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Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels

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Summary

The report provides an analysis of the data and policies regarding a balanced representation of women and men in local and regional politics in Council of Europe member States and in the national delegations to the Congress. It offers an overview of the existing legal and political framework in this field and explores the ways and means of improving it, including by implementing gender quotas and networking with civil society organisations.

The report invites local and regional authorities to ensure that representation of women in any decision-making body does not fall under 40% and encourages them to develop gender-disaggregated statistics to monitor and evaluate nominations and the evolution of elections. The report also calls on governments to support local and regional authorities in these efforts and recommends that they consider adoption of legislative reforms to implement quotas for candidates in elections, to revise the electoral system where it has a negative impact on women's political participation and to implement Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3.

1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RESOLUTION 404(2016)²

1. Achieving equality in political representation between men and women – who represent 50% of the world’s population – is vital for the functioning of representative democracy and a prerequisite of political participation. All Council of Europe member States guarantee legal equality between women and men, including the right to stand for election and to be elected. In practice, however, there are numerous factors that hamper women’s opportunities to take responsibility in public life and hold elected office.
2. Unequal access to education and/or employment, the political institutional system, party systems, the degree of party support and negative attitudes and stereotypes are amongst the most important factors that restrict women’s political participation. Along with the fact that today women in Europe face difficulties in finding a balance between their private and professional lives; they are also often discriminated against and face negative attitudes which disempower them in public and political life and prevent them from becoming role models for younger generations of women to follow in their steps.
3. The effective implementation of gender quotas, associated with an electoral system favourable for women’s representation in politics, is a factor of paramount importance which can lead to more balanced gender participation and thus to a fairer system of political and public decision-making, thereby improving the quality and credibility of the political process.
4. The electoral systems and gender quotas are not the only factors that influence women’s representation. In order to increase effectively both the descriptive and substantial representation of women in politics, a much broader and more comprehensive approach that goes beyond a change in electoral legislation is necessary.
5. The Council of Europe’s pioneering work in the field of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework which can considerably advance women’s rights and bring member states closer to real gender equality. In all Council of Europe bodies, there is the same demand for balanced participation, gender mainstreaming, specific action and monitoring of results.
6. In 2003, the Committee of Ministers defined balanced participation in its Recommendation (2003)3 as the minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life. This requirement has been reaffirmed in the Council of Europe Equality Strategy 2014-2017.³
7. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in its Resolution 1706 adopted in 2010, underlined that the equal participation of women and men in political life is one of the foundations of democracy and recommended that Member States associate measures pertaining to electoral systems and gender quotas with gender-sensitive civic education and elimination of gender stereotypes.⁴
8. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”), when it carries out its electoral observation missions, refers as a baseline to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (adopted by the “Venice Commission” of the Council of Europe in 2002) which leaves the choice of electoral systems to the discretion of the respective country as long as certain principles such as equal voting rights and equal voting power are respected. Nevertheless, the Venice Commission has also stipulated that “Legal rules requiring a minimum percentage of persons of each gender among candidates should not be considered as contrary to the principle of equal suffrage if they have a constitutional basis”.⁵
9. As regards quotas, by revising its Charter in 2007, the Congress undertook to respect the principle of equality between women and men within its own institution and committed itself to including 30% of the under-represented sex in its delegations since 2008. In practice, the participation of a minimum of 30% of women has been ensured since 2011, and has proven to be a very successful initiative for women’s representation, not only as members of national delegations, but also as presidents and vice-presidents of Congress bodies. There is, however, room for improvement to ensure that representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should

2 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2016, 2nd sitting (see Document [CG31 \(2016\)09final](#), rapporteur: Inger LINGE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)).

3 <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2229> and https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02_GenderEqualityProgramme/Council%20of%20Europe%20Gender%20Equality%20Strategy%202014-2017.pdf

4 <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17809&lang=en>

5 <http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282002%29023rev-e>

reach the 40% threshold and to apply this to the rules concerning representation in leadership positions in the Congress.

10. In light of the above and with a view to improving women's political participation and representation, the Congress invites local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and their national associations to:

a. put into practice the Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making to ensure that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40%";

b. ensure, in line with Congress Resolution 393 (2015) on the conditions of office of elected representatives, that the way in which political business in local and regional authorities is conducted does not deter women from standing for election, for instance by implementing family-oriented meeting hours and providing support for childcare;

c. evaluate and report progress in achieving balanced participation in political and public life by developing gender-disaggregated statistics and tools for gender monitoring of nominations and elections analysing their evolution;

d. develop and implement specific actions with a view to enhance women's political participation, such as capacity-building programmes, candidate training, recruitment programmes, systems for mentoring new members or public speaking training;

e. support the establishment of gender equality committees, networks among women's groups and other NGOs that advocate women's political participation and women candidates;

f. integrate and apply the concept of gender budgeting into their working processes, as an instrument of gender equality through the integration of gender as a category of analysis and control in the budget;

g. comply with quota regulations where they exist and introduce reliable monitoring mechanisms to ensure that women are included in the lists on an equal basis with men;

h. sign and implement the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life initiated by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

11. Recalling its Resolution 303 on achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life, the Congress commits itself to:

a. working towards compliance with Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2003(3) so that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life does not fall below 40%;

b. monitoring the gender distribution within the Congress and continuing to publish the relevant data (covering full and substitute members, chairs of committees, political and working groups and rapporteurs) upon the renewal of delegations every four years;

c. integrating and applying the concept of gender budgeting into its work processes;

d. calling on political groups represented in the Congress to lobby with their respective political (national or regional as appropriate) parties to adopt specific action plans for the recruitment of women based on an analysis of the causes of their under-representation, given the vital role political parties play in the promotion of women in politics, by recruiting, selecting and nominating candidates.

RECOMMENDATION 390(2016)⁶

1. Achieving equality in political representation between men and women - who represent 50% of the world's population - is vital for the functioning and quality of representative democracy and a prerequisite of fair and equitable political participation.

2. All Council of Europe member States guarantee legal equality between women and men, including the right to stand for election and to be elected. In practice, however, there are numerous factors that hamper women's opportunities to take responsibility in public life and hold elected office. Women in Europe are often discriminated against and face negative attitudes which disempower them in public and political life.

3. The Council of Europe's pioneering work in the field of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework which can considerably advance women's rights and bring member States closer to real gender equality.

4. In 2003 the Committee of Ministers defined balanced participation in its Recommendation (2003)3 as the minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life. This requirement has been reaffirmed in the Council of Europe Equality Strategy 2014-2017.⁷

5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") has based its policies on gender equality on the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2003)3 and the Council of Europe Equality Strategy 2014-2017 (which set the requirement of a minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life) and Resolution 1706 (2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which recommended that Member States to associate measures pertaining to electoral systems and gender quotas with gender-sensitive civic education and action geared to the elimination of gender stereotypes.

6. In its Recommendation 273 (2009) on equal access to local and regional elections, the Congress advocated the adoption of an electoral system at local and regional level in its member States, ensuring that men and women alternate on lists, with financial penalties in the event of non-compliance, and to enable the under-represented sex to attain positions of responsibility within the executive bodies of municipalities and regions.

7. By revising its Charter in 2007, the Congress undertook to respect the principle of equality between women and men within its own institution and committed to include 30 per cent of the under-represented sex in its delegations since 2008. In practice, the participation of a minimum of 30% of women has been achieved since 2011.

8. In light of the above, notably Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3, with a view to improving women's political participation and representation, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to encourage the governments of member States to:

a. implement the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2003)3, taking stock of the changes and developments that have occurred since 2003 and discuss the results in the respective steering committees;

b. support local and regional authorities in the promotion and implementation of specific measures with a view to enhancing women's political participation in order to comply with the 40% threshold stipulated in Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3 for a minimum representation of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life;

c. consider establishing gender-disaggregated official electoral statistics and tools in order to monitor the elections and nominations at local, regional and national level, based on good practice existing already in several member States, and support the local and regional authorities in this process;

d. encourage and support the establishment, within all levels of government, of gender equality committees networking with NGOs and women's groups that advocate women's political participation and support women candidates;

⁶ See footnote 2

⁷ <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2229> and https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02_GenderEqualityProgramme/Council%20of%20Europe%20Gender%20Equality%20Strategy%202014-2017.pdf

e. consider adopting legislative reforms in order to implement quotas for candidates in elections, with financial penalties in case of non-compliance, and where proportional systems exist, to consider the introduction of zipper systems;

f. consider the revision and adjustment of their electoral systems if these systems have a negative impact on women's political participation and representation.

9. The Congress also invites the Committee of Ministers to enter into a political dialogue with the Congress, in the appropriate format, to follow-up on this recommendation and the attached explanatory memorandum.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁸**Table of contents**

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1. Introduction

1. This report provides a local and regional dimension to the analysis and policies under way in the Council of Europe member States as well as in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) in order to achieve a balanced representation of women and men in political life.

2. The Council of Europe’s pioneering work in the fields of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework which, if implemented, would considerably advance women’s rights and bring member states closer to real gender equality. The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR; CETS No. 005)⁹, which the member states signed in Rome in 1950, set out the legal framework. Its Article 14, guaranteeing civil and political rights, states that enjoyment of thereof should be secured without discrimination on any of various grounds, which include sex.

a. Balanced participation: the beginnings

3. The Council of Europe has been working on balanced participation since the 1980s. Starting with a Plan of Action to promote equal participation, the work continued with the First European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Strasbourg, 1986) which was devoted to equality between women and men in political life and to policies and strategies to achieve equality in decision-making.

4. In 1988, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Declaration on Equality between women and men, stating that gender equality is an integral part of human rights as well as a prerequisite for genuine democracy and emphasised the importance of including women in all areas of decision-making. The Declaration on Equality between women and men as a fundamental criterion of democracy adopted during the Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Equality between

⁸ This explanatory memorandum is based on the contribution of the Council of Europe consultant, Anna Ulveson, senior adviser to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and it is available from the Secretariat upon request.

⁹ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/search-on-treaties/-/conventions/treaty/005>

Women and Men (Istanbul, 1997) constitutes a practical instrument for all those working to increase the participation of women in decision-making in general.

b. Recommendation (2003)3 of the Council of Europe: a watershed event

5. The Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making¹⁰ defines balanced participation as a minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life. To monitor the progress in the implementation of Rec (2003)3, a questionnaire on gender-segregated data on the participation of women and men in political and public decision-making¹¹ was drawn up. Two rounds of monitoring have been completed in 2005 and 2008.

6. According to international human rights standards (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or the Convention of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) there is an obligation for states to ensure the equal participation of women and men in political and public decision-making¹²

7. As for the institutional aspects of politics, one factor empirically found to be strongly influential is the electoral system.

8. The Council of Europe has highlighted in its documents that there is a strong relationship between electoral systems and the number of women elected to public office. The Committee of Ministers recommended in its Recommendation (2003)3 that member states should, where the electoral systems are shown to have a negative impact on the political representation of women in elected bodies, adjust and reform those systems to promote gender-balanced representation (Appendix A, 5). So did the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in its Resolution 1706 (2010) on Increasing women's representation in politics through the electoral system.

9. Besides the electoral system, the effective implementation of gender quotas is an institutional factor of paramount importance. Actually, gender quotas provide one of the most notable powers for women's representation today. The Committee of Ministers recommends that member states should consider adopting legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at local, regional, national, and supra-national levels. Where proportional lists are applied, the introduction of "zipper systems", alternating men and women on the list, should be considered (Appendix A,3). The nomination processes within political parties are also important.

10. This recommendation puts forward eight objectives to be implemented by the governments of member states to promote balanced participation. They include protection of equal civil and political rights, individual voting rights, revising legislation, setting targets, encouraging women to participate in political decision-making and to monitor, evaluate and report progress in achieving balanced participation of women and men. The recommendation proposes legislative and administrative measures as well as supportive measures to be adopted by member States.

11. The recommendation calls on governments to monitor and evaluate progress in achieving balanced participation in political and public life. Ten indicators for measuring progress in this field are included in Appendix A of the recommendation (para. 44), including the one on the need to publish and make readily accessible, comparable gender segregated statistics on candidates for political office and on elected representatives on national/federal/regional and local assemblies according to political party.

c. The transversal approach

12. The Council of Europe Transversal Programme on Gender Equality¹³ launched in 2012 aims to increase the impact and visibility of gender equality standards, supporting their implementation in member states through a variety of measures, including gender mainstreaming and action in a number of priority areas.

10 Recommendation(2003)3: [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec\(2003\)3&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2003)3&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383) and its Appendix

11 Parity democracy: a far cry from reality: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women/decisionmaking/CDEG%20\(2009\)17_en_corrected.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women/decisionmaking/CDEG%20(2009)17_en_corrected.pdf)

12 Recommendation(2003)3 Explanatory memorandum, 1 C, 13:

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM\(2003\)23&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=add&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM(2003)23&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=add&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

13 Council of Europe factsheet "Equality between women and men":

<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02factsheets/FactSheet%20Gender%20equality%20A4%20en.pdf>

13. The Council of Europe's Gender equality strategy 2014-2017¹⁴ outlined five strategic objectives. One of them is achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making. Actions under this heading aim to ensure minimum 40% representation of each sex in any decision-making body, to monitor progress and ensure visibility of data and good practice in Member states. The strategy stresses the importance of identifying and analysing measures to empower women candidates or elected women, in order to encourage women's participation in elections at national, regional and local levels, both as candidates and as voters. The other strategic objectives in this strategy are: combating gender stereotypes and sexism, preventing and combating violence against women, guaranteeing equal access of women to justice, achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

14. In conclusion, in all areas of the Council of Europe; starting with the Committee of Ministers, PACE, Congress and other bodies and institutions, there is the same demand for balanced participation, gender mainstreaming, specific action and monitoring results.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and equitable representation

15. The revised Charter of the Congress (2015)¹⁵ stipulates that each member State's delegation should ensure equitable representation of women and men on the statutory bodies of local and regional authorities in the member State, meaning that all delegations must include, as from 2008, representatives of both sexes with a minimum participation of at least 30% of the under-represented sex.

16. Resolved to continue along this road, the Congress adopted in 2010 its Resolution 303 on "Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life"¹⁶ to invite national delegations to apply this minimum level both to full members and to substitute members, and as far as possible to attain a level of 40% in compliance with Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers. As part of the implementation of the resolution, the Congress decided to regularly monitor the gender distribution within the Congress and to publish the data (covering full and substitute members, chairs of committees, political and working groups and rapporteurs) at each session.

17. Resolution 303 (2010) also refers to the previous Resolution 176 (2004) on "Gender mainstreaming at local and regional level: a strategy to promote equality between women and men in cities and regions"¹⁷, and considers that this strategy must be backed up by practical action. The resolution emphasises that it would be pointless to encourage women to stand for elected office without addressing the fundamental inequalities which prevail in our societies. It calls for a dual approach with gender mainstreaming and specific actions. It also recommends to European local and regional authorities to formalise their commitment to greater equality for all by signing the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life¹⁸ initiated by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and work to implement it.

The application of quotas in the Congress: a brief overview of the situation since 2008

18. Since the revised Charter of the Congress (2007) introduced for the first time the quota to the proportion of women in all national delegations to the Congress (at least 30 %), the Congress tackled the issue with determination and the results can be seen a clear vindication of the quota policy as a successful tool for increasing women's participation in decision-making instances. The evolution has been gradual but unrelenting. Whereas in 1994, 84.19% of the members were men while 12.39% were women, in 2011 these figures were 65.09% men, 31.05% women and in 2014, 56.92% men and 40.57% women.¹⁹

19. As regards high level representative positions, although, globally, between 1994 and 2014, 72.93% (132) of the posts of President and Vice-President were held by men and 27.02% (49) were held by women, it must be underlined that for the first time in 2010, the Vice-presidents of the

14 CM(2013)136 final, Council of Europe's Gender equality strategy 2014-2017:

https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7246

15 <http://urlz.fr/4512>, Article 2

16 Congress Resolution 303 (2010) "Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life" <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1601275&Site=Congress>

17 Congress Resolution 176 (2004) on "Gender mainstreaming at local and regional level: a strategy to promote equality between women and men in cities and regions" <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=816579>

18 European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local life: http://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

19 Factsheet on the work of the Congress of the Council of Europe on women's rights and equality between men and women Strasbourg, 18 January 2016: https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=20150211_fiche_egalite&Language=lanEnglish

Congress were in equal numbers. Today (mandate 2014-2016), there are 7 men and 10 women elected as President / Vice-President.

20. The application of quotas was a long process and a steep learning curve for the Congress. One of the issues was that quotas, introduced in 2008, made no distinction between full and substitute members. This resulted in some countries giving priority to men as full members and women as substitute members. Once the problem was identified, the Congress reacted by introducing in 2011 separate quotas for both full and substitute members.

21. Another unwanted outcome of the imposition of quotas concern countries represented by small delegations in the Congress (for example Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Lichtenstein, Island, Lithuania, Saint-Marino). The 30% quota represents *de facto* a 50% quota for these countries as they are represented by only two members for both substitute and full members in contrast to countries with large delegations (for example, Italy, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, Turkey, etc.). This led to an unequal situation between the member states; the remedy lies in moving towards a higher percentage of minimum quotas for all countries in the longer run.

22. In conclusion, it can be said that, in spite of some difficulties, the introduction of quotas has been a successful initiative for women's representation not only as members of national delegations, but also as presidents. It is a positive sign indicating that it is time to move further in order to achieve the 40% minimum representation quotas for women.

3. Local and regional elections: the question of equal access and balanced representation

23. The Council of Europe through its various bodies has approached the question on different levels. The Congress took up the subject of equal access to local and regional elections for women and men in its Recommendation 273 (2009).²⁰ In paragraph 5b, the Congress recommended the Committee of Ministers to urge the governments of member states "to achieve equal representation of each sex, to:

- establish an electoral system at local and regional level ensuring that men and women alternate on lists (with a minimum of 1 to 3), with financial penalties in the event of non-compliance, and
- enable the under-represented sex to attain positions of responsibility within the executive bodies on municipalities and regions".

24. The Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law, the "Venice Commission" supported this view by referring (in its response²¹ to the Committee of Ministers who had asked them for an opinion on this Congress recommendation) to the Declaration on Women's participation in Elections (CDL-AD (2006)020), which states that "Legal rules requiring a minimum percentage of persons of each gender among candidates should not be considered as contrary to the principle of equal suffrage if they have a constitutional basis", providing thereby a basis for action promoting the use of quotas. The Committee of Ministers in its Reply to the Congress on this issue encouraged member states "to bear these texts in mind in their efforts to promote broad and fair electoral participation at all levels".²²

a. Electoral systems

25. In 2009 the Venice Commission published a report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics (CDL-AD(2009)029).²³ The report studies the systems for elections in parliament but the results can also be applicable at local and regional level given that either the same electoral systems apply at all levels or, if not, such as for regional elections where different systems might be used, their impact on women's participation is similar to comparable systems in other countries.

26. According to the Venice Commission's report, one of the most well-established findings is that countries applying proportional representation systems have a higher proportion of women in their parliaments than those with majority or plurality systems. Combined electoral systems such as, for

20 Recommendation 273 (2009) :

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1565589&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C>

21 Comments by the Venice commission in view of the reply of the Committee of Ministers:

[http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2010\)021-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2010)021-e)

22 Reply adopted by the Committee of Ministers to the Congress Recommendation 273 (2009):

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1670555&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383>

23 CDL-AD(2009)029 : [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

example, mixed member proportional systems, appear to be more conducive to women's parliamentary representation than plurality or majority systems, but less favourable than traditional proportional representation systems. Only the United Kingdom, France and Azerbaijan have plurality or majority systems among Council of Europe member States.

27. In most Council of Europe member states, parliamentarians are elected by proportional representation in multi-member (rather than single member) constituencies. Usually, multi-member constituencies are considered to be more conducive to female nomination and representation than single member constituencies.

28. The electoral system is extremely important for the implementation of quotas. Quotas work differently under different electoral systems. Quotas are most easily introduced in proportional representation systems. However, quotas have also been implemented in some majority systems. A quota system that is not compatible with the electoral system in place will remain purely symbolic.²⁴

29. In theory, the most favourable electoral system to women's representation would be a proportional representation list system in a large constituency and/or a nationwide district, with a legal threshold, closed lists and a mandatory quota which provides not only for a high proportion of female candidates, but also for strict rank-order rule (e.g. a zipper system), and effective sanctions (preferably not financial, but rather the non-acceptance of candidacies/candidate lists) for non-compliance.

30. However, the same electoral system may not automatically bring about the same effect in every country because they can differ considerably and have particular features and types. The electoral system is one of several factors that have an impact on women's representation, and its effects depend largely on the respective political and social conditions of each country or region (if the country is constituted of regions with electoral powers). The electoral system can facilitate or hamper women's access to be elected.

b. Gender quotas

31. Increasing women's participation and representation in political life requires efforts to address political, economic, social, cultural and religious constraints within both formal and informal public and private spheres. A range of strategies such as quotas have been proposed and implemented to help increase women's representation in positions of power and decision making.

32. The use of electoral quotas for women is much more widespread than is commonly known. In fact, half of the countries of the world today use some type of electoral quota for their parliament.

i. Parity measures and gender quotas

33. The international community recommends that a number of measures should be taken in order to promote a more balanced representation of women and men in decision-making bodies. The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979)²⁵ and Beijing Platform for Action²⁶ (adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women, 1995) have been important policies in this area for legitimating the demand for gender balance in politics put forward by women's organisations.

34. One of the 12 objectives of the Platform for Action was formulated as women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. There is a clearly stated aim to achieve gender balance in the nomination process as well as in all decision-making processes. The Platform talks about "discriminatory attitudes and practices" that lead to the underrepresentation of women in arenas of political decision-making.

35. Whereas previously the focus has been on women's lack of resources or lack of will to participate in politics, attention is now directed towards those institutional and cultural mechanisms of exclusion that prevent women from obtaining an equal share of political positions. The responsibility for promoting change shifted from the individual women to those institutions that are, consequently, expected to take action to identify and correct the causes of women's under-representation.

36. In different recommendations and resolutions from the different institutions and organisations of the Council of Europe, quotas or other parity measures has been mentioned as ways to increase the participation of women in political and public decision-making on international, national, regional and

24 The global database of quotas for women "QuotaProject": <http://www.quotaproject.org/en/index.cfm>

25 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

26 Fourth World Conference on Women <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

local level (the previously mentioned Committee of Ministers Rec (2003)3, PACE Resolution 1706 (2010) on Increasing women's representation in politics through the electoral system and Congress Resolution 303(2010) on Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life as well as the Committee of Ministers CM(2009)68, Declaration: Making gender equality a reality²⁷).

ii. Types of quotas

37. Gender quotas²⁸ may be introduced at any level of the political system: national, regional or local. Given the slow speed by which the number of women in politics is growing, there are increased calls for more efficient methods to reach a gender balance in political institutions. Quotas present one such mechanism. Because of its relative efficiency, the hope for a dramatic increase in women's representation by using this system is strong. At the same time quotas raise serious questions and, in some cases, strong resistance. There are three main types of gender quotas used in politics:

- reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislative);
- legal candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislative);
- political party quotas (voluntary).

38. While reserved seats regulate the number of women elected, the other two forms set a minimum for the share of women on the candidate lists, either as a legal requirement or a measure written into the statutes of individual political parties. There are however many more types.

39. Since legal quotas provided in constitutions and/or electoral laws are obligatory by nature, they seem to be more effective than voluntary party quotas. However, this is not necessarily the case. The successful adoption and implementation of legal quotas require not only strict placement mandates and effective enforcement mechanisms, but also the commitment of parties. Even with legal quotas, political parties play a key role in implementing them. Resistant party gatekeepers may find ways to bypass quota legislation or only poorly implement the respective provisions.

iii. Parties as gatekeepers

40. Political parties are vital in the promotion of women in politics. The power to recruit, select and nominate candidates is in the hands of political parties, whatever the electoral system. The stage at which the party gatekeepers actually choose the candidates is the crucial stage for getting women elected. Any attempt to address the issue of women's under-representation in politics must, therefore, target the political parties and their views and strategies on more inclusive decision-making assemblies. A quota system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process. Most often voters have very little knowledge how the candidates they can choose between have emerged. Voters tend to vote primarily for the party label rather than individual candidates.

41. Different types of quotas target different levels in the nomination process. Quotas usually target one of three levels in the nomination process:

- the pool of potential candidates (aspirants),
- the candidates that stand for election (candidates)
- the elected.

42. Even if constitutional amendments and new electoral laws providing gender quotas might seem more commanding, it is not at all evident that these methods are more efficient than political party quotas when it comes to increasing the number of women. It all depends on the actual rules. The crucial question is whether the nominated women are placed in a position with a real chance of election. It is equally important whether the rank order of the candidates on the lists is regulated, so that women candidates are not just placed at the bottom of the lists or if there is a rank order "zipper-system". Sanctions for non-compliance are also important to look at.

iv. Quota percentage

43. Quotas for women require that women constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body to make an impact. The core idea behind this system is to recruit women into political positions and to ensure that women are not only a token few in political life. Previous notions of

27 CM(2009)68 final <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1441675&Site=CM>

28 www.quotaproject.org

having reserved seats for only one or for very few women, representing a vague and all-embracing category of "women", are no longer considered sufficient. Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute a large minority of 20, 30 or 40%, and more ambitiously to ensure a true gender balance of 50-50%.

44. Most quotas aim at increasing women's representation, because the problem is usually the under-representation of women - this is relevant since women usually constitute 50% of the population in any given country. Some quota systems are constructed as gender-neutral, which means that they aim to correct the under-representation of both women and men or at any rate set up a maximum for both sexes. In this case, the requirement may be that neither gender should occupy more than 60% and no less than 40% of the seats. A fifty-fifty quota is in its nature gender neutral, and it also sets a maximum for women's representation, which a minimum requirement for women in fact does not.

45. The "critical mass" concept as applied to the situation stipulates that once women constitute a particular portion thereof, politics and policies will be transformed. Often this is said to be at least one third of the seats in order to be able to exert a real influence on the decisions taken. However, for a better balance a minimum of 40 % needs to be reached and measures need to be taken to move beyond the "critical mass" level of women's representation.

46. There are some criticisms against the "critical mass" concept and how it can apply to gender balance in political representation. For our purposes, it may be more important to concentrate on the "critical acts" which can result in real gains in terms of gender equality. Networking through strong women's organisations, awareness-raising, mobilisation, capacity-building, creating issue coalitions, linking politicians, lobbyists and experts capable of taking advantage of political momentum and windows of opportunity are some of these.²⁹

v. Arguments for and against quotas

47. Quotas, although a powerful instrument for increasing women's representation, are a controversial measure. Various arguments have been set forth for and against the introduction of quotas as a means to increase the political presence of women. The Global Database of Quotas for Women³⁰ lines up some of the arguments for and against quotas:

48. Arguments against:

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference over men.
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected.
- Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside.
- Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women.
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organisation.
- Quotas violate the principles of liberal democracy.

49. Arguments for:

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats.
- Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women.
- Women have the right as citizens to equal representation.
- Women's experiences are needed in political life.
- Election is about representation, not educational qualifications.
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a male-dominated political system.

²⁹ The implementation of Quotas, European Experiences, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2004, p. 160

³⁰ The implementation of Quotas, European Experiences, p. 8

- It is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected; therefore quotas are not violations of voters' rights.
- Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but may be only temporarily.
- Quotas can contribute to a process of democratisation by making the nomination process more transparent and formalised.

vi. Fast track and incremental track discourses

50. Electoral gender quotas represent “the fast track”³¹ to equal representation of women and men in politics in contrast to “the incremental track”. The incremental track is based on a belief in a steady and unbroken line of progress. As society develops and new, more gender equal generations succeed gender equality will be gradually attained. The focus is on women’s resources and in women’s labour market participation and educational level is expected to more or less automatically result in more women candidates.

51. According to the “fast track” the power hierarchy between the sexes is constantly reproduced also in younger generations and backlash is seen possible with regard to gender equality and the number of women in politics. Women’s political representation will not improve automatically as time goes by with new generations, and men will not voluntarily give up powers attained.

52. There are also a third and a fourth discourse; the gender-blind (gender is irrelevant when it comes to political representation from which follows no actions should be taken) and the politics-is-a-men’s-business (strongly preoccupied with gender but assumes women are unfit and unqualified for political positions and their role is as mothers and housewives).

vii. Quotas at sub-national level in Europe

53. The best information on the use of legal gender quotas or voluntary party quotas is found in the already cited Global Database of Quotas for Women³². The website is a collaborative effort of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Stockholm University (IDEA). In this project, electoral quotas are defined as mandatory or targeted percentages of women candidates for public elections.

54. On this website, at the subnational (local and regional) level, you can find 33 member states of the Council of Europe who have gender quotas by law or voluntary party quotas. The information about sub-national level quotas provided is perhaps not exhaustive.

55. In 22 member states voluntary party quotas exist. It can be just one party or several parties: Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

56. Fourteen member states have legal quotas on sub-national level. These countries have quotas by constitution (Greece, Italy) or electoral law (13) or both (Greece, Italy): Albania (33%), Belgium (50%), Bosnia/Herzegovina (40%), France (“binôme” or tandem ballot), Greece (33%), Italy (12 of 20 regions), Macedonia (33%), Montenegro (30%), Poland (35%), Portugal (33%), Serbia (33%), Slovenia (40%) and Spain (40%). Newest country is Georgia (30%), (France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and Spain have also voluntary party quotas). The most common quota threshold is on 33 %, meaning that each gender should represent at least 33 % of the candidates. The highest threshold, 50 %, is in Belgium. The first country to introduce quotas was Belgium in 1994. Many of the countries introduced quotas in the 2000s. There are no legislated quotas for the regional level in federal states such as Austria and Germany or in the United Kingdom in contrast to countries with similar structures such as Italy, Spain and Portugal which have quotas for at least part of their regions.

57. All have rank orders rules, except Montenegro. The most common order is that in a group of three, both genders should be represented. In some countries, such as Belgium and Bosnia Herzegovina, the top two candidates cannot be of the same gender. “Zipper system” exists where every other candidate is a woman. All countries have sanctions for non-compliance. The most common type of sanction is that the list will be rejected and parties have to adjust the errors in order to get it approved. Other sanctions for non-compliance may result in reducing public funding.

31 Women, Quotas and Politics, Routledge research in comparative politics, edited by Drude Dahlerup, 2006

32 <http://www.quotaproject.org/>

4. Electoral statistics on women and men's political representation at local and regional level

a. Access to statistics

58. To have a reliable understanding of the situation two questions need to be asked: How has the Council of Europe's solid legal and policy framework been implemented in practice in the member states when it comes to women's political representation at local and regional level? What kind of monitoring has taken place? In order to be able to interpret and analyse the situation, gender-segregated statistics over time are needed.

59. To find out the results of the most recent elections on women's political representation at local and regional level in the Council of Europe member states, a questionnaire was sent to national delegations and associations with a request to diffuse it among their members.

60. The survey wanted to know the number of women elected mayors and councillors, the number of presidents and members of regional assemblies, existence of gender disaggregated statistics and if quotas exist, what kind of quotas. There were also questions about actions to support and strengthen women's political representation at local and regional level. There were 28 replies from the 47 national delegations: 23 were from member states and 5 from different regions within the member states.

61. It has unfortunately not been possible to interpret and analyse the whole situation in the member states in a satisfactory manner due to the limited number of answers received. Therefore it was necessary to seek more information from other sources to see what was possible to find. The EU Commission has better statistics about the results of elections at local and regional level than in the survey, although unfortunately not complete for the CoE member states (see below).

b. Summary of Congress survey's results

62. Most of the respondents have gender-segregated statistics on women's political representation at regional and local level. Some also collect gender-segregated data on age, educational level and ethnicity.

63. Eight have electoral quota laws for elections at regional level, and nine at local level. Of those who answered no, two respondents answered that they expected a law to come, Czech Republic and Luxembourg. Six of them with quota laws have established rules for the order of candidates of each gender in the list of candidates. They also have sanctions if the law wasn't complied. When asked about the effects of those laws, there were different answers. Most of them found a small increase of women elected. It was clear that it had been effective, but not effective enough.

64. Seventeen of the twenty-eight respondents answered that there is at least one political party that have voluntary party quotas. The effects of this varied between the respondents. Some say it has had effects on women's political representation (Belgium, Spain and Turkey). Sweden and Czech Republic answered that it has had effect on the parties that use the voluntary party quota.

65. There were twenty-one respondents who answered that they had implemented specific actions to support and strengthen women's political participation at local and regional level. Both the state and NGOs had different initiatives. Examples of specific actions were strategic equality strategies, network of female mayors, gender equality committees and awareness raising campaigns. Some effects of these actions were an increasing knowledge of the importance of female representation and an increase in female candidates and mayors. (France, Lithuania, Slovakia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Greece, Iceland and Latvia).

66. Ten respondents answered that political parties had started actions to get women active in politics, for example to start women's caucuses inside the parties, awareness raising activities, campaigns to encourage women's political participation and special working groups for gender equality.

67. Fifteen respondents said that the national organisations of local and regional authorities worked to promote the participation of women in politics: gender equality committees, support to women's organisations who trained female candidates in political work, mentor projects, implementation of gender mainstreaming etc. One such action was to encourage municipalities to sign the "European Charter for equality at local and regional level", the CEMR-charter.

68. It appeared from the survey that in the countries with the highest percentage of female mayors, mayors are elected indirectly by municipal and country councils. In other countries when mayors are elected directly by the citizens and nominated by the political parties, there are fewer women mayors.

A question that needs further research is whether this is because political parties are gatekeepers in the nomination process or whether citizens tend to elect men for mayors: Is it easier to become mayor in an indirect election if you are a woman?

c. Other statistics

69. There has been one comparative study on the results of the first and second rounds of monitoring of Rec (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making: (2005 data)³³. According to the recommendation, balanced participation is defined as a minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies. The years 2005 and 2008 were compared. In the study, both regional and local statistics were included. It had partly the same questions as in the actual survey. Unfortunately it is not the same countries who have answered the three surveys from 2005, 2008 and 2015, which makes meaningful comparison difficult.

70. The European Commission has been collecting gender-segregated data annually³⁴ since 2003 for the regional level, the heads and members of regional assemblies, and since 2011 for the local level, mayors and municipal councillors. The Commission has statistics for all the 28 countries in the European Union as well as for Montenegro, Iceland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Lichtenstein and Norway - in total 35 countries. For 12 Council of Europe member states there are no statistics on the political representation of women and men at local level.

71. The statistics make it possible to see the development of women and men in 24 Council of Europe member states that have regional assemblies with the statistics from the Commission. We have chosen to show the years 2005 and 2015. But for the local level, we have chosen to show the statistics from the Commission 2015 and the statistics from of CoE statistics from 2005 for the 25 countries that were available both years.

72. The following tables showing female representation at the regional level is based on data taken from the European Commission. Regional assemblies do not exist in all countries. The tables showing female representation at the local level is partly based on data taken from the European Commission (2015 data) and partly based on data from the Parity Democracy study mentioned above.

33"Parity Democracy: a far cry from reality", a Council of Europe study (2010)

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680591672>

34 European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/index_en.htm

Table 1.1 Members of regional assemblies

| Members (regional assembly) | 2015 | | 2005 | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Women (%) | Men (%) | Women (%) | Men (%) |
| EU-28 | 32 | 68 | 29 | 71 |
| Belgium | 42 | 58 | 32 | 68 |
| Czech Republic | 19 | 81 | - | - |
| Denmark | 39 | 61 | - | - |
| Germany | 32 | 68 | 32 | 68 |
| Greece | 17 | 83 | 18 | 82 |
| Spain | 45 | 55 | 38 | 62 |
| France | 49 | 51 | 48 | 52 |
| Croatia | 22 | 78 | - | - |
| Italy | 18 | 82 | 11 | 89 |
| Latvia | 26 | 74 | - | - |
| Hungary | 11 | 89 | 13 | 87 |
| The Netherlands | 34 | 66 | - | - |
| Austria | 32 | 68 | 30 | 70 |
| Poland | 24 | 76 | 16 | 84 |
| Portugal | 23 | 77 | 10 | 90 |
| Romania | 15 | 85 | - | - |
| Slovakia | 15 | 85 | - | - |
| Finland | 44 | 56 | 40 | 60 |
| Sweden | 48 | 52 | 46 | 54 |
| United Kingdom | 31 | 69 | 21 | 79 |
| Republic of Serbia | 19 | 81 | - | - |
| Turkey | 8 | 92 | 2 | 98 |
| Norway | 45 | 55 | 44 | 56 |
| All countries | 28 | 72 | 25 | 75 |

73. In ten years there has been an increase of 3% of women in regional assemblies. In 2005 four regional assemblies had reached the minimum representation of 40 %. In 2015 there were six. In eight regional assemblies there are less than 20% women 2015 (Romania, Turkey, Czech Republic, Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, Greece and Italy). Twelve regional assemblies have increased the representation of women. The biggest increases were made by Portugal and Belgium and United Kingdom.

Table 1.2 Regional presidents

| Presidents (regional assembly) | 2015 | | 2005 | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Women (%) | Men (%) | Women (%) | Men (%) |
| EU-28 | 17 | 83 | 16 | 84 |
| Belgium | 0 | 100 | 0 | 100 |
| Czech Republic | 7 | 93 | 15 | 85 |
| Denmark | 40 | 60 | - | - |
| Germany | 31 | 69 | 19 | 81 |
| Greece | 15 | 85 | 9 | 91 |
| Spain | 65 | 35 | 29 | 71 |
| France | 4 | 96 | 8 | 92 |
| Croatia | 14 | 86 | - | - |
| Italy | 14 | 86 | 18 | 82 |
| Latvia | 20 | 80 | - | - |
| Hungary | 5 | 95 | 15 | 85 |
| The Netherlands | 8 | 92 | 28 | 72 |
| Austria | 22 | 78 | 11 | 89 |
| Poland | 19 | 81 | 7 | 93 |
| Portugal | 50 | 50 | 0 | 100 |
| Romania | 0 | 100 | - | - |
| Slovakia | 0 | 100 | 12 | 88 |
| Finland | 21 | 79 | 16 | 84 |
| Sweden | 33 | 67 | 40 | 60 |
| United Kingdom | 50 | 50 | 38 | 62 |
| Republic of Serbia | 0 | 100 | - | - |
| Turkey | 7 | 93 | 0 | 100 |
| Norway | 26 | 74 | 32 | 68 |
| All countries | 15 | 85 | 13 | 87 |

74. In ten years there has been a 2% increase in the number of women in regional assemblies which cannot be called significant. Four out of twenty-three member states have no woman heads of regional assemblies. Ten years ago there were three.

75. Thirteen countries have less than 20% women presidents in their regional assemblies. Eight countries have less female heads 20 of regional assemblies 2015 than 2005. Four have between 20-29% women. Two have between 30-39 % women. Four have reached 40% women or more. Spain, Portugal and United Kingdom have increased the number of women presidents a lot. Denmark has reached 40-60%.

76. All in all, in the regions, the situation does not look too bright; progress is slow. It would appear that it is much more difficult to have a position of power for women in regional assemblies.

Table 1.3 Municipal Representatives

| Municipal councillors | 2015 | | 2005 | |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Women (%) | Men (%) | Women (%) | Men (%) |
| Belgium | 36 | 64 | 26,5 | 73,5 |
| Czech Republic | 27 | 73 | | |
| Denmark | 30 | 70 | 27 | 73 |
| Germany | : | : | 24,4 | 75,6 |
| Estonia | 31 | 69 | 28,4 | 71,6 |
| Ireland | 20 | 80 | 18,9 | 81,1 |
| Greece | 18 | 82 | | |
| Spain | 35 | 65 | 26 | 74 |
| Croatia | 20 | 80 | 10,7 | 89,3 |
| Italy | 27 | 73 | 16,9 | 83,1 |
| Cyprus | 18 | 82 | 20,4 | 79,6 |
| Latvia | 31 | 69 | 42,3 | 57,7 |
| Lithuania | 25 | 75 | 20,6 | 79,4 |
| Luxembourg | 22 | 78 | 17,8 | 82,2 |
| Hungary | 30 | 70 | | |
| The Netherlands | : | : | 16 | 84 |
| Portugal | 26 | 74 | | |
| Slovenia | 32 | 68 | 13 | 87 |
| Finland | 36 | 64 | 36,4 | 63,6 |
| Sweden | 44 | 56 | 42,4 | 57,6 |
| Iceland | 44 | 56 | 31,2 | 68,8 |
| Turkey | 11 | 89 | | |
| Liechtenstein | 17 | 83 | 28,3 | 71,7 |
| Norway | 38 | 62 | 35,5 | 64,5 |

77. The table is a selection of municipalities in order to be able to compare the development 2005 and 2015. Two out of 23 countries have reached the minimum representation of 40% 2015 at local level, Iceland and Sweden. Only Sweden had more than 40% both years. Nineteen have more than 20% female councillor. That is seven more than 10 years ago. Six have less than 20% representation. That is as many as ten years ago. Twelve have increased their representation of women councillors.

78. With the figures we have from 2005 we can see that there have been huge increases for example for Slovenia, Spain, Croatia, Iceland and Italy. The number of female councillors in Latvia has decreased by around 11%, while the rest have increased between 2-4%. This question requires research which is beyond the scope of this report.

Table 1.4 Mayors

| Mayors | 2015 | | 2005 | |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Women (%) | Men (%) | Women (%) | Men (%) |
| Belgium | 13 | 87 | 8,5 | 91,5 |
| Czech Republic | 4 | 96 | 0 | 100 |
| Denmark | 12 | 88 | 7,7 | 92,3 |
| Germany | 10 | 90 | 7,5 | 92,5 |
| Estonia | 14 | 86 | 13,3 | 86,7 |
| Ireland | 19 | 81 | 20,2 | 79,8 |
| Greece | 4 | 96 | 2 | 98 |
| Spain | 17 | 83 | 12,5 | 87,5 |
| Croatia | 7 | 93 | 3,9 | 96,1 |
| Italy | 13 | 87 | 9,6 | 90,4 |
| Cyprus | 0 | 100 | 3 | 97 |
| Latvia | 24 | 76 | 36,4 | 63,6 |
| Lithuania | 5 | 95 | 5 | 95 |
| Luxembourg | 10 | 90 | 10,2 | 89,8 |
| Hungary | 20 | 80 | 14,4 | 85,6 |
| The Netherlands | 21 | 79 | 18 | 82 |
| Austria | 6 | 94 | 2 | 98 |
| Portugal | 8 | 92 | 5,2 | 94,8 |
| Slovenia | 8 | 92 | 5,7 | 94,3 |
| Finland | 17 | 83 | 13,4 | 86,6 |
| Sweden | 37 | 63 | 32,1 | 67,9 |
| Iceland | 26 | 74 | 19,2 | 80,8 |
| Turkey | 3 | 97 | 0,6 | 99,4 |
| Liechtenstein | 9 | 91 | 0 | 100 |
| Norway | 22 | 78 | 17,1 | 82,9 |

79. No country has what the Committee of Ministers defines as balanced participation with mayors, which is a minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political life.

80. Cyprus was the only country that did not have a female mayor in 2015. In 14 countries there are less than 10 % female mayors while in Latvia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Iceland there are between 20-29% female mayors. The rest of the countries have less than 20%. Sweden is the only country who had more than 30% female mayors, 37%.

81. However it is clear that most countries have increased their percentage of women mayors.

Table 1.5 Mayors and council or assembly members in 2015³⁵

| | Mayor or leader | | Members | |
|---------------|-----------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Women (%) | Men (%) | Women (%) | Men (%) |
| All countries | 15 | 85 | 35 | 65 |

82. If you use the Commission statistics from all the 35 member states at local level, you will find that in 2015 the percentage is getting closer to the definition of balanced participation, with women at 35% and men at 65%, although it still has not reached the prescribed level of balanced participation in political decision-making.

83. In France, Sweden and Iceland, 40% or more of the councillors are women. Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, Finland, United Kingdom and Norway had between 30-39% female councillors. Thirteen countries have between 20-29% female councillors and five countries between 10-19%.

84. Data from all 35 member states at local level given in Commission statistics reveal that there were 15% female mayors versus 85% male in 2015, a fact which can be interpreted as evidence that positions of power in municipalities are still a male-dominated work space.

d. Impact of quotas: a first assessment after a decade of quota application

85. The question that most concerns us here is to understand whether it is possible to deduce from the above data if gender quota systems have had an impact on the result of elections or not, and whether there are other factors of importance that determine the results.

86. Many of the 14 countries with electoral quotas by law at the sub-national level have not had them for a long time. Most of these quota applications started around 10 years ago. Some of the countries that have quotas have a higher proportion women elected, at least at councillor level or among members of regional assemblies. Denmark is an exception in that they introduced voluntary party quotas and later abandoned them, but still have a bit higher representation of women than many other countries.

87. Belgium, which was the first country to introduce electoral quotas for gender, has the highest threshold, with 50%. The women representatives were 42% of the members in the regional assemblies in 2015, which means an increase of 10% as compared to 2005. The same increase is seen in their municipal councils, where the percentage of female councillors increased from 26% to 36% between 2005 and 2015. Looking at mayors and regional assembly presidents, one can see that the number of female representatives is still very low. In fact, in both 2005 and 2015, there were no female regional presidents.

88. In Spain, the threshold for the electoral quotas is at 40% and in 2015 the regional assemblies reached the percentage of 45% women representatives, which was an increase from 38% in 2005. And when it comes to regional presidents, the female representatives stand for 65% in 2015, which is the absolute highest percentage of women ever. Greece, Portugal and Serbia all have thresholds at 33%, and Poland's threshold is 35%. In 2015, these countries had between 17% and 24% female representatives in the regional assemblies. In Greece there has been no increase since 2005 whereas in Portugal, the change has been substantial, as there were 50% female regional presidents in 2015, compared with zero in 2005.

89. The higher the threshold, the higher the percentage of female representatives in the regional assemblies. This is an interesting finding; however, more research is necessary to know how, and if, these two really correlate with each other.

e. Voluntary party quotas

90. It is noteworthy that in some countries that apply only voluntary party quotas, women's representation is high, as in Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Iceland. The general assumption

³⁵ European Commission's database on decision-making at local level: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/municipal-councils/index_en.htm

is that high levels of representation, like in Sweden and Norway, have resulted mainly from party quotas. However, it is important to note that in both countries such quotas were established only after women had already gained significant representation. It can be argued that in these cases, quota provisions played only a limited role. Instead a combination of structural factors such as institutional, socioeconomic and cultural factors, and strategic factors such as the activities and campaigns launched by parties and the women's movement explain patterns of women's representation.

91. As regards the implementation of quotas, it is difficult to make conclusions about the connection between types of quota provisions and women's representation – other than that many quota provisions are not properly implemented. There is also a lack of data to make an effective assessment of the effect of quota rules and regulations. And yet women's representation might increase as a result of the very debate about introducing quotas.

92. There are mainly two types of sanctions for non-compliance in legislated quota legislations: rejection of lists before the elections and reducing public funding. Some countries has adopted financial incentives (e.g. Georgia: political parties that do not include in their candidate lists for elections a minimum of 20% candidates of a different gender in a group of every 10 candidates are not entitled to the supplementary public funding. The system does not seem to have the wanted effect³⁶).

93. When voluntary party quotas are adopted, the central party organisation or other relevant body must make a 'contract' with the local party organisations about the practical implementation of the quota regulation.

94. There are discrepancies between quota requirements and actual representation. You can find information about quotas rules that have been adopted' and you can see that there is a lack of compliance in practice. Therefore it is not possible to make conclusions about the connection between types of quota provisions and women's representation — other than that many quota provisions are not properly implemented.

95. The successful implementation of legislated quotas requires institutional bodies that administer, supervise and control the application of quotas. In voluntary party quotas there are not legal sanctions for non-compliance. The sanctions available are pressure from central party organisations, women's groups and the electorate. Further research is needed about the implementation of quotas.

5. Conclusions

96. The analysis of the statistical data of the last decade brings us a number of findings that can be interpreted as confirming that solutions exist although they might not work in as straightforward a manner as could be hoped and involve a variety of parameters.

97. As regards **electoral systems**, there is a strong relationship between the electoral system and the number of women representatives elected. Therefore, if it is intended to achieve a balanced representation of women and men in our democracies, legislators should keep in mind that where the electoral systems are shown to have a negative impact on the political representation of women in elected bodies, there is a need to adjust and reform these systems to promote gender-balanced representation.

98. As regards **nominations**, the power to select and nominate candidates is in the hand of political parties, whatever the electoral system in place. Political parties are the gatekeepers to gender balance in political decision-making because they control 'the secret garden of nominations'. Once nominated, women tend to do as well as men.

99. As regards **quota systems**, the electoral gender quotas have led to rapid increases in women's representation in some cases but to less successful results in other cases. The main conclusion is that, in order to be effective, a quota system must be compatible with the electoral system in place and that quota rules – for example, having 40% of women on electoral lists – must be supplemented with rules concerning rank order as well as – in the case of legislated quotas – effective legal sanctions.

100. As far as the **monitoring of the situation** is concerned, this requires as a first step, the gathering of data and information, which is followed by an analysis of their evolution. An equally important step, however, is raising awareness as to the significance of trends arising or persisting, of difficulties and obstacles detected and or the necessary solutions to respond to the problems, in order

36. <http://www.quotaproject.org/>

to achieve the objectives proposed by Recommendation Rec(2003)3. Unfortunately there is a lack of gender segregated statistics over time for all elections in all member states at national, regional and local level. This is a situation that must be remedied as without such data, it is not possible to draw confident conclusions.

101. There are a wide variety of **socio-economic, cultural and political factors** that can hamper or facilitate women's access to politics. Structural explanations reveal that women's participation in politics is dependent on factors such as the overall development of the country, the existence of an extended welfare state, the socio-economic status of women, the levels of female education or the proportion of women in employment. Cultural approaches refer to gender differences in political socialisation and adult gender roles and to the role of religion or cultural traditions. Among genuine political factors, e.g. the institutional features of democracies, the development of parties and party systems, the degree of party support or the strength of women's movements and networks are important as well.

102. Gender equality at local and regional level, the participation of women in decision-making at regional level and, even more so at the local level, is a critical area of concern where states must invest to create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of women. In a community decisions that affect the lives of women and men, girls and boys, cannot and should not be taken by members of one of the sexes only or almost exclusively.

103. Extensive research has shown that in a multitude of contexts that when women have equal chances with men to be socially and politically active, economies and societies thrive. It is in everyone's economic interest to recognise the essential contribution of women to communities, societies and economies, as well as the high costs of gender inequality. Equality between women and men is not just a question of fairness, but also and economic objective.^{37 38 39}

104. Finally, it should be recalled that the electoral systems and gender quotas are not the only factors that influence women's representation. We have evidence that quotas in themselves do not remove other barriers for women even if they trigger change in attitudes and give women access to political representation. In order to increase effectively both the descriptive and substantial representation of women in politics, a much broader and more comprehensive approach is necessary than changing electoral legislation. Electoral gender quotas can lead to historical leaps in women's political representation. Nevertheless, appropriate electoral reforms may facilitate such a process.⁴⁰

6. The way forward

105. With or without gender quotas, political parties should adopt specific action plans for the recruitment of women based on an analysis of the causes of this under-representation. These specific actions plans should focus on ways to achieve balanced participation and representation of both women and men both in internal party offices and elected bodies.

106. Political parties are vital in the promotion of women in politics. The power to recruit, select and nominate candidates is in the hands of political parties, whatever electoral system. Any attempt to address the issue of women's under-representation in politics must target the political parties and their views and strategies on more inclusive decision-making bodies.

107. Member States must be reminded that to sign the "European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life", is another way to make a political commitment to gender equality; they must be encouraged to make an action plan to gender mainstream the activities in local and regional governments; the political bodies, the employer role and the role as service provider.⁴¹

108. Gender-disaggregated statistics and tools for gender monitoring of nominations and elections should be developed. The European Commission has gender disaggregated statistics on regional and local elections for 35 of the Council of Europe's 47 member states. Official electoral statistics in many

37 If participating rates for women were to reach those for men by 2030, there would be an 12% increase in GDP, OECD, Closing the Gender Gap-Act Now, 2012, <http://www.oecd.org/gender/closingthegap.htm>

38 The latest Eurofound figures estimate that the gender employment gap costs 325 billion euros to the EU, i.e. 2,5% of the EU GDP per year, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/news/news-articles/labour-market/eurofound-highlights-costs-and-challenges-of-gender-employment-gap-in-presentation-to-informal-epsco>

39 Gender equality, economic growth and employment, Åsa Lofström, 2009 <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/news/news-articles/labour-market/eurofound-highlights-costs-and-challenges-of-gender-employment-gap-in-presentation-to-informal-epsco>

40 Venice Commission report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics, CDL-AD(2009)029 : [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

41 European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life: www.charter-equality.eu

countries do not provide details of the candidates nominated for election by sex, which then must be provided through other channels.

109. Gender monitoring of nominations and elections require gender disaggregated statistics that should be gathered and analysed to fulfill the objectives of Recommendation Rec(2003)3. One cannot sufficiently emphasise the fact that one cannot monitor development progress without gender data. As the saying goes, if you can't measure it, you can't improve it!

110. Multiple measures, such as capacity-building programs, candidate training, recruitment programs, system of mentoring for inexperienced new members, family oriented meeting hours, support for childcare, support to women's organisations, should be developed and applied. For example, in order to inform and educate candidates on various overt and covert discrimination that can occur within political parties, the Norwegian sociologist Berit Ås has identified five subtle acts of repression – invisibility, affixing of guilt and shame, ridicule, withholding of information and double punishment – to help women to respond to suppression techniques with counterstrategies.⁴² Skills and leadership training is important for women in preparation for standing as candidates and should be encouraged at all levels.

111. Other measures include combatting gender stereotypes and rejecting sexist behaviour⁴³ in general and approaching voter registration in a gender-aware manner in particular: this entails training officials to ensure that women get on the lists on an equal basis with men; voter education promoting respect for women's equal right to participate.⁴⁴ The establishment of networks among women's groups and other NGOs that support women's political participation and women candidates should be encouraged.

112. Specific arenas for women can be important for discussing and mobilising around women's issues. It can be in women's sections in political parties, or local government bodies such as for example the association for Basque municipalities, EUDEL's meeting place for women mayors and councillors, the Virginia Woolf Basqueskola.⁴⁵ It has courses that address the personal and collective obstacles faced by women elected officials, how to mainstream public policy for gender equality as well as courses in communication, leadership and team management skills.

113. If gender quotas are applied, there are three factors for the success of quota provisions in increasing women's political representation: the design of the quota system, rank-order rules and sanctions for non-compliance. The quota system must be compatible with the electoral system if it is to be effective. Quotas are most easily introduced and women are more likely to be elected under proportional representation than under plurality-majority electoral systems. The electoral system is only one of several factors that have impact on women's representation and its effects depend largely on the respective political and social conditions of each country. The electoral system can facilitate or hamper women's access to elections.

114. In all electoral systems and with legislated as well as party quotas, it's important to include rank order rules about the placement of candidates on the lists according to "winnable seats". Explicit rank rules about the implementation of gender quotas, e.g. zipper-systems where every other on the list is a women or first top two positions in a list must have different gender, are needed. Without rank order rules a quota system may have no effect at all.

115. In this context the Congress should integrate in the nomination document of a delegation to the Congress, the gender representation within each political party/group in the different political bodies alongside the political representation of different political parties, in order to implement (and regularly assess) the existing Council of Europe and Congress decisions as regards balanced participation and representation of women and men at local and regional levels of government. This first step of compulsory compilation of gender-differentiated statistics of political parties' electoral results will highlight the gender equality within a political elected body as the municipal or regional council.

116. It should also integrate and apply the concept of gender budgeting into the working process of the Council of Europe and the Congress.

42 <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/five-master-suppression-techniques>

43 See also CG(18)10, 2010 Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life, Explanatory memorandum <https://lc.cx/oJMu>

44 <http://www.oecd.org/social/gender-development/29592332.pdf>

45 <http://www.eudel.eus/destacados/basqueskola/?lang=en>