

Chapter 5

Power and decision-making

Key findings

- Becoming the Head of State or Head of Government remains elusive for women, with only 14 women in the world currently holding either position.
- In just 23 countries do women comprise a critical mass – over 30 per cent – in the lower or single house of their national parliament.
- Worldwide on average only one in six cabinet ministers is a woman.
- Women are highly underrepresented in decision-making positions at local government levels.
- In the private sector, women continue to be severely underrepresented in the top decision-making positions.
- Only 13 of the 500 largest corporations in the world have a female Chief Executive Officer.

Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of every individual to take part in the government of her or his country.¹ Equal access to power, decision-making and leadership at all levels is a necessary condition for the proper functioning of democracy. Ensuring women's freedom to participate in politics, both as voters and as representatives, has been central to international, regional and national efforts aimed at more inclusive and democratic governance. These freedoms and rights are not limited to politics but extend to participation and leadership in public life, the private sector and civil society in general.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women commits States Parties to act appropriately to ensure that women and men have equal rights in regards to voting, participation in the formulation of government policies, participation in non-governmental organizations and representation of their governments at the international level.²

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social,

economic and political status are essential for the achievement of transparent and accountable government that works for the benefit of both women and men. It recognizes that women's empowerment and full participation on an equal basis with men in all spheres of life, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental to the achievement of equality, development and peace. In addition to setting out government commitments, the Platform for Action urges a range of actors to take measures in support of women's participation in all levels of power and decision-making.³ These include political parties, the private sector, trade unions, national, regional and sub-regional bodies, employers' organizations, research and academic institutions and non-governmental organizations.⁴

This chapter provides an assessment of the current situation as well as recent trends in the participation of women and men in positions of power and decision-making across the world. Four main areas are covered: politics and governance, the judiciary, civil service and the private sector.

Identification of trends and cross-country comparisons are limited by the lack of data at the inter-

¹ United Nations, 1946. Article 21.

² United Nations, 1979. Articles 7 and 8.

³ United Nations, 1995.

⁴ Ibid., section G, paragraphs 190-195.

national and national levels. Statistical agencies in many countries do not routinely collect and disseminate data on women in power and decision-making, and few international or regional organizations compile those statistics. The most readily available information on decision-making is the number and proportion of women in national parliaments and key elected positions, collected under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and monitored within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The European Commission's database on women and men in decision-making gives a comprehensive regional picture of women and men in top positions.⁵ The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) Gender Statistics Database and the United Nations Development Fund's (UNIFEM) biennial *Progress of the World's Women* provided additional statistics on some of the topics covered in the chapter.

Data at the international level are especially lacking on women's access to high-level decision-making positions in local government and in the private sector. The statistics and analysis on some of these topics are based in large part on sources available from private or non-governmental organizations. The presentation and analysis on these topics are therefore relatively limited.

A. Politics and governance

Public governance is one of the arenas where inequality between men and women is highly visible. Limited female participation in structures of governance where key policy decisions are made and resource allocations decided often has a negative impact on women's political, economic and social opportunities.

1. Representation in national parliament

Although women make up about half of the electorate and have attained the right to vote and hold office in almost all countries of the world, they continue to be underrepresented as members of national parliaments. The importance of women's political empowerment has been recognized within the framework of the MDGs, with one of

⁵ European Commission, 2010. The database covers decision-making in politics, public administration, judiciary, and business and finance for the 27 European Union member States as well as Croatia, Iceland, Norway, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

the indicators for monitoring Goal 3 (promote gender equality and empower women) being the proportion of seats held by women in lower or single houses of national parliaments.

Levels and trends

Improvement in the representation of women in national parliaments worldwide has been steady but slow

There has been a slow and steady improvement in the representation of women in national parliaments worldwide. At the time the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995, women accounted for on average 10 per cent of members of the lower or single houses of national parliaments. This figure had increased to 17 per cent by April 2009 (table 5.1).

All regions have showed progress in improving gender balance in national parliaments since 1995. In all sub-regions of Africa and in 4 out of 5 sub-regions in Asia, the average proportion of women in the lower or single houses of parliament doubled or more than doubled. Most of these sub-regions have had less than 10 per cent female members of parliament in 1995 but have achieved double-digit figures by 2009. The exception is Western Asia, where women's representation has improved from a very low average (4 per cent) in 1995 to the current 9 per cent. Southern Asia has had a particularly notable improvement, helped no doubt by a positive intervention by several governments through such legislation as the implementation of candidate quotas and reserved seats (see also sub-section on the use of gender quotas). Four out of nine countries in Southern Asia have introduced quotas to boost female representation at the level of the national parliament (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan).⁶

Elsewhere, all sub-regions within Latin America and the Caribbean and the more developed regions have also experienced steady gains since 1995. In comparison, Eastern Asia and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) have seen very little increase in their share of women members of parliament. The latter stands out for its continued low share of female parliamentarians.

Following recent improvements, the proportion of women parliamentarians in the lower or sin-

⁶ International IDEA and others, 2010.

gle house of parliament averaged 15 per cent or better in most sub-regions in 2009 (table 5.1). Western Europe had the highest female representation, averaging 29 per cent. In Southern Africa, South-Eastern Asia, South America and the more developed regions outside Europe women's representation averaged at least 20 per cent. However, average female representation was still below 15 per cent in Northern Africa (10 per cent), Eastern and Western Asia (14 and 9 per cent, respectively) and Oceania⁷ (3 per cent).

At the country level, progress in women's representation is apparent from the count of countries wherein women comprise a critical mass⁸ – at least 30 per cent – of parliamentarians. In 2009, women attained this mass in the lower or single house of parliament in only 23 countries (see Statistical Annex) – still a small number but a considerable increase over the five countries that had achieved this level in 1995.⁹

The 23 countries with at least 30 per cent women parliamentarians include nine from Western Europe and seven from sub-Saharan Africa (see Statistical Annex). The highest proportion in the world was registered by Rwanda in its 2008 elections. The first country ever to have achieved a gender balance in national parliament, Rwanda's achievement (56 per cent) is a marked increase over the 17 per cent representation of women in 1995,¹⁰ and can be attributed partly to focused and coordinated efforts to address the issue of gender balance during post-conflict reconstruction, and might also be associated with the fact that the majority of survivors of the preceding conflict were women. In fact, a number of post-conflict countries rank high with regard to women's participation in both lower and upper chambers of legislative bodies (see Statistical Annex).

A few countries are close to attaining gender parity in parliament representation. In addition to Rwanda, seven countries currently have at least 40 per cent female representation in parliament:

⁷ Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

⁸ According to a classic theory of minority behaviour, women who are successful in a man's world absorb the dominant culture to such an extent that they tend to dissociate themselves from other women, to underrate their own success and to perceive any discrimination they meet as a result of their own shortcomings. It takes a minority of a certain minimum size, 30–35 per cent, to be able to influence the culture of groups and to facilitate alliances between group members (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 1992).

⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006a.

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009a.

Table 5.1
Proportion of parliamentary seats in lower or single chamber occupied by women, by region, 1995, 1999 and 2009

	Proportion women (percent)		
	1995	1999	2009
World	10	11	17
Africa			
Northern Africa	4	3	10
Southern Africa	12	14	24
Eastern, Middle and Western Africa	8	9	16
Asia			
Central Asia	8	8	19
Eastern Asia	12	13	14
South-Eastern Asia	9	12	20
Southern Asia	5	5	16
Western Asia	4	5	9
Latin America and the Caribbean			
Caribbean	13	13	17
Central America	10	13	19
South America	9	13	20
Oceania	2	4	3
More developed regions			
Eastern Europe	9	10	17
Western Europe	20	23	29
Other more developed regions	12	18	22

Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments* (2009a).

Note: Unweighted averages.

Argentina, Cuba, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, South Africa and Sweden.

Elsewhere, the countries that lead their sub-region in terms of women's representation in parliament include Tunisia in Northern Africa with 23 per cent, Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia with 26 per cent, China in Eastern Asia with 21 per cent, Timor-

Box 5.1

The first-ever success of women candidates in a Kuwait election

Four women members of parliament are among 21 newcomers to the 50-seat Kuwaiti National Assembly, following the polls of May 2009. This development stems from the country's shift towards merit and political competency from an association with tribal ties and expediency. That all four hold PhDs, have a formidable reputation for professionalism and now represent 54% of eligible voters points to a radical shift in opinion across Kuwait's society.

Source: *The Economist*, 2009.

Leste in South-Eastern Asia with 29 per cent, Nepal in Southern Asia with 33 per cent, Iraq in Western Asia with 26 per cent, Costa Rica in Central America with 37 per cent and Belarus in Eastern Europe with 32 per cent.

At the opposite end, in 2009 six countries still had no women in their lower or single chamber of parliament.¹¹ In addition, as many as 40 countries or areas had less than 10 per cent female representation (see Statistical Annex).

Presiding officers

Women rarely hold the top positions in national parliaments, as shown by the small number of women serving as presiding officers. In 2009 only 21 out of 176 lower or single chambers of parliaments in the world¹² and 10 out of 73 upper chambers were presided by a woman. (table 5.2)

The highest concentration of female presiding officers was found in the more developed regions, where

Table 5.2
Countries with a woman presiding over parliament, by region, 2009

Lower or single house	Upper house
Africa	
Gambia	Gabon
Ghana	Swaziland
Lesotho	Zimbabwe
Rwanda	
Asia	
India	
Pakistan	
Turkmenistan	
Uzbekistan	
Latin America and the Caribbean	
Saint Lucia	Bahamas
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Belize Grenada Saint Lucia
More developed regions	
Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Austria	Netherlands
Bulgaria	United Kingdom
Estonia	
Hungary	
Iceland	
Netherlands	
Romania	
Serbia	
Switzerland	
United States of America	

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women speakers of national parliaments* (2009b).

¹¹ Belize, Federated States of Micronesia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Solomon Islands.

¹² Countries or areas with population size lower than 100,000 are excluded from the counts.

a total of 14 women presided over the single, lower or upper chamber of parliament. Seven women held this position in the parliaments of Africa (all sub-Saharan), four in Asia (two in Southern Asia and two in Central Asia) and six in Latin America and the Caribbean (of which 4 in the Caribbean).

Candidacy and election

In most countries in Africa, Asia and Oceania, women comprised less than 20 per cent of candidates in the last elections for the lower or single house of parliament

The limited data (available for 65 countries) on women and men electoral candidates illustrate that the low proportion of women electoral candidates is directly correlated to women's limited representation in their parliaments. The proportion of female candidates for lower or single house of parliament tended to be low in countries within the less developed regions, being predominantly in the range of zero to 30 per cent in the last elections (table 5.3). Women in countries within the more developed regions fared better, comprising in most cases 20 to 45 per cent of the candidates. In only four countries – Belgium, Costa Rica, Iceland and Rwanda – were candidates distributed roughly evenly by sex.

Available data in Africa display a low proportion of female candidates for the lower or single house of parliament – lower than 20 per cent, with the exception of Burundi and Rwanda. The proportion is under 10 per cent in 3 of the 4 countries with available data in Oceania; this low proportion of female electoral candidates in the region parallels the limited representation of women in their parliaments as seen in the earlier section.

In all 14 Asian countries for which data are available (the majority of which are Western Asian countries), women comprised less than 30 per cent of candidates in the last election for the lower or single house. In Latin America and the Caribbean the five countries with available data show a wider spread of the proportion of female candidates, from a low of 3 per cent in Belize to a high of 51 per cent in Costa Rica. For the more developed regions, the proportion of women candidates ranged from 12 per cent in Japan to 49 per cent in Belgium and tended to cluster within the range of 20 to 45 per cent.

The low proportion of women in parliaments is related not just to the lower proportion of female candidates but also the lower election rate of women compared to men. For the 65 countries

Table 5.3

Countries by proportion of female candidates for the lower or single house of parliament, by region, 2003–2008 (latest election year)

0–9%	10–19%	20–29%	30–45%	46–53%
Africa				
Central African Rep. (2005) Ghana (2008)	Benin (2003) Cameroon (2007) Dem. Republic of the Congo (2006) Djibouti (2003) Ethiopia (2005) Kenya (2007) Mauritius (2005) Zambia (2006) Zimbabwe (2008)	Burundi (2005)		Rwanda (2003)
Asia				
Bahrain (2006) Iran (Islamic Republic of) (2008) Nepal (2008) Oman (2007) Yemen (2003)	Kuwait (2008) Syrian Arab Republic (2007) Tajikistan (2005) Turkey (2007) United Arab Emirates (2006)	Armenia (2007) Cyprus (2006) Jordan (2007) Lao People's Dem. Republic (2006)		
Latin America and the Caribbean				
Belize (2008)		Trinidad and Tobago (2007)	Paraguay (2003) Peru (2006)	Costa Rica (2006)
Oceania				
Samoa (2006) Solomon Islands (2006) Vanuatu (2008)	Tonga (2008)			
More developed regions				
Hungary (2006) Ireland (2007) Japan (2005) Malta (2003) Ukraine (2006)	Australia (2007) Belarus (2008) Canada (2006) Croatia (2003) Czech Rep. (2006) Estonia (2007) Germany (2005) Latvia (2006) New Zealand (2008) Poland (2007) Slovakia (2006) United Kingdom (2005)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (2006) Denmark (2005) Finland (2007) France (2007) Netherlands (2003) Portugal (2005) Serbia (2008) Sweden (2006) Switzerland (2003) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2008)		Belgium (2007) Iceland (2007)

Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliament: The year in perspective* (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008).

with available data, female candidates for the lower or single house of parliament have, on average, a lower likelihood than male candidates of winning a seat, a likelihood that amounts to 0.87 that of men¹³ (figure 5.1). Variations across regions under-

lie this global ratio. Regionally, the average likelihood of women candidates winning a seat in the lower or single house of parliament is higher than that of men candidates only in Africa – by a factor of 1.17. In Asia and the more developed regions, women's likelihood of getting elected is 0.85 that of men. The regions where women candidates are most disadvantaged compared to men candidates in terms of the probability of getting elected are Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania.

¹³ The likelihood of a female candidate winning a seat (also called female election rate) refers to the proportion of female candidates that were successfully elected; and the likelihood of a male candidate winning a seat, to the proportion of male candidates that were successfully elected. The female/male ratio of the likelihoods is an indication of how successful female candidates were in getting elected compared to male candidates. A ratio of one means that female and male candidates generally had the same likelihood of winning a seat; a ratio lower than one means that female candidates in general had a

lower likelihood of winning a seat than male candidates; while a ratio higher than one means that female candidates in general had a higher likelihood of winning than male candidates.

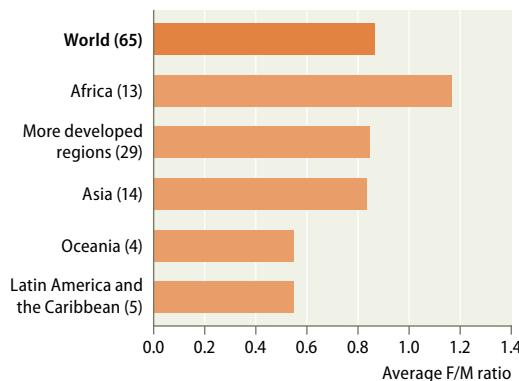
At the country level, Nepal stands out as having a much higher election rate for women compared to men: a success rate of 54 per cent against 10 per cent for men (see Statistical Annex). Belarus also had a much higher election rate for women, showing a female/male election rate ratio of greater than 2. A further 22 countries also had the same or higher female election rates than men, with female/male ratios ranging from 1 to 1.9 in the latest parliamentary elections between 2003 and 2008. In contrast, women's election rates were lower than men's in 36 countries, displaying female/male ratios ranging from 0.98 to as low as 0.23; and five countries had a ratio of zero, signifying the extreme case where no female candidates were successfully elected. Those five countries are Belize, Kuwait¹⁴, Oman, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

The use of gender quotas

In many countries electoral gender quotas (see box 5.2) are considered to be an effective measure to improve gender balance in parliament. Generally, quotas for women require that women constitute a certain number or percentage of a body, such as a candidate list or a parliamentary assembly. Today quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least 30 or 40 per cent, or even a true gender balance of 50 per cent, as opposed to only a few tokens.¹⁵

Many countries in the world implement gender quotas to offset obstacles that women have faced in

Figure 5.1
**Average ratio of female election rate to male election rate for candidates to the lower or single house of parliament, by region, 2003–2008
*(latest available election)***



Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliament: The year in perspective* (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008).

Note: Unweighted averages; the numbers in brackets indicate the number of countries with available data.

¹⁴ Kuwait has since successfully elected four women to its National Assembly (see box 5.1).

¹⁵ International IDEA and others, 2010.

the electoral process. At present, at least 90 countries apply an electoral gender quota of some kind for the lower or single chamber of their national parliaments. Of these countries, 16 have reserved seats for women in the lower or single chamber of parliament, 33 have legislated candidate quotas and 54 have voluntary political party quotas (table 5.4). Reserved seats for women are found only in Africa (11 countries) and Asia (5 countries) and are particularly concentrated in Eastern Africa and Southern Asia (see box 5.3 for list of countries with legislated reserved seats). Legislated candidate quotas and voluntary political party quotas are the more common types of quota found in Latin America and in Eastern and Western Europe.

Eighteen of the 23 countries with a 30 per cent or better representation of women in the lower or single house of parliament implement some kind of gender quota

Gender quotas are shown to have helped increase the representation of women in parliament. Eighteen out of the 23 countries with at least 30 per cent representation of women in their lower or sin-

Box 5.2

Types of electoral quota for women

An electoral quota for women may be mandated in the constitution, stipulated in the national legislation of the country or formulated in a political party statute. Typically, three types of electoral quota are distinguished, the first two being legislated quotas (constitutional and/or legislative) and the third one voluntary, thus:

- Reserved seats – reserves a number of seats for women in a legislative assembly
- Legislated candidate quotas – reserves a number of places on electoral lists for female candidates
- Voluntary political party quota – rules or targets voluntarily adopted by political parties to include a certain percentage of women as election candidates. This does not include quotas for internal party structures.

One country may have several quota types.

Source: International IDEA and others, Quota Project: Global database of quotas for women (2010).

gle house have implemented some kind of gender quota for national parliaments, either legislated or voluntary. Furthermore, in 2009, women comprised on average 21 per cent of parliamentarians in countries that used gender quotas, compared to an average of 13 per cent in countries that did not have such measures.¹⁶

The introduction of gender quotas, however, is not without controversy. While quotas compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats, it has been argued that they contradict the principles of equal opportunity since women are given preference over men.¹⁷ It has also been observed that quotas are hard to apply in single winner systems, where each party nominates a single candidate per district. Furthermore, the re-election of parliament members restricts the rate of member turnover at each election, which makes gender quotas difficult to comply with. Analysis by the European Commission shows that around two thirds of members of parliament are re-elected at each election, leaving limited opportunities for new leaders and hence limited opportunities for progress towards gender balance.¹⁸

2. Heads of State or Government

Very few women get to the top position of power within their government. A glance at the number of female Heads of State or Government reveals that these positions remain elusive for women. Only seven out of 150 elected Heads of State in

Box 5.3

Countries that mandate reserved seats for women in the lower or single chamber of parliament through the Constitution or electoral law

- Eastern Africa (9): Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania.
- Other Africa (2): Egypt, Niger.
- Southern Asia (3): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan.
- Other Asia (2): Kyrgyzstan, Jordan.

Source: International IDEA and others, Quota Project: Global database of quotas for women (accessed in June 2010).

Table 5.4

Number of countries with a gender quota for lower or single house of parliament, by type of quota and region, 2009

	Any type of quota	Reserved seats	Legislated candidate quotas	Voluntary political party quotas
World	90	16	33	54
Africa	24	11	3	12
Northern Africa	4	1	0	3
Eastern Africa	11	9	0	3
Middle Africa	2	0	1	1
Southern Africa	2	0	0	2
Western Africa	5	1	2	3
Asia	18	5	8	6
Central Asia	2	1	1	0
Eastern Asia	1	0	1	1
South-Eastern Asia	4	0	2	2
Southern Asia	5	3	1	1
Western Asia	6	1	3	2
Latin America and the Caribbean	18	0	13	12
Caribbean	1	0	1	1
Central America	7	0	4	5
South America	10	0	8	6
Oceania	0	0	0	0
More developed regions	30	0	9	24
Eastern Europe	12	0	5	8
Western Europe	16	0	4	14
Other more developed regions	2	0	0	2

Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from International IDEA and others, Global database of quotas for women (accessed in June 2010).

the world are women, and only 11 of 192 governments are headed by women (table 5.5). Notable developments in both developing and developed countries include the election of female Heads of State or Government in Iceland in 2009, in Haiti and the Republic of Moldova in 2008, Argentina, India and Ukraine in 2007, Chile in 2006 and Germany and Liberia in 2005. Thus, the number of female Heads of State or Government in 2009 totalled 14, compared to 12 in 1995.¹⁹

3. Ministers

Worldwide, on average only one in six cabinet members is a woman

Women continue to be underrepresented in cabinet appointments in all regions of the world. Globally, the average share of women among ministers was only 17 per cent in 2008 (figure 5.2). Although low,

¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009c.

¹⁷ International IDEA and others, 2010.

¹⁸ European Commission, 2009.

¹⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006d.

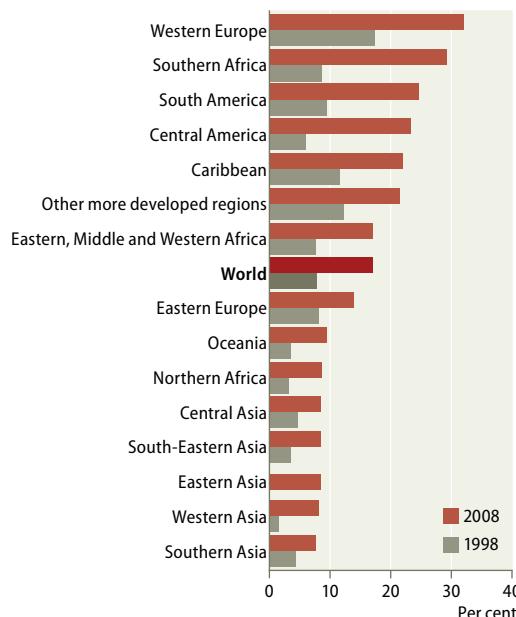
Table 5.5
Countries with a woman Head of State or Government, by region, as of April 2009

Head of State	Head of Government
Africa	
Liberia	Liberia
	Mozambique
Asia	
India	Bangladesh
Philippines	Philippines
Latin America and the Caribbean	
Argentina	Argentina
Chile	Chile
	Haiti
More developed regions	
Finland	Germany
Ireland	Iceland
	Republic of Moldova
	Ukraine

Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from country reports.

it is a significant improvement from the average of 8 per cent in 1998. In all regions and sub-regions, the share of women is significantly higher compared to 10 years ago, with the recent proportions more than double those of 1998 in most sub-regions. The four sub-regions with the highest proportions of women ministers in 2008 (Western Europe, Southern Africa, South America and Central America) all

Figure 5.2
Share of women among ministers, by region, 1998 and 2008



Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from United Nations, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* (2000); and Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Women in Politics: 2008* (2008).

Note: Unweighted averages. No data for Eastern Asia 1998.

showed improvements of greater than 15 percentage points compared to 1998.

Western Europe and Southern Africa led the way in women's representation with an average of 33 and 30 per cent, respectively, of cabinet appointments being a woman. Elsewhere women's representation in the cabinet exceeded 20 per cent in all sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean and in the more developed regions outside Europe. The average share in Eastern, Middle and Western Africa coincided with the global average (17 per cent). Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, Oceania and all five sub-regions of Asia lagged behind in women's representation among ministers.

At the country level, progress is shown by the increase in the number of countries where women held at least 20 per cent of ministerial positions: 63 countries in 2008 (see Statistical Annex) compared to only 13 in 1998.²⁰ Worldwide, women's share of ministerial positions in countries ranged from zero to 58 per cent in 2008. Countries with the highest proportions of female ministers include six from Western Europe (three of them Nordic countries), three from Latin America and the Caribbean and one from Africa (table 5.6).

Progress, however, bypassed some countries. In 2008 there was no female minister at all in nine countries²¹ (see Statistical Annex). This number is slightly lower than the 14 countries in 1998.²²

Table 5.6
Countries with highest proportion of women ministers, 2008

Country	Percentage of women ministers
Finland	58
Norway	56
Grenada	50
Sweden	48
France	47
South Africa	45
Spain	44
Switzerland	43
Chile	41
El Salvador	39

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Women in Politics: 2008* (2008).

²⁰ United Nations, 2000.

²¹ Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Myanmar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Solomon Islands.

²² United Nations, 2000.

Worldwide four countries, all in Asia, had no woman in their cabinet in both 1998 and 2008: Bhutan, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

In general, women aspiring to careers in politics still encounter difficulties, suggesting that the democratic principles of parity and equality continue to be hampered by structural and attitudinal barriers, including discrimination and gender stereotypes that disadvantage women in many regions.

4. Local governments

Most countries have elected bodies at sub-national levels, some with state or provincial governments and most with local councils. Local governments are closest to their constituents and have the capacity to provide them with such social services as public transportation, drinking water, sanitation and the planning of cities. For the same reasons as in national government, gender balance is important in local government; however, like national government, local governments worldwide suffer from a low representation of women.

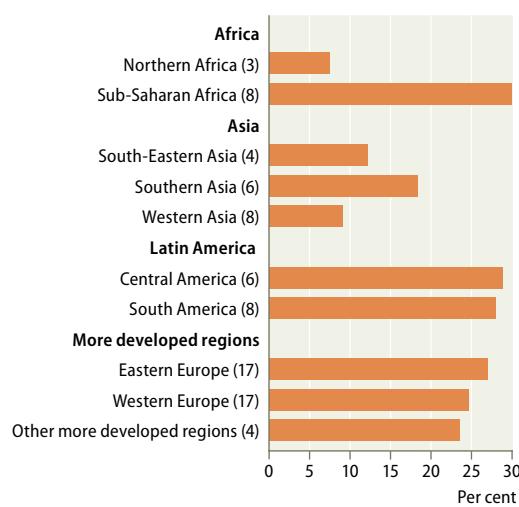
Women are a small percentage of councillors in local government

Similar to the situation in national parliaments, local governments in all world regions are far from achieving gender balance within decision-making positions. Regional averages for the proportion of women among elected councillors ranged from a low of 8 per cent in Northern Africa to a high of 30 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (figure 5.3). In other parts of the world, the sub-regions in Latin America and in the more developed regions registered averages in the range of 24 to 29 per cent, while South-Eastern, Southern and Western Asia all showed averages below 20 per cent.

Of the 83 countries of the world with available data for 2003–2008, only four had more women than men councillors: Belarus, Costa Rica, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.²³ In contrast, women are a very small minority (less than 5 per cent) among councillors in eight countries: Azerbaijan, Egypt, Estonia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Morocco, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Turkey.²⁴

A number of countries have applied constitutional or legislative gender quotas to hasten progress towards more equitable representation at the local

Figure 5.3
Share of women among councillors, by region, 2003–2008 (latest available)



Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from United Cities and Local Governments (2009) and national sources.

Note: Unweighted averages; the numbers in brackets indicate the number of countries with available data.

level of government. For example, India's constitutional amendments in 1993 to strengthen local governance included the reservation of one third of seats in local governing councils for women; this quota was increased to 50 per cent in 2009. Similarly, Pakistan's Devolution of Power Plan in 2000 reserved 33 per cent of seats for women at all sub-national levels.²⁵ This has played a part in the higher proportions of women in the local councils of India and Pakistan (38 and 25 per cent, respectively) compared to other countries in Southern Asia.

Women comprise no more than a fifth of all mayors in 73 out of 77 countries or areas

The proportion of women in top leadership positions in local government is much more limited than in local councils. In none of the sub-regions with available data²⁶ did the average proportion of women mayors exceed 10 per cent except in the more developed regions outside Europe, which registered an average of 14 per cent (figure 5.4). This proportion is much lower than the average of 24 per cent for councillors in the same sub-region (figure 5.3).

Women mayors in the countries of Eastern and Western Europe accounted for, on average, 10 per

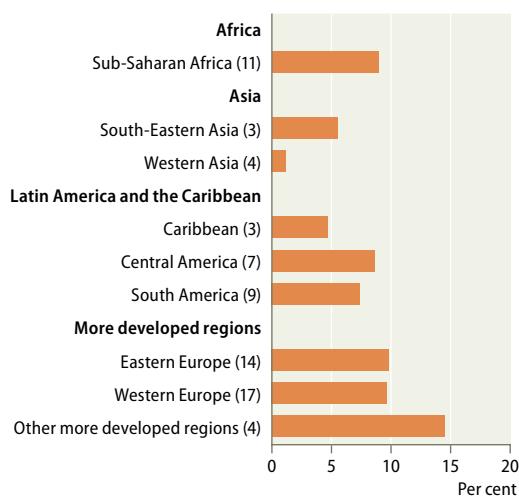
²³ UN Millennium Project, 2005, p. 105.

²⁴ United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) collected and published data on women and men councillors and mayors for 2003. The data presented here come from the UCLG's dataset and, in addition, include data extracted from the UNECE Gender Statistics Database and several national sources (see Statistical Annex).

²⁵ UNECE Gender Statistics Database (2009) and national reports.

²⁶ Ibid.

Figure 5.4
Share of women among mayors, by region, 2003–2008 (latest available)



Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from United Cities and Local Governments (2009) and national sources.

Note: Unweighted averages; the numbers in brackets indicate the number of countries with available data.

cent of all mayors; again, this is a much lower proportion than women's 25 per cent or higher average representation in local councils. In the 11 countries with available data in sub-Saharan Africa, on average only 9 per cent of mayors were women. For South-Eastern Asia and for the three sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, the figures range from 5 to 9 per cent. The four countries with available data in Western Asia had the lowest average proportion of women (1 per cent) at the mayoral level.

Out of the 77 countries or areas with available data, the ones with the highest proportion of women mayors include Latvia (25 per cent), Mauritius (40 per cent), New Zealand (26 per cent) and Serbia (26 per cent). The low proportion of women among mayors is evident worldwide; other than the above-mentioned four countries, the averages were below 20 per cent in all countries or areas with available data, and three (Bangladesh, Mayotte and Trinidad and Tobago) had no female mayor (see Statistical Annex).

Mayoral positions are in the same class, so to speak, as heads of State or Government and presiding officers of parliament, being positions that are hardest for women to attain. For women, the difficulty of attaining the top executive position may be related in part to the stereotypical perception that women lack the leadership qualities necessitated by the job. Women are relatively more successful in landing positions as members of a legislative or governing body. For example, the five Nordic countries may boast relatively high representation

of women among members of parliament and local councils (the percentage of women in these bodies range from 26 to 47 per cent in all five countries). In contrast, only one of the five countries had a woman head of State (Finland) or head of Government (Iceland), and only one had a woman presiding over its parliament (Iceland). With respect to mayors, the proportion of women among mayors in the five countries range from only 9 to 17 per cent (see Statistical Annex).

The difficulties of combining family life, work life and politics remain a severe obstacle to women seeking political office. Among the political challenges that women face, the prevalence of the "masculine model" of political life and lack of party support feature prominently.²⁷ In particular, the barriers to the political participation of women at the local level may be related to lack of community support, lack of family co-responsibility within households to release women from unpaid household work, little recognition and legitimacy allocated to their contribution within public power spheres, and the lack of economic resources to pursue a candidature.²⁸

B. The judiciary

1. National courts

The judiciary is still predominantly male except in Eastern Europe. In 11 of the 12 countries with available data in that sub-region, female judges in general outnumbered male judges, with 64 per cent of all judges in the average country being female (table 5.7). The situation is not as positive for women judges in the Supreme Court, the apex of judicial power within the national judiciary. As with other areas already examined in earlier sections and in other chapters, so it is with the judiciary: the further up the judicial hierarchy, the smaller the representation of women. Thus, in the supreme courts in the Eastern European sub-region, women outnumbered men in only four countries. Notable, however, is that in two of these (Bulgaria and Romania), women in the Supreme Court outnumbered men to an even greater degree than they did in all courts combined, occupying 78 and 75 per cent, respectively, of the Supreme Court seats.

In Western Europe and Western Asia, the proportion of women in all courts was below 50 per

²⁷ International IDEA, 2005.

²⁸ Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres Mexico, 2006.

cent. The same pattern of lower female presence in the supreme courts compared to all courts is observed, with two exceptions: Ireland and Sweden, where the share of women judges is higher in the Supreme Court than in all courts combined (table 5.7).

In other regions of the world, two countries stand out as having a large presence of women in the Supreme Court: Honduras where one of two judges in the Supreme Court was a woman, and the Philippines where women accounted for one third of Supreme Court judges. At the other end of the spectrum, all judges in the supreme courts of India and Pakistan were male.²⁹

2. International courts

Women are also underrepresented in international and regional courts, with only four of 12 such courts having 30 per cent or more women judges. The highest share is seen in the International Criminal Court (ICC), where seven of 18 judges (39 per cent) were women (table 5.8). This high representation of women was achieved because the Rome Statute, the governing document of the ICC, calls for a fair representation of female and male judges.³⁰ In contrast, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea was composed entirely of male judges, while in the International Court of Justice only 7 per cent of the judges were women.

C. Civil service

Women's representation in decision-making positions in the civil service is among the concerns raised in the Beijing Platform for Action. The limited information available to assess levels and trends pose challenges to addressing gender disparities in these areas.

1. Senior administrators

Available data indicate that women are underrepresented among high-ranking government administrators with decision-making power. In 33 countries (EU-27 plus 6 other countries) monitored by the European Commission, for example, women occupied on average only 25 per cent of the highest level non-political administrative positions and 33 per cent of second-level administrative positions

Table 5.7
Share of women among Supreme Court judges and all judges, by region, 2003–2009 (latest available)

Country	Supreme Court judges (per cent)	All judges (per cent)
Western Asia (4)	9	33
Armenia	—	21
Cyprus	8	38
Georgia	11	46
Turkey	17	28
Eastern Europe (12)	41	64
Bosnia and Herzegovina	25	68
Bulgaria	78	66
Croatia	47	65
Czech Republic	25	62
Estonia	16	63
Hungary	61	72
Latvia	57	71
Lithuania	19	54
Poland	26	64
Republic of Moldova	33	33
Romania	75	71
Slovenia	34	75
Western Europe (6)	19	33
Iceland	22	30
Ireland	25	22
Italy	13	38
Portugal	2	49
Sweden	44	38
United Kingdom	8	20

Sources: Compiled by United Nations Statistics Division from UNECE, Gender statistics database (2009); European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making (2008); UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* (2009); and national reports.

Table 5.8
Share of women among judges in international and regional courts, 2006

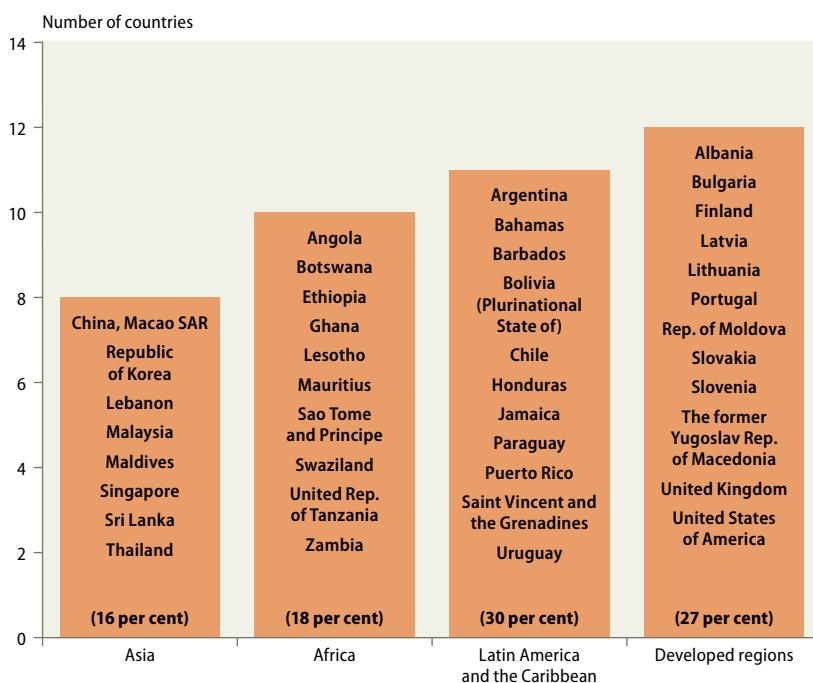
0–9%	10–19%	20–29%	30–39%
International Court of Justice (7%)	European Court of Justice (17%)	European Court of Human Rights (27%)	International Criminal Court (39%)
International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (0%)	Caribbean Court of Justice (14%)	Andean Court of Justice (25%)	Court of First Instance (36%)
	Inter-American Court of Human Rights (14%)		International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (33%)
	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (11%)		Special Court of Sierra Leone (30%)

²⁹ UNIFEM, 2009.

³⁰ United Nations, 1998.

Source: UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* (2009), p. 79.

Figure 5.5
Number and list of countries or areas where the national statistical office (NSO) is headed by a woman, by region, 2010



Source: United Nations Statistics Division, Contacts database (accessed in January 2010).

Note: The percentage in brackets refer to the proportion of countries or areas in the region that have a woman as chief statistician.

in government ministries.³¹ High-ranking female administrators were more likely to occupy the high-level posts in socio-cultural ministries (education, welfare, health, etc.) as opposed to ministries associated with the basic government functions (foreign affairs, interior, defence, justice, etc.). Women occupied 33 per cent of the highest-level positions in socio-cultural ministries compared to only 22 per cent in the ministries with basic functions.

**Out of 190 national statistical offices worldwide,
41 are headed by women**

A specific high-ranking administrative position in a country is that of chief statistician, the person in charge of the government entity responsible for producing official statistics. Worldwide, 41 of 190 national statistical offices (22 per cent) have a woman as chief statistician.³² Female heads are more common in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the more developed regions compared

³¹ European Commission, 2010.

³² Data on chief statisticians come from the contacts database maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division.

to Africa and Asia. In the former two regions, women account for 30 and 27 per cent, respectively, of chief statisticians, as opposed to 18 and 16 per cent, respectively, in Africa and Asia (figure 5.5). There are two regions where all chief statisticians are male: Northern Africa and Oceania.

A very important high-ranking position in government is the Governor of the central bank, the entity responsible for overseeing the monetary system for the country. Available data from Europe shows that no woman has attained this position (box 5.4).

2. Women and men in the United Nations

Article 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women requires States to ensure that women have equal opportunities to represent their governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations. The Beijing Platform for Action called on the United Nations to implement employment policies in order to achieve overall gender equality at the professional level and above by 2000, and a target was set for women to hold 50 per cent of managerial and decision-making positions in the United Nations by 2000; this target, however, has been met only in the case of junior professionals.

Between 1998 and 2009, there was an increase in the proportion of women at every level of the professional and higher categories of staff in the United Nations Secretariat. Progress was more marked (greater than 10 percentage point increase) in the highest decision-making and managerial positions, namely those at the under-secretary-general and assistant secretary-general levels – positions where women were extremely underrepresented in 1998 (figure 5.6). The two director categories (D-2 and D-1), which also involve managerial decision-mak-

Box 5.4

Central banks are male dominated in the European Union

In 2009, the central banks of all 27 European Union Member States are led by a male governor and their boards have on average five men for every woman.

Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making (2010).

ing, showed increases of five percentage points in the 11-year interval. The senior and mid-level professionals (P-5, P-4 and P-3) registered the smallest gains (2 to 4 percentage points), while the junior professional level (P-2) improved by 6 percentage points. Apart from the junior professionals which were 45 per cent female in 1998 and are now 51 per cent, no other category achieved the 50 per cent target envisioned in 1995.

The current situation of women in the United Nations Secretariat, where the proportion of women at each level of the hierarchy is lower than that in the next level down, echoes the trend in national governments. The deficit of women at the most senior levels persists, with women comprising only between 20 and 30 per cent of directors, assistant secretaries-general and under-secretaries-general.

D. The private sector

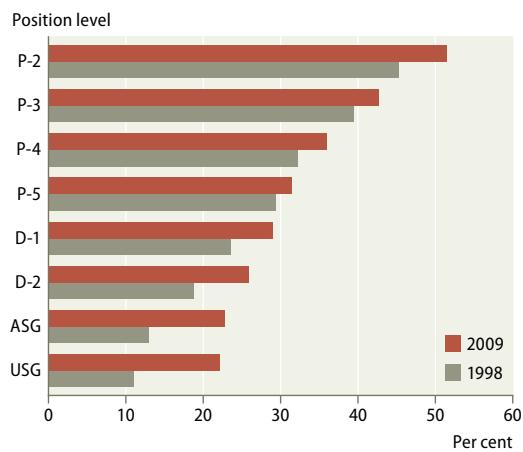
Women around the world have gradually gained more opportunities to participate in and contribute to the development of society. However, despite some advances toward gender equality in the private sector, the gaps in the corporate sphere remain enormous.

1. Corporate boards

Evidence suggests that corporate boards with more female members have greater participation of members in decision-making and better board governance.³³ Specifically women are less likely to have attendance problems than men. Furthermore, the greater the proportion of women on the board, the better are the attendance levels of male directors and the more equity-based is the pay for directors. In addition, companies where at least three women serve as board members show stronger than average results in financial performance; this association holds across industries.³⁴

Although women directors are now present on most boards of directors of large companies, their number remains low compared to men. For example, in the United States of America in 2009, while 89 per cent of the Standard and Poor 500 companies³⁵ had at least one woman director on

Figure 5.6
Proportion of women in the professional and higher-level positions in the United Nations Secretariat, 1998 and 2009



Source: United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, *The Status of Women in the United Nations System and in the United Nations Secretariat, as of 30 June 2009 (Secretariat), as of 30 December 2008 (United Nations System)*.

their board, women comprised on average only 16 per cent of board directors.³⁶ Companies with a female Chief Executive Officer (CEO) were more likely to have a greater number of women on their board of directors:³⁷ 32 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in companies with a male CEO.³⁸

The low proportion of women in the boards of large companies is also evident in Europe. In 2009 women directors comprised on average 12 per cent of directors on the board of the top publicly traded companies in 33 countries (EU-27 plus 6 others).³⁹ The proportion of women directors on corporate boards was highest by far in Norway (42 per cent). This proportion exceeded 20 per cent in only two other countries: Finland (24 per cent) and Sweden (27 per cent).

Some countries have implemented proactive policies to boost female participation at the board level of private companies, particularly in Scandinavia. In Norway, for example, legislation passed in 2002 requires state-owned companies to have at

Euronext and the NASDAQ OMX. The average board size for the Standard and Poor 500 companies was 11 in 2009.

³⁶ Spencer Stuart, 2009.

³⁷ The higher proportion of female directors in companies with a female CEO is in part due to the fact that the CEO is often a member of the board of directors and would thus count towards the total number of women directors in those companies. At the same time, a large female presence in the company's board may be a factor in the ascendance of a female CEO.

³⁸ Spencer Stuart, 2009.

³⁹ European Commission. 2010. Based on the largest publicly listed companies compiled from the primary blue-chip index of the stock exchange(s) in each country.

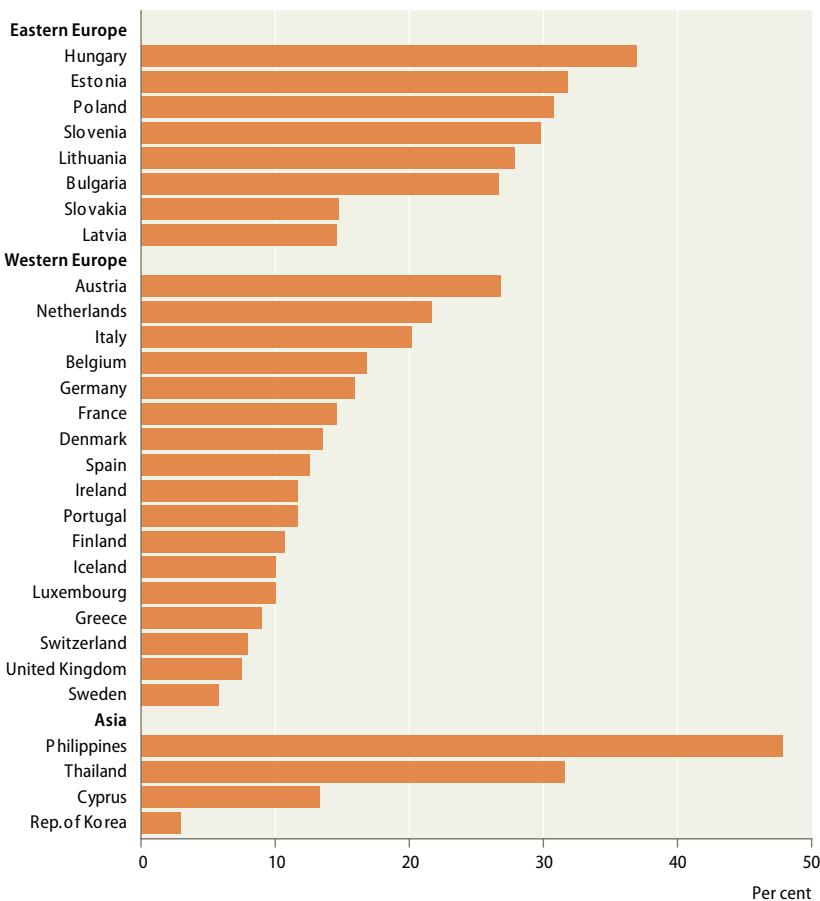
³³ Adams and Ferreira, 2008.

³⁴ Joy and others, 2007.

³⁵ Large publicly held companies included in the Standard and Poor 500 index; all 500 companies trade on either of the two largest American stock market companies: the NYSE

Figure 5.7

Proportion of women among directors and chief executives of enterprises or organizations, 2000



Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from ILO, Labour Statistics database (LABORSTA), Employment by sex and detailed occupational groups (SEGREGAT), ISCO-88 code 121 (accessed in June 2009).

least 40 per cent representation of each sex on their boards. Another law was passed in 2006 requiring the private sector to comply with the same rule.⁴⁰ These government measures contributed to raising female board membership to 42 per cent by 2009 from only a quarter in 2005.⁴¹

Spain is another country which mandated a quota to raise the number of women on boards.⁴² The gains, however, have been modest since the legislation was put in place in 2007: the proportion of women increased from 6 per cent in 2007 to only 10 per cent in 2009.

2. Chief executives

Women corporate leaders have a potential to influence the way employees live and work by promoting fairer management practices, a better balance between work and family life and fewer gender disparities in the workplace. However, as in leadership and decision-making positions in the government (see sections A to C above), women chief executives are not common in the private sector.

Figure 5.7 presents the proportion of female directors and chief executives for 25 countries in Europe and 4 in Asia. The analysis is based on detailed occupation data by sex from 2000 and focuses on occupations variably listed as director, chief executive, president, managing director or other similar position at the head of an enterprise or organization. The available data show that the proportion of directors and chief executives who are women varies widely among countries even within the same region, ranging from 15 to 37 per cent in Eastern Europe, from 6 to 27 per cent in Western Europe and, for the 4 countries in Asia, from 3 to 48 per cent. In most of the Eastern European countries (6 out of 8), women comprised more than 25 per cent of directors and chief executives. In comparison, this was the case in only one (Austria) of 17 Western European countries with available data; the large majority of countries in this region had proportions below 20 per cent. In Asia, the Philippines and Thailand both had comparatively high proportions of women among directors and chief executives, with 48 and 32 per cent, respectively; while the Republic of Korea registered the lowest proportion among all the countries, with 3 per cent.

Only 13 of the 500 largest corporations in the world had a female CEO in 2009

The glass ceiling appears to be most impenetrable in the largest corporations, which are still essentially male domains. Of the 500 largest corporations in the world⁴³, only 13 had a female CEO in 2009,⁴⁴ a proportion amounting to less than 3 per cent. In 33 countries in Europe (EU-27 plus 6 others), the same pattern emerges of a very low proportion of women in the top position of

⁴⁰ Norway, Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2010.

⁴¹ European Commission, 2008 and 2010.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The Fortune Global 500, which is a ranking of the top 500 corporations worldwide as measured by revenue. The list of companies is compiled annually by Fortune magazine.

⁴⁴ Fortune, 2009.

the highest decision-making body in the largest companies, namely the chairman of the board. In 16 of the 33 countries, the chairman of the board of all the top publicly traded companies⁴⁵ in 2009 was male; and in only three countries (Bulgaria, Slovakia and Norway) were women at the helm of at least 10 per cent of the country's top companies as chairman of the board.⁴⁶ For the European countries, the average proportion of women serving as chairman of the board of top companies was 3 per cent.

In sum, women are still severely underrepresented in the highest decision-making positions within the private sector, at least in the more developed regions. The situation is unlikely to be more encouraging in the less developed regions, although there is not enough data to confirm or refute this. Compared to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership and decision-making positions in the government, judiciary and civil service (see sections A to C), the situation in the private sector is even more severe.

⁴⁵ The number of top publicly traded companies considered range from 9 in Iceland to 50 in the United Kingdom.

⁴⁶ European Commission, 2010.