

Women in politics – international comparisons

Compared to the rest of the world, our national parliament has a very low number of women representatives.

When countries are ranked for the number of women representatives, the comes a lowly 47th out of 184 countries listed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The IPU ranks countries according to the percentage of women in the lower or single house of the national parliamentary body. The top 20 are as follows:

Rank	Country	Election Date	Total No. Seats	No. Women	% Women
1	Rwanda	Sept 2003	80	39	48.8
2	Sweden	Sept 2002	349	158	45.3
3	Norway	Sept 2001	165	63	38.2
4	Finland	Mar 2003	200	75	37.5
5	Denmark	Feb 2005	179	66	36.9
6	Netherlands	Jan 2003	150	55	36.7
7	Cuba	Jan 2003	609	219	36.0
8	Spain	Mar 2004	350	126	36.0
9	Costa Rica	Feb 2002	57	20	35.1
10	Mozambique	Dec 2004	250	87	34.8
11	Belgium	May 2003	150	52	34.7
12	Austria	Nov 2002	183	62	33.9
13	Argentina	Oct 2001	255	86	33.7
14	South Africa	Apr 2004	400	131	32.8
15	Germany	Sept 2002	601	197	32.8
16	Guyana	Mar 2001	65	20	30.8
17	Iceland	May 2003	63	19	30.2
18	Belarus	Oct 2004	109	32	29.4
19	Seychelles	Dec 2002	34	10	29.4
20	New Zealand	Jul 2002	120	34	28.3

The UK is ranked 13th within the European Union (EU). Many European countries use positive action measures designed to address the under-representation of women in their legislature. In Europe, the Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) and the Netherlands head the ranking.

EU Countries	% Women MPs (equivalents)	Election Year
Sweden	45.3%	2002
Finland	37.5%	2003
Denmark	36.9%	2005
Netherlands	26.7%	2003
Spain	36.0%	2004
Belgium	34.7%	2003
Austria	33.9%	2002
Germany	32.8%	2002
Luxembourg	23.3%	2004
Lithuania	22.0%	2004
Latvia	21.0%	2002
Poland	20.2%	2001
UK	19.8%	2005
Portugal	19.5%	2005
Estonia	18.8%	2003
Czech Republic	17.0	2002

Further information

For an analysis of why the UK is behind so many other countries, see the Fawcett briefing Increasing women in politics: what works worldwide, available on our website.

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