

# WHY SHOULD THE DOUBLE QUOTA SYSTEM BE REVISED?

The impact of electoral changes on gender representation  
in decision-making and the need for a new phase of  
reform

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## THE EVOLUTION OF LEGISLATION ON THE DOUBLE QUOTA SYSTEM

**The long road towards equitable gender representation in the electoral and decision-making process began in 2006.** From the adoption in 2006 of [Law No. 5 on ensuring equal opportunities between women and men](#) until 2021, several legislative measures were approved to ensure the equitable representation of women and men<sup>1</sup> in the decision-making process. However, their effectiveness has been significantly reduced by subsequent decisions of the Legislative Body. For example, in 2016, a 40 per cent minimum quota for the representation of both genders in governing bodies and on electoral lists was introduced by law<sup>2</sup>. These changes were essential for ensuring the principle of gender equality in politics; however, they failed to produce results, as the Republic of Moldova switched to a new type of electoral system in 2017: from a proportional system to a mixed-member system. With the introduction of the mixed system, the intended effect of the gender quota provisions was drastically reduced, as they were applied only to the list of candidates for the national constituency (51 MPs, based on proportional representation – on party lists).

**In 2019, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova passed a bill aimed at amending the electoral legislation.** With the approval of this bill, the mixed electoral system was abolished and the country returned to the proportional electoral system – based on party lists. Among the provisions adopted were changes to the procedures for drawing up candidate lists through the application of the double quota system (a 40% representation quota and provisions on list positioning, (a minimum of four candidates of each gender for every ten positions)). Although the double quota system was approved in 2019, a derogation from the provisions of the legislation in force was introduced for the 2019 general local elections: candidate lists were to be drawn up in accordance with the minimum representation quota of 40% for both genders and a minimum of three candidates of the opposite sex for every 10 positions. In the general local elections of 20 October 2019, the number of female candidates for councillor increased at both levels, and the highest number of female councillors elected in the last 16 years was recorded.

**In the early parliamentary elections of 11 July 2021 and the general local elections of 2023, the full double quota system was applied for the first time.** Thus, candidate lists were to be drawn up in accordance with the following two conditions: (i) a minimum representation quota of 40% for both genders and (ii) the placement of candidates on the lists according to the formula: a minimum of four candidates for every ten seats. Failure to comply with the conditions set out in the above provisions results in the electoral body refusing to register the lists of candidates. Following the July 2021 election, 41 MPs (out of 101) were women, marking the highest proportion of female MPs in the country's history (40% of the total). The dual quota system has been strengthened by the introduction into legislation of financial incentives for parties that ensure the effective representation of women and young people. Of the annual subsidies granted to political parties from the state budget, 7.5% is distributed in proportion to the number of women elected to Parliament, and a further 7.5% is allocated based on the number of women elected in local elections. Similarly, 5% of the subsidies are allocated in proportion to the number of young people (those under 35) elected to Parliament, and a further 5% is allocated for young people elected to local councils.

**Consequently, the evolution of women's representation in Moldova's elected bodies demonstrates that the progress made over the last decade is not the result of spontaneous changes in electoral behaviour, but the direct effect of deliberate legislative interventions.** The introduction and consolidation of the double quota system have functioned as an essential corrective mechanism, transforming the principle of gender equality from a declarative norm into an effective tool for rebalancing representation in the decision-making process.

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<sup>1</sup> Law No. 5 on ensuring equal opportunities between women and men, [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=144448&lang=ro#](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=144448&lang=ro#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://genderpulse.md/ro/blog/moldova-face-un-pas-istoric-in-promovarea-egalitatii-de-gen-in-politica#:~:text=The%20Parliament%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Moldova%20has%20adopted%2C,political%20decisions%20and%20the%20formation%20of%20the%20Government>

# THE IMPACT OF THE DOUBLE QUOTA SYSTEM ON EQUITABLE GENDER REPRESENTATION

The first results of the dual quota system were seen in the 2023 local elections. Following the initial implementation of the dual quota system in 2019 – albeit in a modified form – the key change took place in 2023, when the mechanism came into full effect in the local elections. This full implementation contributed to a more balanced distribution of women on electoral lists, including in the top deciles – considered the most winnable positions – which are traditionally occupied predominantly by male candidates. In the 2023 elections, women accounted for 45.3% of candidates for district/municipal councillor, and 47.2% of candidates for local councillor, demonstrating a positive trend compared to recent elections. Thus, in the 2023 local elections, the proportion of female candidates for district/municipal councils increased by over 15% compared to the 2015 elections and by over 2% compared to those in 2019. At the level of local councils, the proportion of female candidates has risen by around 12% compared to 2015 and by 1.4% compared to 2019. The positive trend in recent years clearly shows that the double quota system is the mechanism that ensures equal opportunities and chances for women and men in the electoral process, and the existence of these provisions will further increase the proportion of female candidates for councillor in the future.

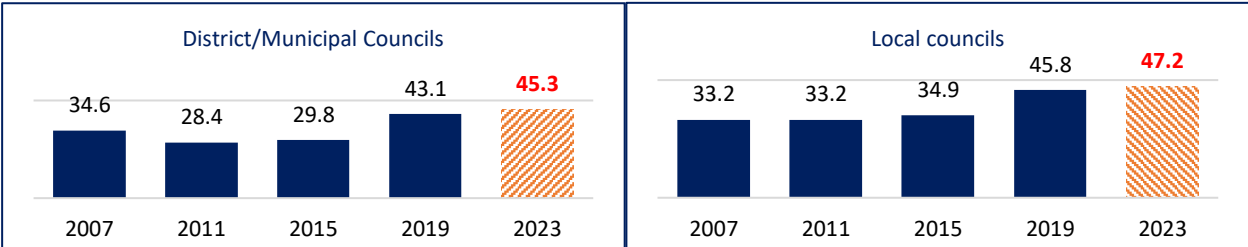


Figure 1. Proportion of women among candidates for district, municipal and local councillor, %  
Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the CEC

Thanks to the quota provisions, the gender gap recorded in the 2023 local elections has narrowed. The gender gap represents the difference between the proportion of female candidates and the proportion of women elected to office. In the context of female candidates for local council positions (2023), the gender gap is half that of 2019. At the district/municipal council level, the gender gap is higher, at 11.6%, though it has decreased compared to the previous election year. In this case, the numerical composition of the respective councils amplifies the impact of the gender gap in terms of women’s representation. However, we note that the implementation of the updated provisions on list positioning in the 2023 elections has reduced the discrepancies between the proportion of women who stood as candidates and those who were elected, diminishing the gender gap compared to the 2019 election, with the most significant impact being felt within district/municipal councils, as these bodies are numerically larger.

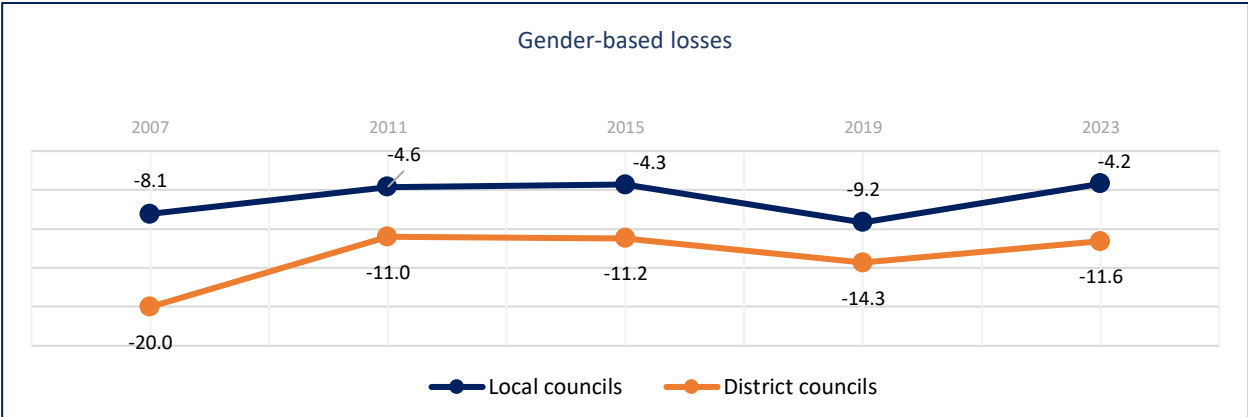


Figure 2. Trend in gender gaps in district/municipal and local council elections, %  
Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the CEC

**As a result, the proportion of women elected to council positions is increasing year on year.** Following the 2023 local elections, the proportion of female councillors in district and municipal councils stood at 33.3%, almost double the figure from the 2015 election, before the double quota provisions were introduced. At the same time, the representation of women in local councils is even higher, reaching 40.3% in 2023, 10% more than in the 2015 elections.

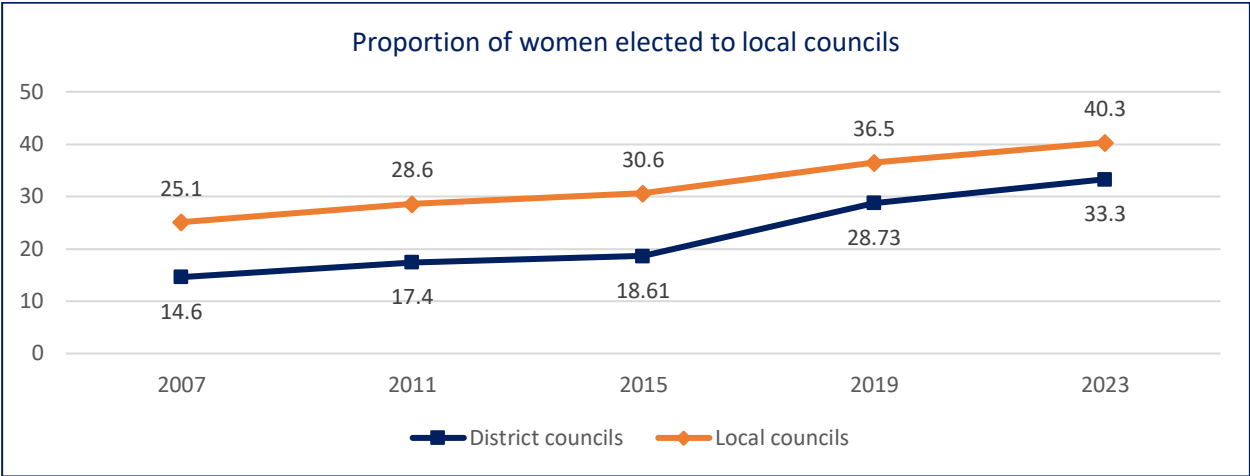


Figure 3. Proportion of women elected to district/municipal and local councils, %  
 Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the CEC

**Thanks to the dual quota system, the 2025 parliamentary elections were also marked by a relatively balanced representation of women on the candidate lists.** According to data provided by the Central Electoral Commission, women accounted for 44.5% of all registered candidates, a figure indicating the maintenance of a relatively balanced gender representation on electoral lists. This level of representation is closely linked to the legal obligation imposed on political parties to respect the minimum quota of 40% for each gender when drawing up electoral lists. However, compared to the 2021 parliamentary elections, when the proportion of women among candidates was 46.7%, a slight decrease can be observed, which suggests that, although legal mechanisms help to ensure a more balanced representation on electoral lists, their impact also depends on how political parties support women’s participation in the electoral contest in practice.

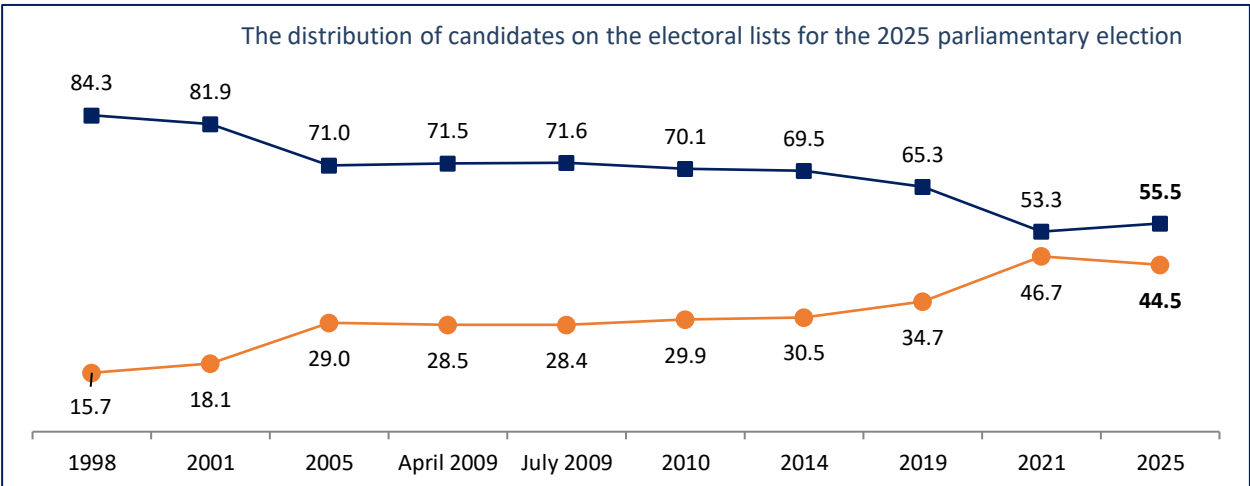


Figure 4. Distribution of candidates on electoral lists in the 2025 parliamentary election, %  
 Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the Central Electoral Commission, 2025

**Legislative changes regarding the introduction of the dual quota system have had a fundamental impact on the placement of women on electoral lists.** The introduction in 2016 of a minimum quota of 40% for each gender represented a first step towards increasing the presence of women on candidate lists, but the absence of rules regarding the order of placement initially limited the impact of this measure on eligible positions. Previously, although women were present on electoral lists, they were much less frequently included at the top of these lists. The top positions, with the highest probability of securing a seat, were

predominantly occupied by men, whilst the proportion of women increased gradually towards the bottom of the lists, where the chances of being elected are considerably lower. Subsequently, with the introduction of the double quota mechanism, which also included requirements regarding the placement of candidates on lists, a clear shift in the distribution of women can be observed. As the graph indicates, the proportion of female candidates is no longer concentrated in the lower deciles but is now much more evenly distributed across the electoral lists, including in the top positions.

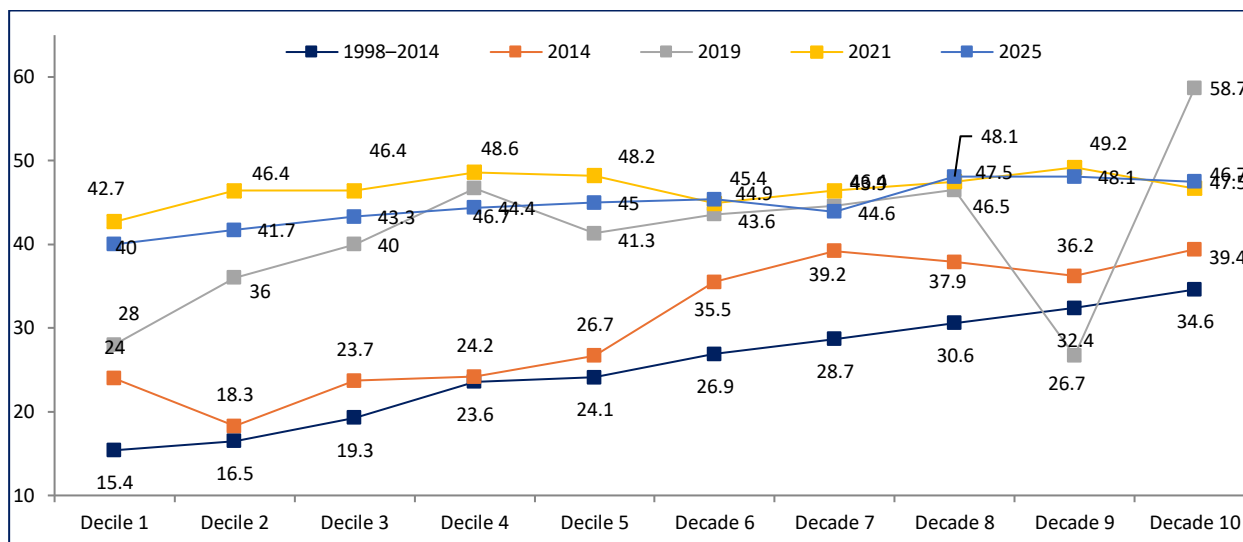


Figure 5. Trend in the positioning of women on candidate lists for the position of MP, by year and decile, %  
 Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the Central Electoral Commission, 1998–2025

**As a result, the provisions of the double quota system determined the final results of the parliamentary elections.** According to the results of the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025, women hold 36.6% of all seats, 4 percentage points less than previously; however, following the latest reshuffles, their share has risen to 39.6%. This decline is explained both by the lower number of female candidates standing for election and by the persistence of structural barriers, including worsening social perceptions regarding the role of women in decision-making positions. However, the current proportion and that from the previous election represent the highest figures of all previous parliamentary elections, confirming the relevance and necessity of maintaining legislative provisions regarding gender-balanced representation in Parliament.

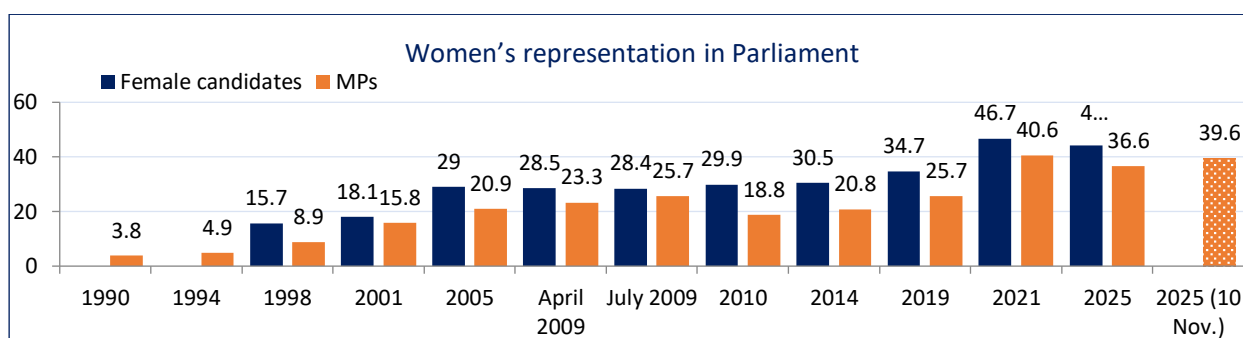


Figure 6. Trend in the representation of women on candidate lists and elected as MPs, %  
 Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the Central Electoral Commission, 1990–2025

# LIMITATIONS AND GAPS IN THE APPLICATION OF THE DOUBLE QUOTA SYSTEM

Although the impact of the double quota system is evident, and representation in Parliament, district and municipal councils, and local councils has become more balanced following the latest elections, there are a few limitations and gaps that still constitute significant barriers to the full implementation of these provisions.

**An analysis of the composition of electoral lists in the 2023 local elections highlights two limitations in the full implementation of the provisions of the dual quota system.** Whilst an examination of candidates' positions on the lists, at the decile level, indicates a relatively balanced representation of women and men, a more detailed analysis of the distribution across each position shows that women are more frequently placed towards the end of the deciles, particularly in the first two deciles of the lists. This trend considerably reduces their chances of winning a seat. However, it cannot be said that the double quota system has not been applied, as the formal requirement is met, with at least four women appearing in each group of ten positions.

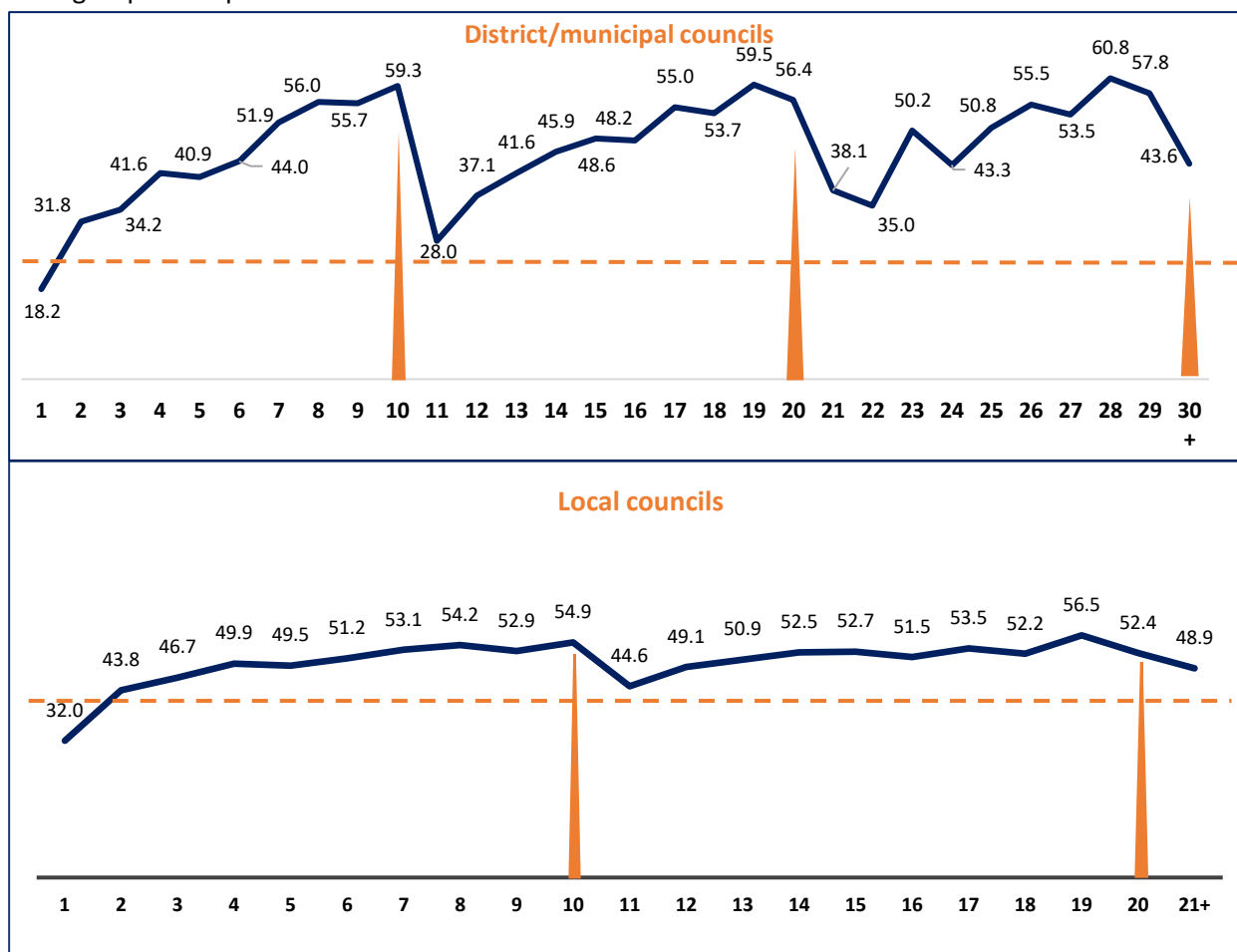


Figure 7. Positioning of female candidates on candidate lists for district/municipal and local councils, by position, %  
Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the CEC

**Another limitation to the application of the double quota system at local level is the uncertainty regarding its application in the case of lists with a smaller number of candidates.** In the case of candidate lists for district and municipal councils, approximately 7.7% of all lists deviated from compliance with the double quota system, of which 3.6% disadvantaged men and 4.1% disadvantaged women. At the same time, around 0.7% of the lists breached the provision regarding ensuring at least 40% representation for the under-represented gender. In the case of local councils, a higher number of lists were found to have

breached the 40% quota, accounting for approximately 3% of all candidate lists. Furthermore, 8.7% of the lists submitted disadvantaged a particular gender in terms of their position on the list, of which 4.3% disadvantaged women and 4.4% disadvantaged men. Analysis of these breaches shows that, in most cases, they were caused by calculation errors or technical difficulties in the precise application of the quota. Such situations arise particularly when the total number of seats on a council is odd – for example, 13, 27, 33 or 35 seats. In such cases, strict adherence to the 40% threshold becomes difficult, as the result of the calculation cannot be expressed as a whole number of candidates (for example, in a council with 27 seats, 40% would amount to 10.8). Consequently, parties are forced to round off the number of candidates, which may lead to deviations from the provisions of the quota system.

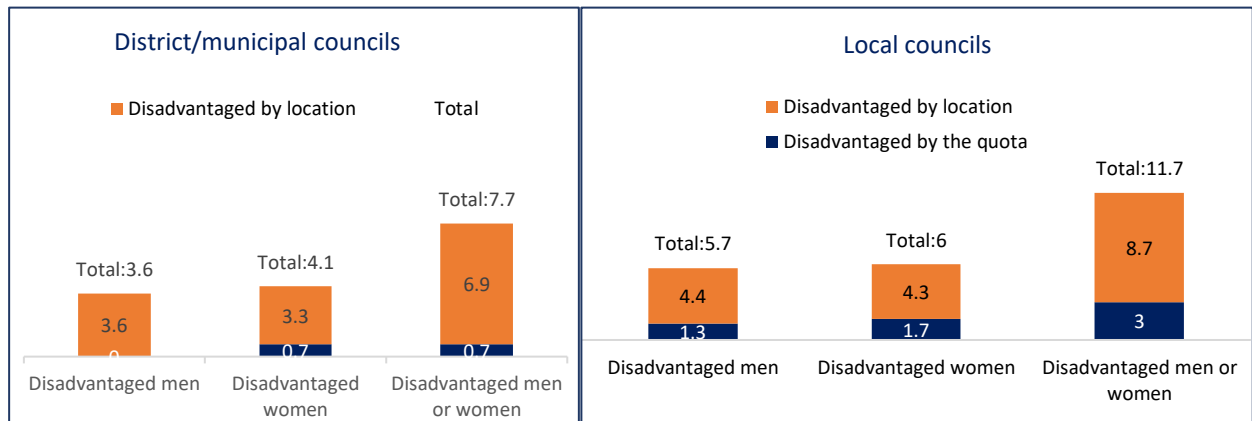


Figure 8. Proportion of candidate lists for district/municipal council elections in which one gender or the other was disadvantaged, %;

Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the CEC

**In the case of parliamentary elections, too, a more detailed analysis of how candidates are positioned on the lists highlights certain gender imbalances.** Although the minimum representation threshold is generally met, the distribution across segments of the lists shows that women do not benefit to the same extent from positions considered eligible. The data presented in the figure below indicate that in the top quintiles of the lists – the positions with the highest chances of winning a seat – the proportion of men is considerably higher, exceeding 70% in some cases (for example in Q1, Q3, Q5 and Q7). At the same time, women tend to be concentrated more frequently in the middle or lower segments of the lists, positions that offer lower chances of entering Parliament. Thus, although the impact of the dual quota system is noticeable, formal compliance with the gender quota does not always automatically translate into equal access to positions with a higher probability of election, maintaining a continuing trend of men being concentrated at the top of the lists, whilst women are more often placed in areas with more limited visibility and electoral opportunities.

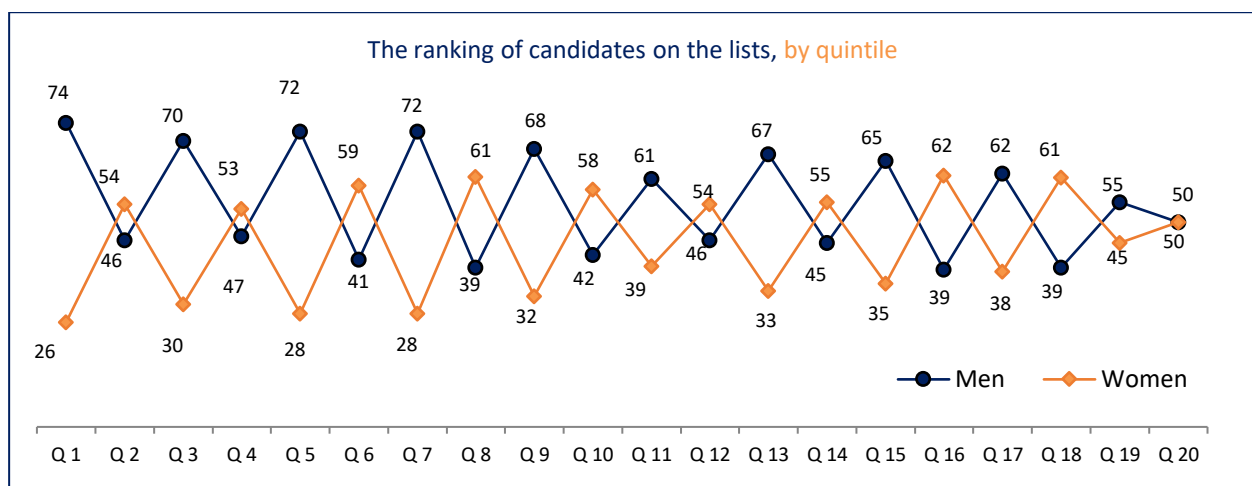


Figure 9. Positioning on candidate lists for the role of MP, by gender and quintile, %

Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the Central Electoral Commission, 2025

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The current barriers posed by technical difficulties in small lists and the tendency to place women in ineligible positions can be overcome through legislative changes that strengthen provisions regarding placement. At the international level, there are at least three feasible options for reforming the list placement formula:

1. **The '2 out of 5' rule: for every 5 places on the list, at least 2 must be occupied by people of the opposite sex.** This entails a balanced distribution in each consecutive block of 5 places, so as to prevent a situation where the first 5 positions are occupied exclusively by men or exclusively by women. In practical terms, parties would be required to include at least two people of the opposite sex in every group of five candidates. Such a solution, effectively a *division of the 4/10 quota* into smaller sub-sections, would strengthen diversity and ensure the consistent presence of women throughout the entire list, including at the top.
2. **The '1 in 3' or '2/1' rule requires that, for every 3 positions on the list, at least one candidate must be of the opposite sex.** This rule would guarantee the presence of both genders even in very small segments of the list (in practice, no block of three consecutive candidates would be of the same gender). Such an algorithm offers the advantage of adapting to the short lists specific to local council elections. For example, in a 9-member council, this rule would automatically ensure the presence of at least 3 women on the list; however, in combination with the general 40% requirement, the party would still be obliged to include at least 4 women out of the total of 9 candidates to meet the legal threshold.
3. **The 'zig-zag' or 'zebra' system involves alternating female and male candidates, position by position, across the entire list.** This method would lead to near-perfect *50/50 parity* and would completely eliminate the possibility of one gender occupying more than one consecutive place at the start of the list. In practice, if the first candidate on the list is a man, the second must be a woman, the third a man again, and so on, or vice versa. The strict alternation method, one by one, ensures the clearest combination of numerical and positional balance. The 'zig-zag' system compels parties to offer women *equal chances of election*, as it places them equally in the positions considered 'safe' on the list. Furthermore, it sends a strong message to voters regarding the parties' commitment to gender equality by presenting a visibly balanced list: *half women, half men* in regular alternation.

*In Serbia, the decision was made to introduce alternating representation every fourth candidate on the list. In Macedonia, the law stipulates that at least one candidate in every group of three positions on the electoral lists must be of the opposite sex. Another example is Poland, where it has been established that at least one woman must be among the top three candidates on any list. In Portugal, within electoral constituencies, lists may not include more than two consecutive candidates of the same sex. In Belgium, the following rule has been adopted: the top two positions on the electoral list cannot be occupied by candidates of the same sex. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Electoral Code stipulates that the top two positions on the list of candidates must include a candidate belonging to the under-represented sex. Furthermore, the first five positions on the list of candidates must include at least two people of different sexes, and in the first eight positions at least three candidates must be of the opposite sex. In Spain, quotas apply not only to the entire party list, but also to each group of five successive positions on the list.*

The application of allocation systems such as zip, (1/1), 2/1 or 3/2 would contribute not only to increasing women's representation in Parliament, but also to correcting persistent imbalances in local elections, providing a fairer and more functional framework for ensuring gender equality in electoral competition. The two graphs illustrate the potential impact that the introduction of alternative placement rules would have had on the representation of women in the Parliament elected in 2025. The graph on the right reflects the situation immediately after the elections (28 September 2025), whilst the one on the left shows the current

composition (10 November 2025), following reshuffles and the redistribution of seats. The estimates were produced by the CPD based on the seats won by each party that entered Parliament, simulating how the proportion of elected women would have changed if the lists had been drawn up according to the zip system (with a 1/1 alternation formula), the 2/1 system or the 5/2 (3/2) system. The results speak for themselves: regardless of the point in time analysed, the current system resulted in lower representation of women: 36.6% immediately after the elections and 39.6% after reshuffles. In contrast, the zip system would have produced near parity (48.5%), whilst the 2/1 and 5/2 systems would have considerably improved women’s chances of securing eligible positions. Even though these latter two options show results close to the actual figures, it is essential to emphasise that the estimates are based on seats already won; in reality, had these placement formulas been applied as early as the list-drawing stage, women would have been placed in higher positions, which would have given them a real chance of securing a seat in the first round of allocation. These conclusions are also relevant to local elections, where the difficulties in applying the gender quota are exacerbated by the fact that many lists include a small number of candidates (11, 13 or 15 positions), and the current ‘4 out of 10’ formula does not ensure a balanced distribution across short lists. In such cases, placing women at the bottom of the lists – even if this formally complies with the quota – considerably reduces their real chances of being elected, particularly in district or municipal councils.

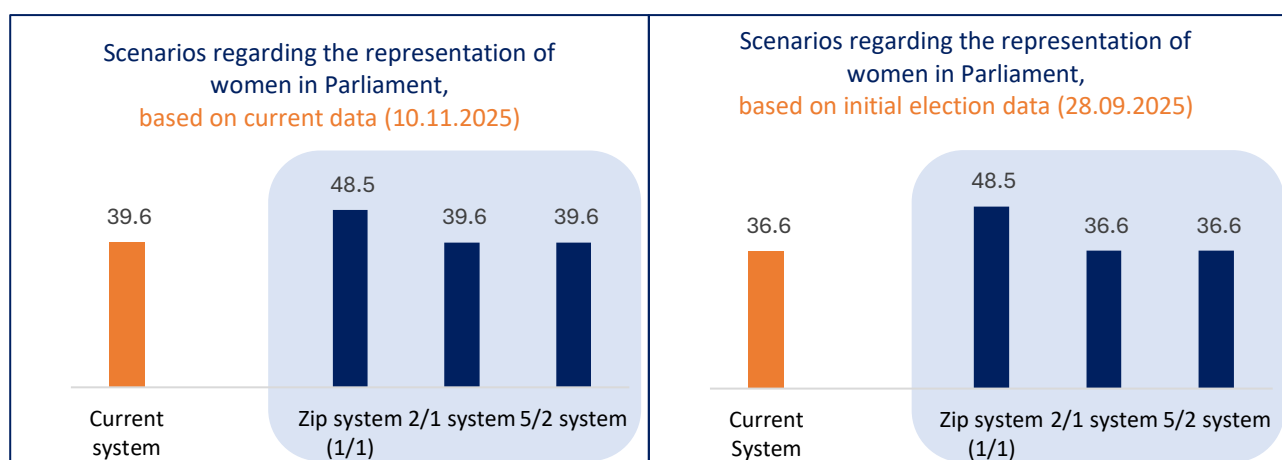


Figure 10. Proportion of women in legislative bodies, classified according to the placement provisions applied  
Source: CPD calculations based on data provided by the Central Electoral Commission, 2025

**Specific recommendation:** It is proposed that Article 68(3) of Electoral Code No. 325/2022 be amended to strengthen the rule regarding the placement of candidates on electoral lists. In its current form, the provision states that ‘lists of candidates for parliamentary and local elections shall be drawn up in accordance with the minimum representation quota of 40% for both genders, and the placement of candidates on the lists shall be determined according to the formula: a minimum of four candidates for every ten seats’.

It is recommended that this formula be replaced with one of the following options:

**strict alternation (1/1);**

**the 2/1 system** (at least one candidate of the opposite sex for every two positions);

**the 3/2 system** (at least two candidates of the opposite sex for every five positions).

These formulas ensure a more balanced and effective distribution, reduce the risk of women being concentrated at the bottom of the lists, and increase the real chances of gaining access to elected office.

# GENDER REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENT

**In the Republic of Moldova, the presence of women in government has remained low in recent decades, with minor fluctuations between cabinets.** In the first two decades following the declaration of independence, the governments of the Republic of Moldova were almost entirely dominated by men. In several cabinets of the 1990s, including the governments of Mircea Druc<sup>3</sup>, Andrei Sangheli<sup>4,5</sup> and Ion Ciubuc<sup>6</sup>, there were no female ministers, indicating a deeply male-dominated political landscape. Even in cases where women were present in the executive, their proportion was extremely low. For example, in the governments of Valeriu Muravschi<sup>7</sup> and Andrei Sangheli I, women accounted for approximately 4.2% of all ministers, which meant, in practice, the presence of a single woman in the cabinet. The first noticeable increase in female representation did not occur until the early 2000s. In the governments of Dumitru Braghiș and<sup>8</sup> (1999–2001), the proportion of women reached 10.5%, and in the governments led by Vasile Tarlev it varied between 9.5% and 13.6%. However, these increases remain modest and do not exceed the symbolic threshold of 15%, suggesting that women’s participation in the executive remains exceptional rather than structural. A distinct turning point in this evolution was the Zinaida Greceanîi government<sup>9</sup> (2008–2009), in which the proportion of women reached 30%. However, this trend did not become institutionalised. Following the change of government, in the cabinets led by Vlad Filat<sup>10</sup> the proportion of women fell back to much lower levels, between 4.5% and 10%. The period 2013–2016 marked a new relative increase. In the Iurie Leancă Government<sup>11</sup> (2013–2015), women accounted for 28.6% of ministers, and in the Streleț Government<sup>12</sup> (2015–2016) approximately 30%, this being one of the highest levels recorded up to that point.

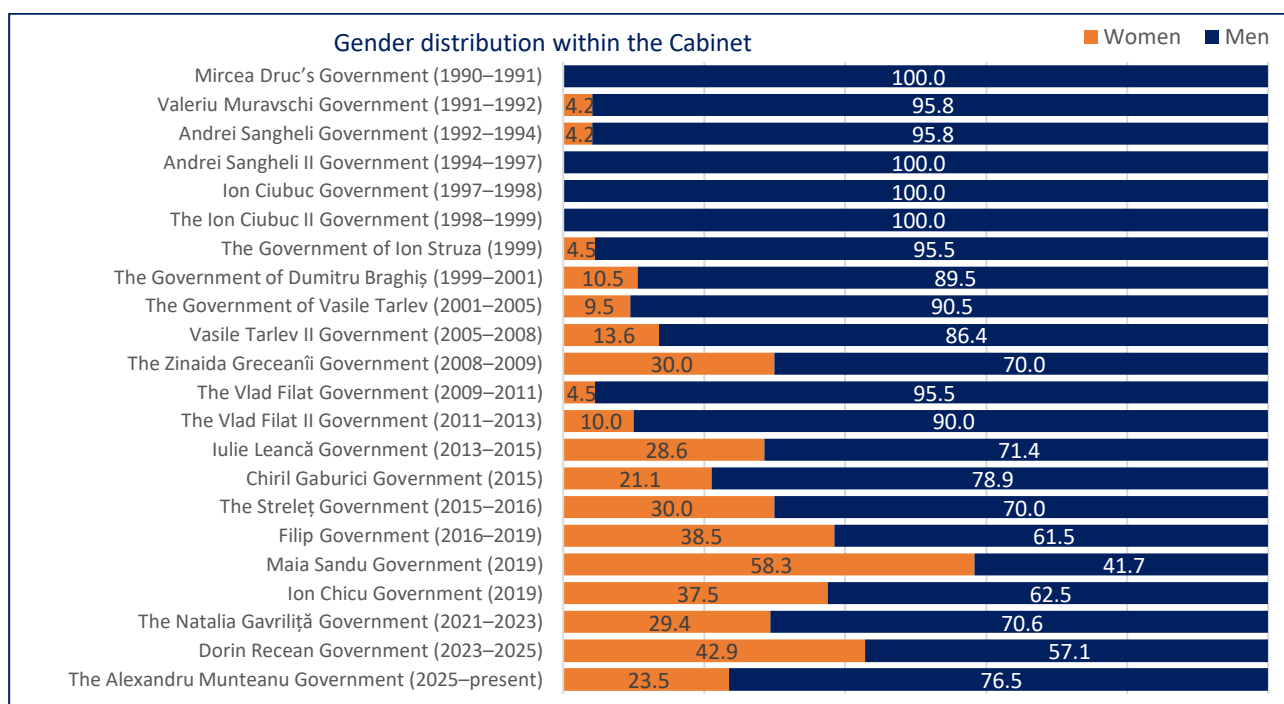


Figure 11: Gender distribution within Cabinets of Ministers, by gender, by government, in %  
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from [www.alegeri.md](http://www.alegeri.md), 1990–2026

<sup>3</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Mircea\\_Druc](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Mircea_Druc)

<sup>4</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Andrei\\_Sangheli](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Andrei_Sangheli)

<sup>5</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Andrei\\_Sangheli\\_II](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Andrei_Sangheli_II)

<sup>6</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Ion\\_Ciubuc](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Ion_Ciubuc)

<sup>7</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Valeriu\\_Muravschi](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Valeriu_Muravschi)

<sup>8</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Dumitru\\_Braghi%C8%99](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Dumitru_Braghi%C8%99)

<sup>9</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Zinaida\\_Grecean%C3%AEI](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Zinaida_Grecean%C3%AEI)

<sup>10</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Vlad\\_Filat](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Vlad_Filat)

<sup>11</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Iurie\\_Leanc%C4%83](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Iurie_Leanc%C4%83)

<sup>12</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Valeriu\\_Strele%C8%9B](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Valeriu_Strele%C8%9B)

**A key milestone in the development of the regulatory framework on gender representation in the executive was the adoption of Law No. 71 of 14 April 2016<sup>13</sup>.** The law amended several legislative acts, including the former Law No. 64-XII of 31 May 1990 on the Government, introducing for the first time an explicit obligation regarding the gender composition of the executive. According to the amendment introduced by Law No. 71/2016, in Article 27(2)(4) of the Law on the Government, the following text was inserted after the phrase “forms the Government”: “respecting a minimum representation quota of 40% for both genders”. In the consolidated version of the law, this provision stated that: “The Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova (...) shall form the Government, respecting a minimum representation quota of 40% for both genders, and shall propose its composition in the manner prescribed.” From a legal perspective, this wording had three essential characteristics. Firstly, it was a mandatory provision, not a programmatic one. The legislator did not use phrases such as “shall promote” or “shall encourage”, but instead established an explicit obligation for the Prime Minister when forming the executive. Secondly, the provision was numerically specific, clearly setting a minimum threshold of 40% for each gender, which significantly reduced the scope for political arbitrariness in the process of forming the Government. Thirdly, the provision was directly incorporated into the organic law on the organisation of the Government, which gave it significant legal force and made gender balance an explicit criterion of executive legitimacy.

**However, this regulatory framework was of relatively short duration.** With the 2017 reform of the central public administration and the adoption of Law No. 136/2017 on the Government, the legal framework governing the formation of the executive was reorganised, and the provision regarding the gender quota was not included in the new law. Chapter III of Law No. 136/2017, which regulates the procedure for the investiture of the Government, no longer contains the mandatory requirement for a minimum representation of 40% for both genders. Instead, the law merely stipulates that, when drawing up the list of Government members, the candidate for the office of Prime Minister “must take into account legislation on ensuring equal opportunities between men and women, in conjunction with criteria of professionalism and merit.” This amendment has fundamentally altered the nature of the regulation. Whereas the rule introduced in 2016 was a ‘result-based’ one, requiring the attainment of a clear numerical threshold, the rule introduced in 2017 is merely a ‘due diligence’ one, obliging the candidate for the office of Prime Minister to take into account the principle of equal opportunities, without setting a specific representation target. Consequently, the firm legal obligation regarding gender balance in the Government has been replaced by a general guideline, which is difficult to verify and practically impossible to enforce in the absence of a numerical criterion.

**The trend in women’s representation in the various post-2016 governments reflects the absence of a clear upward trend.** Interestingly, however, the government led by Pavel Filip (2016–2019) did not initially meet this quota. It was only after the 2017 administrative reform and the reduction of the number of ministries to nine that the proportion of women rose to 38.5%, approaching the legal threshold of 40%. This represented one of the closest examples of applying the spirit of the law, even though the requirement was not consistently maintained throughout the entire term of office. By the end of Filip’s term (2019), the composition of the Government had changed several times, and the proportion of women had fallen below the level initially promised.

**The highest level of female representation in government was achieved under Maia Sandu’s government (2019), where women accounted for 58.3% of cabinet members.** This figure exceeds not only the statutory quota of 40%, but also international standards for gender-balanced governments. As with the Greceanii Government, this situation confirms that an executive led by a woman tended to include a higher number of women in ministerial posts. However, this cabinet had a very short term. The technocratic government that succeeded it (Ion Chicu<sup>14</sup>, 2019–2020) reverted to an almost exclusively male composition – perpetuating the traditional model. It was only after the 2021 parliamentary elections, with the formation of Natalia Gavrilița’s government<sup>15</sup> (August 2021–February 2023), that there was a renewed increase in the proportion of women. Gavrilița was the second female prime minister in the country’s history, and her initial team

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=92833&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=92833&lang=ro)

<sup>14</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Ion\\_Chicu](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Ion_Chicu)

<sup>15</sup> [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul\\_Natalia\\_Gavrili%C8%9Ba](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul_Natalia_Gavrili%C8%9Ba)

included around five female ministers out of 13 portfolios (approx. 38%). These included key ministries such as the Interior and Health.

**Currently, the proportion of women in ministerial posts remains low, standing at under 20%.** Following Natalia Gavrilă's resignation in February 2023, the new Cabinet led by Dorin Recean<sup>16</sup> (Feb. 2023 – Nov. 2025) initially began with a relatively balanced composition (around 41% women among ministers, 7 women out of 17 government members). Upon taking office, the Recean Government included women in key portfolios such as the Interior, Finance, Justice, Infrastructure and Health, alongside other deputy prime minister positions held by women. This was a positive record for the Republic of Moldova, reflecting both the influence of pro-gender equality political commitments and pressure from civil society.

**However, the situation deteriorated shortly afterwards due to political upheaval.** In July 2023, three female members of the Recean cabinet resigned and were replaced by men. In the following months, further cabinet reshuffles led to a decline in the number of female ministers. For example, at the start of 2024, only 2 of the 14 portfolios were held by women (around 14%). Even though more women were appointed to the Government during 2024 – for instance, to the Ministry of Agriculture (Ludmila Catlabuga) or the return of a woman to the Ministry of the Interior (Daniela Misail-Nichitin) – overall the proportion remained around the 20% mark.

**By the end of 2025, with the appointment of the new Alexandru Munteanu government<sup>17</sup> (Recean's successor), female representation in the executive had reached one of the lowest levels of the past decade.** Of the 18 members of the Munteanu government, only 4 are women, compared with 7 women in the previous government. This corresponds to a proportion of around 22%, reconfirming the trend of severe imbalance. The absence of any legal constraints or firm political obligations regarding parity encourages the maintenance of a male-dominated 'status quo' at the top of the executive.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul\\_Dorin\\_Recean](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul_Dorin_Recean)

<sup>17</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul\\_Alexandru\\_Munteanu](https://alegeri.md/w/Guvernul_Alexandru_Munteanu)

## International experience regarding the promotion of women's representation in governments

**Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**<sup>18</sup> on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making explicitly defines 'balanced participation' as a situation where the representation of neither sex in a political or public decision-making body falls below 40%. At the same time, the Council of Europe recommends that states consider constitutional and/or legislative amendments, adopt special incentive and support measures, set targets with deadlines, and monitor separately the proportion of women and men in national, federal and regional governments, including in ministerial portfolios.

**According to data published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women**<sup>19</sup>, globally women hold approximately 22–23% of ministerial portfolios, indicating persistent under-representation in the executive.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, only a small number of states have managed to achieve levels close to parity: in 2025, nine states had gender-balanced or nearly gender-balanced governments, with 50% or more women in ministerial posts.<sup>3</sup> These include Finland (61.1%), Chile (50%) and Spain (50%), all of which serve as useful examples for understanding the mechanisms through which women's presence in government can be strengthened. These examples demonstrate that gender balance in the executive is achievable when there is political will and appropriate institutional mechanisms, but also that, in the absence of such instruments, women's participation in governments tends to remain limited and dependent on the political climate.

**Spain** offers perhaps the clearest example of the legal institutionalisation of balanced representation in the executive. Through Organic Law 2/2024 on equal representation and the balanced presence of women and men, published in *the Boletín Oficial del Estado*<sup>20</sup>, the Spanish legislature amended the Government Act and introduced an explicit rule regarding the composition of the executive. The legal text stipulates that, when appointing vice-presidents and ministers, the principle of balanced representation must be guaranteed, so that each gender accounts for at least 40% of the total. Furthermore, the same law extends the 40/60 rule to secretaries of state, senior bodies and management within the central administration, as well as to certain public sector entities. In other words, Spain does not treat gender balance as a mere political preference, but as a normative criterion for the organisation of executive and administrative power. In 2025, Spain ranked among the countries with the highest proportion of female ministers worldwide, with 50% of cabinet members being women, indicating that a clear legal obligation can produce verifiable and sustainable results.

**Finland** represents a different model. Here, the increase in women's participation in the executive is not based on an explicit quota for the cabinet, but on a long-standing legal and institutional framework for gender equality. The Act on Equality between Women and Men<sup>21</sup> stipulates, in Sections 4 and 4a, that authorities must systematically promote equality in the decision-making process and that, in government committees, advisory councils and other relevant public bodies, the proportion of women and men must be at least 40% each, unless there are special reasons to the contrary. Furthermore, the same law requires a fair proportion of women and men in the executive and administrative bodies of public entities. This regulatory framework does not directly mandate cabinet parity, but it creates an institutional environment in which balanced representation becomes standard administrative practice, rather than the exception. The result is evident in the current composition of the executive. The Finnish Government officially stated in December 2024 that approximately 60% of ministers are women, which is "the highest level in Finnish history<sup>22</sup>". At the same time, the Finnish Government emphasised that the proportion of women in politics is among the highest in the European Union.

<sup>18</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/1680519084>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>20</sup> More specifically, the law states: "In the appointment of Vice-Presidents and Ministers, the principle of gender balance shall be guaranteed, such that each gender accounts for at least forty per cent of the total." <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2024-15936>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.finlex.fi/api/media/statute-foreign-language-translation/689104/mainPdf/main.pdf?timestamp=1986-08-07T21%3A00%3A00.000Z>

<sup>22</sup> <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1271139/finland-ranks-eighth-in-eu-gender-equality-index>

**Chile** illustrates a third type of practice: gender parity in government promoted through a political decision at the level of the head of the executive. Although there is no classic legal quota for the cabinet comparable to that in Spain, Chile played a major symbolic and regional role through President Michelle Bachelet's decision to appoint the first gender-balanced cabinet in the country's history. In 2006, President Michelle Bachelet – Chile's first female head of state – immediately appointed a 50/50 cabinet, with 10 female and 10 male ministers, fulfilling her campaign promise. She included women in key posts (Defence, Economy) from that very first government. Although the composition subsequently changed, Bachelet maintained a balance very close to parity throughout both her terms (around 40–50% women in the cabinet). Chile thus demonstrated the feasibility of gender parity at government level in a developing and culturally conservative country, paving the way for broader reforms (Chile subsequently adopted a 40% quota for parliamentary lists). This is also confirmed in reports submitted to the UN system: in a report by the Chilean government on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention, the authorities noted a gender-balanced cabinet comprising 10 men and 10 women, noting that this had contributed to advancing gender equality in the public sphere.

### **Recommendation:**

It is recommended that Law No. 136/2017 on the Government be amended to expressly reintroduce the obligation to ensure a minimum representation quota of 40% for each gender within the Government, following the model previously established by Law No. 71/2016. The current provision, under which the candidate for the office of Prime Minister is merely required to 'take into account' legislation on equal opportunities, has proved insufficient, as it does not establish a clear numerical threshold, does not create a verifiable standard, and does not allow for sanctions in the event of non-compliance with the principle of balanced gender representation in the executive. Consequently, it is proposed to replace the duty of care with a mandatory provision, explicitly stipulating that, when drawing up the Government list, the candidate for the office of Prime Minister is obliged to ensure a minimum quota of 40% for each gender. At the same time, to give this obligation legal effect, it is recommended that it be linked to the parliamentary investiture procedure, so that Parliament cannot grant a vote of confidence to a government list that does not meet the minimum representation requirement for both genders. In the absence of such a condition, the rule risks remaining purely declaratory and failing to have any real impact on the composition of the executive. Furthermore, it would be appropriate to introduce an obligation to maintain gender balance in the event of government reshuffles, to avoid situations where the representation of women falls significantly after the vote of confidence.

# INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN PROMOTING GENDER-BALANCED REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL LIFE

**Gender quotas are no longer the exception, but an increasingly widespread standard at parliamentary and local levels.** According to the data in the charts below, 93 countries apply gender quotas for parliament, and the distribution of quota levels is, in fact, very telling: most countries fall within the 30–39% range (36 countries), followed by those applying 40–49% (21 countries) and those that have achieved 50% parity (18 countries). This distribution reveals two things. Firstly, the 30% threshold has functioned internationally as a minimum entry threshold, associated with the idea of a ‘critical mass’. Secondly, the current trend is moving ever more clearly towards 40% and above, which means that the Moldovan standard of 40% is not excessive, but is in line with the dominant trend in contemporary electoral reforms.

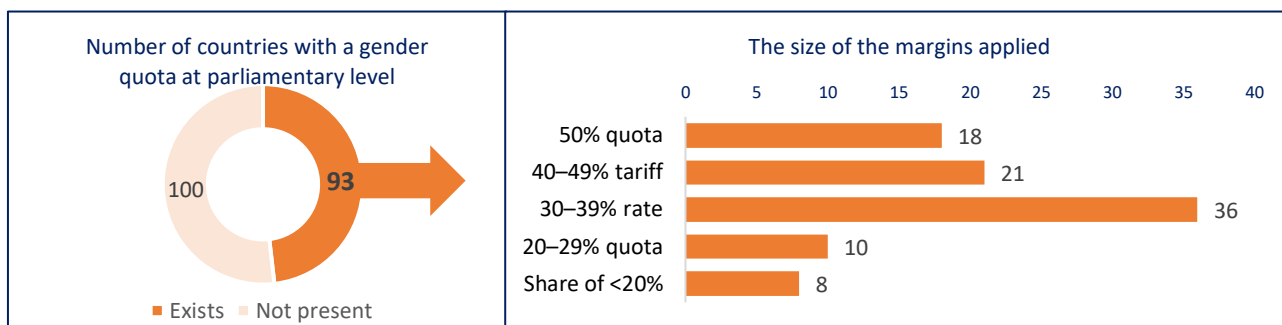


Figure 12: Proportion of countries<sup>24</sup> applying gender quotas in parliamentary, by size of quotas applied, number  
Source: United Nations Gender Quota Portal

**Similarly, international experience shows that the promotion of gender-balanced representation is not limited to national parliaments, but extends to local public authorities as well.** According to the data in Figure 13, 82 countries apply gender quotas for local public authorities, confirming that this type of measure is widely used at the local government level too. As regards the level of quotas, the most common figures fall within the 30–39% range (37 countries), followed by quotas of 40–49% (18 countries) and 50% (15 countries). The relatively high number of states applying quotas close to parity indicates that the local level is increasingly perceived as a key arena for addressing gender imbalances in politics. The importance of these measures is all the greater given that local authorities often represent women’s first point of entry into elected office and political experience. In many political systems, a political career begins at the level of local or regional councils, and women’s participation in these structures helps to create a wider pool of candidates for parliamentary or executive positions.

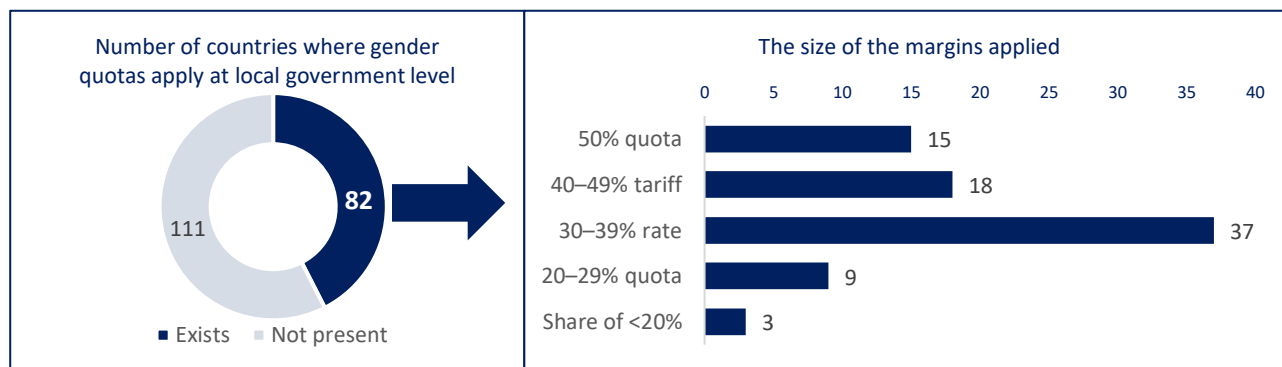


Figure 13: Proportion of countries<sup>25</sup> applying gender quotas at the level of local public authorities, by size of quotas applied, number  
Source: United Nations Gender Quota Portal

<sup>23</sup> Calculated based on the member states of the United Nations (UN)

<sup>24</sup> Calculated based on the member states of the United Nations (UN)

<sup>25</sup> Calculated based on the member states of the United Nations (UN)

**International experience shows that electoral systems which have succeeded in producing a sustainable increase in women’s representation in elected bodies have not limited themselves to introducing a single measure**, but have combined them in various ways. In terms of public policy, these address three distinct levels of inequality: women’s numerical access to candidate lists, their distribution across winnable positions, and the effective enforcement of party compliance with the rules. Consequently, the effectiveness of a system depends not only on the existence of a quota, but on the regulatory framework through which this quota is translated into effective representation. At the same time, international standards treat these measures not as arbitrary privileges, but as legitimate tools for correcting persistent structural imbalances.

**The international and European regulatory framework supports the use of corrective measures to ensure gender-balanced representation in the decision-making process.** *The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW*<sup>26</sup>*) expressly recognises the legitimacy of temporary special measures designed to accelerate de facto equality and specifies that these do not constitute discrimination; at the same time, states are obliged to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life. At European level, the Council of Europe treats the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making as a prerequisite for justice and democracy. Recommendation Rec(2003)3*<sup>27</sup> *sets a target of at least 40% for each sex and calls on states to use legislative, administrative and support measures to reach this threshold. The same logic is found in European Union law. Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides that equality between women and men does not preclude the maintenance or adoption of measures granting specific advantages to the under-represented sex. Furthermore, the new EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2026–2030*<sup>28</sup>*, adopted by the European Commission on 5 March 2026, expands on the previous approach and translates the objectives of the Roadmap for Women’s Rights into a set of concrete actions. The Strategy provides for the integration of the gender perspective into all policies, combating gender-based violence and cyber violence, countering anti-gender narratives and risks related to AI, the use of gender-sensitive funding and, explicitly, supporting the equal and safe participation of women in politics. Also particularly relevant to the issue of political representation is the Declaration of Principles for a Gender-Equal Society, annexed to the Roadmap for Women’s Rights. This enshrines, in Principle 7*<sup>29</sup>*, political participation and equal representation, calling for the promotion of balanced representation in positions of responsibility and decision-making, the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all spheres and at all levels of public and political life, as well as zero tolerance for violence, hatred and harassment of women in public life. Principle 8 adds that these objectives require specialised institutional mechanisms, gender mainstreaming, adequate funding, institutional infrastructure and the systematic use of sex-disaggregated data in the design and evaluation of public policies.*

**A key player within the Council of Europe is the Venice Commission, which has examined the constitutional compatibility of these measures with electoral principles.** The Venice Commission has issued favourable opinions on gender quotas, stating that they “*are not contrary to the principle of equal suffrage*” provided they have a clear constitutional or legal basis. For example, in a recent opinion on Georgia (June 2024)<sup>30</sup>, the Commission emphasised that international standards recognise the positive obligation of states to ensure gender equality and welcomed the fact that the Constitutional Court of Georgia had confirmed the constitutionality of temporary quotas for women. The same opinion criticised the premature abolition of quotas in Georgia and recommended the urgent reintroduction of special temporary measures (such as gender quotas or equivalent methods) to substantially increase the proportion of women elected. Moreover, the Venice Commission has consistently expressed concern regarding the low number of women in politics and, together with the OSCE/ODIHR, issued *the Joint Guidelines on the Regulation of Political Parties* (2010),

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<sup>26</sup> <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cedaw/cedaw.html>

<sup>27</sup> [https://edoc.coe.int/en/gender-equality/7657-achieving-balanced-participation-of-women-and-men-in-political-and-public-decision-making-a-gender-equality-and-democratic-requirement.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://edoc.coe.int/en/gender-equality/7657-achieving-balanced-participation-of-women-and-men-in-political-and-public-decision-making-a-gender-equality-and-democratic-requirement.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>28</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en)

<sup>29</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/declaration-principles-gender-equal-society\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/declaration-principles-gender-equal-society_en)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/-/venice-commission-publishes-two-new-opinions-on-election-code-abolishing-gender-quotas-and-on-the-composition-of-the-central-election-commission#:~:text=Regarding%C2%A0amendments%20to%20the%20Election%20Code,been%20abolished%20without%20being%20replaced>

which encourage parties to promote gender equality within their structures and candidate lists<sup>31</sup>. The Council of Europe has also drawn up a Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (through the Venice Commission), which states that positive action measures, if proportionate, may be compatible with electoral rights and may be justified by the legitimate aim of correcting under-representation. Both the Venice Commission and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have welcomed instances of countries introducing mandatory quotas and have recommended the expansion of such practices. For example, in a 2010 resolution<sup>32</sup>, the Parliamentary Assembly called on member states to implement quotas of at least 40% women on electoral lists, combined with rules on list placement (such as *the 'zipper' system*) and effective sanctions, as a means of overcoming resistance to change and achieving parity in representation.

**International experience and European best practices demonstrate that ensuring parity in the decision-making process is not a one-off legislative act, but an ongoing process of fine-tuning state mechanisms.** For the Republic of Moldova to translate the lessons of international experience into a new phase of reform, by adopting strict list placement formulas (the *zebra* system, 1 in 3 or 2 in 5) and reintroducing the mandatory 40% quota in the Government, it is essential to anticipate and dismantle conceptual and institutional barriers. The development of evidence-based public policies requires that reluctance to change the *status quo* be addressed proactively, through legal rigour, empirical data and international standards. Transposing these best practices into the Republic of Moldova, however, requires a deep understanding and the dismantling of conceptual barriers and systemic reluctance that may arise during the legislative and implementation processes. Any reform of the electoral system or the government's decision-making architecture inevitably faces arguments that tend to defend the status quo. For public policies ensuring equal opportunities to be effective, these obstacles must be anticipated and dismantled through legal, statistical and institutional arguments.

#### ***"THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS ALREADY EFFECTIVE, SO WHY CHANGE IT?"***

A frequently cited argument for maintaining the current system is that the Republic of Moldova already has a functional regulatory framework, which has enabled a relatively high level of women's representation in Parliament and local councils to be achieved. However, this interpretation overlooks the essential difference between formal compliance with the gender quota and actual access to seats. Although parties comply with the requirement for a minimum of 40% candidates of each gender, the current placement rule ("a minimum of 4 candidates for every 10 seats") allows women to be concentrated in positions with low chances of election. Recent electoral data confirms this trend: in the 2025 parliamentary elections, men dominated the top positions on the lists, and in the 2023 local elections, women occupied only 18.2% of the top positions on the lists for district and municipal councils. The problem becomes even more evident in a fragmented political system, where many parties win only 1–3 seats in a constituency. Under these circumstances, placing a female candidate in fourth or fifth position, even if it formally complies with the placement rule, almost completely reduces her chance of being elected. The situation is even more problematic in the case of the short lists used in local council elections, where the number of candidates is often 9, 11, 13 or 15. In such cases, if women are predominantly placed in the second quintile of the list (positions 6–10), their actual chances of securing a seat become minimal, as most parties win only 1–3 seats on the council. Thus, the current system produces equality at the level of candidacies, but not at the level of seats actually won. At the same time, the uniform application of the '4 out of 10' rule creates technical difficulties in constituencies with short lists, particularly at local level. The structure of the lists does not correspond to the logic of deciles, and the calculation of the 40% quota for odd numbers frequently generates fractional results and rounding errors. The consequences were evident in the 2023 local elections, when approximately 7.7% of the lists for district councils and 8.7% of those for local councils resulted in gender imbalances or disadvantages due to these technical constraints.

#### ***"THE DOUBLE QUOTA SYSTEM VIOLATES THE PRINCIPLE OF MERITOCRACY AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE"***

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<sup>31</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2024\)023-e#:~:text=in%20the%20Joint%20Guidelines%20of,guaranteed%20equal%20protection%20of%20all](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2024)023-e#:~:text=in%20the%20Joint%20Guidelines%20of,guaranteed%20equal%20protection%20of%20all)

<sup>32</sup> <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19134&lang=en#:~:text=6,making%20bodies%20at%20all%20levels>

In reality, this objection is based on a false premise: that access to political competition takes place on a level playing field, where candidates are selected solely on the basis of competence. However, the data shows that political recruitment is heavily influenced by non-meritocratic factors, access to financial resources, informal networks of influence, internal party standing, and the ability to fund the campaign.

**An analysis of the 2023 local elections<sup>33</sup> clearly shows that women enter the race from a weaker economic position than men.** The average income of a male candidate for mayor was 34% higher than that of a female candidate, and the differences in productive capital were even greater: the value of land owned by men was approximately six times higher. At the same time, men accounted for around 60% of financial donations and 73% of donations in kind, whilst women more frequently compensated through unpaid labour, representing 52.9% of those involved in voluntary work to support election campaigns. Under these circumstances, access to eligible positions reflects not only 'merit' but also the unequal distribution of political and economic resources. The same logic is evident at parliamentary level. In 2025, male candidates placed at the top of the lists declared significantly higher incomes than women in similar positions, and the report explicitly notes that structural economic inequalities favour men in occupying leading positions on electoral lists. In other words, in a political system where 'merit' tends to be confused with access to money, fame and internal influence, gender quotas do not negate meritocracy, but rather correct an already flawed selection process and compel parties to seek competence across society's entire talent pool, not just within its male and financially better-connected segment.

**Nor is the argument regarding the restriction of freedom of choice convincing.** The placement rules do not interfere with the citizen's vote, but with the way in which parties construct their electoral offer. The order of candidates on the list is determined internally by the party, and the law even allows this order to be changed up to 10 days before the election, which confirms that candidate placement is, in essence, an act of internal authority within the political party. In this context, state regulation does not restrict the voter, but limits the arbitrary power of party leaderships in the allocation of eligible seats.

From this perspective, gender quotas and placement rules are not a privilege granted to women, but a tool for restoring fairness in a system that does not, in fact, operate on a purely meritocratic basis. They do not replace competence, but compel parties to stop turning financial advantage, informal influence or the male monopoly on party leadership into hidden criteria for political selection. Consequently, quota mechanisms do not stand in the way of genuine meritocracy, but create the minimum conditions for it to function effectively.

***"QUOTAS ARE NO LONGER NECESSARY; GENDER EQUALITY COMES NATURALLY WITH TIME."***

**This argument is contradicted by data on voters' perceptions.** If gender equality were to evolve 'naturally', as women's visibility in public office increases, we should see a steady decline in stereotypes and wider acceptance of women in positions of power. In reality, the trend is the opposite<sup>34</sup>: between 2021 and 2025, the proportion of people who believe that women "have no place in politics" rose from 18.2% to 26.2%, and nearly 19.9% continue to believe that women are "less capable" of holding leadership roles. At the same time, traditional stereotypes have become much more pronounced: 62.4% of respondents believe that a woman's place is in the family and the home, 69.1% believe that the man should be the breadwinner, and 55.8% believe that household chores are primarily the responsibility of women. These figures show that the mere passage of time does not automatically erode patriarchal norms; on the contrary, they can coexist with, or even react defensively to, the growing presence of women in politics.

**The persistence of prejudices is also directly reflected in electoral preferences.** In 2025, 31.7% of respondents would prefer a man as president of the country, compared to just 3.3% who would choose a woman; for the role of MP, the ratio is 23.2% for men, compared to 3.2% for women. Furthermore, almost half of respondents (49.1%) consider the current level of women's representation in Parliament to be 'sufficient', and only 12.2% believe there should be more women. In other words, even when the numerical

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<sup>33</sup> LOCAL ELECTIONS 2023: BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

<https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Raport-Alegeri-combinat-1.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> REPRESENTATION, POWER AND GENDER INEQUALITIES IN THE 2025 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, CPD,

[https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Raport\\_final-Alegeri-2025-ROEN.pdf](https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Raport_final-Alegeri-2025-ROEN.pdf)

representation of women increases, this does not automatically generate corresponding social legitimacy, nor does it, in itself, produce a public demand for greater equality.

**Furthermore, stereotypes are not distributed evenly, but have a clear social profile, which suggests that they will not disappear spontaneously.** In 2025, nearly 46% of men held stereotypes regarding women's role in the family and decision-making, compared with 36.7% of women; the highest levels are found among people with low levels of education (58.9% among those with incomplete education and 47.6% among those with general secondary education), in rural areas (47.2%) and among people over 60 (45.5%). Alarming, stereotypes are also on the rise among 18–29-year-olds, from 27.6% in 2021 to 37.6% in 2025, contrary to the assumption that generational change would automatically resolve the issue.

**The data also show that women continue to be perceived as entering politics from a structurally disadvantaged position.** Domestic responsibilities are identified by 20.5% of respondents as a barrier specific to women, and other obstacles frequently associated with them are a lack of confidence (10.7%), a lack of family support (8.3%) and the pressure of cultural norms regarding gender roles (9.8%). Furthermore, the report notes that, between 2020 and 2024, the effects of successive crises were disproportionately attributed to women in leadership roles, whilst hate speech and sexist attacks against female politicians fuelled the false perception that they are less competent to lead. Consequently, not only does equality not come 'naturally', but it is actively hindered by stereotypes, social sanctions and institutional biases. Under such conditions, abandoning quotas would not accelerate equality, but would shift the burden of discrimination entirely onto female candidates.

#### ***“THERE ARE ALREADY ENOUGH WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCILS”***

A recurring argument, frequently used to discourage the adoption of new gender mechanisms or to justify the removal of existing ones, is the assumption that “there are already enough women in politics, so special measures are no longer necessary”. Proponents of this view usually cite the achievement of the approximately 40% threshold in Parliament and local councils as a final victory, treating gender equality as a goal already ticked off. From a sociological, institutional and international law perspective, this approach represents a dangerous cognitive error, which confuses a temporary numerical peak – generated exclusively by the pressure of current legislative provisions – with a structural and irreversible transformation of the political system. This argument is also based on the perceptions of a section of the electorate: according to the 2025 CPD study, 49.1% of respondents consider the current level of women's representation in Parliament to be sufficient, whilst only 12.2% believe there should be more women. However, this perception does not reflect actual equality, but rather society's habituation to a minimum threshold of female representation, without questioning whether women enjoy equal access to office, internal power and strategic decision-making roles.

If the political system had truly achieved a state of organic equity, the presence of women would be uniform at all decision-making levels. Statistical data, however, reveal a severe imbalance: women are admitted to deliberative bodies (where the dual quota system operates) but remain excluded from executive roles, where unilateral decision-making and the management of financial resources are concentrated.

At local level, although women make up 40.3% of local councillors, only 24% of the mayors elected in 2023 are women (a negligible increase of just 2% compared to 2019). The current rate of growth suggests that the Republic of Moldova would only reach a critical mass of 30% female mayors by 2035. At central level, the collapse in representation is even more telling. Once the mandatory 40% quota for the composition of the Government (introduced in 2016) was transformed into a mere recommendation (in 2017), the presence of women in the Executive became dependent on the political climate. Thus, from a government with almost equal representation at the start of 2023 (approx. 41%), by the end of 2025, in the Munteanu cabinet, the figure had fallen to just 22% (4 women out of 18 members). This discrepancy clearly demonstrates that, in the absence of strict legislative constraints, political decision-makers immediately revert to patriarchal patterns of power distribution.

Furthermore, this quota is not legally designed 'for women', but for the opposite sex / both sexes, which means that it operates symmetrically and also protects men in the event that they become under-

represented. In the report on the 2023 general local elections, some parties submitted lists with too low a proportion of men, and the Central Electoral Commission obliged them to comply with the requirement for balanced representation. In other words, the dual quota system does not establish a privilege for women, but a mechanism for the fair representation of both sexes.

From a human rights perspective, the issue is not whether women have reached a threshold considered 'reasonable', but whether their participation complies with the principle of fair representation in a society where women make up approximately half the population. CEDAW obliges states to ensure that women, on an equal footing with men, have the right to be elected and to participate in the formulation of public policy and the exercise of public functions. In the same vein, the Council of Europe states that the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making is a matter of the full exercise of human rights, social justice and the proper functioning of a democratic society, and that 'balanced participation' means that the representation of neither sex should fall below 40%. Consequently, the dual quota system should not be viewed as a temporary concession to women, but as a tool through which the state ensures citizens' right to be represented fairly, in accordance with the actual structure of society.