

# Mayoress!

## Women in Local Leadership

Results and recommendations of an EU project



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Fields of action and examples of good practice .....	7
Recommendations to the EU .....	14
Project description and partner organizations .....	17
Annex .....	19

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# Introduction



Politics is decisively important for cohesion in the European Union: town twinning, youth exchanges, visitor programmes and much more make for cross-border contacts and promote reciprocal understanding; joint projects and networks enable the transfer of knowledge and best practices. This cooperation is becoming all the more important as politics and society are facing big challenges to be mastered all across Europe – such as fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the handling of migration or climate protection. How successful, for example, the “Green New Deal” of the EU will be is not least decided locally – in the municipalities and regions. It is there where political decisions make a direct impact on the daily lives of citizens. Therefore, especially in municipal politics, diverse perspectives and the experiences, points of view, and competences of men and women are needed.

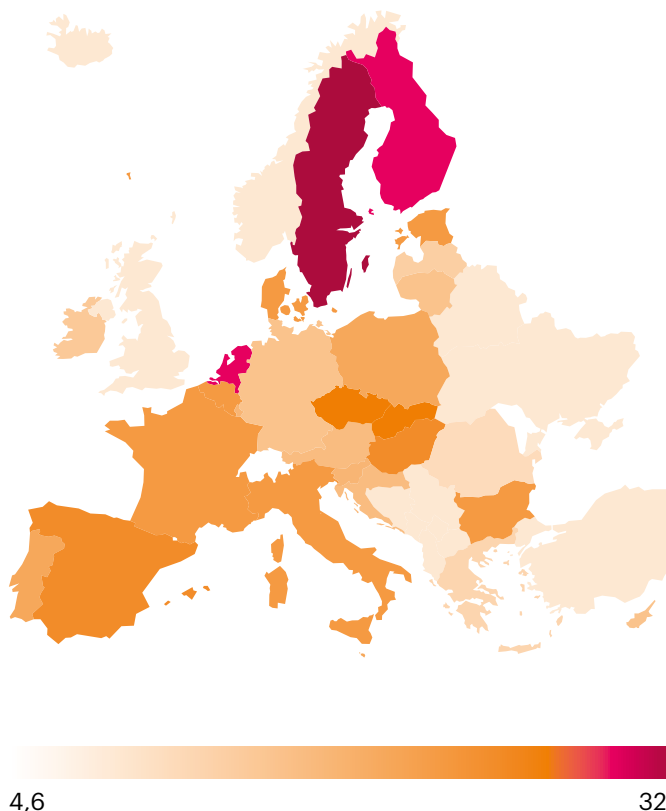
However, the quota of women in municipal representative bodies is 28.8 percent on average of all Member States. Just 15 percent of town halls are led by women.

Meanwhile gender equality and equal participation of women in politics is a central interest in the EU. The EU Commission is headed by a woman for the first time with women and men taking an equal number of its seats. By now, at least, women make up 39 percent of representatives in the EU parliament (EIGE 2021). But the percentage of women in national parliaments of the 27 EU States is much lower on average and currently at 32.7 percent (EIGE 2020).

What is not given enough attention is that women in municipal leadership positions are extremely underrepresented this way and they can therefore influence municipal politics only to a limited extent. This presents a deficit not only in policies promoting equality but also in democracy more generally, which prompts questions as to what the causes and obstructions are. What are the political, institutional or also societal barriers that keep women from taking public office and how can they be overcome?

## Mayoresses

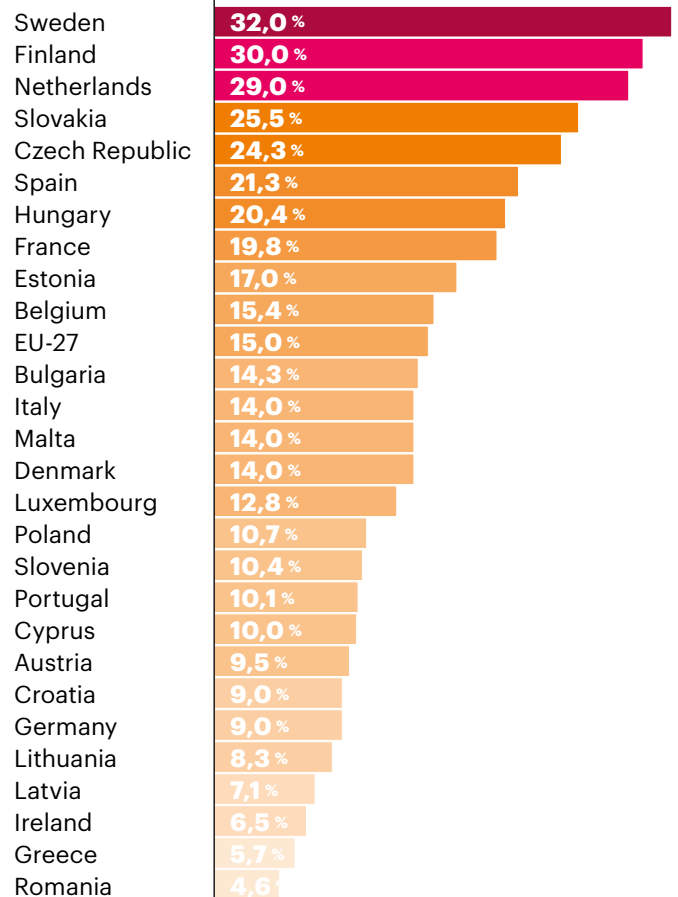
### Percentage of women leading town halls in the EU



4,6

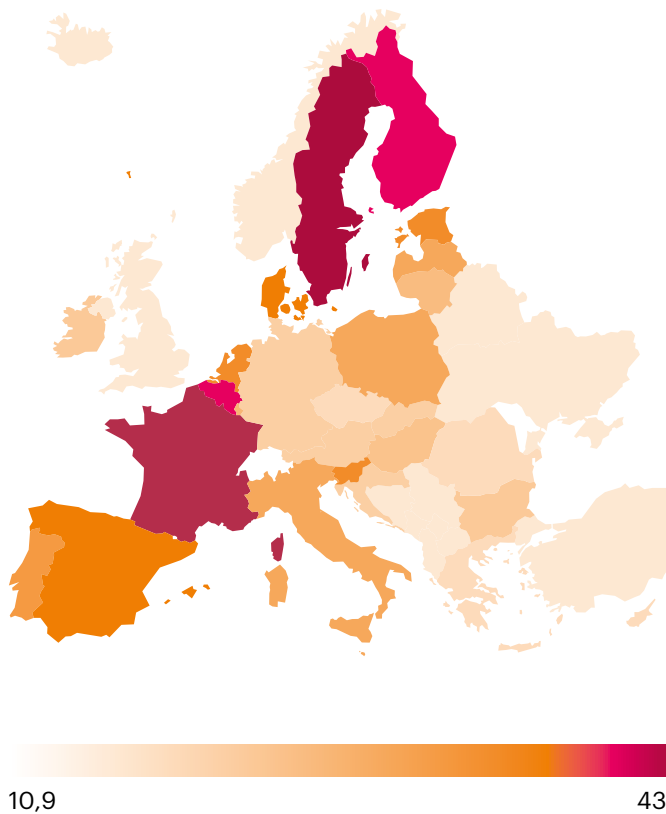
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Map: EAF Berlin; Source: Own research and Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR); data: September 2021

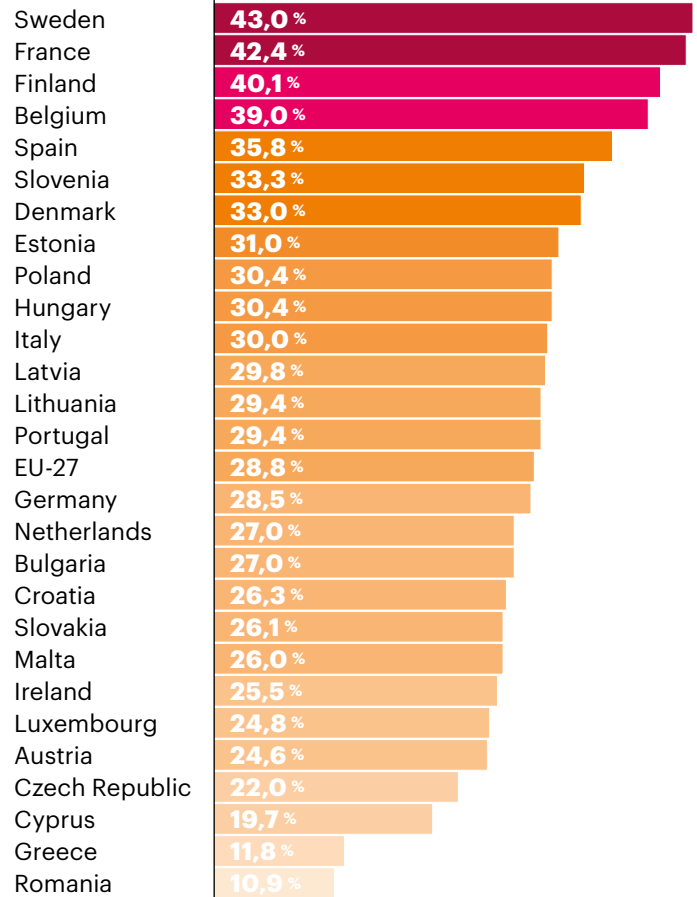


## Representatives

### Percentage of women in local parliaments in the EU



Map: EAF Berlin; Source: Own research and Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR); data: September 2021



Sure: local politics and elections of mayor or mayoress take place locally. The direct possibilities of the EU to influence this are limited.

Nonetheless, a lot can be done at the European level to move the topic into the public conscience and put it on the political agenda.

Against this background, the project “Mayoress – Women in local leadership” of the independent research and consulting organisation EAF Berlin (European Academy for Women in Politics and Economy) was created. Jointly with the partner organisations from France, Austria and Poland, the project aimed at showing ways for how, in the future, more women can make of the decisions in the town halls of Europe for the development of their town or municipality.

“Mayoress” organised the exchange of experience, tested best practices, promoted networking among mayoresses and candidates for the office, reflected on the barriers,

and the commonalities as well as the differences between the respective countries. The comparison between countries is telling in two ways. On the one hand, the barriers for women in politics that exist primarily for social and structural reasons are similar because the equality of women and men has in fact not been reached in any one of the countries. On the other hand, the countries have tested different ways and instruments, making the exchange about the actually successful approaches all the more worthwhile.

In this handout, we want to share our experiences and give recommendations for what can be done at the different levels. For this purpose, we outline central fields for action and present examples of best practice from various countries that are worth emulating. Suggestions to the EU will be presented for discussion in closing. But firstly, we outline the factors briefly, which have obstructive effects across the countries on the participation of women in political offices, in particular in municipal leadership positions.

## Obstacles for women

It is a generally true fact that the modern parliamentary democracy emerged in the 19th century in the western countries with the explicit exclusion of women. In Germany, Austria and Poland, women received the right to vote and, respectively, the right to be elected into political office in 1918, coinciding with the collapse of the monarchical systems at the end of World War I. In France, these rights were granted only in 1944. The historical changes of course still resonate today, because the formal and informal rules of the game politics and political culture receiving expression in the symbols that are used by it, its language, rituals and etiquette continues to be male-dominated. The idea of politics as a male domain is still present in society, even if women increasingly move into the picture and positive changes are cognisable.

### Expense of time and appeal of municipal politics

Socio-cultural framework conditions and the division of time and tasks between the genders, respectively, are the key obstructions at this point in time. Despite being actually time-consuming, municipal political and the usually related partisan political involvement are exercised largely in honorary functions. Women, however, normally have fewer resources available in terms of time to work a job, run their family, and exercise a function at the top levels of municipal and party politics. In Germany, for example, women spend nearly twice as much time than men do with household chores and caring for their children (BMFSFJ 2018).

Men often have the better starting conditions for a successful career in municipal politics: They more frequently have stellar careers, working in corresponding positions offering them more time to introduce themselves, maintain their networks, and they often have greater financial resources available to lead a successful election campaign.

Although women are indeed interested in politics and committed, they often prefer civil society organisations for their commitment. Therefore, it is also important to make municipal political commitment more appealing to women and other groups that have been underrepresented so far and specifically to compensate disadvantages in the starting conditions.

### Right to vote and be elected, and nomination practices of the parties

It is generally true that the percentage of women in politics is lower in systems with majority rule or direct election than in proportionate elections. Who is nominated by the parties in the run-up and whom they send into the race from a promising position therefore makes the decisive difference. But candidates who are not members of any party also regularly need the support from parties or a coalition of parties.

Research shows that women are not only nominated less frequently but in many cases also in special scenarios or in particularly difficult constellations. Meaning, as “stop-gap candidate,” when no male candidate was found or when winning the election seems hardly probable, even to the candidate’s own party. However, women are often “surprise winners” (Kletzing 2017, Lukoschat /Belschner 2014, Holtkamp/Garske/Wiechmann 2020).

But why do parties waste opportunities to use the talents of women?

That is to say, by no means only rational arguments come to bear in the parties’ nomination processes. The more strongly an office is associated with power and the more appealing it seems to be, the greater is the competition and usually male-dominated networks and relations play a role. Women work as mayoresses somewhat more frequently in smaller municipalities and cities – which is the case in Germany, France and Austria – where the office is exercised in honorary function or as additional office, and where holding the office is less associated with power, prestige and financial recompense.

What, therefore, can be done to raise the percentage of women? A few select fields for action are presented below, which have been discussed many times in the course of the project.

# Fields for action and best practice examples



# 1. Networks: Visibility and empowerment

One of the key learnings from Mayoress is how important it is for mayoresses to build networks. While female politicians certainly also need networks reaching inside of parties and associations, women's networks can have supportive effects in multiple respects. They not only open up a protected space for the exchange of experiences, but also give mayoresses greater exposure and can foremost improve their influence or contribute to a better enforcement of their interests or special demands. Another important function is that mayoresses can become visible role models for other women and give them concrete support. For example, experienced mayoresses or women who have already left office can act as mentors and advise women on their candidacy and during the first years in office.

In Austria exists a countrywide network that organises an annual meeting for the exchange of information and ideas, which is sponsored by the Austrian Association of Municipalities. The building of networks at state or regional levels is also progressing in Germany. As part of "Mayoress", the organisation of networks has been supported concretely in Germany in two federal states as model regions, Schleswig-Holstein and North Rhine-Westphalia. Key partners have been and continue to be the state organisations of the Association of Towns and Municipalities. These act beyond the project end as points of contact and ideally provide the infrastructure for the organisation of the network on top.

## Practical example: Network for full-time mayoresses in Schleswig-Holstein

The network was founded in 2020 in Schleswig-Holstein; efforts for establishing were already underway before then, as the network spokeswoman emphasises: "It was cumbersome. But I did not budge. I realised from the start that networking is the key to getting things done. It is also the basis for all of us being able to do our jobs healthily and happily," says Birte Kruse-Gobrecht, mayoress of Bargteheide.

The network primarily targets full-time mayoresses who are currently in office as well as those who used to be. Its members elect a spokeswoman and a deputy. They work closely together with the Towns Congress of Schleswig-Holstein and the Conference of Municipalities of Schleswig-Holstein (Schleswig-Holsteinischer Gemeindetag). Membership is free. The fees for participation in seminars are financed as advanced training costs, which can be claimed by the mayoresses. The network intends to promote the exchange of information and experiences among the mayoresses. The members additionally see themselves as sparring partners for women, who are pursuing a candidacy and who can pass on valuable experiences and practical tips here, e.g. about the organisation of the election campaign. At the same time, administration is also in the focus: accordingly, for example, joint strategies are discussed to promote parity between women and men in (municipal) administrations and in their leadership positions or to push ahead with modernisation and digitalisation of administrative processes.

The beacon effect of the network can be seen beyond state borders. Accordingly, mayoresses from Schleswig-Holstein advised mayoresses from Lower Saxony for the organisation of the network there. The activities of the Schleswig-Holstein network are documented on a website and in social media.

### Communication partners and contacts:

Birte Kruse-Gobrecht, Speaker of the network,  
Town of Bargteheide  
Heike Döpke, Dpty. Speaker, Town of Barmstedt



## 2. Advanced training offers

Advanced training offers for mayoresses, like seminars, coachings or trainings are recommendable. However, these should be aligned specifically on the needs of the target group.

But there is also a more critical view of special advanced training offers for women. It was reported by the French project partners of L'observatoire del parité d'Occitanie, for example, that the advanced training offers sponsored by the state tended to codify the perspective that women required special support. In contrast, especially the change of the institutional framework conditions and political culture was decisive, which had to address men just as much and, accordingly, which had to be supported by them as well.

Nonetheless, specific offers can be sensible, on the one hand, if they promote the formation of networks among women and while also giving them reassurance that they are not alone when encountering certain difficulties. At the same time, they are sensible if they cover specific needs and situations. The mayoresses participating in the project meanwhile did express wishes for interdisciplinary offers, e.g. training of skills they can use for their personal appearance and the handling of the media.

Since a 60 to 70-hour workweek is no rarity for mayoresses, the participation in advanced training should not add further hurdles and burdens. Therefore, the understanding for utilising training offers during the working time should be promoted inside of the administrations and mayoresses should be informed of their rights. Besides ensuring sufficient financial resources for the training measures, the wish for a "seal of quality" as guidance in the vast range of offered training in seminars was also voiced.

### Practical example: Advanced training of elected municipal officers in France

Elected municipal officers in France have had the right to advanced training since 1992. Participation in advanced training in the first year of their term in office has even been mandatory since 2019.

The municipal parliaments decide on the advanced training budget each year, which is financed from the municipal budget, and they set the substantive key points. In addition to this offer, the elected officials have a right to individual advanced training for the promotion of their work in municipal politics. The offers may furthermore be used for the preparation of an occupational re-training after the end of the term in office.

Until 2021, office holders were eligible for 20 hours of advanced training per year, for which the costs were limited to EUR 100 per hour. The hours could be cumulated during the entire term in office. In 2021, the individual training eligibility was reformed and switched from an amount in hours to an amount in euros. The amount can change each year, depending on the available funds and it is currently 700 Euros.

The Ministry for Territorial Cohesion and Relations with Local Regional Authorities (Le ministère de la Cohésion des territoires et des Relations avec les collectivités territoriales) regulates the accreditation of the advanced training organisations.

### 3. Framework conditions: Financial and social security

The social and economic conditions under which mayoresses and mayors work have been discussed several times in the project, taking the perspective that they are one set of parameters for making adjustments to improve the appeal of the office in general and specifically to women. Even though the same rules apply generally to mayoresses as to Mayors, women are often affected by them in a different way. Especially when they exercise their offices in honorary function or as additional office, the framework conditions contribute to fewer women deciding to take office (or being able to do so).

Just a few key points can be picked out here, since the rules on financial consideration and social benefits can differ very much not only between the partner countries but also by region or state within the countries themselves.

#### Rules on consideration

The amount of the salary for the mayoresses or mayors exercising their office full-time and, respectively, the salary of those working in honorary function or additional office is normally dependent on the size of the municipality. Mayoresses and mayors of larger cities are by now attributed, as in Germany, to the comparably higher remuneration groups of civil service. However, the rule is: the smaller the municipality, the lower the remuneration and the smaller the team of the administration.

The tasks as the head of a town hall have become neither simpler nor fewer in small municipalities. To mayoresses and mayors of smaller municipalities, public office might also mean losses in salary. This also explains, e.g. why in France nearly 40 percent of mayoresses and mayors are pensioners.

There is a need to take action especially as regards service in honorary or additional office. The amount of the expense refund, which is set at the national level or by the federal states in municipal statutes must be closer to reality and meet the requirements of the office better in the future. Being mayor should not be the privilege of those who can afford taking the office in the first place. This is an indirect barrier for women, as women regularly work less well-paid jobs or as less well-paid self-employed professionals or entrepreneurs due to socio-structural factors, and are usually less wealthy than men are.

The amount of the remuneration or expense refund ultimately also plays a role for the pension eligibilities or retirement benefits that are earned during the term in office, and they can therefore significantly influence the decision for or against a candidacy.

In Austria as well, the financial compensation of mayoresses and mayors depends on the size of the relevant municipality, whereas each state has its own rule. Many of the mayoresses and mayors in Austria work in this capacity in honorary function or additional office, but the vast array of responsibilities is more consistent with a full-time job. Benefits for social security of mayoresses and Mayors are limited to a health and accident insurance; there are only marginal pension provisions and no right to parental leave. These rules cause a burden especially for women. Improving benefits for social security is therefore an important concern in the political debate in Austria about increasing the percentage of women.

#### Maternity protection and paternal leave

Especially regulations on maternity protection or parental leave are inappropriate and no longer contemporary while they also fail to reflect that the office is aligned on male life patterns and biographies.

In **France**, Justine Guyot, the young mayoress of Decize, made headlines in 2019. Because she wanted to take leave for maternity protection, she was forced to set aside her office, suspend her public schedule, and not adopt any further resolutions as mayoresses. A mayor on sick leave, in contrast, may continue to exercise his office if he has a medical certificate, while such an exception is not allowed for a mayoress on maternity leave.

In **Germany**, the expense refund for honorary mayoresses and mayors continues to be paid for a total of eight weeks in cases of illness. If mayoresses become pregnant while in office and want to take off more than eight weeks, they have to either forego the refund or ask for the city council's agreement for the continuation of the payments.

Many mayoresses attend meetings almost until the day before they give birth, they continue to be active in their municipalities, and make a quick return to their position after the birth of their child. But society is not prepared for the following situation: Young female candidates, in contrast to their (young) male counterparts, are often asked in the election campaign about their family planning, if they want children or about how they can balance office and family. A mayoress, who wants to go on leave for the birth of a child, not only rarely has to justify herself as to why she became a candidate under these circumstances in the first place.

## 4. Protection from hate speech, violence, and sexual harassment

The increase in the frequency of hate speech, attacks and harassment of mayoresses and mayors, and other elected officials or public representatives, and their effects on the situation and motivation of women was discussed in the project and seen as a worrying development. There is an urgent need for action at all political levels.

According to current studies, 68 percent of surveyed mayoresses and mayors in Germany have been insulted, threatened, berated or even physically assaulted at least once in the past in the context of their work (Lukoschat/Mahler Walther 2020). In 2019, this was still 41 percent (Erhardt 2020). Women experience this even more frequently than men (76 compared to 67 percent). In addition, 13 percent of mayoresses stated having been sexually harassed at least once in the past (Lukoschat/Mahler Walther 2020).

These experiences leave a mark: In 2021, the majority of surveyed mayoresses and mayors stated in a representative survey by forsa for Körber Stiftung that they had changed their behaviour for fear of being insulted or physically assaulted. The use of social media is omitted for the most part by 37 percent. 19 percent have already contemplated leaving politics for fears for their own safety or the safety of their family; almost one-third responds to political topics less frequently than in the past (forsa 2021).

A current study by the Austrian Association of Municipalities shows a similar pattern: in the survey of about 100 mayoresses, 57 percent of the women stated that they had been confronted once before with personal hostilities or hate online (Austrian Association of Municipalities 2021).

A qualitative study by the Institute of Public Affairs details a similar picture in Poland. The study is based on qualitative interviews and an analysis of social media in Poland and it demonstrates that politicians are exposed to manifold hostilities, insults and violence (Druciarek/Niżyńska 2020).

Male politicians as well face hate speech and violence, but the attacks on women more frequently take aim in a sexist form at their bodies and sexuality (Lukoschat/Köcher 2021).

Therefore, there is an urgent need for action at the political levels to protect female politicians better, take preventive measures, and not least strengthen criminal prosecution of such offences.

### **Practical example: The online portal “Strong in Office”**

The portal [Strong in Office](#) (Stark im Amt), which is sponsored by the German President, has existed in Germany since April 2021. It is designed as a central point of contact and source of help to provide the people’s representatives, specifically at the municipal level, with information and guidance whenever they experience hate and violence. The portal functions as a navigator and presents options for action and contacts that help master the challenge posed by an attack and be able to hold those responsible accountable. Ways for prevention are also to be outlined. At the same time, public awareness for the situation of local politicians is to be raised. The portal is a cooperation project of Körber-Stiftung together with the German Conference of Towns (Deutscher Städtetag), the German Conference of Districts (Deutscher Landkreistag) and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund). The German Forum for Crime Prevention (Deutsches Forum für Kriminalprävention) has given its advice in the course of the drafting of the case examples and supporter profiles.

The portal is targeted at all local office holders and representatives in Germany. The special situation of mayoresses and mayors, and district administrators is addressed at numerous junctions.

## 5. Binding rules

One central subject of discussion in the project was the exchange regarding binding rules or quotas for raising the percentage of women in municipal parliaments. What rules exist and, accordingly, which effects do they have on the percentage of mayoresses? What experiences have the countries made with them?

It should be considered in general in this regard that a direct election of an office for which one person, respectively, serves as candidate cannot be made subject to the same quota rules as can apply to electoral lists, which are subject, for example, to the rule that the electoral lists need to be composed of men and women at a certain ratio or even equally.

In a country comparison, however, it becomes clear that in **France**, where statutory parity rules have applied since 2000 to the elections of parliaments, including the municipal representative body, the portion of mayoresses is also higher than in Germany, Austria and Poland. The parity law passed in 2000 already and it has since then been continuously developed further. It shows positive effects on the chances of women to be elected to the office of mayor, especially in larger municipalities, where the mayor or mayoress is not elected directly by the people but usually appointed by the largest fraction (see Country example: France).

In **Poland**, there has been a gender quota for electoral lists since 2011. Accordingly, on each electoral list of the European Parliament, the Sejm (national parliament), and the regional parliament, both genders must be represented at a quota of 35 percent. However, these rules are less effective than in France. The percentage of women is currently barely at 11 percent and therefore only slightly above the average in Austria (9.5 percent) and Germany (9 percent) (Łada-Konefał 2020, Österreichischer Gemeindebund 2021, Lukoschat/Mahler Walther 2020).

**Austria** and **Germany** do not have any statutory provisions on parity. In both countries meanwhile voluntary quota rules exist, which have been adopted by the parties in the social democratic, green and leftist spectrum. Baden-Württemberg as the only state in Germany to date has passed a target rule the effects of which, however, proved to be limited. The “rule of thumb” continues to apply in Germany that the more rural and more conservative a region, the lower the portion of women in municipal representative bodies. The highest portion of women can be found in large cities and city-states such as Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg (Lukoschat/ Belschner 2019).

Likewise, empirical studies from Germany’s largest state, North Rhine-Westphalia, indicate that there is a connection between a high percentage of women in town and municipal councils and the election of a mayoresses (Wiechmann 2020).

In the German states of Brandenburg and Thuringia, parity laws were adopted for the state elections there in 2019. These, however, have been declared void by the relevant state constitutional courts. It is expected in Germany that the federal constitutional court will enter judgment soon as to how a parity law can be arranged to be consistent with the constitution. The legal debate pivots here on the question to what extent the equal treatment provision in Art. 3 (2) GG [German Constitution] justifies intervention in the likewise protected freedom of political parties and the freedom of elections.

In the recent past, an instrument was introduced in Austria that aims at promoting positive developments by financial incentives. In 2019, the national council adopted a modification of the so-called “Club Financing Act” (law concerning the financing of parliamentary fractions), which provides for a bonus if a quota of women of more than 40 percent is reached. The state funding for fractions increases by 3 percent if the parliamentary fraction representing in the national or federal council is correspondingly composed of men and women (Federal Chancellery 2021).

Binding rules, whether in the form of party-internal quotas or statutory requirements in election laws or party laws, are an effective instrument to secure access for women to offices and positions. It was also expressed as a consensus in the project, however, that binding rules are not enough and accompanying measures are still needed, which aim at a positive change in political culture in the sense of a culture of equality of genders.

## Country example: Sweden

Sweden is a positive Example. There, the proportion of women in municipal councils is 43 percent and 40 percent on municipal boards. 32 percent of the municipal leadership positions are held by women, making it the highest in EU-wide comparison.

The following points are named by the Association of Swedish Municipalities and Regions as the factors of this success:

- Clear goal definition and binding rules internal of the parties themselves, which must scrutinise their recruitment and nomination practices.
- Changing the structural local political work in the manner that enables women and men alike to balance job, family and political involvement in the municipality better.
- This includes making meeting times and work organisation more flexible and adjusting them better to the needs of people with caretaking duties, providing higher financial expense refunds and using the new digital formats to hold meetings independently of the location.
- Offer of training and mentoring programs to strengthen female candidates and politicians. Creation of specific networks for women for discussing shared experiences and reciprocal support.
- Support for female politicians, who are exposed more to hate, harassment and violence than men are in Sweden and many other countries.

(Source: Emil Broberg, Co-Chair of the Standing Committee for Gender Equality **Council of European Municipalities and Regions**, CEMR; Council Member of Östergötland/Sweden and Member of the Board of the **Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions** SALAR).



## Country example: France

The structuring of voting laws is an important parameter to increase the portion of women in politics in general as well as in municipal leadership positions. This is exemplified by France.

Following the amendment of 1999 to the French constitution, the “Law on the promotion of equal access for women and men to public appointments and elected offices” (Loi sur la parité) came into force in 2001. It has since then been continuously developed further.

For elections subject to proportionate electoral law – municipalities with more than 1,000 residents, regional councils and the European Parliament – must compose the lists of men and women in alternation (zip merger principle). If this requirement is not fulfilled, the lists can be rejected. This proved to be a very effective rule. The portion of women in town and municipal councils increased from 21.7 percent (1995) to significantly more than 40 percent today (Direction générale des collectivités locales 2020).

For the elections of the département councils in 2015, a pioneering novelty was introduced. It obligates the parties to put a woman and a man, respectively jointly, on each ballot (the “binôme” principle). The number of départements was cut in half before this. The councils are now composed to one-half, respectively, of women and men.

In the elections to the national assembly that are subject to majority rule, the parties are obligated to nominate the same number of female and male candidates in the electoral districts. If this requirement is not fulfilled, the refund from the state for the costs of the election campaign will be reduced. At first, the parties tended to accept the financial losses that seemed to be sustainable for them but, since the regulation was tightened, things have changed. The success of the party La République en marche of Emmanuel Macron also contributed to this by implementing the parity law stringently. At this time, the portion of women in the national assembly is 42 percent (EIGE 2021).

### What is the situation in terms of municipal leadership positions?

The mayoresses and mayors are not elected directly by the population but in municipalities with more than 1,000 residents by the representing fractions in the constituting session of the new municipal council. The office is taken most of the time by the candidate whose name comes first on the winning list. However, primarily men continue to be entered in the most promising first place on the list.

Even though the parity law does not apply to the elections of the office of mayor, it has also developed positive effect there: the percentage of mayoresses rose from 13.9 percent in 2011 to currently almost 20 percent (EIGE 2021), which is substantially more than on average in the EU Member States. Numerous large cities like Paris, Lille and Strasbourg are also led by women by now.

### Read more:

Current recommendations to the future municipal parliaments, a graphic of the underrepresentation of women in politics can be found [here](#) (in French).

**20 years French parity law** – A key impulse but parity is far from reached! With statements on women in local politics by Cécile Weidhofer, EAF Director and contributor to Project Mayoress.



# Recommendations to the EU



The EU has no direct influence on the institutional framework conditions of local politics such as election procedures, the arrangement of financial compensation for expenses, or other benefits for social security of office holders. This is a matter of the Member States or also of the respective states in countries with a federalist system of government like the Federal Republic of Germany. Yet, there is a number of possibilities for actions also or especially at the level of the EU for increasing the representation of women in municipal representative bodies and in local leadership positions.

### **1. Requirements and incentives for continuous data gathering**

The EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) is already doing important work, but it is reliant on the reports of the Member States. The quality of the data gathering varies vastly; comparisons between countries and in the course of time are therefore possible often only by means of time-consuming research. Institutions such as the Observatoire de la parité in France, which gathers data on a continuous basis and develops recommendations on this basis, are the exception. The EU should therefore impose requirements on its Member States or give them incentives, also in the form of material resources, for continually gathering, updating, and transferring the data on the representation of women in local politics.

### **2. Continuous discussion of gender representation in municipal politics and in leadership positions in the Committee of Regions (CoR)**

Although the CoR is not an institution of the EU, it nonetheless has an important advisory function for the European Commission. Furthermore, the gender mainstreaming approach should be implemented consistently in the CoR and the effects of political measures on the equality of women and men should be reviewed.

### **3. Making the topic part and parcel of project and research funding by the EU**

Significantly more reliable data and qualitative studies are needed regarding voter behaviour, the portion of candidates and elected officials, the nomination practices of parties, and not least on how the representation of women takes effect on political processes and decisions.

### **4. Construction of an online-based platform specifically for mayoresses to exchange knowledge and experience**

All kinds of best practices that are developed and implemented for recruiting and supporting women and their leadership positions in local politics should be made available on a permanent basis, e.g. in the form of newsletters or podcasts with profiles and interviews of mayoresses etc.

### **5. Programs for regular, cross-border network meetings for mayoresses**

Regular, cross-border network meetings should be offered for mayoresses in light of the importance of and need for personal contacts and continuous exchange have become very clear in the project. Even if network activities are foremost sensible in the countries directly, the cross-border exchange is nonetheless valuable because it offers the chance to be inspired by best practices. The exchange promotes a mutual understanding for the political and social situation in other countries and also helps to reduce any prejudices that may exist. Especially in the EU, which is characterised by many tensions and differing interests of national actors or governments, network meetings of the actors at local and regional levels are a valuable possibility to build bridges and reinforce cohesion.

### **6. Campaign for an increase in the proportion of Women in city halls**

The topic should be brought to the forefront of public attention, to emphasise the importance of municipal politics for democracy and to promote the culture of appreciation for these important offices that are often exercised in honorary function or as a second office.

### **7. Protection of female politicians from violence**

Across Europe, insults and attacks on male and female local politicians and mayoresses and mayors, respectively, increase in real life as well as in the virtual world. Attacks against women meanwhile occur very frequently and, in the form of sexualised violence, they are much fiercer than the attacks against men. It stands to be feared that women might be held back due to such experiences to take a high-profile office at the municipal level. The Regulation against gender-specific violence that is currently being prepared by the EU should therefore also include protection for female politicians.

### **8. Strengthen equality in the CEMR**

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) as the head association of the national associations or conferences of towns and municipalities play a key role as interest representation in relation to the EU. The possibilities of the equality committee of the CEMR to take actions must be expanded, corresponding financing be secured, and the Equality Charta must be developed further as an instrument for the promotion of equality at the municipal level. Recommendations and best practices for a less time-consuming, more flexible, and more reconcilable organisation of meetings and workflows in local politics, e.g. by making use of digital formats, would be central aspects here. The CEMR already has a Code of Conduct for its events and everyday business. From this, guidelines or recommendations should be developed for a „culture of equality“ in municipal committees to overcome everyday sexism in communication and interaction.



## The EU project Mayoress — Brief description

The project **MAYORESS — Promoting Women in Local Leadership** aims at increasing the representation of women in municipal leadership positions, in particular, mayoresses and their cross-border networking.

In collaboration with experts and practitioners, mayoresses and candidates were supported in the project phase from 2019 to 2021, lasting networks were organised in North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein, and the cross-border exchange with Austria, Poland and France was promoted. In addition, recommendations for political actors (parties, associations, ministries) were developed on this basis for the implementation of measures and policies at the national and European levels. Another objective was raising the awareness among the public for the need of more gender equality in the town halls.

MAYORESS was managed and implemented by EAF Berlin, and sponsored by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union, and co-financed by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

Among the project and cooperation partners are the Austrian Association of Municipalities, Élués locales, the Observatoire régional de la parité d'Occitanie, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, the Association of Towns and Municipalities of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Conference of Municipalities of Schleswig-Holstein, the Towns Congress of Schleswig-Holstein, and the Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

## Project modules

### 1. Mayoresses and candidates

One focus of activities was in Germany: In North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein, lasting networks for mayoresses were organised and empowerment measures were developed and tested for mayoresses, and online peer mentoring was offered in addition for candidates for office in North Rhine-Westphalia. A workshop for speakers of the altogether six German mayoresses networks aimed at strengthening cooperation nationwide.

### 2. European Mayoress Campus

The European Mayoress Campus had to be held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and had the objective of promoting the personal exchange of ideas and experiences, as well as supporting the cooperation between mayoresses or women in municipal leadership positions in the participating countries.

### 3. Expert forum

Proven experts from different European countries and the European Commission participated in a forum and developed recommended actions closely oriented on practice.

# Partner organisations

## France

### Observatoire régional de la parité d'Occitanie

The Observatoire régional de la parité d'Occitanie (roughly translated as the Parity Observatory of the Occitania Region) was founded in the year 2000 with the objective of promoting women in public and economic life, and supporting their involvement in all areas where decisions are made. The focus of the organisation's work is the gathering of data and publication of analyses and recommendations for actions relating to women in politics and the economy.

### Élues locales

The „Élues locales“ organisation is an independent and non-partisan organisation, which is dedicated to facilitating advanced training for local office holders and it is recognised by the French Interior Ministry. Its purpose is giving support and advice to all elected women in France in their local political work. As part of the offer of specialised workshops and networking at the local, regional and national levels, the office holders are given the instruments to solidify their political influence and provide them with opportunities to exchange ideas.

## Germany

### EAF Berlin (project management)

EAF is committed to equal opportunity and diversity, and it cooperates with well-known partners at the junction between politics, the economy and science. EAF Berlin has many years of international experience in supporting the political participation of women by means of mentoring, networking and training.

### German Association of Towns and Municipalities (Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund, "DStGB")

The German Association of Towns and Municipalities is the head organisation of small and medium-sized towns and municipalities. The primary purpose of the non-partisan municipal head association is the representation of the interests of about 11,000 German towns and municipalities with districts at the federal and EU levels.

### Association of Towns and Municipalities of North Rhine-Westphalia (Städte- und Gemeindebund NRW)

The Association of Towns and Municipalities of North Rhine-Westphalia is an interest representation of 361 of 396 municipalities in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

### Conference of Municipalities of Schleswig-Holstein (Schleswig-Holsteinischer Gemeindetag, SHGT)

As a municipal association at the state level, the Conference of Municipalities of Schleswig-Holstein represents the interests of 1047 of 1106 municipalities and towns in the state of Schleswig-Holstein. The SHGT is a member of the German Association of Towns and Municipalities.

### Towns Congress of Schleswig-Holstein (Städteverband Schleswig Holstein)

The Towns Congress of Schleswig-Holstein consists of the Association of Towns of Schleswig-Holstein (Städtebund Schleswig-Holstein) and the Conference of Towns of Schleswig-Holstein (Städtetag Schleswig-Holstein). It represents the interests of 62 independent and municipal towns in Schleswig-Holstein as well as the municipalities Halstenbek and Sylt.

## Poland

### Instytut Spraw Publicznych (ISP)

The Instytut Spraw Publicznych (Institute of Public Affairs) is a non-partisan Polish think tank with seat in Warsaw. The organisation, founded in 1995 with the aim of supporting the reforms for the modernisation of the Polish society, researches current social and political questions at national and international levels. Its analyses, strategy papers and books are widely read by representatives of politics, the administration, research and civil society.

## Austria

### The Austrian Association of Municipalities (Österreichischer Gemeindebund)

The Austrian Association of Municipalities is the head association of the interest representation of 2,084 of overall 2,095 Austrian municipalities and towns at the federal and EU level.

# Annex

## Figures

Austrian Association of Municipalities: Bürgermeisterinnen-Umfrage 2021 anlässlich des Bürgermeisterinnentreffen in St. Anton an der Jeßnitz. (Mayoresses' Survey 2021 on the occasion of the Mayoresses' Meeting in St. Anton) 2021.

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Diversity in  
Leadership

