



**The Flemish Parliament reaches a European top position
in the percentage of women members**

**Report on the impact of the electoral gender quotas
on the Flemish Parliament elections held on 25 May 2014**

Summary:

Following the elections of 25 May 2014, the Flemish Parliament carried out a study on the application of the statutory electoral gender quotas and its impact on the composition of the Flemish Parliament.

The legislation aims to increase the number of women elected.

The number of women in the Flemish Parliament has increased in the fifth consecutive election, from only 21 members or 19.3% in the first direct election in 1995 to 55 or 44.4% in 2014.

Regarding the percentage of women MPs, the Flemish Parliament now has a leading position in Belgium and in Europe (situation 1 November 2014):

Belgium		Europe	
- Flemish Parliament	44.4%	- Sweden	43.6%
- Walloon Parliament	42.7%	- Finland	42.5%
- Brussels Parliament	41.6%	- Spain	39.7%
- Federal Chamber	39.3%	- Norway	39.6%
- Parliament of the German-speaking Community	28.0%	- Denmark	39.1%
		- Netherlands	38.7%
		- Germany	36.5%
		- Austria	32.2%
		- Italy	31.4%
		- France	26.2%
		- United Kingdom	22.6%

Among other topics, the report also discusses the number of men and women heading an electoral list, the number of men and women holding an eligible position and possible future evolutions.

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1. Context

At the first direct election of the Flemish Parliament in 1995, 103 men were elected, against 21 women (= 19.3%). This disparity is easy to explain: first of all, women were greatly underrepresented on the electoral lists; in addition, they were often placed in ineligible positions on the list. The same was the case for the federal chambers and the other regional parliaments. To promote women's participation in political decision-making, a system of statutory electoral gender quotas was introduced in the 1990s in a three-phase process:

- Following the example of the regulation initiated in 1994 for the federal parliament elections, in 1999 it was decided to allow no more than 2/3 of the theoretical maximum number of candidates of the same gender on any electoral list (applying to both effective seat holders and successors).
- Starting from 2004 the law dictates that on electoral lists for effective seats as well as on those for successor positions, the difference between the number of candidates of each gender may not exceed one.
- Furthermore, as from 2009 the first two candidates on a list may not be of the same gender.

2. Gender balance within the Flemish Parliament after the elections of 25 May 2014

Following the elections held on 25 May 2014 we herewith present the third report on the application of the gender legislation and the impact thereof on the composition of the Flemish Parliament. In 2004, the Flemish Parliament commissioned professor Stefaan Fiers (KU Leuven) to carry out the evaluation; in 2009 this task was carried out by professor Petra Meier and Mrs Sandra Sliwa (Universiteit Antwerpen). Building on the methodology that was developed in 2004 by professor Fiers and advanced by professor Meier in 2009, this time the administration of the Flemish Parliament have processed the data themselves. Consequent application of the same methodology allows for comparison of the data from the individual elections.

The report provides an answer to the following questions:

1. How many electoral lists were headed by a male or a female candidate for the Flemish Parliament elections held on 25 May 2014?
2. How many male and how many female first successors participated in the Flemish Parliament elections held on 25 May 2014?
3. How many men and how many women held an eligible seat in the Flemish Parliament elections held on 25 May 2014?
4. How many men and how many women were elected Members of the Flemish Parliament on 25 May 2014?

Important note: the data below involves only the lists of the parties that ended up having a seat in the Flemish Parliament. The multitude of small parties that do not stand a chance of being elected into Parliament bear no relevance for the answer to the question to what extent the gender quotas would impact the balanced composition of the Parliament. Processing that data would cloud the analysis of said impact.

2.1 Number of men and women on the first place of an electoral list

	2004		2009		2014		
	male	female	male	female	male	female	total
18-30 yrs ¹					0	0	0
31-40 yrs					6	6	12
41-50 yrs					7	8	15
51-60 yrs					6	0	6
> 61 yrs					2	0	2
Total	26 83.9%	5 16.1%	33 76.7%	10 23.3%	21 60%	14 40%	35

Compared to 2004 and 2009, the number of women on the top of an electoral list rose sharply to 40%. In the age category 18-50 yrs the balance even tips slightly towards women. The 51+ yrs category contains no women.

One possible reason for the increase in the number of lists headed by women is the recent legislation aimed at combating fake candidacies. In the event of coinciding elections, candidates may be nominated for one parliament only. Double candidacies for seats or successor positions are also forbidden. Also, MPs who during their parliamentary mandate participate in elections for another parliament, lose their active mandate as soon as they are elected in that other parliament. As a result of all these measures, political parties can no longer 'milk' their vote-catching leaders – who are still predominantly male – by placing them on several party lists simultaneously. As a result, the number of people leading a party list increases. The influx of new (young) candidates heading a list seems to have created a positive development in favour of women. After the outflux of the older generation of exclusively male heads of electoral lists, this should lead to greater parity.

2.2 Number of male and female first successors

This report involves only the parties/lists that acquired at least one seat in Parliament at the 25 May 2014 elections. For the majority of these parties the possibility of participating in government affects the composition of their electoral lists. The larger the chance of getting a seat in government, the more strategic the position of the first successor.

	2004		2009		2014		
	male	female	male	female	male	female	total
18-30 yrs					4	1	5
31-40 yrs					11	6	17
41-50 yrs					4	3	7
51-60 yrs					5	0	5
> 61 yrs					1	0	1
Total	22 71%	9 29%	34 79.1%	9 20.9%	25 71.4%	10 28.6%	35

Of all the data in this report, the number of first successors represents the largest gender imbalance. Only 10 out of 35 first successors are female. On the other hand, female first successors appear to have a better chance of getting a seat in the Flemish Parliament immediately after the elections. Of the 11 elected persons

¹ The age categories in these and the following tables are based on the candidates' dates of birth on the day of the elections.

who became a member of the Flemish, Brussels or federal government, 6 were replaced by a male first successor and 5 by a female first successor. This means that half of the female first successors ended up in parliament almost immediately after the elections, against only 24% of its male counterparts.

2.3 Number of men and women holding an eligible position

Eligible positions are defined as the number of eligible positions topping an electoral list, equalling the number of seats won by that list at the previous elections plus one. The first successor position is also considered an eligible position.²

	2004		2009		2014		
	male	female	male	female	male	female	total
18-30 yrs	2	11	9	6	9	5	14
31-40 yrs	26	29	30	32	35	31	66
41-50 yrs	42	17	49	22	35	27	62
51-60 yrs	42	7	32	14	23	11	34
> 61 yrs	6	2	6	1	6	0	6
Total	118 64.1%	66 35.9%	126 62.7%	75 37.3%	108 59.3%	74 40.7%	182

The percentage of women in eligible positions on electoral lists for the Flemish Parliament rose slightly from 35.9% in 2004 to 37.3% in 2009 and to 40.7% in 2014. Although women constitute half of the candidates, they still occupy less than half of the number of eligible positions.

The age category split shows that the imbalance can be attributed mainly to female underrepresentation in older generations of eligible candidates. Of the 40 eligible candidates aged 50+, only 11 are female.

The intermediate category of 31- to 50-year-olds displays the best parity: 54.7% of the eligible candidates are male; 45.3% are female. If this generation of candidates maintains its current gender ratio at the next elections, the underrepresentation of women in the eldest age category will be annihilated gradually.

Finally it should be noted that as was the case in 2009, the youngest age category again shows a male dominance. In first instance the gender quotas seem to have a positive effect for the women who entered into politics at the time the quotas were introduced in 2004. This generation of female politicians has meanwhile acquired a place in parliament. For younger women, however, getting an eligible position again seems less obvious.

2.4 Number of male and female candidates elected as parliament members

	2004		2009		2014		
	male	female	male	female	male	female	total
18-30 yrs	0	6	4	3	5	4	9
31-40 yrs	14	19	10	21	16	21	37
41-50 yrs	34	8	30	18	29	21	50
51-60 yrs	30	4	25	9	14	9	23
> 61 yrs	6	3	4	0	5	0	5
Total	84 67.7%	40 32.3%	73 58.9%	51 41.1%	69 55.6%	55 44.4%	124

² The definition of eligible positions is taken from the 2004 and 2009 evaluation reports. Using the same parameters allows for comparing the data of the last three elections.

This table refers to the candidates who on election day were declared elected by the main bureau of the electorate district. This means that it includes elected candidates who gave up their mandate immediately after the elections.

The number of female elected representatives has risen for the fifth time in a row. Just like in 2004 and 2009 women are the dominant gender in the 18-40 years age group, but the difference is getting smaller. The 41-50 yrs age group shows a male dominance, but here too, the gap between men and women is narrowing. Women are still greatly underrepresented in the highest age category 51+. However, the number of elected representatives aged 50+ has fallen steeply. As a result, the female underrepresentation in the group of older elected representatives has relatively little impact on the entire scheme of things. Said impact will become even less as the generations displaying greater parity move up in the age scale.

It is noteworthy that in comparison to the number of eligible positions, women seem to be elected relatively easier than men. Of the 74 female candidates in an eligible position, 55 or 74.3% were elected. Of all the men in an eligible position only 63.9% got elected (69 out of 108).

It is hard to find a simple explanation for the difference. It is definitely not a case of women getting elected more often from a 'non-eligible' position as a result of votes of preference. Out of 8 MPs elected outside the list of eligible positions, only two are female. The remarkable difference between the rate of eligible positions and the rate of elected representatives shows how hard it is to define the actually eligible positions.

3. Comparison with other parliaments

For illustration purposes the table below shows the gender ratios for the other Belgian parliaments and for a few national parliaments³ of neighbouring countries.

	Percentage male MPs	Percentage female MPs
Belgian parliaments		
Flemish Parliament	55.6%	44.4%
Walloon Parliament	57.3%	42.7%
Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region	58.4%	41.6%
Parliament of the German-speaking Community	72.0%	28.0%
Federal House of Representatives	60.7%	39.3%
Senate ⁴	50.0%	50.0%
Foreign federal/national parliaments⁵		
Sweden	56.4%	43.6%
Finland	57.5%	42.5%
Spain	60.3%	39.7%

³ Status at 1 November 2014. Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>. The parliament of Andorra is the only national parliament in Europe with a better gender parity (50% male and 50% female representatives) than the Flemish Parliament.

⁴ Men and women have the exact same number of seats (30) in the Senate. As far as the federal senators appointed by the parliaments are concerned, women are in a slight majority (27 women; 23 men). The co-opted senators show a male dominance (7 men, 3 women). It should be noted that the Senate is the only parliament where quotas apply regarding the composition of the assembly: no more than two thirds of the senators may be of the same gender (section 67, par. 3 of the Constitution).

⁵ For countries with a bi-cameral system the percentages reflect the lower houses (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*; UK House of Commons; German *Bundestag*, etc.)

Norway	60.4%	39.6%
Denmark	60.9%	39.1%
The Netherlands	61.3%	38.7%
Germany	63.5%	36.5%
Austria	67.8%	32.2%
Italy	68.6%	31.4%
France	73.8%	26.2%
United Kingdom	77.4%	22.6%

As it's difficult to compare the political importance of the regional parliaments in the other federal states in Europe, this list only contains national/federal parliaments. This said, it has to be noted that particularly in Spain the regional parliaments have a remarkably good gender score.

4. Conclusion

The number of elected representatives in the Flemish Parliament increased for the fifth election in a row. 55 female candidates (44%) were elected directly for the Flemish Parliament. The exact same number of women has an effective seat in the Flemish Parliament. The replacement of the elected representatives who became part of a government therefore did not change the situation. With a 44% female ratio the Flemish Parliament takes a top position in Europe and the rest of the globe. The generation of female politicians who entered politics at the time of the introduction of gender quotas seems to benefit fully from the statutory quota regulation. The (partial) catch-up race run by this generation over the past 10 years seems to continue to be beneficial mainly for themselves. The younger generation of women seems to have a slightly harder time claiming its position.

A general remark as a final conclusion. The parliamentary obligation to evaluate the impact of the gender quotas was based on the principle that gender quotas are permitted only up to the point when their objective is achieved. Getting close to achieving an objective does not justify the conclusion that the temporary favourable measures have become obsolete. The better gender balance in parliament primarily shows that gender quotas have a real impact on the number of female elected representatives, not that gender quotas have become unnecessary. It is hard to assess to what extent the statutory gender quotas have led to a different culture, i.e. one in which electoral lists would demonstrate greater gender parity even without statutory rules.