

Women in politics: facts and figures.

The RoSa-factsheets aim to familiarise you with the scope of equal opportunities in Flanders. Each factsheet probes the situation in a specific area. Broad themes as well as specific ones are put into the spotlight, depending on the relevance and/or availability of information and numerical data. We do not intend to offer exhaustive information, our primary aim is to sketch the position of women in Flanders in a surveyable and accessible way.

Since its founding in 1978, RoSa is the place in Flanders to look for information and documentation about equal opportunities, emancipation policy and women's studies.

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Woman and decision-making

The Peking Action Platform stated that "women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account"(G181). 116 governments, including Belgium, signed this declaration.

This article examines the political participation of women in Flanders. We provide the most recent statistics, including figures from the three previous elections.

Following the complex Belgian federal structure (see Factsheet n°1), statistics for each level are represented separately. The figures on the European and federal (national) level reflect the situation in Belgium (including the Flemish as well as of the Walloon region). The statistics for the regional and local (provincial and municipal) level represent the Flemish situation. The historical context highlights the most important dates in the history of political participation of women in Belgium.

The number of women in Flemish/Belgian political life is growing, albeit very, very gradually. At this rate, it would take another 500 years before we reach parity in parliament. To cope with the inequality between men and women in the power-sharing and decision-making process at all levels, structural measures are needed. In 2002, the Belgium government introduced the quota-laws. These dictate that only half plus one of the candidates on the election lists can be of the same sex. This law applies to all political levels in Belgium.

Important dates

- 1920 • Women aged 21 or more obtain voting rights at local elections
- 1921 • Passive voting rights (Women are allowed to be candidates)¹
- 1921 • First woman to enter the Belgian parliament (Marie Spaak-Janson)

⁽¹⁾ The law of 9 May 1919 gave active voting rights to widows and mothers of soldiers and civilians killed by the enemy during World War I. Also female prisoners of war were allowed to vote. This measure gave voting rights to about 20.000 women.

enters parliament through co-optation, as a member of the Belgian Workers' Party)

- 1949 • Active voting rights
- 1965 • First woman to enter government
- 1974 • The number of women in parliament reaches 15.42%
- 1994 • Tobback-Smet law (at least 1/3 of all candidates should be female, at all levels). The law was introduced partially at local elections in 1994, and completely at federal level in 1999.
- 2002 • Quota-laws. Only half plus one of the candidates on the election lists can be of the same sex. The first two candidates on the list must be of a different sex. These laws apply to all political levels in Belgium.

Current situation

Political participation of women is improving in recent years. At the federal elections of 2003 women overstepped the magical mark of 30%.

- 32% in European Parliament
- 33% in Federal Parliament
- 30% in Federal Government
- 20% in Flemish Parliament
- 33% in Flemish Government
- 29,5% in Provincial Councils
- 31% in local councils, 20% in local government, 7.5% local mayors.

Figures

Europe

Year	% women Flanders	% women Walloon region	Tot. % women Belgian level
1984 - 1989	15.4	18.0	16.6
1989 - 1994	15.4	18.0	16.6
1994 - 1999	36.0	30.0	32.0
1999 - ...	42.8	20.0	32.0

Federal Parliament

- Women in Parliament, 1987 - 2003

Year	% women House of Representatives	% women Senate	% women Parliament ²
1987	8.4	8.1	8.3
1991	9.4	10.8	10.1
1995	12.0	23.9	15.8
1999	23.3	28.2	24.9
2003	34.6	29.6	33.0

(2) Number of directly and through co-optation elected representatives in Parliament, as well as at provincial level. After the general elections in 1999, co-optation was used especially to raise the number of women in Parliament. The number of women directly elected in the House was 19%, in the Senate 25%.

- **Women in Parliament (Flemisch Parties), 2003**

	% Women in Parliament
Soc.-Dem.	45.7
Christ.-Dem.	30
Liberals	27
Extr. Right	23.1

- **Flemish Parliament**

Year	% women in Parliament
1987	9.1
1991	9.0
1995	16.9
1999	20.3

Province

- **Percentage women at provincial level in Flanders**

level	1987 %women	1991 %women	1995 % women	2000 % women
Governors	0	0	10	20
Permanent deputies	7.4	7.4	10	13.3
Council members	12.3	15.2	21.6	29.3

- **Women in provincial councils, 2000**

Province	FI Nat	Ext Rght	Lib	C-Dem	Soc Dem	Greens	Other	Total		
								V	T	%
Antwerp	1	6	2	11	4	4	-	35	84	41.7
Fl. Brabant	-	1	6	7	4	4	1	24	84	28.6
Limburg	-	1	1	7	4	-	4	18	75	24.0
East.-Flanders	2	4	3	8	1	1	-	24	85	28.6
West-Flanders	-	2	1	9	1	2	-	19	80	23.8
Total	3/15	14/54	14/54	42/126	14/75	11/26	5/10	120	407	29.5

Local elections

- Flanders

level	1982 %women	1988 %women	1994 % women	2000 % women
council members	9.8	13.8	19.9	30.8
executives	7.1	10.4	14.1	19.96
mayors	2.9	3.9	5.1	7.47

comparison eu member states

women in national government, situation 2001

country	% women nat government	%women nat parliament
Sweden	50.0	44.3
Denmark	42.9	38.3
Finland	38.9	37.0
Germany	38.6	29.8
The Netherlands	36.0	32.4
United Kingdom	32.9	17.0
Austria	31.3	27.1
France	29.4	8.3
Luxembourg	28.6	16.7
Ireland	21.9	14.2
Spain	17.6	27.1
Greece	12.5	8.7
Italy	10.3	10.2
Portugal	9.8	20.0

source: www.db-decision.de

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