

Study Guide

on topic area:

**Enhancing the involvement of women in governance and
decision-making processes**

for the European Council committee

for its simulation during

Rhodes Model Regional Co-operation 2022

High School Edition

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1. Welcoming Message

Esteemed Delegates,

I am more than thrilled to welcome you all to the European Council of Rhodes MRC 2022 the High School Edition. First and foremost, I hope that your decision to participate in this year's simulation will be a great opportunity to interact with other young people and get a brighter view of a policy-making process. From my part, I will be alert at any time to facilitate your effort and help you have a fruitful debate and a great experience overall!

Our committee will examine the **involvement of women in governance and decision-making processes**, a matter which seems concern national, regional and international stakeholders but also on an individual level, as well. Therefore, it is undoubtedly a challenging concept, which requires your innovative thoughts and ideas.

The present Study Guide¹ has been conducted as a roadmap for understanding and tackling the topic and I hope it will be a great hand concerning your preparation. I expect your next step to be the conduction of an examination of your country's policy and to get well informed concerning the status of women involvement in your country.

Apart from my expectations for a productive debate, I encourage you to get actively involved in the committee, as it is your chance to broaden your knowledge on worldwide problems.

Do not be afraid to stand up and support your arguments and get prepared for the real debate! I thank you in advance for your cooperation and highly anticipate meeting you all in Rhodes and create some memories! May any inquiry of yours arise, do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

The Board of the European Council

Alexios Vasileios Tsanos, President

¹ *The present Study Guide was originally drafted by the Board Members of the RhodesMRC 2019 High School Edition, ms. Anastasia Apostolaki and ms. Aikaterini Fragkouli, and updated for the purposes of RhodesMRC 2022 High School Edition by the Members of the Secretariat.*

2. Introduction to the Committee

The European Council is the body of the European Union (EU) that comprises of the Heads of States of each one of the twenty-seven (27) Members of the EU along with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission². The European Council is not a legislative organ and its main duty and function are to provide general political directions. The European Council decides the political priorities and the European Union's overall direction. Moreover, the Council holds the responsibility to set the EU's common foreign and security policy. The Council meets, according to the Treaties, twice every semester³. However, the President may also set additional meetings. In every official meeting the European Council discusses complicated or sensitive issues that cannot be resolved at a lower level of intergovernmental cooperation and adopts conclusions, which should guide the general policy of the European Union. Conclusions require unanimity among all EU Member States. The content of these conclusions tends to be general and broad, in order to serve as a general guideline and the primal voice of the EU Member States. The strategic agenda 2019-2024⁴ consist of four main legislative priorities: the protection of citizens and their freedoms, the development of a strong and vibrant economy, the growth of a climate-neutral, green, fair and social continent and the promotion of the European interests and values on the global stage.

3. Introduction to the Topic

Gender diversity in government and public institutions is crucial as decision-making bodies create policies that affect both men's and women's rights and choice⁵. Strengthening the involvement of women in governance and decision-making promotes balance in policy making procedures and encourages the development of gender-inclusive policies and programs⁶. In addition, women leaders often include to the agenda issues that have been previously under-addressed, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave, and childcare, and consider these topics priorities, leading to a more equitable society⁷. Alarming, however, according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) it seems that across Europe women are still under-represented in decision-making, whether it is in elected office, the civil service, the private sector or academia, despite advances in democratic governance and proven abilities of women as leaders and agents of change⁸. In fact, according to the European Institute for

² Consilium.europa.eu. (2019). *History - Consilium*. [online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/history/?filters=2031> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

³ Consilium.europa.eu. (2019). *The role of the European Council in nominations and appointments - Consilium*. [online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/role-nominations-appointment/> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

⁴ Consilium.europa.eu. (2019). *Setting the EU's political agenda - Consilium*. [online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/role-setting-eu-political-agenda/> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

⁵ Oecd.org. (2019). OECD Roundtable on Better Governance for Gender Equality - OECD. [online] Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/gov/roundtable-better-governance-for-gender-equality.htm> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

⁶ Oecd.org. (2019). OECD Roundtable on Better Governance for Gender Equality - OECD. [online] Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/gov/roundtable-better-governance-for-gender-equality.htm> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

Ibid.

⁷ UN Women | Europe and Central Asia. (2019). What we do: Leadership and political participation. [online] Available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019]. Ibid

⁸ UN Women | Europe and Central Asia. (2019). What we do: Leadership and political participation. [online] Available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

Gender Equality (EIGE), on average across the EU women account for 33% of members of national parliaments. This means that still two thirds of members of Parliament are men and progress is slow and uneven. Women represent 32% of senior ministers in Member State governments and only 26% of leaders of major political parties⁹. With the aforementioned figures in mind, one can easily conclude that there is still great of room for improvement upon the matter at hand.

4. Key Terms and Definitions

- **Governance**: Establishment of policies, and continuous monitoring of their proper implementation by the members of the governing body of an organization. It includes the mechanisms required to balance the powers of the members -with the associated accountability- and their primary duty of enhancing the prosperity and viability within the organization¹⁰.
- **Gender equality**: This term refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men and other genders. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not exclusively a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, a sustainable people-centered development¹¹.
- **Gender gap**: The gap in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access, rights, remuneration or benefits¹².
- **Gender discrimination**: *"Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field"*¹³.

⁹ *Achieving gender balance in decision-making*. (n.d.). European Commission - European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equality-between-women-and-men-decision-making/achieving-gender-balance-decision-making_en

¹⁰BusinessDictionary.com. (2019). Governance [online] Available at: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/governance.html> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

¹¹ European Institute for Gender Equality. (2019). *Concepts and definitions*. [online] Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/concepts-and-definitions> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

¹²European Institute for Gender Equality. (2019). *Concepts and definitions*. [online] Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/concepts-and-definitions> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

Ibid.

¹³ European Institute for Gender Equality. (2019). *Gender discrimination*. [online] Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1161> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

5. Legal Framework

5.1. EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 presents policy objectives and actions to make significant progress by 2025 towards a gender-equal Europe. The goal is a Union where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our European society. One of its key objectives is achieving gender balance in decision-making. The Commission will lead by example. It aims to reach gender balance of 50% at all levels of its management by the end of 2024. Supporting measures will include quantitative targets for female appointments and leadership development programmes. The Commission will also increase efforts towards reaching a larger share of female managers in EU agencies and will ensure gender balanced representation among speakers and panellists in the conferences it organises¹⁴.

5.2. Council Conclusions of 7 December 2015 on equality between women and men in the field of decision-making

This set of Conclusions builds on previous work and political commitments voiced by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and other relevant stakeholders in this area. The Council has already highlighted the need to increase the representation of women on decision-making bodies, not only in the economic and political fields, but also in areas such as science and research, the media and sport. There are clear signs that the overall situation is improving in a number of Member States, however it is nevertheless true that women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions in all walks of life. The issue of gender balance in decision-making therefore still requires close attention from policy-makers and researchers¹⁵.

5.3. Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW)

CEDAW was adopted in 1979. All member states recognized the obligation of providing equal opportunities in all spheres of life. It constitutes one of the most important texts regarding empowerment of the political participation of women and it entered into force in 1981. In particular, Article 7 of this Convention regulates the political participation of women and calls the Members States to take all appropriate measures¹⁶.

5.4. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

ICCPR entered into force in 23 March 1976 and all member States recognized the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the “*human family*”. The articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are in conformity with the measures of the abovementioned CEDAW,

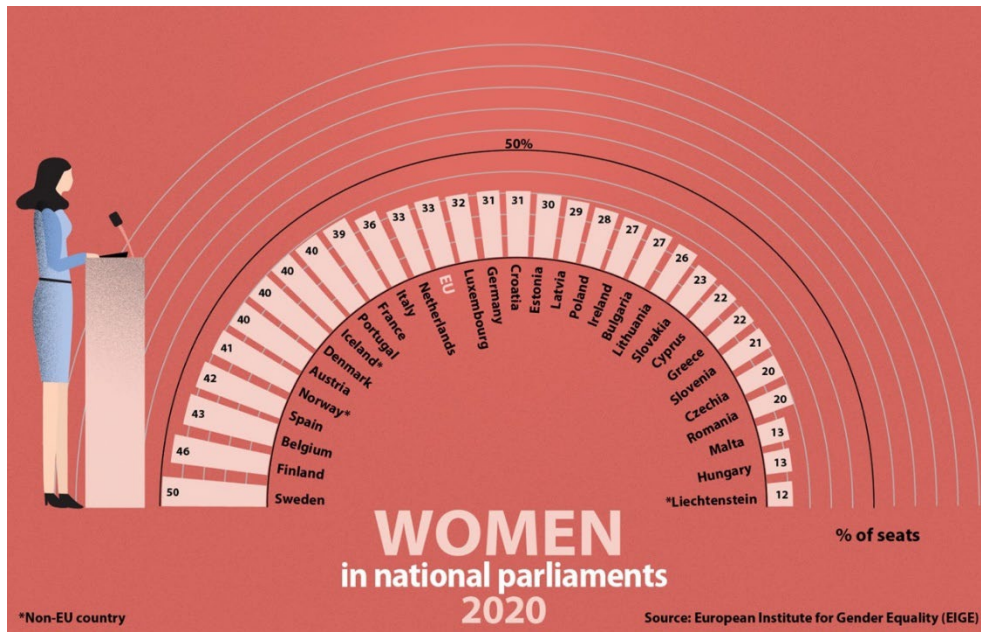
¹⁴ "EU action to promote gender balance in decision-making." European Commission - European Commission. Accessed October 27, 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equality-between-women-and-men-decision-making/eu-action-promote-gender-balance-decision-making_en.

¹⁵ data.consilium.eu. Accessed October 27, 2022. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14327-2015-INIT/en/pdf>.

¹⁶ Undocs.org. (2019). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. [online] Available at: <https://undocs.org/CEDAW/C/NLD/4> [Accessed 26 Sep. 2019].

since the latter only extends the Covenant's scope¹⁷. Moreover, in this context, the international standards set by different entities played an important role to the substantial growth of international commitment to fulfill women's equal right to political participation¹⁸.

6. Analysis of the Topic Area



Progress has been made towards achieving equitable participation between men and women in governance and decision-making, as demonstrated by the fact that in 2020 women held 33% of seats in national parliaments in the EU, a share that has been rising since 2004, when women accounted for around one-fifth (21%) of members in national parliaments. In particular, the highest share of female members

in national parliaments was recorded in Sweden, where women accounted for almost a half of parliamentarians (close to 50%), ahead of Finland (46%), Belgium (43%) and Spain (both 42%), while at the opposite end of the scale, the lowest shares were recorded in Hungary and Malta (both 13%). In addition, another statistic from Eurostat shows that the number of female presidents and prime ministers in the EU also rose since 2004. Today, four out of 27 heads of government are women, whereas there were none in 2004. Nevertheless, over this period there were never more than four female presidents or prime ministers at the same time¹⁹. In fact, according to UN-Women, no Member State has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and based on the current rate of progress, it estimates that it will take 82 years until the gender gap in political participation is finally closed²⁰.

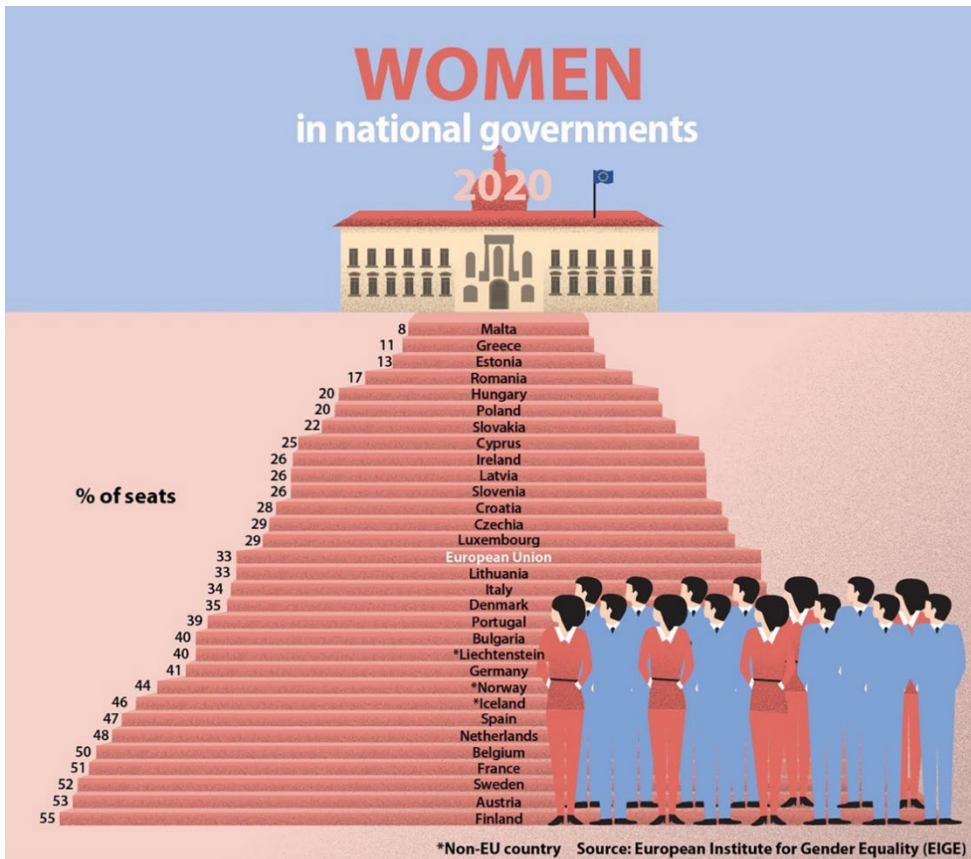
¹⁷Ohchr.org. (2019). [online] Available at:

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23/A.HRC.23.50_EN.pdf [Accessed 26 Sep. 2019].

¹⁸ See supra note 22

¹⁹ "1 in 3 parliament and government members are women." European Commission | Choose your language | Choisir une langue | Wählen Sie eine Sprache. Accessed October 27, 2022. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210307-1>.

²⁰UN Women. (2019). UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/8/un-women-strategic-plan-2018-2021> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].



Within this part of our Study Guide we will address the most important key-areas and factors that are related to the gender gap in governance and decision-making²¹.

#InternationalWomensDay

ec.europa.eu/eurostat

6.1. Gender-based discrimination within the workplace

Gender inequalities within the workplace usually refer to inefficiencies at the recruitment process or worker-maldistribution in formal and non-formal workforces. The majority of women continue to be in a disadvantaged position with less power, status and income compared with men²². On the other hand, the ones who managed to successfully enter the male-dominated work environments came across with gender discrimination. Promoting gender equality increases the chances of women and men holding an equal opportunity of choosing an occupation, being hired and fairly paid, and of course maintain equal treatment and opportunities throughout their careers²³.

6.2. The gender perspective into all policies and programs

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are critical dimensions of the European Council, in order to achieve a more balanced representation among the directors of listed companies, the governance mechanisms, the institutions and broader political debates, within the involvement in

²¹Un.org. (2019). [online] Available at:

https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_34_180.pdf
[Accessed 25 Sep. 2019].

²²Krivkovich, A., Nadeau, M., Robinson, K., Robinson, N., Starikova, I. and Yee, L. (2019). *Women in the Workplace 2018*. [online] McKinsey & Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>
[Accessed Oct. 2018].

²³European Commission - European Commission. (2019). *Equal opportunities and access to the labour market*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/equal-opportunities-and-access-labour-market_en.

decision-making processes. Thus, the gender perspective consists of an important aspect that aims to be presented in good governance. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the five main attributes of good governance include the following: 1) transparency, 2) responsibility, 3) accountability, 4) participation, and 5) responsiveness²⁴.

6.3. Public life and politics

The obstacles that women politicians encounter are not identical across the EU, because we are dealing with a mosaic of various cultural, economic and political contexts and electoral systems. Nevertheless, we can recognise three key factors that contribute in relation to women's under-representation²⁵. To begin with, there are barriers that block women's entering to politics, such as: women's individual perceptions of their own abilities and of the costs and risks of running for office, unequal access to key resources like time, money, and political networks, unequal family responsibilities, male-dominated political cultures in parties and parliaments, gender roles and stereotypes in wider society and the lack of female role models. Secondly, there are barriers limiting the "call" for women candidates. These project the way in which political parties select and engage candidates, through their voters' preferences or attitudes towards women's obligation in public life or as politicians. It is a fact, nevertheless, that the corresponding influence of parties and voters' range in different electoral systems. Last but not least, the plurality/majority systems based solely on single-member constituencies²⁶ make electoral systems themselves a potential institutional barrier, as comparatively systems which are based entirely on proportional representation or that include a factor of proportional representation are more sufficient in promoting the election of female candidates.

6.4. Women in elections

Almost one hundred years have passed after women won their voting right and were first elected to parliament in a few European countries. However, in a 2016 Council of Europe report²⁷ states that generally women are not notably better represented in regional parliaments, with the gender-balance approach, therefore the whole idea of gender equal representation seems more difficult without changing existing institutions. In 2018 a position paper by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)²⁸ declared that women are still under-represented in decision-making and leadership positions in all aspects of life, with the situation in local and regional governments getting even worse; for instance, in the EU, only 15% of mayors and approximately 35% of local or regional council members are women. While in the run-up to the European elections

²⁴Etico.iiep.unesco.org. (n.d.). [online] Available at: <http://etico.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unpan010193.pdf> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2019].

²⁵ Womenlobby.org. (2019). *Women in Politics*. [online] Available at: <https://www.womenlobby.org/-Women-in-Politics-507-?lang=en> [Accessed 2019].

²⁶ For European elections, proportional representation applies in all EU countries, but they can use either open or closed lists. For details, see 2019 European elections: National rules, EPRS, European Parliament, 2018

²⁷ Rm.coe.int. (2019). *Implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017*. [online] Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806eeb7b> [Accessed 2016].

²⁸ Ccre.org. (2019). *A European approach to equality, diversity and inclusion*. [online] Available at: https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/Bilbao_conference_conclusions_EN.pdf [Accessed Jun. 2018].

in May 2019²⁹, when new mandates were established in the Commission and European Council, it was perceived as a goal how a better gender balance (at least 40%) or gender parity (50%) could be accomplished in the next Parliament through the EU's strategy for gender equality and how the EU and its Member States could move on an authentic parity democracy.

7. Room for Improvement and Possible Solutions

Even if equal political rights and equal political participation have in some extent been ensured in most EU member states, the room for improvement is non-negligible regarding women's political participation. Enhanced empowerment of active female participation still constitutes of an urgent matter in today's agenda, as gender inequality still persists in the political sphere. Nevertheless, when addressing this issue multiple approaches can be combined and taken into consideration.

First of all, national governments should further address and enhance the existing legal framework relevant to women's participation in social and political life and come in compliance with European and international legal, or non, framework upon the matter. Even more, governments should be encouraged to collect data or allow EU related instruments to do so, in order to comprehend the roots of low participation of women in politics and better understand the magnitude of the issue. Moreover, many countries have introduced gender quotas as an affirmative action tool to ensure more political participation of women, while other countries completely oppose them. In fact, there are multiple ways that quotas can be implemented varying from party quotas to reserved seats in parliament³⁰, therefore gender quotas consist of an approach that is worth discussing.

In addition, an important area that is in need for improvement refers to structural injustices which prevent women from participating in politics. One concrete example is the field of education, as there are still more boys than girls receiving a higher education, which results in more men than women in high positions of power. Another issue is childcare. Specifically, women are mainly seen as responsible for their children and if governments are not able to provide assistance for them, for example via adequate daycare spots or granting paternity leave so that fathers can also take care of their children, women are left behind and their potential to run for office diminishes. Even more, when discussing about the economic empowerment of women, it is apparent that women need to get more opportunities to be seen in leading positions in order to be perceived accordingly -in terms of status- within societies. This leads us to the final measure: awareness campaigns; The importance and benefits of women in governance and politics needs to be stressed in the population so that women will not be frowned upon when deciding to take a political position. Finally, the image of a woman capable to lead and equal to men in decision making and skills needs to be presented in society in order to change societies perception of women as primarily 'wives' and 'mothers'.

²⁹ Europarl.europa.eu. (2019). *Women in political decision-making in view of the next European elections*. [online] Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608863/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608863_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608863/IPOL_STU(2019)608863_EN.pdf) [Accessed Feb. 2019].

³⁰ Idea.int. (2019). *Gender Quotas Database | International IDEA*. [online] Available at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas> [Accessed 26 Sep. 2019].

8. Conclusion

Taking all the above into consideration, it can be easily understood that achieving fully gender equality and women's empowerment is no easy task. However, we have to intensify our efforts on multiple levels in order to provide women and girls with equal access to education, health care, work, representation and participation in political and economic decision-making processes, so as for the societies and humanity to benefit at large.

9. Points to be Addressed

1. What are the consequences from the lack of gender balance in governance?
2. What are some of the main factors that are linked to gender imbalance in the political sector?
3. What measures should be taken in order to safeguard and promote women's inclusive political participation?
4. What is the role of the European Council and other European institutions in order to assist the better parliamentary representation of women?
5. How can public awareness towards the topic boost female representation?
6. What is the role of education towards fighting stereotypes against women?
7. How can we guarantee gender equality within the workplace?

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