

## Getting the Balance Right In National Cabinets

### What Works For Women

The results are in: the number of women cabinet ministers is increasing slowly, but steadily. In 1999, women comprised 8.7 percent of cabinet ministers worldwide. By July 2007 women's representation in national cabinets had risen to 15.2 percent.

These are important findings. Until now no extensive research has been conducted on women's representation in cabinets. And while boosting the number of women in cabinet positions is integral to achieving gender parity in government, it will also likely have an impact on an administration's policies.

As part of its 50/50 Campaign to increase women's participation in government, WEDO reviewed women's representation in national cabinets in 188 countries. The campaign, which was launched in 2000, has focused primarily on women in national parliaments and other major decision-making bodies.

The rising number of cabinet appointments is significant because it demonstrates a growing acceptance of women in prominent decision-making positions. And when women are present in greater numbers they are able to have a direct influence on governments by bringing their concerns to the table and taking action.

#### Achieving 50/50

It is difficult to forecast the conditions for achieving gender equality in national cabinets. For example, although the Nordic countries rank at the top for both the percentage of women in parliament and in cabinets, only ten countries out of the 22 countries with the most women cabinet members have reached a critical mass of women in parliaments.

A country's rank in terms of women's representation in parliament, therefore, cannot be used as a predictor for how it will fare when it comes to the number of women cabinet members. Cabinet ministers, unlike parliamentarians, are appointed positions. This means that the strategies for promoting equal representation in national cabinets differ from the concrete measures such as proportional representation and campaign finance reform that are being adopted and advocated to increase women's representation in parliaments worldwide.

One strategy that could be applied, however, is the use of gender quotas in the nomination of cabinet ministers. Chile became the number two ranking country with approximately 48 percent of its cabinet comprised of women, after the President insisted on gender equality in her cabinet.

In Spain, in March 2007, quotas were adopted for almost all elected positions. Party electoral lists are required to have a minimum of 40 percent and a maximum of 60 percent of either sex among their candidates in all elections. Although quotas have not been established for cabinet positions, a robust women's lobby coupled with strong political leadership from the newly elected president has led Spain to rank fourth with 47 percent women in their national cabinet.



**Table 1: Women's Representation in Cabinets Worldwide** <sup>ii iii iv</sup>

Rank	Country	Total Ministers in Cabinet	Female Ministers	% Women in Cabinets	Rank Women in Parliaments
1*	Finland	20	11	55.0% **	3
2	Chile	21	10	47.6%	73
3*	Norway	19	9	47.4%	5
4*	Spain	17	8	47.0%	8
5	France	15	7	46.7% **	86
6	Switzerland	7	3	42.9%	31
7	Nicaragua	12	5	41.7% **	58
8*	Sweden	22	9	40.9%	2
9*	South Africa	27	11	40.7%	12
10*	Burundi	20	8	40.0% **	16
10*	Germany	15	6	40.0%	15
11	Ecuador	18	7	38.9%	31
12*	Austria	14	5	35.7%	13
13*	Iceland	12	4	33.3%	14
13	Sao Tome and Principe	12	4	33.3%	111
13	Grenada	12	4	33.0% **	26
14	Malawi	22	7	31.8% **	79
15*	Denmark	19	6	31.6%	6
15	Lesotho	19	6	31.6% **	36
16*	Peru	16	5	31.2%	19
17	Panama	13	4	30.8%	67
18	Liberia	20	6	30.0% **	84
19*	Costa Rica	17	5	29.4%	4
19*	Netherlands	17	5	29.4%	7

\* Countries that have achieved a critical mass of women parliamentarians and cabinet ministers.

\*\* Increase of women ministers is the result of recent elections

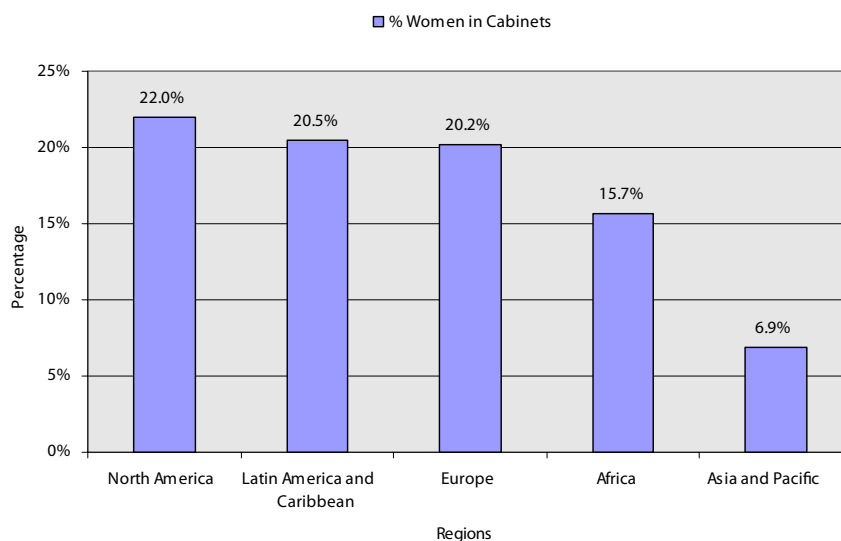
Source: WEDO

### Progress By Region

A regional review of the percentage of women in national cabinets shows that Europe, Latin America and North America all have at least 20 percent women in cabinet. Latin America has approximately 23 percent, North America approximately 22 percent and Africa approximately 16 percent. Asia and Pacific lag behind at nearly 7 percent (see Figure 1).

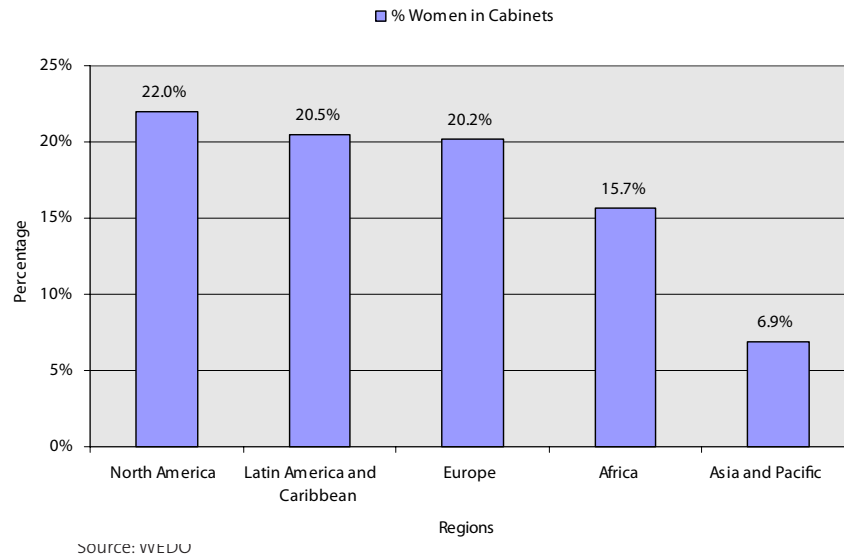
There are also notable sub-regional differences, some of which are highlighted in Figure 2. For example, there is a large variation in women's representation in cabinets in Western (27.8%) and Eastern (10.5%) Europe. The greatest sub-regional difference exists in Africa where Southern Africa has 23.9 percent and North Africa has 4 percent women in cabinets.

**Figure 1: Women's Regional Representation in Cabinets**



Source: WEDO

## Figure 2: Sample of Sub-regional Variation in Women's Representation in Cabinets



### Distribution By Category

Female cabinet members, besides being underrepresented, are also less likely to be appointed to what are considered to be the most powerful cabinet positions, like finance and foreign affairs (see Table 2 on back). The exception to this is the Caribbean where women cabinet ministers are more equally divided across the different fields.

Women are most often selected for Socio-Cultural positions. Almost 45 percent of the female ministers are located in this sector, while in the other three categories—Basic Functions, like foreign and internal affairs (22%), Economy, like trade and agriculture (20%) and Infrastructure, like transportation and environment (17%)—women's representation is much lower.

Out of 29 countries that have only one woman cabinet minister, 21 of the women occupy socio-cultural positions. Ironically, some of the women ministers in these sub-regions head so-called gender equality or women's empowerment ministries, many of which lack the financial resources necessary to function efficiently. In some instances, appointed women are related to the (male) head of another ministry, the head of government or even the country, raising serious questions about their legitimacy and accountability as decision-makers.

Boosting the number of women cabinet members will require persistent persuasion by advocacy groups, grass root organizations and civil society. This means pressuring every chief executive to appoint at least 50 percent women to cabinet positions and securing commitments from candidates who are running for election. Governments must be convinced that women can no longer be kept at the margins of political institutions and decision-making spheres. It's time to get the balance right!

## Table 2: Women's Representation in Cabinets per Category

Region	Basic Functions*	Economy*	Infrastructure*	Socio-Cultural*
Africa	9.6%	13.7%	10%	27.3%
Asia and Pacific	4.6%	4.2%	1.5%	13.3%
Europe	18.4%	11%	18.1%	32.6%
Latin America and Caribbean	14.2%	14.8%	20.7%	28.4%
North America	24.3%	7.1%	25%	28.3%

Source: WEDO

\* BEIS-typology created by European Union to categorize ministers in their different fields of action. WEDO categorized the ministers accordingly.

B stands for Basic Functions like: foreign and internal affairs, defense, justice;

E stands for Economy like: finance, trade, industry, agriculture;

I stands for Infrastructure like: transportation, communication, environment;

S stands for Socio-cultural functions: social affairs, health, children, family, youth, elderly people, education, science, culture, labor, sports;

## Resources

CIA: [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)

Governmental websites of countries

Information sites about governments

Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

UN EGM/EPWD/2005/BP.2 The participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making; The Parliamentary Dimension

Wikipedia: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

World Politics 51.4 (1999) Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling by Andrew Reynolds

Worldwide guide to Women in Leadership: [www.guide2womenleaders.com](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com)

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## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Out of 187 Countries (UN membership minus five, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Montenegro, Myanmar, Qatar)

<sup>ii</sup> Included in the research are one head of government of each country; the Prime Minister, or when there is no Prime Minister; the President and the heads off the Ministries.

Excluded are:

- Vice/Deputy (Prime) Ministers/Presidents;

- Ministers of State;

- Ministers (with)in Ministries;

- Secretaries (of State), except when they are head of the Ministry (e.g. United Kingdom);

- Ministers at the Presidency;

- Minister in charge of part of the President's or Prime Minister's Office

- Minister with(in) Ministry

- Ministers outside the Cabinet

<sup>iii</sup> Due to the dynamic nature of elections, numbers may not always reflect the most recent electoral outcomes. WEDO apologizes when numbers are inaccurate. Please contact us with corrections.

<sup>iv</sup> Situation as of July 1, 2007

<sup>v</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), May 31, 2007.

<sup>vi</sup> Ministries may be ministries without a portfolio, family names are the same as those of male government officials, [www.guide2womenleaders.com](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com), reports when women are related to a male government representative.