The Women Leaders Index 2016-17
Gender equality within civil service leaderships among G20 and EU nations

A league table and report on the proportion of women among senior civil servants in the G20 and EU nations, 2013-2016.
Produced by Global Government Forum with the support of EY

www.womenleadersindex.com
Ever since I first got involved in the civil service professional media, nearly 20 years ago, I’ve done everything I can to support public servants’ efforts to tackle discrimination and prejudice within government. I’ve done so in part because I believe strongly in equality of opportunity: it must be right that selection and promotion is decided on the basis of merit, rather than an individual’s gender, race, sexual orientation or disabilities.

In part, I have pursued the agenda because I’ve been encouraged to do so by civil servants at all levels, who’ve welcomed our ability to produce events, research and publications that help them to level the playing field within their organisations. And in part, I’ve kept at it because there is still work to be done: the vast majority of civil service organisations remain more white, male and able-bodied at senior levels than in more junior ranks, and the subtle – and not so subtle – barriers that perpetuate this difference prevent public bodies from making full use of the talent within their workforces.

Over the years, we have seen enormous progress across many national civil services. Since we first researched the Women Leaders Index in 2013, the mean proportion of women in the senior civil services of our top-ranked six countries has risen by five points to a very encouraging 41%. Still more dramatically, the middle-ranking seven countries have seen their mean score rise from 18 to 31%. The countries high up our Index are edging ever closer to parity. And, as our interviewees reveal, this level of progress produces big rewards in terms of improved organisational cultures, better decision-making and bigger talent pools.

This Index is by far our most comprehensive yet: we have both extended it beyond the G20 to include EU nations, and also carried out interviews with senior officials and public sector analysts around the world – enabling us to provide case studies identifying the agenda’s accelerants and obstacles in 11 countries. Our ability to secure interviews with top civil servants not only reveals the importance they attach to this agenda; it also shows that league tables like our Index catch people’s attention and, I hope, help build the pressure for positive change.

Whether you work in a top-performer or one of those nations working your way up the Index, our goals are to help you both to make the case for that change, and to understand how best to pursue it.

I very much hope you find the Index helpful in this; and if you do, the impact is likely to reach well beyond your own employer. For in this field – as in so many others – it is often public servants who lead the way, setting an example that slowly gains traction outside government and, ultimately, helps to create a fairer, better society.

Indeed, much of the work of creating more inclusive societies sits with public servants, who every day devise policies and deliver services to help and support their populations. In future, I hope those public servants will be led by a still more representative leadership group.

Finally, I would like to thank EY for their important and ongoing partnership. It is their support over the years that has enabled the Women Leaders Index to grow into the powerful piece of research that it is today.
Section 1: Introduction

“The suppression of women from participation in social, political and economic life hurts the people as a whole, not just the women. The emancipation of women is an integral part of social progress, not just a ‘women’s issue’.”

Amartya Sen, economist

Global Government Forum’s Women Leaders Index is a snapshot of the proportion of women occupying civil service leadership positions across federal or national governments in each of the G20 countries. Our goal is to highlight the countries that are leading the way on making progress towards gender equality in their senior civil service ranks, and to offer learning and ideas for improvement to those lagging behind.

Alongside data on the proportion of women leaders in national civil services, we have also collected figures on the proportion of women elected to national legislative chambers, those holding ministerial posts, and those sitting on publicly-quoted private sector boards. All this information is set out and analysed in Section 2 of this report.

Of course, the data must be considered with the caveat that it comes from a range of sources within a set of countries with differing public sector structures, and so it is not always possible to offer direct comparisons (see Methodology, Section 5). However, the underlying picture of women’s influence and status within the G20’s civil services is clear enough. And we believe that by revealing and analysing that picture, we can help draw attention to gender inequality; offer insights that by revealing and analysing that picture, we can help civil servants around the world identify and pursue effective ways to promote gender equality; offer insights that by revealing and analysing that picture, we can help civil servants around the world identify and pursue effective ways to promote gender equality among their public sector leaders.

Women in the senior civil service, G20 nations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Proportion of Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>United States</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Mean of G20 countries (and EU Commission)</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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The proportion of senior civil servants who are women in the G20 nations, according to data collected in the early part of 2017. In each case, data covers the top five grades of a country’s civil service ranks.

It should also be noted that in all but two of the countries – Turkey (see p24) and South Korea – the proportion of women in civil service leadership posts has increased over the four years since the Index was launched; so the underlying trend is positive. Even in Saudi Arabia the figure of 1.3% represents progress, as it wasn’t until 2015 that women were permitted to take senior civil service jobs there.

However, this overall improvement masks a much more nuanced and complex picture across the 20 countries. The 2017 Index – the fourth such list produced by GGF – is again a mixed bag, with several highly-developed Western nations continuing to inch slowly but inexorably towards parity; and, at the other end of the scale, a group of socially conservative states languishing stubbornly in single figures.

Outside those two groups is an assortment of individual countries with their own unique stories to tell. Mexico and France (see p18 and p16 respectively), for instance, are making excellent progress and gaining fast on the top group, thanks in part to quotas requiring that a set proportion of senior appointments go to women.

At the top of the Index, plaudits must go to Canada (p10), Australia (p12), South Africa and the UK (p14), the top-ranked countries – all of which have over 40% female senior civil servants and are still progressing. At the other end of the scale, however, Turkey has gone backwards again, losing women from its senior civil service ranks for the fourth consecutive year.

For the first time this year we have also gathered data on the 28 EU states – though these figures cover just the top two civil service grades in those countries, whereas the G20 data refers to the top five levels of seniority. The EU data suggests that on average, EU countries are much more advanced on gender equality than the G20: five of the 28 countries actually boast more women than men in their top civil service grades. Among all 28 nations, the average is 40% women: a big improvement since 2003, the earliest year for which we have data, when the proportion was just 26.4% – coincidentally the same average as across the G20 now.

In Section 3 we examine the EU data, and consider why many of those countries are doing so well. And in Section 4, we set out the lessons we’ve drawn from interviewing key figures in the field as to how civil service leaders the world over can best promote gender equality among their own management ranks.

This report is built on G20 data going back to 2013, when Global Government Forum (GGF) first carried out the research for EV. This year, the work of gathering and presenting comment and analysis has also passed to GGF – though EV continues to provide invaluable support: this Index would not exist without EV’s continued interest and commitment.

By shining a spotlight on those countries that are making progress, and highlighting the policies and practices that have been proven to have an impact on HR management, recruitment, promotions, staff development, flexible working etcetera, we aim to help civil servants around the world identify and pursue effective ways to promote gender equality among their public sector leaders.

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Why work towards gender equality in senior roles?
Women make up over half of the world’s population, and according to the G20 comprise on average just under 50% of the total public sector workforce. Yet this research shows that they generally remain under-represented in key decision-making positions. The infamous glass ceiling is still very much in evidence across the world’s biggest economies. The arguments in support of gender equality are not new.

As Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen wrote as long ago as 1995: “The suppression of women from participation in social, political and economic life hurts the people as a whole, not just the women. The emancipation of women is an integral part of social progress, not just a ‘women’s issue’. ”

A mountain of research has accumulated proving that diversity in leadership – and by diversity we mean visible factors such as gender, ethnicity, and age as well as non-visible ones such as socio-economic background, education and life experiences – improves the quality of debate and decision-making across the public, private and voluntary sectors. For employees in public service, this has particular implications.

As Lord O’Donnell, former head of the UK civil service, tells GGF: “The issue for me was that we couldn’t attract everything else we possibly could to make sure we do something about it. We’re seeing the people of Australia, trying to enhance opportunity for them, deliver security for them, so if we’re not broadly reflective of the Australian community then I think we’ve got real issues as to whether we can really understand what that community is seeking.”

If women are not to be designated as inferior to their male counterparts, then they deserve to be given the same opportunities in their career choices, promotions, and pay. But as well as being an issue of fairness and equity of representation, for Parkinson this agenda is also very much about improving organisational performance.

“People sometimes criticise this as identity politics or political correctness gone mad, but there is no element of that at all,” he says. “This is a bunch of hard-nosed senior leaders starting from asking the question: ‘How do we improve the effectiveness of our organisations? How do we make sure we are delivering the best policies, best programmes, best services we can for our community?’”

Charette agrees the issue goes much deeper than political correctness. “If you look at all the research on this, the value proposition for gender equality and diversity in leadership positions, whether in the public sector or the private sector, is very clear. And I would say that in the public sector it’s even more important, because if we are to have credible public service structures and institutions that are able to give good, thoughtful, strategic advice to governments, they have to understand and represent the population they are there to serve. That’s absolutely critical.”

What’s more, in today’s fast-changing and dynamic world, it is critical that governments can make use of all the talent available to them – and if they’re failing to promote women, they’re only fishing in half the pool.

As Lord O’Donnell, former head of the UK civil service, tells GGF: “The issue for me was that we couldn’t attract people by just paying more money like the private sector could, so we had to make sure we were doing everything else we possibly could to make sure we were identifying and getting in the best talent.”

The UK’s senior civil service gender statistics at the time were such that O’Donnell figured “we must be missing out on lots of very good women” – and he decided to do something about it.

I

n both the 2015-16 and 2016-17 WLI datasets, the G20 countries have fallen neatley into three clear groups: the top six, which have high scores and are making slow but steady progress; the middle seven, which mostly started from a low base in 2013 but have advanced the fastest; and the bottom group of seven, which are notable for their slow starting point and lack of meaningful growth.

The top six countries have occupied their leading rankings virtually without change since the Index was launched in 2013 (South Africa overtook the UK to gain third place in 2014, but all other rankings haven’t moved).

Women in the senior civil service, G20, 2013-16

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The top six have all climbed incrementally towards gender parity over recent years, Mexico and France show much faster progress from a lower starting point. If they continue on this course, within a year they’ll become solid performers within this top group = overtaking the USA and perhaps Brazil, whose own figure has risen 1.6-2.4 points per year.

This year, however, the impressive 5-6 point acceleration of France and Mexico in the middle seven presents a clear challenge to the leading group (see table, below left). If they maintain anything like this progress next year, they’ll overtake the States; for they stand just 0.4 points behind the Americans, who only increased their figure by 0.4 points over the year.

Mexico has demonstrated particular success at moving the dial over the whole four years, from just 14% representation in 2013 to 34% this year – up 5.2 points on last year. And France records the highest growth of all 20 nations over the last year, rising six percentage points to 34% and moving five places up the table.

Considering these two countries as members of the top group this year would unfairly drag down the performance of the top six, who’ve seen their mean figure climb steadily over the four years – from 36% in 2013 to 41% this year.

Nonetheless, the prospect is of Mexico and France achieving around 40% themselves over the next year. And in this case, they will become the top group’s fastest-improving members.

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The top six G20 performers show very similar progress since 2013, rising slowly from a high base. As the G20 mean figures show, their improvements are slower than the average – but this figure is pulled down by the poor performers at the bottom of the chart, and next year some middle-ranking, fast-improving nations could move into the top 10.

"I never thought of myself as a ‘woman leader’," says Janice Charette, until recently Canada’s most senior civil servant and now its High Commissioner to the UK. "I just thought it was really natural and normal; I never thought there were any barriers to overcome. I was the second woman to be appointed as the Clerk of the Privy Council, and there have been women leaders... across ministries in the government of Canada. Women have been making it to the top for decades.

"It never occurred to me that this needed to be the subject of ‘initiatives’ because there were trailblazers even ahead of me, and I am not a young pup..."

Charette’s experience is borne out by the data. When Global Government Forum first started tracking the proportion of women in G20 senior civil service posts for 2013 back in 2015, Canada was already streets ahead of its peers with 45% representation. In the four years since, slow but steady improvement has enabled it to hang onto its number one spot each year – a feat described by Charette as “a significant achievement”.

The net increase in our position looks relatively small, but that’s because we started from such a high base," she says. "That’s down to a couple of things: a consistent effort to attract women into the public services of Canada; and [work] to remove barriers [abstracting] their ability to seek and succeed in leadership positions.”

In fact, Charette’s successor as Clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, suggests that Canada is now in the “third wave of leadership” on the issue of gender equality in senior positions.

"There have been successive waves of leadership from people in my job and deputy minister [departmental chief] jobs to increase the supply chain and the feeder pool," he says. "So it has required less and less effort to put women in positions of responsibility, because more and more of them are coming into the zone where you have no hesitation; you just go for the best person, and it works out.

Canada’s government ministers are female; seventh for the proportion of women on boards; and tenth among elected national politicians in legislative assemblies (see graph, p12).

"We’re beyond binary gender now in Canada, we’re talking about transgender"

Michael Wernick, Clerk of the Privy Council, Canada

"I would say we’re in the third generation now. First there were the real pioneers – the first women in jobs or at various tables – then the second wave was probably in the ’90s, when you saw more and more women in positions of responsibility and the numbers started to move up quite a bit. You began to have fewer of those: ‘Oh, the first woman in that job!’ moments as various barriers were broken through.

We’ve already had a woman prime minister and a woman chief justice, and two of my predecessors as cabinet secretary were women.

“So now we’re in the third wave, which is more about workplace culture: how meetings are conducted; avoiding ‘mansplaining’ and ‘manterruption’; tackling unconscious bias – that much subtle and nuanced stuff. In fact, we’re beyond binary gender now in Canada, we’re talking about transgender and that sort of thing.”

This is evidenced by the announcement in March’s federal Budget of a $3.6m (US$2.7m/$2.4m) LGBTQ2 secretariat at the Privy Council Office. Taking its name from the catch-all Canadian term ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, and 2-spirited’; this office will help to coordinate government initiatives on LGBTQ2 issues.

Interestingly, it does not appear that Canada’s early successes were routed in civil service initiatives designed to improve gender equality in leadership roles; neither Charette nor Wernick can recall any specific programmes on the issue from the 1980s or ’90s. But Canada was an early adopter of equal rights and anti-discrimination policies across wider society, and civil servants – who designed and delivered these policies – seem to have taken them to heart.

“We have legislation which dates from the ’90s which requires employers to remove barriers to four designated groups: women, visible minorities, indigenous persons and people of disability,” comments Wernick. “We have a Human Rights Commission which is very active on these issues and has an audit function so that people are held to account. And also there is a complaint-based mechanism, where if people feel there is any discrimination they can pursue it – so there is a legal and structural framework.

“The legislative framework that governs public sector employment does include employment equity but we have never had an explicit quota-based system; it’s always been more about removing barriers”.

National labour market policies have been a big help. Notable among these is an employment insurance system which gives parents of young children the ability to take a year of funded childcare leave, can be split equally between mothers and fathers, and is often topped up by employers. “A lot of women really count on those sorts of supportive policies, especially if they want to achieve positions which are higher-workload, higher-demand, as leadership positions tend to be,” says Charette.

Work does go on within the civil service to monitor and improve diversity, but this has never focused specifically on gender. Says Charette: “There is an advisory group that works to support the clerk, who ultimately has the responsibility and accountability for the management of the senior leadership community in the civil service.

“That committee, under the leadership of the clerk, monitors very carefully and regularly – two or three times a year – the demographic of the senior leadership. It looks at age, gender, professional background, and language, because we are a bilingual country.”

The biggest challenge facing that committee currently is how to attract more visible minorities and indigenous first-nation Canadians into senior leadership roles. Charette says the committee will develop targeted strategies such as fast-streaming existing employees, recruiting externally and setting up secondments.

“It really depends on the nature of the gap you’re trying to fill,” she says. “But it’s never been necessary to do that to improve the gender balance.”

Both Wernick and Charette are confident that Canada will continue to make progress, eventually reaching parity. Says Wernick: “The numbers look very promising in the feeder grades. And if you look at what’s coming out of the universities and colleges, most disciplines are heavily stacked with female graduates – even science and engineering. I don’t think we’ll have a problem achieving gender parity.”

It helps that leaders at the very highest levels continue to champion equal opportunities. One of the first actions of incoming Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2015 was to announce his Cabinet, comprising half women and half men. Says Charette: "I was the Clerk of the Privy Council at the time of his transition to becoming prime minister, and I know this was something he was thinking about in his years as party leader: building the pipeline of candidates across the country who could potentially go on to be Cabinet ministers. It was his explicit choice to have a gender–equal Cabinet”.

And there’s something else that helps, concludes Wernick: the evolution of leadership styles in the modern world. “The public service I joined in the 1980s had a lot of yelling and screamers and ostracize-throwners,” he recalls. “That’s just not a successful strategy any more.”
Making faster progress in second place is Australia (see case study, right), which has improved steadily from 37% women in 2013 to 43.5% in 2016 — and at 3.2 percentage points, posted the biggest rise among the top six nations this year. Also improving rapidly this year is fifth-ranked Brazil, which progressed from 35.4% last year to 37.8% this year — up 2.4 points. Brazil has made steady progress to get to 50/50, because if you are starting at 10% now you’re not going to get to 50% in three years’ time. So we’ve asked people to lay out stretch targets across all our business areas for the period out to 2019 and report against them, to show that you are making progress.

“Ultimately, if you are going to make sure that working flexibly is not a career killer by removing any stigma or disadvantage, then that allows people to balance their work and their outside responsibilities and still advance their careers.”

Martin Parkinson, Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australia

With 45% female senior officials in 2015, Canada was always going to make slow progress; the country is inching towards parity with average growth of 0.5 points per year; and on current trends will achieve a 50/50 split in 2033. Australia entered 2013 eight points behind Canada, but its average 2.1 point annual growth has brought it to 43.5% — just three points behind. If it can retain this pace, it will hit parity in 2019 or 2020.

Women in national legislatures and ministerial positions, G20 countries, 2016-17

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women in Parliament</th>
<th>Women in Ministerial Positions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
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</table>

G20 countries show huge variations in the proportions of women in national parliaments and in ministerial posts. South Africa and Germany score well on both sides, whilst Canada and Australia suffer from weaker representation in national assemblies. In Latin America, Argentina and Mexico perform well in parliament but have very few female ministers. And while there is some correlation with civil service data, the link is not a hard one.

CASE STUDY

Australia

Australia’s Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet has recently finished a trial of an HR programme called ‘All Roles Flex’. It is now being evaluated, and if results are positive it will be rolled out throughout the department.

The department’s secretary, Dr Martin Parkinson, first introduced the programme in the Treasury when he was Treasury Secretary, and now wants to bring it to his new post.

All Roles Flex starts from the premise that any job in the department can be done flexibly as a job share, part-time, or remotely using teleworking; whatever best suits the employee. And crucially, it shifts the onus onto the manager to put together a business case to say why a role can’t be done flexibly, instead of – as previously – the employee having to demonstrate that it can.

This is one of several recent reforms designed to drive up the numbers of women in senior jobs. Parkinson explains: “While giving people greater access to flexible work isn’t necessarily gender-specific, as it turns out most people who end up working flexibly are women. So if you can make sure that working flexibly is not a career killer by removing any stigma or disadvantage, then that allows people to balance their work and their outside responsibilities and still advance their careers.”

Australia is currently second among the G20 nations in our Index, and made faster progress last year than any other country in the top six. It has been advancing much faster than first-placed Canada over the last four years and if this rate continues, looks likely to take the number one spot soon (see graph, right).

Despite this progress, Dr Parkinson says the view within Australia’s Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is that “we haven’t moved as fast as we would have liked”. To address this, the Australian Public Service (APS) has produced a Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2019. The strategy recognises that certain boards in traditionally male-dominated industries or sectors might find it hard to achieve parity; so the aim is for 50/50 in aggregate, with each individual board required to have at least 40% women.

Alongside the creation two years ago of a database called Boardlinks – which holds details of leading women who might be suitable to join government boards – this target has had a big impact, Parkinson says. “A total of 41% of all positions on government boards are now held by women, and 32% of all chair and deputy chair roles. That’s a big increase”.

At the very highest level of the APS, six of the 18 secretaries are currently female. Parkinson is hoping that the new gender equality strategy will help to balance these numbers, but he is quick to point out that increasing cultural diversity is even more of a challenge: “We’ve been replacing middle-class white men with middle-class white women, so the challenge for us, in a society where almost 50% of our population has at least one parent born outside Australia, is to look more like Australian society.”

To that end, he has also set up a Secretaries Equality and Diversity Council which comprises all 18 secretaries, and is responsible for ensuring implementation of not just the Gender Equality Strategy1, but also the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy2 and the APS Disability Employment Strategy3.

Growth in women in the senior civil service in Canada and Australia, 2013-16
since our tracking began, under the leadership of its first female president Dilma Rousseff. Next year, we may learn whether that progress is continuing now that Rousseff has been impeached and replaced by 75-year-old law professor Michel Temer. The other three top-placed countries, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States, continued to make progress this year but only very slowly, with percentage point rises of 1.3, 1.4 and 0.4 respectively. This is particularly disappointing for South Africa, which has shown the best effort of the top six over the four years since the Index started: representation of women in the senior civil service has risen more than seven percentage points to 41.1%. It is also the most consistently high-performing country across all four metrics that the Index research tracks: senior officials, legislature, ministerial posts and company boards. However, the journey to gender equality in South Africa hit a stumbling block in 2015 when the new Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill failed to make it onto the statute books. Under the Bill, South Africa’s Minister for Women, Children and People with Disabilities could have applied comprehensive requirements for gender equality to any public or private bodies. Political parties were specifically included. The Bill aimed to achieve “at least 50% female participation in boards, outcomes and empowerment policies”. However, the law was controversial: many deemed it unworkable or a duplication of existing legislation, and some even called it unconstitutional. Parliamentary progress faltered when the National Assembly failed to secure a quorum for voting, and eventually the Bill was scuppered by the Parliamentary term coming to an end in May 2015. Minister in the Presidency Susan Shabangu, who is responsible for women’s affairs, said the Bill had lapsed and would not be resuscitated. The UK civil service (see case study, right) has never had quotas. But from 2005 the Labour Government and then-Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus (now Lord) O’Donnell encouraged departments to improve the diversity of their senior workforces, setting targets and appointing ‘diversity champions’ among senior staff to push for change. These reforms had an impact: the proportion of women in the senior civil service rose from 27% in 2005 to 34% in 2010, and to over 40% by 2017.

It was Lord O’Donnell’s dream that by 2020, the work he had led on improving the representation of women within the UK’s senior civil service would deliver parity. By the time the five-year diversity strategy that he put in place as Cabinet Secretary and head of the civil service lapsed in 2013, women comprised 35% of all senior civil servants – still some way short of that year’s 39% target. But the groundwork that was laid by O’Donnell and his team during those years ensured that the numbers continued to rise – even when the diversity agenda was held hostage to wider civil service reform demanded by ministers in the coalition government, and whilst the proportions of ethnic minorities and disabled people amongst senior civil servants failed to progress.

For the last four years, the proportion of women in the top five ranks of the UK’s senior civil service has been increasing by at least one point each year. While it’s not yet managed to edge above the average of its top-six G20 group, it has stayed in fourth place on the leader board and the positive trend looks sure to continue.

“Until you’ve got gender parity right up to the top of the system, you haven’t got enough role models that really show women at all levels that this is a place that’s truly gender-blind” Melanie Dawes, Civil Service Gender Champion, UK Government

Lord O’Donnell is happy with the figures. “By my back-of-an-envelope calculations, if progress continues at the same rate, we will get where I wanted to be by 2020 or two or three years after that, so I regard that as very strong progress and very pleasing.” As well as setting targets, under Lord O’Donnell the UK civil service rolled out flexible working policies, made it easier for people to work part-time or job-share and, he says, “made sure that as an employer we were happy with people taking time off for childcare duties”.

The organisation also did some work around encouraging women to apply for jobs, after analysis of applications showed that male applicants often outnumbered females. “We found that this classic thing you hear about was actually happening,” says O’Donnell. “Women were looking at jobs, and if they didn’t have all five competencies that the job required then they didn’t apply. Whereas men would be happy to put themselves forward if they had two of them. “This might be a confidence issue, or a kind of style issue.”

Sir Paul Jenkins was diversity champion in the UK civil service from 2011 to 2014, and has his own theory about that. Women are more thoughtful than men about what they want to achieve in their careers, he believes, and don’t necessarily want to make it to the top at any cost. “If they’ve had caring responsibilities they’re usually had to work unbelievably hard to get the balance right, so they think much more carefully about what they really want from their next job. Men will just think: ‘I want to get to the top’. Then they get to the top and realise that actually it’s a pretty horrible job, but they got there and that’s what matters.

“Women are more used to thinking carefully before they make the next leap, rather than grinding inexorably upward.”

Melanie Dawes is permanent secretary at the UK’s Department for Communities and Local Government and the current UK civil service gender champion. She also chairs the Civil Service People Board, which oversees the implementation of workforce strategies across Whitehall. Dawes has been in the UK civil service for 28 years, and says she has sensed a quantum shift in gender equality over that period. “In the ’90s it was incredibly unusual to see women in the senior civil service; in fact, it was quite unusual to see people working part-time.”

That’s changed dramatically. Dawes has even more recent intelligence than our data, showing that the proportion of women is now up to 41.6% – including a third of permanent secretaries. If South African progress remains at last year’s level, the UK will overtake it in next year’s Index.

It’s clear this is an agenda that the UK service takes seriously; and its leaders work hard to create the right culture so that diversity, in all its forms, can flourish. Diversity and inclusion objectives form part of appraisals for permanent secretaries; there is no central target set, but each department has its own goals. “Some departments are coming from a really difficult starting point, so we have to recognise that,” says Dawes. But each permanent secretary does have to account for the work they’ve undertaken and the progress they’ve made.

Dawes advises that “the secret to getting this staff right is to get quite detailed and granular about what your particular issues are; my personal view is that high-level targets can actually work against that.”

“We’ve looked at a whole range of processes to try and get under the skin of things that are causing people to be turned off or not to succeed. That goes to language in job applications, and the processes you use for selection – for instance, we’ve been increasingly using staff panels for senior posts; you get real insight there. Training meeting chairs to ensure that all voices are heard; discipline around how decisions are made; unconscious bias training; active networks – all can help.”

There is an organisation-wide staff survey every October, which includes several questions around diversity and inclusion such as I feel like you can be yourself and be open about your identity in this role, and we’re working hard to see if we are progressing on that.”

CASE STUDY United Kingdom

Women form a majority of the UK’s public sector workforce, but around 40% of senior civil servants and 35% of the civil service’s most high-ranking leaders. But the proportion of women in leadership roles is growing — and doing so faster among the very top jobs than the wider senior civil service.
“How many women found themselves pouring the coffee in meetings; hearing a point they have made ignored, only for it to be warmly received when made by a man; finding that a decision has been made informally and they weren’t included?”

Melanie Dawes, Civil Service Gender Champion, UK

Melanie Dawes, permanent secretary in the UK’s Department for Communities & Local Government, is currently the UK’s civil service gender champion. Dawes has led a programme of work to explore attitudes to women in the civil service, and wrote in a recent blog: “How many women found themselves pouring the coffee in meetings; hearing a point they have made ignored, only for it to be warmly received when made by a man; finding that a decision has been made informally and they weren’t included? Research shows that even today these age-old cultural patterns are alive and well.”

Still, the average rise among the top six nations in total is better than the previous year, at 1.5 points versus 1 point – so the overall trend remains positive.

Middle group of seven

Most of the middle-tier group of seven nations have seen double-digit percentage point increases in the appointments of women to senior civil service grades since 2013 – most notably Russia which, according to the data it has supplied, had just 13% women four years ago but now boasts almost 33%. That said, the other metrics suggest that the power base in Russia remains heavily skewed towards men: while three-quarters of all public sector workers are women, that’s true of just 12.7% of those elected to political office, fewer than one in ten Cabinet ministers, and just 5.4% of board directors.

We have already noted that Mexico and France are neck and neck in seventh place in the table, but these two countries score quite differently with regard to female representation in other areas of life. Mexico takes top spot in the G20 for the highest proportion of women elected to political office, at 42.4%, though just 11.8% of its Cabinet ministers are female. France, on the other hand, boasted 50% women continued on p18

CASE STUDY

France

If there is one G20 country that has lessons to teach about how to boost the proportion of women leaders, it is France.

In 2013, when the Women Leaders Index first began tracking the G20, just one in five of France’s so-called ‘higher public servants’ were female. In each of the years since, this proportion has improved steadily, and in the most recent year France posted the biggest jump of any country, at six percentage points. It’s now equal with Mexico in joint seventh place, with 34% women in its senior civil service ranks; and its impressive growth rate suggests it could well supplant one of the top six countries within the next year or two.

France also earns plaudits in other areas. With 36.8% of its corporate board seats held by women, France takes top spot in the G20 on this metric; and under the Hollande administration (now replaced by Emmanuel Macron) it equalled Canada on the proportion of female Cabinet ministers, at 50%.

With this record France, like Mexico, has shown that the introduction of quotas – whatever one may think of their longer-term consequences – does work in driving up the numbers of women appointed into senior civil service jobs.

Applied removes names and other background markers such as schools and universities from applications. Dawes is proud of the UK’s record on gender – especially when compared with other European democracies. And she admits that bigger challenges than gender now confront the UK service – ethnic diversity in particular – but she is far from complacent.

“When you’ve got gender parity right up to the top of the system, you haven’t got enough role models that really show women at all levels that this is a place that’s truly gender-blind. Yes, our proportion of women permanent secretaries has risen rapidly recently, but it was just 20% only about a year ago.”

Cabinet secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood is, she adds, “putting massive effort into this, and we are making good progress – but we have still got further to go at the top, and these things can slip away from you if you don’t keep up consistent pressure. It’s still the case that some departments, like the Treasury and Cabinet Office – which are, after all, the centres of power – are not nearly as gender-balanced as others. So we’ve still got work to do there.”

What’s more, France has moved from a standpoint of stiff opposition to gender quotas in politics, to a position where it now applies gender quotas across several policy domains.

As Élénore Lépinard from the University of Lausanne states in a recent paper on the subject: “Once a country allergic to any policy that would look like affirmative action for women or any other social group – let alone quotas with fixed targets – France has transformed in a decade and a half into the land of gender quotas.”

“We once measured a deport as a foreign import and hotly debated in the public sphere, gender quotas have become a legitimate and unproblematic means to redress gender imbalance”

Élénore Lépinard, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics, University of Lausanne

Nowadays, France imposes gender quotas for university juries, government ministries, corporate boards of medium and large firms, supervisory boards of public institutions, higher civil servant posts for hospitals and other public institutions, professional organisations, sports federations, regional socio-economic councils, and most elected political bodies.

Yet as recently as the mid-’90s, the word ‘quota’ was itself taboo in discussions on gender parity in politics. The very idea of a target to achieve special treatment for women was dismissed as un-Republican, un-French and contradictory to the principle of equality, says Lépinard. So what changed?

Essentially, when the Socialists unexpectedly returned to power in 1997, they changed the Constitution to include the following sentence: “the law promotes women’s and men’s equal access to electoral mandates and elective functions”. This introduced not only a legal change, whereby positive-action measures for women were given constitutional legitimacy for the first time, but also a semantic change – from ‘equality’ to ‘parity’. Women’s rights activists seized on this and reframed the debate around the principle of parity.

The establishment of the Observatory of Parity kept up the pressure, and helped to spread gender quotas beyond electoral politics. In 2011, corporate board quotas of 40% women were adopted; and a year later the same quota was imposed for higher public service functions, with a target of 40% to be reached by 2018. Socialist President François Hollande later replaced the Observatory with the High Council for Equality between women and men, which has a broader mission and more staff than its predecessor. Among its members are senior civil servants in charge of gender equality in each ministry, charged with mainstreaming gender equality into the everyday business of civil service organisations.

Lépinard concludes: “Once a measure depicted as a foreign import and hotly debated in the public sphere, gender quotas have become a legitimate and unproblematic means to redress gender imbalance.”
No country has made greater progress on improving the gender balance among its senior civil servants over the last few years than Mexico.

Despite its entrenched patriarchal and macho culture, under the leadership of President Enrique Peña Nieto the country has more than doubled the female representation among its senior public service ranks – from 14% in 2013 to 34% this year. Whilst Mexico remains weak in the proportion of women on company boards (5.3%) and ministerial jobs (11.7%), among senior civil servants its rate of growth has outstripped the G20 average by some distance (see graphs, right).

How has it achieved this?

According to Lorena Cruz Sánchez, president of Inmujeres – Mexico’s National Women’s Institute – making gender equality a priority state policy was a crucial milestone.

“Thanks to the commitment and political will of our president, for the first time in the history of Mexico the gender perspective was established as a transversal axis within the executive, legislative and judiciary, as well as the three observatories, to be established by August 2017. The Peña Nieto administration has also established the Mexican Standard on Labor Equality and Non-Discrimination, which certifies public and private workplaces that meet minimum standards on numbers of women workers, women’s representation in decision-making positions, equal pay, and tackling workplace violence. One of the criteria is for organisations to have 40% women in management positions.

In order to lead by example, and to inspire the private and social sectors, the president instructed all departments within the Federal Public Administration to become certified. Some 80% of all Cabinet central government orders – federal, state and municipal – now incorporate gender equality and the representation of women in various decision-making positions.

“Mexico has realised that economic development and social progress are impossible without the full incorporation of women,” she says.

“Thanks to the commitment and political will of our president, for the first time in the history of Mexico the gender perspective was established as a transversal strategy in our National Development Plan,” she says.

“Mexico has realised that economic development and social progress are impossible without the full incorporation of women”

Lorena Cruz Sánchez, President, Inmujeres

Several European countries – France, Italy and Germany – are closer to gender equality among private sector leaders than among top civil servants. These three countries lead the G20 in the proportion of women on company boards, neatly followed by five of the six countries that perform best on the civil service leadership metric. But Brazil, which is fifth in the main Index, scores a miserable 6% for women on company boards; its Latin American neighbours show similar tiny numbers.
However, both these countries should be applauded for the progress they have made on getting more women into their senior civil services. What is notable about both countries is that they have each introduced quotas, which appear to have worked in driving up the percentage of women in senior roles. Interestingly, in recent years the focus of the gender debate in both countries also shifted from the principle of equality to one of ‘parity’, and each established ‘Parity Observatories’ to monitor progress.

The European Commission takes a different approach. According to a fact sheet on the EU's work on gender equality, the EC's progress is the result of efforts to raise awareness of the importance of promoting equal opportunities, encouraging recruitment and appointments of greater numbers of women, proactively identifying potential in the female workforce, and supporting talented women through targeted training, mentoring and coaching.

"Gender equality is not an aspirational goal," said the European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker. "It is a fundamental right."

The European Commission ranks 9th overall in the G20 with 33% female senior civil servants – and a target of 40% by 2019. EC's Juncker recently said that "enormous strides" had been made towards meeting the commitment. Indeed, the figure climbed from 20.5% in 2013 to 32% in 2015; but it rose just one point over the following year, and the EC will have to move fast to hit its target.

Although there are just nine female Commissioners out of 28, the Commission recently appointed several women as director general or deputy director general – bumping up the figures for women in those positions from 13% in November 2014 to 29% now. In July, the commission published a new Diversity and Inclusion Charter and an action plan setting out how it intends to reach its 40% target. All departments are to be given targets for the number of new female appointments to head of unit posts – currently, 35% of units across the EC are headed by women – and those that fail short will be asked to seek additional female applicants before awarding jobs to men. The charter also promises a new HR policy designed to improve work-life balance and provide flexible working arrangements, available to both men and women.

Towards the bottom of the group, Italy (see case study, right) has gone backwards – moving from 32% to 30.3% continued on p22

**CASE STUDY**

**Italy**

Italy is one of only two G20 countries to have seen a fall in the proportion of women in its top civil service jobs this year. And if we consider its overall progress since 2013 – or, indeed, since 2007 in the EU table – it’s clear that forward progress has only ever been faltering.

Italy started well above the average of the other countries in its group of seven; but as the other nations have made progress, Italy has fallen below the average of its peer group (see graph, right).

According to the European Gender Equality Index, Italy has the lowest level of gender equality in the EU. Female civil servants aspiring to leadership positions have fewer role models; it was 30 years after the 1946 foundation of the republic that the first female minister was appointed, and the country has never had a woman president or prime minister.

Yet as many women as men join the civil service every year, according to Edoardo Ongaro, Professor of Public Management at the UK’s Open University and President of the European Group for Public Administration. So why don’t they make it to the uppermost ranks?

**“By and large the right policies are there, but the structural features of the service impede them; you need decades to produce outcomes”**

Edoardo Ongaro, President, European Group for Public Administration

Ongaro says that there are some basic structural features of Italian public service that help to explain the imbalance. When a graduate wins the public competition to join the civil service, he says, they join "the ranks of the state technically forever; for the rest of their life." And because the "Anglo-American model of public sector hiring and firing is not the Continental and certainly not the Italian way", staff turnover is very low.

It’s also extremely difficult to sack or demote civil servants. "You can’t remove people, you can’t strip them of their grades, and since the mid-’90s there has been a freeze on hiring," comments Ongaro.

"The public sector workforce has gone down from 3.5 million to three billion.

"So you’ve frozen hiring, you can’t fire anyone, you just have to wait for people to retire; and Italians tend to retire later than many other countries. To change the situation, you need time intervals of decades. How on earth can you be effective in a policy to rebalance the gender mix with those constraints?"

The problem for women is compounded by child-rearing, Ongaro says. Italy has one of the longest compulsory statutory maternity leave entitlements in Europe – five months – and mothers can, if they wish, take a phased re-entry into work over as long as three years.

"So if you had two periods of maternity leave, that could be up to six years in which your job is protected, which is good, but basically your career is on standby," says Ongaro. "Many women simply miss the crucial years for getting to the top." It doesn’t help that there is no national provision of out-of-school care facilities or extra-curricular activities – a major problem in a country where summer holidays last 13 weeks and many schools open for just four or five hours a day. As a result, figures from Italy’s institute of data analysis INPS show, 88% of all parental leave is taken by women.

However, Ongaro believes that gender inequality is a live issue in the corridors of power; in recent years, he says, attempts have been made to redress the balance. In 2007, a national directive for implementing Measures for Equality and Equal Opportunities between Men and Women was issued by the Department for Public Administration. The directive aimed to increase the presence of women in managerial positions; develop good practices for HR management in view of equal opportunities; and promote awareness about and application of tools for gender equal opportunities among HR managers in the public sector.

However, women in top positions remain stubbornly in the minority. "By and large, the right policies are there," concludes Ongaro. "But those structural features of the service impede them; you need decades to produce outcomes."

Italy’s policymakers have seen fits to bring in gender quotas elsewhere in the country’s economy, but no such measures exist yet in the public sector. In 2011, a quota system was imposed on the boards of directors and boards of statutory auditors of companies listed on the Italian Stock Exchange, beginning at 20% and raised to 33% by 2015. Fines for non-compliance can be up to a million euros. This has undoubtedly had an impact: Italy is currently second among G20 nations for the proportion of women on boards, at 30.6% (see graph, p18).

In 2013, the same quotas were applied to the boards of state-owned businesses. There are also quotas for local government where both sexes must be represented – though there are no sanctions for non-compliance. There are no mandatory gender quotas in the Italian Parliament, which comprises 31% women, but parties are encouraged to alternate men and women in electoral lists.

Until Italy reformes some of its long-established HR, recruitment and career development practices, however, it appears that the country’s civil service will only be able to make incremental progress on gender equality within its leadership cadre.

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The proportion of female senior civil servants: Italy vs mean of middle 7 G20 countries, 2013-16

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Whilst the middle seven G20 nations have, on average, shown faster movement towards gender parity than the top or bottom groups, Italy’s progress went into reverse last year – and the country has never matched the average progress within that middle group.
over the year, it scores well for women on corporate boards, though, with 30.6% – putting it second among G20 nations, and providing more evidence of the efficacy of quotas.

Germany is the last of the middle tier, but is still posting strong improvement year on year. This year its metric rose 5.4 points to 26.4% – double its figure of four years ago. It also scores highly across other metrics, with 36.5% politically elected women leaders, 43.8% Cabinet ministers, and 24.2% women on private sector boards. So Germany (see case study, right) is clearly moving in the right direction – and on several fronts simultaneously.

Generally in the middle group, however, there is not nearly such a clear picture of universal rapid growth as last year: the average percentage-point rise of all seven countries is 2.7 versus 4.6 last year, reflecting very different performances across the group.

“The third and bottom group of countries all posted continued low scores... The four countries at the bottom of the table tell a woeful story. Last year these countries recorded 0.8 points average growth; this year, this halved to just 0.4 points”

**Bottom group of seven**

The third and bottom group of countries all posted continued low scores, and are making slow progress.

It should be noted that women in these countries also don’t feature as heavily in the overall public sector workforce – so in part, the problem is a glass floor as well as a glass ceiling.

This is usually attributed as much to wider societal and cultural factors as to themes emerging within government recruitment practices.

Indonesia and India rank 14th and 15th with 17.4% and 17% women leaders respectively, though each has more than doubled their female representation since 2013. China comes in at 16th with 12.6%, just marginally better than its 2013 score of 11.5%. In China, women’s careers are generally deemed to be less important than their husbands’, and studies have shown that it is routine for women to be less important than their husbands’, and this is partly a function of the time taken for a more diverse intake to percolate up through public bodies. “For women to build careers you need some time,” he says. “We shall see in 10 or 15 years what the leadership positions distribution among men and women looks like.”

Meanwhile, Germany is taking firm action on women in business. In November 2013, the federal government introduced a 30% quota for women on the boards of DAX-listed companies; at the last count, women comprised 24.2% of directors.

"This traditional model has been overcome only after the student revolution and subsequent societal changes," Bauer says. "The German public service has become more female, more part-time, more heterogeneous – mirroring trends in society. There are also positive discrimination policies in place, and the state as an employer needs to follow the regulations or recommendations for the economy as a whole. So positive action in promoting women has been more seriously tackled, and the job security – being able to come back after giving birth – and the requirement for the state as an employer to accept all kinds of part-time arrangements, has made the public service a very attractive workplace for women."

"The German public service has become more female, more part-time, more heterogeneous, mirroring trends in society"

Michael Bauer, Professor of Comparative Policy Administration and Policy Analysis

Bauer adds that top civil service positions are "still to a large extent in the hands of male lawyers from an upper-middle-class background"; but this is partly a function of the time taken for a more diverse intake to percolate up through public bodies. "For women to build careers you need some time," he says. "We shall see in 10 or 15 years what the leadership positions distribution among men and women looks like."

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"This traditional model has been overcome only after the student revolution and subsequent societal changes," Bauer says. "The German public service has become more female, more part-time, more heterogeneous – mirroring trends in society. There are also positive discrimination policies in place, and the state as an employer needs to follow the regulations or recommendations for the economy as a whole. So positive action in promoting women has been more seriously tackled, and the job security – being able to come back after giving birth – and the requirement for the state as an employer to accept all kinds of part-time arrangements, has made the public service a very attractive workplace for women."

"The German public service has become more female, more part-time, more heterogeneous, mirroring trends in society"

Michael Bauer, Professor of Comparative Policy Administration and Policy Analysis

Bauer adds that top civil service positions are "still to a large extent in the hands of male lawyers from an upper-middle-class background"; but this is partly a function of the time taken for a more diverse intake to percolate up through public bodies. "For women to build careers you need some time," he says. "We shall see in 10 or 15 years what the leadership positions distribution among men and women looks like."

Meanwhile, Germany is taking firm action on women in business. In November 2013, the federal government introduced a 30% quota for women on the boards of DAX-listed companies; at the last count, women comprised 24.2% of directors.
Five countries are making strides in increasing women's participation at the top of government. Turkey, the Philippines, Estonia, South Africa and South Korea are both among the top performing within their regional groups, and are making significant progress overall.

Turkey, Case Study

Although not at the very bottom of the table, Turkey deserves special mention as the only G20 country to have seen the proportion of women in its senior civil service falling year after year.

From a low base figure of 13.6% women in 2013, Turkey's metric has drifted steadily downwards and is now at just 8.8%.

Turkey is significantly behind most G20 countries when it comes to women's rights. There is no absence of legislative seeking to improve gender equality, but societal attitudes have not kept pace; indeed, the current government has consistently emphasised Islam and traditional values. In 2011, for example, the government rebranded the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, a move seen by women's activists as a retrograde step.

On the positive side, the ruling AK party has made efforts to ensure that employment rules don't discriminate against religious women. Under the avowedly secular policies of Kamal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, women were not allowed to wear headscarves in the police, military, universities, or public sector roles – a rule that preserved the separation of state and faith, but presented very observable and traditional Muslim women with a de facto employment barrier. Then, four years ago, AK permitted headscarves in universities and public service; and the government has just passed a law enabling headscarved women to serve in the police and military.

“The rate of women in senior levels positions in the bureaucracy is low”

Onur Dinçer, topical expert, Ministry of Family and Social Policies

However, within many traditional Muslim families women are strongly discouraged from pursuing careers – at least after marriage, when most are expected to concentrate on bringing up children. So these apparent freedoms, whilst allowing a few strongly religious women into civil service at an earlier age, are balanced by the expectation that “the time of unpaid leaves due to maternity leaves shall be considered in the degree and rank improvements of state officials”.

The purges of the civil service and other public authorities such as schools and universities which followed last year’s coup attempt have not helped matters. Tens of thousands of state employees suspected of being sympathetic to US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, accused by Turkey of masterminding the putsch, were removed from their jobs.

The latest rise in unemployment, showing jobless rates up nearly two percentage points to 12.7%, is due in part to the mass sackings of more liberal academics and public sector workers – and the increase in unemployment among women is twice that among men.

Meanwhile, religious conservatives continue to push back against the equality agenda. An International Women's Day event in March this year at an Istanbul university was attacked by an armed group chanting religious slogans. Murders of women have been rising at an alarming rate. Women have a long road ahead before they reach equality with men here.

According to George Dyson, head of research at the Centre for Turkish Studies in the UK: “The government has been facing a lot of attacks on a lot of sides, and has been using the civil service to shore up support and get interest groups on side. That could be one explanation for why you have more men in higher positions.

"Now the government looks like it is repeating that with other groups [of public sector workers] following the purges, insulin-resistant-nationalists who are more likely to be men as well."

Dyson says that in Turkey, successive governments have always faced the problem of trying to secure the loyalty of the civil service. “There's a presence at keeping the civil service independent and non-political, but the problem is that previous governments will have stacked the civil service with their own people; so despite all the best intentions of the next governments, if they want to get things done, they have to put their own people in. It's a vicious circle.”

Asked for a comment on Turkey's performance, Onur Dinçer – a topical expert from the Ministry of Family and Social Policies – admitted that “the rate of women in the senior level decision position in the bureaucracy is low”, with 89% men and only 11% women. According to data from the State Personnel Administration, in February 2017 there was one female deputy secretary, six general directors, 54 deputy general directors and 369 department heads (14%).

Recent amendments to the Civil Servants Act sought to enhance parental leave and part-time working entitlements for parents. For example, breastfeeding ‘leave’ for new mothers was raised from 1.5 hours a day to three hours for the first six months, and both mothers and fathers were given the option of taking up to two years of unpaid leave. However, these rights come with the proviso that “the time of unpaid leaves due to maternity leaves shall be considered in the degree and rank improvements of state officials”.

Early in 2016, arrangements were also introduced covering part-time employment for working parents. State employees were entitled to work part-time until the child reached the primary school age – though only one parent can benefit from this for each child.

Women fare poorly at the political level in Turkey, too. In the November 2015 elections 81 female MPs were elected, comprising just 15% of the legislature – though this is a significant increase from the 4.4% in 2002. The 15 years of AK government have seen only seven female ministers, three of whom were ministers for family and social policies. Throughout the entire 90-year history of democratic Turkey, including the AK administration, just 20 ministers have been women. The pipeline of women active in local government leadership is not heartening either: currently, just three out of 50 metropolitan mayors are women, and 40 out of 1,581 town mayors.

That said, Dyson adds that by some measures the situation for women in Turkey has improved notably over the last decade: literacy and labour participation rates have risen, along with legal protections and rights. By 2014, figures showed that 30.3% of women were employed, compared with 23.4% ten years earlier. Between 2013 and 2017, the proportion of Turkey’s small business owners who were women rose by 12% to 15%. In addition, the AK Party has implemented laws to improve property rights for women, and men are no longer officially heads of households.

Dyson says that the ruling party does try to engage with women's rights issues, but its efforts are undermined by a “hardcore conservatism towards the role of women in family life and public life.” It may be some time before Turkey turns around the decline in female senior civil servants, and rejoin the rest of the G20 in making progress on gender equality.
As a group, the EU states appear to be doing markedly better than the G20 at getting women into the top tiers of their civil service structures. Across all 28 states, the average this year is 40%, against an average for the G20 of 26.4%. And five of the EU countries—Slovenia, Romania, Latvia, Greece and Bulgaria—have already surpassed parity, with more than half of their most senior officials women. Top-placed Slovenia reached equality as long ago as 2008.

We should point out that the EU data covers just seven percentage points on average across the EU nations towards gender parity.

If anything, this makes the EU figures even more impressive, as those countries are more successful at promoting women right to the top of the ladder.

The EU has also demonstrated sharp growth: nearly again over the rather longer period of 2007 to 2016. The G20 data, however, covers the five most senior grades – making direct comparisons between the two datasets difficult.

Our analysis of the 28 members between 2003 and 2007, and the same seven percentage points on average across the EU nations towards gender parity.

Across all 28 states, the average this year is 40%, falling below the EU's 40% average. But its organisational chief executives, board-level directors and the heads of secretariats or major business units. Notably, all the Baltic states–Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania—are in the EU top ten. And all the G20 members which are also EU members—UK, France, Italy and Germany—fall below the EU’s 40% average. Ireland also finds itself languishing near the bottom of the table – but not for much longer, it hopes, as it is just beginning a programme of reform to redress the balance (see case study, p28).

Germany is an interesting case. According to the G20 data for 2013, at that time just 13% of civil servants in Germany’s top five grades were women. But its performance on the EU data, covering just the very top jobs, was better – with over 20% women in 2013. This is likely due to the gender quotas implemented in the early 2000s, which have since been lifted. Since then, Germany has made significant progress in increasing the number of women in leadership positions, reaching an average of 36% across all 28 members in 2016. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in the top tier of the civil service, where only 31% of the positions are held by women.
Malta (see case study, p30) and Austria, though still just below the average, have made great progress since 2003, steaming up from 2nd and 4th from bottom to sit mid-table on the EU data. Finland (see case study, p32) and Lithuania have also shown fast improvement, but many of the top-placed nations already had good results by 2003.

Sixth in the EU table is Sweden. The Swedish civil service is organised differently from other EU states, in the sense that the Swedish central government administration is based on decentralisation of powers rather than delegation – the system used in countries with a ministerial model. The central government administration employs around 215,000 people in about 200 state agencies. The Government Offices form a single, integrated public authority comprising the Prime Minister’s Office, the government ministries and the Office for Administrative Affairs, and employs some 5,000 staff. The data in the table refers only to the central government administration.

The director-general for human resources in Sweden’s Government Offices, Pernilla Glaes, says that recruitment of personnel must follow the regulations laid down in the constitution, which requires people to be appointed based on merit and skill; only if two candidates are judged to be equally skilled and qualified can managers choose according to other factors, including gender. However, the government has set a goal for all public sector employers to raise the number of women in leadership positions, and a clear trend is setting in – with rises in the proportion of women almost every year since 2007. The overall EU situation appears even more impressive in light of the findings of the EU’s annual gender report, published in March 2017. Sixty years after women’s rights were enshrined as a fundamental value in the Treaty of Rome, researchers found that substantial progress has been made, particularly in terms of women in public sector management positions, although there is still much work to be done.

The Republic of Ireland has realised it has work to do. Langishing at 25th amongst the 28 EU countries, with just 26.9% women among its senior civil servants, Ireland is kicking off a raft of initiatives designed to push it up the league table.

David Cagney, chief human resources officer at the Irish government’s Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, blames the country’s poor score on several years of austerity, during which there was very little staff movement of any kind within the service. Now that’s drawing to a close, he says, “things are starting to loosen up and in that context we can take some steps to address these issues”.

Now the service has set a target of a 50/50 gender balance for its senior appointments, at secretary general and assistant secretary level – although the principle of merit will still apply. “We’re not in the business of positive discrimination per se,” Cagney says, “but in a situation where a male and a female candidate are of equal merit in relation to a position, we will have regard to the gender balance of the senior management team of the organisation to which the appointment is going to be made – and that may well influence the decision of the appointment board.”

At secretary general level, the current ratio is 20% women; at assistant secretary it is 33%; and principal officers are 40% female; and assistant principals 48% – so Ireland does have large pools of female managers from which it can draw through the next generation of organisational leaders. However, meeting the targets will not form part of leaders’ appraisals, and there will be no sanctions if the target is not met. “Our view is that that would be counter-productive; and that’s the view of quite a lot of females too, who are anxious they are not seen as token appointments,” says Cagney. “We don’t want to take a ‘stick’ approach. We want this done as part of good practice, not as part of compliance.”

The initiative will be subject to ongoing review and benchmarking, though, and the results from each department will be well promulgated. “It will be obvious if some departments aren’t making progress”, comments Cagney.

The service is hoping to encourage more women applicants by reviewing all of its policies to ensure they support a gender-balanced workforce. “We are looking at the language in which competencies are described and skills requirements are expressed, to ensure they are not impediments to women applying for senior positions,” he explains.

“A lot of effort is going into raising awareness and increasing communication of the whole gender balance agenda within the civil service”

David Cagney, Chief Human Resources Officer, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland

Unconscious bias training is also being rolled out to all secretaries general and their senior management teams, and a talent management programme for assistant secretaries and principal officers has been launched. Ireland, there is, says Cagney, a “very strong expectation” that those joining this programme will be split 50/50 along gender lines. “A lot of effort is going into raising awareness and increasing communication of the whole gender balance agenda within the civil service,” he adds.

The Irish Constitution, however, sets out rather a narrow social-economic role for women; and in the European Institute for Gender Equality Index 2013, Ireland received its lowest score for ‘power’ – reflecting the level of representation of women across the decision-making system. Yet the new focus on achieving greater equality is gaining traction, and not just within the civil service.

In 2016, a quota system was introduced under which at least 30% of candidates of political parties in the general election must be female; parties that fail to comply will see their state funding halved. The number of women who stood in the subsequent general election was twice that of the previous one, and there was a 40% jump in the number elected. Women now hold just over 22% of seats in Dáil Éireann, the lower legislative chamber.

If women are given more opportunities to get into the top ranks, Cagney believes, they won’t be held back by a lack of confidence. “We have asked the Economic and Social Research Institute to do some quantitative and qualitative research for us. And one of the interesting results is that while we do have a dearth of female managers at senior level, there is no sense that it’s because they don’t believe they are capable of doing the job; and no sense that they feel in any way inhibited from doing it.”

The main finding from the study, he says, was that women are discouraged by the intensity and scale of the workload in senior jobs, and the fear that they won’t be able to carry any “atypical work arrangements” which they currently enjoy into a bigger job.

The proportion of women in the top two civil service grades, Ireland vs EU mean, 2005-16

Starting from a low base in 2003, Ireland’s progress in getting women into the very topmost civil service jobs has broadly paralleled the EU average – though Ireland slipped backwards during 2005–09, whilst the EU accelerated.

continued on p30
While politicisation in and of itself does not explain is a legally-binding principle for EU member states. despite the fact that political neutrality of civil service of politicisation of their civil service organisations – in Central and Eastern Europe, have varying degrees. It's also true that a number of EU countries, particularly paid, and for some reason the young men seemed into the public sector and noticed it was very badly. “That's the explanation I was given when I was discussing this with my counterparts in Latvia, Estonia, “And when you come back and sit for interviews you are at a disadvantage to your colleagues who have continued. Because these family-friendly measures are mostly taken up by women, men continue with their career progression and women fall back.”

“Most of the time, it is women who have taken these options up; it means that their career progression continues,” she says. “They don’t lose out on that experience at work, in learning more skills and being involved in the workplace, and this has meant that women’s talent continues to develop and be appreciated.”

In order to give the policy the best chance at success, the Commission organised training sessions for civil service managers on effective management of staff based in remote locations. Tracking of the uptake of these tools has proved their value. In 2009, 34 women and 37 men in the top five grades made use of flexi-time and family-friendly measures (not including maternity leave); by 2015, this had grown to 143 women and 67 men.

Likewise, in 2009 just eight women and no men in the highest grades utilised teleworking; by 2015, 40 women and eight men did so.

Similar increases are also shown in the feeder grades, meaning the pipeline of female talent has also strengthened.

Besides this, the public service has a gender mainstreaming policy whereby it ensures there are no discriminatory practices in vacancies for job ads and selection processes, and that interviewers comprise both men and women.

In 2014, the government also introduced free childcare for parents in work and education, as well as breakfast and after-school clubs. Since then, the number of women re-entering the labour market after childbirth has risen by 6%.

Eduardo Ongaro, president of the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) – a policy research body bringing together academics, policymakers and public sector managers – notes that many of the EU states are so small that even a handful of promotions to or departures from leadership positions can really tilt the balance. “Data is much more reliable when you have larger countries,” he says.

Ongaro also points out that the Baltic nations – especially Estonia, but also Latvia and Lithuania – essentially copied the governance models and policies of Sweden and Finland, “countries that are in many respects models of gender politics”. They did so to secure their accession to the EU, he says, receiving structural funds cash after joining in order to implement these policies.

“When you have the right policies and the right money applied to a country less than half the [population] size of London, you can really make an impact,” he says.

Juha Sarkio, director general of the Personnel and Governance Policy Department at Finland’s Ministry of Finance, says that the breakup of the Soviet Union heralded a backlash against the heavily macho, male-dominant system that the USSR had fostered.
Slovenia reached gender equality in the senior ranks of its civil service as long ago as 2008. In a 2013 paper entitled Politicization of senior civil servants in Slovenia, academics Lea Nahtigal and Miro Hadek from the University of Ljubljana wrote that: “On assuming power, every government undertakes at least a partial replacement of the civil service apex; hence, these acts are recognised as completely legitimate. In the case of Secretaries-General, there is an almost complete substitution at every change of government.” They concluded: “Since this change is performed by every government, it is perceived as perfectly legitimate and rational, as it is rather hard to anticipate that any government would act differently. “A high degree of control over senior civil servants’ appointments and careers causes a high fluctuation in administrative managers, thus contributing to organisational instability, which as a consequence demotivates other senior civil servants, who know already in advance that the most important positions... cannot be reached based on competence alone, but only with the assistance of personal and political connections.” Slovakia has a similar system of political appointments. Back in 2006, Slovakia abolished the Civil Service Office and transferred civil service management authority to the Ministry of Labour and the Government Office. It also politicised the rank of Head of Service Office, the highest civil servant, and removed job protection for directors-general, so that any government could act differently. However, it is now running to reverse some of that. In its new Civil Service Act, adopted this year, it has reinstated protections for directors-general, so that they cannot be removed from post without good reason – such as unsatisfactory performance. “This way,” says Tatiana Janeckova, head of the Civil Service Office at the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, “we have set a clearer border between political and unpolitical nominees.”

Case Study
Finland

Finland’s rapid rise up the EU table can be attributed to two major factors, according to Juha Sarkio – who oversees HR and governance issues for Finland’s finance department.

First, during the 1990s and early 2000s Finland underwent a huge programme of privatization, shifting several operations and many thousands of individuals out of the civil service and into the private sector. Many of these services – which included road-building, traffic management, post offices, railways and universities – were heavily dominated by male staff and managers. Before this process began, Finland’s public service employed 215,000 people; nowadays, just 72,000 remain. And the core civil service tended to have a higher proportion of women in leadership positions than these service delivery operations.

Alongside this, the country has seen a substantial rebalancing of the numbers of women entering and graduating from university, providing a much stronger pipeline of female talent for top jobs in all sectors. “The number of women top civil servants has been increasing very rapidly, and it will continue to increase over time because 75% of the students in Finnish universities now are women,” explains Sarkio. “That trend has been going on for ten years. The only sector where young men are in the majority are the technical sciences.” University admission criteria are based heavily on candidates’ primary and secondary school results, where girls tend to do much better than boys. While the overall civil service population is currently evenly split between males and females, more of the newcomers are women nowadays simply because they form the majority of graduates.

“The number of women top civil servants has been increasing very rapidly, and it will continue to increase over time because 75% of the students in Finnish universities now are women”
Juha Sarkio, Director General of the Personnel and Governance Policy Department at Finland’s Ministry of Finance

Sarkio adds that the civil service has ascertained that over the next ten years, 70% of its senior leaders now in post will retire. As in Sweden, Finland’s laws require that recruiters may only make civil service appointments on the basis of merit. And Sarkio believes that the larger pipeline of women will undoubtedly lead to more women taking on top roles in all departments except those traditionally dominated by men, such as military administration, police and security.

On a general policy level, Finland stipulates that parental leave can’t all be taken by one parent; one-third of it must be taken by the other. But despite this, the data shows that women still tend to take more parental leave than men. Discussions are now underway in Parliament as to whether the rules should be tightened so that mothers and fathers must share their leave equally.

Juha Sarkio, Director General of the Personnel and Governance Policy Department at Finland’s Ministry of Finance
Lord O’Donnell

In the last two years, after their governments brought in or publicly-quoted companies climb sharply in the number of women in key roles, their use continues to create unease in some quarters. David Cagney, chief human resources officer at the Irish Government’s Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, says that most women in the Irish Civil Service would prefer the country’s new gender-equality targets to be enshrined in law or even added to managers’ appraisal criteria, lest their promotions be seen as tokenistic.

Critics of quota systems also allege that they increase bureaucracy, fail to address the real reasons behind women’s under-representation, and can result in people being appointed to posts for which they’re not suitable—a terrible outcome, as this can end up undermining rather than strengthening trust in women’s ability to take on top leadership roles.

Of course, political will can be shown without the formal framework of quotas, and this too is highly effective. Both the Prime Minister of Canada and the President of France have opted to staff their Cabinet with 50% women, even though in both cases only around a quarter of their country’s national parliamentarians are female.

But not every country has the luxury of quota systems or thorough modern premiers; and if countries without such strong political leadership want to improve gender diversity within their public sector top teams, they need to find other devices.

Equality legislation

Legislative levers can also be used to introduce and safeguard maternity leave, promote equal employment opportunities and discourage discrimination. But it’s important to look carefully at how such policies are employed in practice, and whether any obstacles exist to their full implementation.

As Australia’s Dr Martin Parkinson says: “The barriers are going to be different in different organisations so the key challenge is to understand where your own barriers lie. That requires you to not engage in a series of ad hoc responses to gender inequality, but to really get to grips with what’s driving it in your own organisation.”

The UK’s civil service gender champion Melanie Dawes makes a similar point, recommending that every organisation needs to get “quite detailed and granular” about what their particular issues are, so that they can work out how to tackle them.

For instance, an organisation might want to look at whether it is really enabling all candidates to progress, even if they work part-time or flexibly. Or whether its job descriptions are worded in such a way as to appeal to women as well as men.

Dawes says that in her two years as gender champion, she has done a lot of work on implementation of policies such as parental leave and flexible working. “I’m a strong believer that you can have all the processes and systems in the world but you have to think about the lived experience of women – and men – in giving their best at work and being supported to do that.

“So on things like maternity and paternity leave, we are constantly pushing on new toolkits, and we are about to up the ante in measuring what people think and whether they have had a good experience with it. Following up things like that is really important.”

Flexible working

The OECD states that flexible work arrangements, such as parental leave, temporary part-time employment, teleworking, compressed weeks and flexitime, are among the most effective measures deployed across the OECD region to smooth women’s pathways to top jobs in public service.

It’s true that these measures are proving effective in several of the countries studied here — witness Malta’s surge in teleworking, and Australia’s pilot of the ‘All Roles Flex’ scheme. Under this latter reform, the onus falls on managers to demonstrate that a job can’t be carried out flexibly; instead of the employee having to prove that it can.

But Lord O’Donnell, former UK Cabinet Secretary and a key driver of the UK civil service’s progress on gender equality, issues a warning alongside this: take care that you don’t make so many concessions to flexible working that you relegate women to less intensive, less interesting jobs.

“Sometimes you hear women’s movements saying that you’ve got to change the jobs so that they can be done between 9am and 3pm to suit school hours — I think that’s really dangerous,” he says.

“Particularly if you’re working at the centre of government, there are always going to be political crises, or terrorist events, or budgets that go down to the wire – the nature of these jobs is that you are dealing with life and death matters. These events are going to be tough and at times they are going to involve long hours – it’s an illusion to think you can get away from that. But that’s also what makes them so interesting – you’re right at the heart of dealing with all these complex, important matters.

“We can’t change that – terrorists aren’t suddenly going to say ‘ok, I’ll confine my terrorist activity to nine to five, Monday to Friday’ — it doesn’t work like that. So we need to find a way to accept that there are occasions when we need to do that.”

continued on p36
it will be like this but also to make sure we have the flexibility to say ‘Okay, we can be there with allowances for emergency childcare’, or ‘If you’ve worked all weekend, you can take the Monday and Tuesday off’.

“What you don’t want is to get to the stage where you are restricting women to second-class jobs.”

He adds that nobody wants people to be working long and unsociable hours regularly, but “none of us can guarantee steady hours in these senior jobs; they will be variable. So we need to design our policies around that.”

**Workplace culture**

It’s important to make sure the culture of the workplace genuinely supports diversity objectives, and doesn’t just play lip-service to them. There are a number of actions that can be taken to advance equality:

- Embed targets or accountability into senior staff appraisals;
- Conduct staff research into perceptions of culture and follow up with actions for change;
- Train those chairing meetings, to ensure that all voices round a table are heard;
- Ensure discipline around how decisions are made;
- Create active networks to keep the issue high on the agenda;
- Deliver unconscious bias training.

Ireland’s civil service is currently delivering unconscious bias training to all its secretaries general and their senior teams. David Cagney explains: “There’s a recognition that there is a tendency for people to appoint people like themselves, although people may not be absolutely conscious of this. I’m aware that in the UK civil service recruiters for lower grades have removed from application forms details like names, school, university background and so on, and that has thrown up some interesting results. So there is a recognition that people need to be very conscious they could be making decisions based on influences they are not even aware of, perhaps to do with their own background or previous experiences or whatever.”

He adds that rolling out initiatives like unconscious bias training also “sends a major signal that we realise we do have a challenge and there are many aspects to that challenge which need to be addressed including perceptions of people”.

**Targeted talent development**

There are also a number of more targeted actions that can take to encourage more women to move up through the pipeline and into senior roles. Sir Paul Jenkins, the UK civil service diversity champion from 2011 to 2014, says that “the trick is to look at the feeder grades and do what has always been done with the blokes, which is identify the ones that have potential and give them a package of development tools and really stick at it – formal mentoring, coaching, career development. The further up the pipeline you go the more closely you identify future talent, and you do it with a focus on the things you care about – in this case gender diversity. We see much more of that these days.”

Australia’s Parkinson also advises having some answers ready to counter any concerns from men that greater opportunities for women will come at a cost to them. “I once stood in a ‘town hall meeting’ in front of our 1,000 staff – most of whom are male – and said: ‘Put your hands up if you want to lead an organisation that is systemically biased against half of the Australian community’.

“Or, to make it more general, ask: if you want to ensure your organisation’s success, why would you dream of choosing to ignore the leadership capability of half the population?”

**Last words**

Over the years since its inception, the Women Leaders Index has tracked significant improvements in gender diversity at the top levels of the public sector in most of the G20 countries – and truly dramatic progress in a handful. But most nations have a long road to travel yet before they achieve gender equality within their senior civil service cadres. And unless there is continued pressure from both civil service leaders and elected politicians, they’ll never reach that destination.

“Governments need to keep in mind what Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, pointed out, “That nothing is as important today in the political economy of development as the recognition that we need women’s participation and leadership.” Cruz Sanchez, for one, is “sure that their knowledge, experience and vision as women would help us solve many of the problems facing our societies.”

So tackling gender bias doesn’t just widen and deepen the talent pool, and save civil services from shedding valuable skills and expertise; it helps governments to reflect their populations, improving their development of policies and services. And, says Mexico’s Lorena Cruz Sanchez, it fosters better leadership by opening up discussions and improving the quality of decision-making.

“in my experience, I have found that having a diverse team around the table – a gender-equal team – meant that the discussions and decision-making processes tended to be more collaborative,” she says. “There tends to be a focus on not just the ‘what’ but also the ‘how’, and a greater ability to identify potential risks and mitigation strategies. When you have more different perspectives around the table, the discussion becomes more sophisticated.”

Looking ahead, the UK’s Melanie Dawes urges people to keep up the pressure towards these goals. “In many ways, in the UK we are very fortunate on the gender side – we already have our second female prime minister – but you can’t take your eye off the ball on gender equality,” she says. “As a woman, I definitely don’t think the job is done. But we are certainly not complacent, and I’m very pleased that you do this work – because we all need it.”

David Cagney

Sir Paul Jenkins QC
The Global Public Sector Women Leaders Index records the proportion of women employed in the top five grades of the senior civil service in each of the G20 countries. It also tracks the proportion over previous years, running back to 2013. This group comprises roughly the top 1% of public officials, defined as non-elected senior executives across federal or national governments, or the executive ranks of the core civil service in central government.

For comparison, the research collates the latest data on four other metrics in each G20 country: the proportions of women working across the entire public service; women elected to national political office, largely in legislative chambers; women in ministerial positions; and female directors on publicly-quoted boards.

Definitions of senior leaders are based as far as possible on data used in previous years to provide optimal comparisons. Data on women in the senior civil service and women across the total public sector is gathered directly from individual central government agencies, with the exception of China, where the statistics for public sector leaders are calculated using a proprietary GGF database of senior officials to provide estimates. 2016-17 data for Italy and Germany, in both the G20 table and the EU table, refer to level 1 and level 2 administrators as defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality. However, G20 data for these countries for previous years were obtained from different sources and cover the top five grades.

Data for Argentina refers to 2015, as 2016 data is currently unavailable.

Data for Russia uses a better source than previously, so we have recalculated the figure for 2015-16 based on newly available data to remain consistent.

Data on women in national elected positions is sourced from the UN and Inter-Parliamentary Union statistics, which are publicly available.

Data on women in Cabinet positions is collected via third-party sources such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union statistics, or via data published by individual governments themselves.

Data on women on private sector boards is collated from data published by Catalyst and a publication by Harvard University via Institutional Shareholder Services, Inc.

EU data for Level 1 and 2 administrators is provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

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About Global Government Forum

About

Global Government Forum is a publishing, events and research business that helps senior civil servants around the world to meet global challenges by building their expertise, knowledge and connections.

Our Goals

Global Government Forum exists to help leaders across national public sector organisations to learn from the work of their peers overseas, and to build links with fellow civil servants in other countries. We help people identify the tools and innovations to overcome the challenges they face, and provide an environment where they can exchange ideas about what works – and what doesn’t.

Governments have always had to face new challenges, but in the modern world these are faster-moving and more globalised than ever before. Around the world, civil servants are working – to pick a few examples – to meet rising citizen expectations; to realise the potential of digital services; to handle demographic threats to public health and government finances; and to reform and improve their organisations.

Many of the solutions demand partnerships with other nations, and stronger relationships between the public, private and social sectors; and all of them require civil servants to develop new skills in topics such as digital services, financial and data management, public engagement, policy making, staff development and organisational reform.

But if the challenges are ever more global, so are the solutions – we’re increasingly able to communicate across national borders, and to find answers overseas to the questions being asked by impatient ministers and electorates. We at Global Government Forum help foster that conversation among senior public servants and industry experts by publishing impartial and independent news and interviews, organising events for the world’s top civil servants, and disseminating research.

What we do

We conduct research into the issues facing civil servants, using a combination of data collation, interviews with senior officials, and online surveys testing the opinions of our global, 220,000-strong audience. Our research reports typically include detailed analysis of the findings, and often involve discussing those findings with top civil servants to gather their reactions and opinions.

We run events bringing together top civil service leaders from a range of countries. At these informal, off-the-record discussions, senior officials can share their ideas and experiences with their peers and with selected experts from the worlds of academia and business. Our current portfolio includes events for those leading civil service development and reform, and for heads of finance departments.

We publish www.globalgovernmentforum.com: an independent editorial website carrying news, features and interviews. Our News articles keep you up to date with developments in organisational management, public service delivery and reform; our Features examine innovative policies, emerging threats and international comparisons; and our Interviews with top civil service leaders explore how they’re meeting the challenges facing officials around the world.

Contact us

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