



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Women in politics

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Discussion paper – Lithuania



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# Women's political participation – Lithuania

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## Introduction

This discussion paper analyses women's political participation in Lithuania by reviewing the current situation in the top political decision-making positions, identifying key challenges to achieving gender equality in politics, and evaluating the recent state policies and initiatives. The paper concludes with a review of policy recommendations.

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Current Situation

Achieving gender balance in political decision-making is one of the main areas of improvement for Lithuania in pursuing gender equality. Since 2013, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Gender Equality Index has consistently shown that Lithuania lags in the power domain. Although some progress has been made, Lithuania scored 55.5 in 2024, compared to the EU average of 61.4, placing it 16th among the 27 EU Member States. Considering solely the political power – excluding economic and social dimensions – Lithuania performed better, scoring 62 (almost the EU average of 62.6), ranking 13th overall.

EIGE's political power indicator measures the representation of women and men in national parliaments, governments, and municipal councils, offering a useful picture of gender equality in political decision-making at the highest level. Table 1 presents the changes in the female-to-male ratio in political positions for 2019, 2023, and 2025, reflecting the outcomes of the last three parliamentary elections and the two most recent local elections.

**Table 1. Number of women and men in the government, parliament and municipalities, 2019-2025.**

	% of ministers W	% of ministers M	% of MPs W	% of MPs M	% of regional assemblies W	% of regional assemblies M
Lithuania 2019	21	79	24	76	29	71
Lithuania 2024	42	58	29	71	33	67
Lithuania 2025	29	71	28	72	33	67

After the 2016 elections, the Lithuanian parliament had 30 women out of 141 members. The 2020 elections increased this number to 38, and by the end of the parliamentary term in 2024, after several mid-term changes, the number of women MPs rose to 41. Currently, after the 2024 elections, 40 women are serving in the parliament. Only three of the 16 Seimas committees are chaired by women; of the 11 Seimas commissions, four are chaired by women.

The government formed in 2016 under Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis initially included three women ministers out of 14. However, following a cabinet reshuffle in 2019, Lithuania was, for several months, governed by an all-male cabinet. The government finished its term with one women minister. In contrast, the 2020 government led by Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė started with six women ministers, earning the title of [“the most gender-balanced cabinet in eastern EU”](#). By the end of the term, five women remained in ministerial positions. The current government, led by Prime Minister Gintautas Paluckas, includes four women.

In 2021, Lithuania had women holding the positions of Prime Minister, Speaker of the Parliament, and leading two of the three ruling coalition parties. By 2023, women led all three governing parties and the main opposition party. However, as of spring 2025, only one of the largest parties has a woman as its chair, and no top three political positions are held by a woman.

The March 2023 municipal elections saw record female participation: [47% of all council candidates and 26% of mayoral candidates](#) were women. However, the election results brought only 33% of women to the local municipalities – just a marginal increase compared to the 2019 elections. No municipality elected more women than men to its council, although 20 out of 60 municipalities had more women than men running for councils. At the beginning of 2024, only 6 out of 60 municipalities in Lithuania are led by women mayors (10%).

Thus, the data suggest that progress toward gender equality in Lithuanian politics has stalled. Despite some notable achievements around 2020, women's representation across government, parliament, and municipalities has stabilised at around 30%. There was minimal advancement in the number of female mayors, but at the current pace, even reaching the 30% threshold in municipal councils seems a distant future.

## 1.2 Regulation and legal provisions

The Lithuanian Parliament has adopted two legal acts addressing gender equality. The first is the [Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men](#) adopted in 1998 as part of Lithuania's preparation for EU membership. This law was adopted to implement the constitutional principle of equal rights for women and men, and to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender. As of 2024, amendments to the law include a provision establishing the goal of achieving gender balance in the management and supervisory bodies of large companies.

The second is the [Law on Equal Treatment](#), adopted in 2003. It ensures that the provisions of Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which guarantee equality of all persons and prohibit discrimination based on gender, race,

nationality, language, origin, social status, or faith are implemented. The law also provides the legal basis for the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (OEEO) activities.

OEEO monitors the implementation of both laws. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour is responsible for formulating and implementing policy measures under the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. To this end, it adopts periodic Action Plans to achieve the law's objectives. The most recent Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Action Plan 2023-2025 was adopted at the beginning of 2023. This plan is the government's primary strategic document addressing gender equality issues in the country, including specific measures related to women's political participation and empowerment (see Section 2.1 below)

### 1.3 Main challenges

The progress in women's political participation in Lithuania has stalled. Two significant challenges appear to contribute to this issue. First, voters in elections continue to favour male candidates. For example, in the 2023 municipal elections, although women made up nearly 50% of the candidates, their numbers in the councils increased only slightly.

Second, there is a substantially lower number of women entering politics. The 2024 Seimas elections provide a good illustration: female candidates were highly outnumbered, with [645 women and 1,075 men](#) registered as candidates. The increased number of women candidates in the 2023 municipal elections also has not resulted in more women politicians in local councils.

Party selection procedures might improve the situation as they are essential in shaping candidate lists. In Lithuania, most parties lack internal gender equality policies guiding candidate selection. Only the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) has adopted formal measures to promote women candidates. The LSDP enforces a 40% gender quota for candidate lists and internal governing bodies, arranging electoral lists in a "zipper pattern" (alternating female/male candidates)<sup>1</sup>.

Beyond institutional factors, the persistent underrepresentation of women could be explained by social conservative values of the majority of Lithuanian society and enduring gender stereotypes which continue to frame politics as a male-dominated domain. Additionally, the media, particularly social media, produces frequent and often fervent hostility towards women in politics, deterring more active participation.

Finally, Lithuanian policymakers remain sceptical, and in some cases, are openly resistant towards the adoption of temporary special measures to increase women's political representation. This is the case despite repeated recommendations from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has urged Lithuania to implement such measures. The prevailing attitude among

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<sup>1</sup> The Lithuanian Green Party also implements gender quotas that aim for 50/50 representation, however, they typically receive only about 2% of the votes.

decision-makers remains cautious, if not stubbornly opposed, to institutional interventions, either failing to acknowledge the problem entirely or fearing public backlash and accusations of unfairness.

## 2. Policy measures and initiatives

### 2.1 Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Action Plan (2023-2025)

In early 2023, the Minister of Social Security and Labour adopted the [Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2023-2025 Action Plan](#). The Action Plan aims to promote gender equality, eliminate status differences between women and men, inform the public about measures for equal opportunities, and strengthen inter-institutional cooperation in gender equality.

The planned measures include raising awareness and providing education on gender equality, creating opportunities for both women and men, organising various training sessions and events, building the competence and capacity of NGOs, collecting data on women's representation in various leadership roles (including political positions, diplomacy, and the national defence system), improving the legal framework, and enhancing cooperation with social partners.

This Action Plan had seven goals:

- increase equality between women and men in the labour market;
- reduce the gender pay gap;
- integrate gender equality into educational materials;
- promote work-life balance;
- encourage balanced participation of women and men in decision-making and top political positions;
- motivate people to prioritise their health;
- improve the situation of women and girls from vulnerable groups.

The fifth goal of the Action Plan focuses on achieving balanced political participation in high-level decision-making positions. One of the three objectives for implementing this goal seeks to increase gender equality in top political positions.<sup>2</sup>

This objective intends to focus on the following activities: analysing successful best practices abroad; organising events that encourage women's participation in politics and combat harmful stereotypes; developing the skills of municipal administration

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<sup>2</sup> The other two objectives are: to improve data collection on gender equality in leadership positions and to strengthen the capabilities of NGOs working on gender equality and equal opportunities issues.

representatives responsible for gender equality and members of the Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (an advisory body at the Ministry); seeking gender balance in the decision-making processes of the Local Action Groups while implementing the Local Development and Smart Villages Strategies and making decisions regarding local development investments (an initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture).

To advance the objectives of the Action Plan in this area, the Ministry decided to organise a project competition, which resulted in funding for the initiative “Women's Political Participation: From Analysis to Action” (see next section).

## **2.2 Project “Women's political participation: from analysis to action”**

In 2023, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour allocated funding for non-governmental organisations to implement measures of the Action Plan promoting equal opportunities for women and men, choosing to focus on empowering women in politics. The project call aimed to encourage women to engage in political life and elections while reducing gender stereotypes in politics through educational, informational, analytical, and advocacy activities. The NGO [Lithuanian Women's Lobby Organisation](#) received the grant to implement the project “Women's political participation: from analysis to action” (implemented in 2023)<sup>3</sup>.

The project's aims were a) to organise awareness-raising and educational campaigns on the role of gender equality in democracies; b) to collect and analyse data on women's participation in politics and best practices abroad; and c) to prepare recommendations for increasing women's participation in politics in Lithuania.

[The project](#) produced three analytical reports:

- on the role and significance of gender politics in the electoral programmes of political parties during the 2020 parliamentary elections;
- on women's involvement and participation in the 2023 local council and mayoral elections, the analysis of municipal election results identified the factors that enable women to be elected, resulting in recommendations for training, education, and outreach activities;
- on the relation between women's participation in local politics and gender equality in local municipalities.

Several information campaigns were organised as well:

- [A public awareness raising campaign](#) before Parliamentary elections on the importance of gender equality in politics and the importance of women's

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<sup>3</sup> Project partners were Kaunas Women Employment and Information Center, Klaipeda Social and Psychological Support Center, Center for Equality Advancement, Women Information Center, Social Innovation Fund.

participation in politics. The organisers assert that the campaign produced 48 different message segments and reached 270,000 users;

- 9 episodes of the podcast "[Courage to be a Leader](#)" with women in leadership positions reached 18,000 users;
- 3 online TV broadcasts "[A dose of feminism](#)", six articles were published and disseminated on portals and social media platforms, three national and three regional radio programmes prepared on various topics regarding women's participation in politics, including the obstacles women face in politics and the strategies to overcome them.

A policy discussion on "Women's political participation for progress: from analysis to action" was organised in the Lithuanian Parliament, where [the declaration was adopted](#). The Declaration proposed measures to increase gender balance in politics (reviewed in section 3). The recommendations were based on analyses of the good practices of the temporary special measures implemented abroad and the analysis of the EU and international legal instruments on the application of temporary special measures.

## 2.3 Impact and Evaluation

Current policy measures to increase women's political participation primarily focus on data collection and monitoring, awareness-raising, public information campaigns, and policy discussions. These initiatives highlight the challenges women face entering politics, articulating the reasons for fairer representation, and exploring potential policy responses, rather than implementing concrete structural or legislative reforms.

The government periodically receives suggestions for introducing mandatory temporary special measures (from NGOs, CEDAW, or OEEO). However, discussions rarely progress to a more serious level, and no drafts of legal acts are currently under consideration.

Despite active information and awareness-raising campaigns, gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained and understandably difficult to change. They require sustained, long-term, and strategic efforts across the education system, collaborating with media outlets and funding grassroots initiatives, not just momentary measures and initiatives just before and during election periods.

## 3. Recommendations

One of the outcomes of the reviewed project was a set of diverse [recommendations](#) to accelerate the gender balance in politics. Most of the recommendations are based on the best practices in other countries and require showing a strong political will to approach the issue strategically.

As mentioned, the temporary special measures are frequently recommended to increase women's political participation in Lithuania, but the ideas are rarely debated

beyond the expert discussions and policy roundtables. Several legislative initiatives specifying special measures have been proposed, for example:

- Amend the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men to introduce the concept of special temporary measures using the best international practices and experiences and add a specific provision on gender balance in political decision-making.
- Revise the Electoral Code to introduce a 40% gender quota for the political party candidate lists.
- Amend the Law on Political Organisations to incorporate explicit provisions on gender equality and non-discrimination. These amendments would require political parties and organisations to include internal rules on gender balance in their statutes; to publicly disclose information on gender representation; and to link public funding to evidence that gender balance rules are being implemented, including the publication of gender-disaggregated data on electoral candidates.

Other initiatives and activities that could be considered:

- Encourage the media to provide non-stereotypical, objective coverage of women and men in politics (especially through education initiatives and trainings).
- Strengthen data collection and monitoring systems to have regular, disaggregated tracking of progress (or stagnation) in gender equality across various political domains, including national and local governance, diplomacy, security, education, public sector, and local government. This data should be in open access and easily available.
- Fund targeted research to understand the lived experiences of women politicians better, analyse voter behaviour and biases, and evaluate the impact of different policy interventions. Research could also explore effective strategies to shift voter preferences and reduce resistance to female candidates.
- Support mentorship and leadership development initiatives for aspiring politicians, with a strong focus on women. These programmes could include formal mentoring structures, capacity-building workshops, and networking opportunities.
- Implement consistent, strategically designed and smart public information campaigns. Effective awareness-raising requires high-quality content, evidence-based messaging, expert involvement, and carefully selected communication channels customised to diverse target audiences.

The factors influencing women's electoral success are interconnected, requiring a coordinated and systemic approach. To break through the current plateau, Lithuania requires targeted, strategic efforts at the national level. Political parties are the crucial players here. It's important to encourage them not just through different incentives, but also by introducing accountability measures that prioritise gender equality and actively support women's participation in politics. Changing societal understandings and biases is a long-term project. It requires the political will, genuine political

commitment, consistent investment, and institutional capacity so that gender equality in politics becomes the norm to be expected rather than an exceptional achievement or rare victory.

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