

# HOW THICK IS THE GLASS CEILING IN BRUSSELS?

Monitoring women's representation  
and speaker diversity on policy panels

EU PANEL WATCH • February 2019



## EU PANEL WATCH

**runs** a campaign based in Brussels, where power is concentrated in the hands of the few, and the political representation and participation of women, people of colour, minorities, youth, people with (dis)abilities and other marginalised groups is still far from equal – from panels to parliaments, boards, media, and academia.

**collects** data every year on speaker representation at policy events across a number of sectors to draw attention to inequalities and assess how far we still have to go.

**advocates** for diverse debate – in gender, ethnicity, race, religion, age, (dis)ability and background – and encourages broader cultural and social shifts, because what future is built with only the voices of the few?



This is our fourth Monitoring Month report, and there are clear reasons why our work remains important.

At this year's Davos, men spoke of #MeToo as having caused a "fear" of mentoring women, and companies toted new "solutions" like limiting instances where men and women interact. This is a classic example of non-diverse debate. The solution has not been shaped by those whom the problem really affects.

Had there been more women heads of companies present, surely they would have come up with something better. It shows us how necessary it still is to create diverse spaces, diverse debate and help move more diversity to the top.

Because it's the people who talk who determine what's worth talking about and who's worth listening to. If it's just the same people talking all the time, there will be issues, views, and not to mention solutions, that are excluded. That's a huge weakness in our policy and decision-making.

But it's a weakness we can fix through awareness, commitment and numbers: because when you make noise about a problem, it's good to have some data to back it up. So, here's our data.

**Laurel Henning &  
Marika Andersen**  
Co-founders

# Résumé exécutif

Pour la quatrième année consécutive, EU Panel Watch a réalisé une recherche portant sur le nombre d'hommes et de femmes, y compris hommes et femmes de couleur, qui interviennent lors de conférences et panels tenus à Bruxelles. Cette recherche annuelle comprend à la fois une collecte de données, l'analyse des résultats et des recommandations. En 2018, nous nous sommes intéressé.es aux événements comprenant au moins deux orateurs ou oratrices et avons pris en compte les intervenant.es prononçant les discours d'ouverture et de clôture. Au total, nous avons analysé 150 conférences, 248 panels et 1563 orateurs et oratrices.

Selon les résultats de notre recherche, **deux tiers des oratrices et orateurs des conférences et panels tenus à Bruxelles sont des hommes**. La proportion de femmes oratrices est légèrement plus importante sur les panels que sur tous les événements confondus. En effet, en 2018, **34% des panélistes étaient des femmes** (contre 33,8% en 2017) et parmi les orateurs principaux et autres intervenant.es hors panels, 28,4% étaient des femmes – les 71,3% restants comprenant une majorité d'hommes blancs. Nous avons également mis en évidence que **les femmes de couleur représentent seulement 2,7% des intervenant.es dans tous les événements comptabilisés** et 3,1% sur les panels (contre 4,2% et 4% pour les hommes de couleur). Seulement 1,3% des orateurs principaux et autres intervenant.es hors panels sont des femmes de couleur (contre 4,5% d'hommes de couleur).

Par ailleurs, **12.5% des événements comptabilisés étaient paritaires**, 42.6% étaient composés d'une majorité d'hommes et **26.1% ne comprenaient que des hommes**. Les secteurs comptant la plus grande participation des femmes sont **l'égalité entre les genres et les droits humains, la culture et l'éducation, ainsi que l'emploi et les affaires sociales, l'industrie et la santé**. En revanche, les secteurs parmi lesquels les femmes sont le moins représentées étaient les télécommunications, le transport, l'agriculture, la justice, l'énergie, l'innovation digitale et la technologie et la finance.

Ainsi, les résultats de notre recherche – qui sont cohérents avec les chiffres des études portant sur la représentativité des femmes dans les ministères, parlements et assemblées régionales – montrent clairement que **les femmes et les personnes de couleur, en particulier les femmes de couleur, sont les laissé.es pour compte des processus décisionnels**. En effet, les intervenant.es des panels et conférences font part de leurs opinions avec les chef.fes d'État, législateurs et autres décideurs, et les journalistes relaient ces opinions dans les médias. Ceux qui contribuent aux débats lors d'événements publics influencent ainsi les politiques et prises de décisions. Cependant, lorsqu'une partie de la population est surreprésentée, seul un morceau de l'histoire est conté alors que différents groupes peuvent avoir des intérêts et besoins distincts en fonction de leurs expériences et leur position sur l'échelle sociale.

# Introducing Monitoring Month

**We expanded our scope and looked at events with at least two speakers.**

Every year EU Panel Watch collects data on how many men and women are contributing at policy conferences in Brussels. The aim of our annual research is more than a data gathering exercise – we also analyse the results and provide recommendations for improvement.

After 3 years of conducting Monitoring Month in the month of June, **November** was chosen due to its busy event schedule. By conducting Monitoring Month at a different time in the year, we have had an opportunity to assess the reliability of our results.

In 2018, we expanded the scope of our research by looking at events with **at least two speakers**. In addition to recording who spoke on panels, we included keynote speakers, presenters, opening remarks and closing statements. Since event organisers are using new formats for their events, we wanted to remain flexible enough to capture evolving realities, beyond the traditional three-to-five-participant panel.

As in previous years, we kept track of who is moderating, but we did not count **moderators** as speakers, as their role is not to give opinions or arguments, but instead keep the debate flowing, ensure speakers are on time, and the audience is engaged.

Data on gender, race and ethnicity were collected based on **third-party visual identification**. Aware of the challenges in collecting equality data – such as the definition of categories, doing justice to the complexity of identity, and data protection – our researchers were encouraged to contact speakers via email to allow them to self-identify if they wished to do so or to use the category 'Not applicable' where third-party identification was not possible or relevant. As we do not name any individual speakers, the anonymisation of speakers' personal data is ensured.

We collected the data by using Twitter and EU event websites, downloading conference agendas, and attending or livestreaming events. Although we did not select the events using a strict methodology, we made sure to include conferences from a range of event organisers, hosted by organisations from **different sectors**, and covering a range of topics. As event attendees often change at the last minute, we also encouraged volunteers to double-check that panellists were correctly identified.

The figures were compiled by volunteers in their spare time with a common understanding of the task but without supervision. As a result, there may be some minor errors – we make no claims of perfection.

# 2018 results for speaker diversity

**Out of 1563 speakers, one third were women in 2018.**

In 2018, we covered 150 conferences, 248 panels, and 1563 speakers overall. The majority of conference speakers in our dataset were panel speakers (76%), but we also collected data on keynote speakers, presenters, opening remarks and closing statements. We found that **two thirds of all event speakers were men.**

The proportion of women speakers is slightly higher on panels (34%) than for events overall (32.7%), since fewer women were keynote speakers and other non-panel speakers (28.4%) than men (71.3%), of which a majority were white men.

We observed that one in seven event speakers and panellists was a **person of colour** (6.9% and 7.1% respectively). **Women of colour** represented only 2.7% of all event speakers or 3.1% of panellists, compared to 4.2% and 4% respectively for men of colour. Women of colour also made up only 1.3% of keynote speakers and other non-panel speakers, compared to 27.1% for white women and 4.5% for men of colour.

If we exclude events from the gender equality sector from our calculations, the proportion of women speakers falls below one third, and drops down to 2.5% for women of colour, meaning that **women's speaker participation is lower when the debate is not about gender equality.**

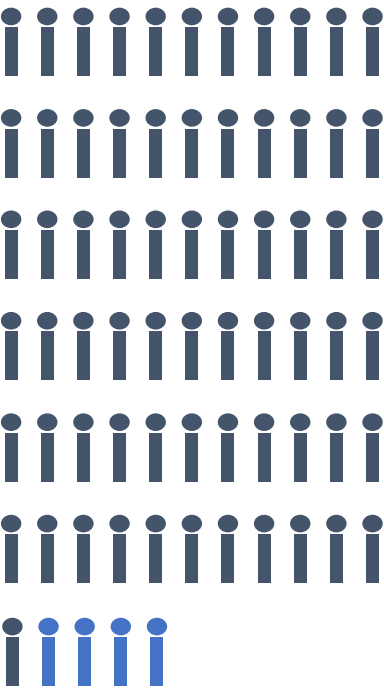
Our results were a mixed bag. 12.5% of observed events and panels were **gender-balanced**; 1.5% higher than in 2017. We also observed that **majority-male** events and panels marginally decreased from 45% in 2017 to 42.6% in 2018, however, **all-male** events and panels actually slightly increased from 23.5% to 26.1%, meaning that there are **twice as many all-male panels as equal panels.** For the second year in a row, we found that three quarters of all-male panels also had a **male moderator**, while all-female panels had only women moderators. Nearly 4% of all events and panels had **only women speakers**; two thirds of these were about gender equality. **Majority-female** events and panels slightly decreased from 18% in 2017 to 14.9% in 2018. When we excluded events from the gender equality sector, the proportion of all-male and majority-male events and panels increased to 27% and 44% respectively, while for all-female and majority-female events and panels it fell to 2.2% and 13.8% respectively.

**Media** and **regional governments** were the worst performing categories of event organisers, but almost four out of five events or panels organised by **businesses** were all or majority-male. **EU institutions, think tanks, political parties and foundations**, didn't fare much better, since around two thirds of their events or panels were all or majority-male. **Civil society organisations** performed better, as they had about half as many all or majority-male panels or events as businesses, but a quarter were gender balanced.

**34%** of panellists were women.  
3.1% of panellists were women of colour.



**64.8%** of panellists were men.  
4% of panellists were men of colour.



**1.2%** of panellists could not be identified in terms of gender, race or ethnicity.



**33%**

of all event speakers were women, but less than 3% were women of colour.

**34%**

of panellists were women, but only 3% were women of colour.

**28%**

of keynote speakers and high-level presenters were women, but only 1% were women of colour.

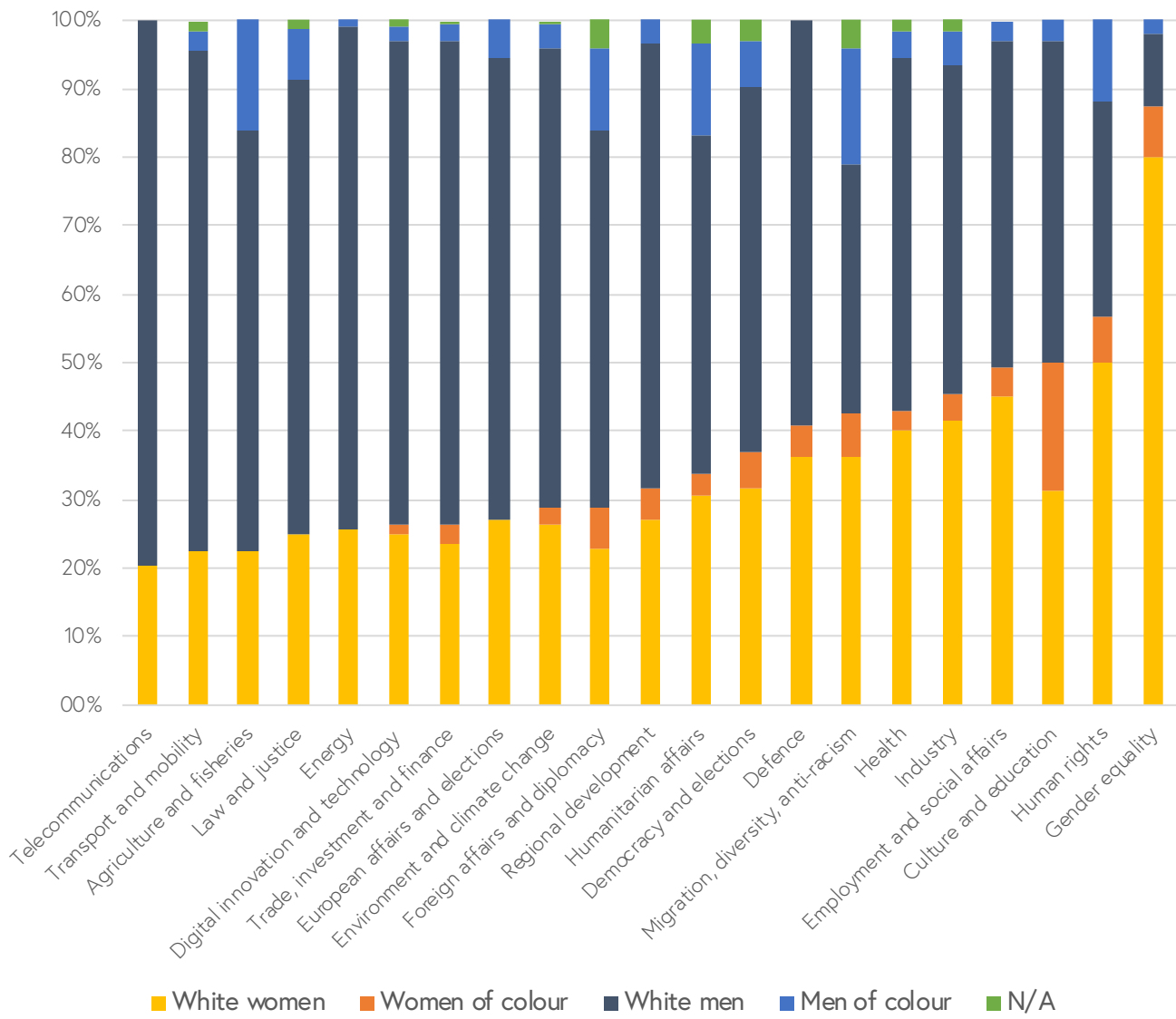
**30%**

of speakers were women when the debate was not about gender equality.

**26%**

of panels were 'manels', meaning they had no women speakers at all.

## Speaker diversity per sector



The best performing sector was culture and education.

For the purposes of calculating sectoral gender balance, some inter-disciplinary events were counted in more than one sector. The sectors which had the lowest levels of **participation of women** – both white women and women of colour – were telecommunications, transport, agriculture, law, energy, technology and finance. The sectors which had the highest proportion of women speakers were gender equality and human rights, while the **culture and education** sector enjoyed gender balance and women of colour made up nearly two thirds of speakers, followed closely behind by employment, social affairs, industry, and health sectors – where women made up slightly less than half of speakers.

Although events on agriculture and fisheries, humanitarian affairs, foreign affairs, and migration had the highest levels of speaker participation for men of colour, this did not correspond to the rate of participation for women of colour, as they were disproportionately under-represented at such events.

Outside of the culture, education, gender equality, migration and foreign affairs sectors, **women of colour** represented less than 5% of speakers, while events on telecommunications, transport and mobility, agriculture and fisheries, law, energy, and EU affairs did not involve any women of colour at all.

# What do the results mean?

**At this rate we can expect to see gender parity in 80 years.**

Although policy discussions in Brussels cover a wide range of topics, they are still largely dominated by white men, who also hold the lion's share of power in Europe. For the fourth year in a row, our data shows that policy conferences in Brussels fail to represent all segments of European society. Our results show in a real and observable way that women, people of colour, and minorities are left out of important political processes. Speaker diversity on panels mirrors the **unequal representation and leadership** in institutions and wider society.

We acknowledge, however, that our data is collected based on third-party visual identification, so assumptions are made on the gender, racial and ethnic identity of speakers. Our data also does not integrate dimensions of **class, age, sexuality, disability, and geopolitics**, so no complete assessment can be made on the merits of any individual speaker, nor is it our intent to do so.

One conclusion is clear: women are underrepresented in speaking roles in policy conferences in Brussels. Although progress *is* taking place, it is happening at a snail's pace. Women's representation at events and on panels improved only marginally, from 33.8% in 2017 to 34% in 2018. At this rate

**we can expect to see gender parity in 80 years.** Much progress still needs to be made in terms of representation of women of colour, as **less than one woman out of ten recorded was a woman of colour.** In politics, as in many other spheres of life, women of colour face overt and indirect discrimination based on their gender and ethnicity/race, and efforts to improve women's representation by mainstream feminist networks are often not inclusive of women of colour. Considering that three quarters of all-male panels also had a male moderator, it is clear that some event **organisers do not see a problem with an all-male panel**, so they also show no interest in having 'at least' a woman moderator.

When looking at more **prestigious roles** like keynote speakers, the proportion of women falls to 28% and 1% for women of colour. A decrease in almost 6% between women's representation on panels and their representation in more prominent speaking roles demonstrates that in addition to being offered fewer opportunities to speak, they are **invited less often to speak at peak conference times or to deliver longer, more influential presentations.**

Our results are consistent with the percentage of women who hold office in ministries, parliaments, and regional assemblies, which is currently at around 30%, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality. As the **seniority and prestige of speakers** is seen as more

important than gender balance and racial or ethnic diversity for many conferences, this **gender gap in leadership** is also reflected in who speaks at high-level conferences, even though many event organisers in Brussels are women.

Women's voices are not distributed evenly across conference topics, and our 2018 results show a very clear **feminisation, masculinisation and racialisation of sectors**. While the gender equality sector was expectedly overrepresented by women (although disappointingly less than one in ten was a woman of colour), and all-female panels had only women moderators, some sectors had alarmingly low levels of participation of women, both white women and women of colour.

Moreover, when we exclude events from the gender equality sector from our calculations, we find that the rates of all-male and majority-male panels and events increased, while the rates of all-female and majority-female panels and events decreased.

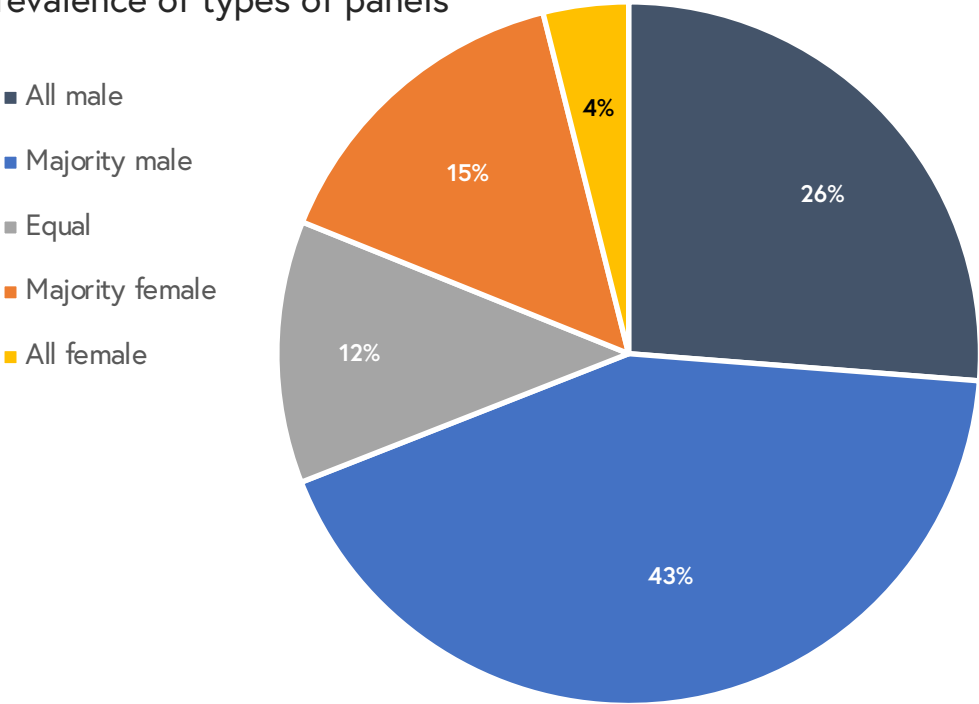
Some organisers still don't see a problem with an all-white male panel.

While more events in Brussels are spotlighting gender equality, these events are **not adequately involving men** in the discussions, which is a missed opportunity and perpetuates the idea that gender equality is a 'women-only issue'.

The 'best' sectors for men of colour were migration, anti-racism, agriculture and humanitarian affairs, but this did not translate into positive results for women of colour. The best sector for gender balance and the representation of women of colour was culture and education, but this was not the case for men of colour.

The rate of women's overall participation is lowered significantly by two sectors – digital innovation and technology and trade, finance, investment and competition – which were by far the most popular topics addressed during policy conferences in November 2018, but where only one in four speakers was a woman.

Prevalence of types of panels



Panels mirror the **gender gap** in leadership and wider society.

Women of colour face **overt and indirect discrimination** based on their gender and ethnicity or race.

Conferences reinforce the idea that gender equality is a **'women-only issue'**.

# Why is this an issue?

## Panels reflect the glass ceiling for women's representation in politics.

**Policy-shaping conferences have an impact on our daily lives.** Speakers and panellists share their views with heads of state, policy-makers, and business leaders, while journalists report the statements of these speakers to audiences around the world. Who contributes to debates as speakers can influence policies in a variety of sectors. When one segment of the population is overrepresented in high level policy conferences, we are only hearing a part of the story. Yet, different groups can have different interests, goals and policy needs due to their social location and experiences of distinct disadvantage.

If a highly homogenous group is discussing policy challenges and solutions, it may treat the 'white male' perspective as the default, but the **one-size-fits-all approach is clearly flawed**. The underrepresentation of women and other disadvantaged groups constitutes a democratic deficit and is also a problem of legitimacy, effectiveness, justice and responsiveness.

As most events today don't remain in the conference room but also end up being broadcasted on traditional and social media, who gets **published, quoted and retweeted as an expert** in a given field can influence how media consumers view politics and society at large.

Media representations play a substantial role in people's socialisation, and they can reinforce people's perceptions of who is 'political' and who is included or excluded from the exercise of power. For younger generations, seeing few people who look and act like them in politics can be discouraging.

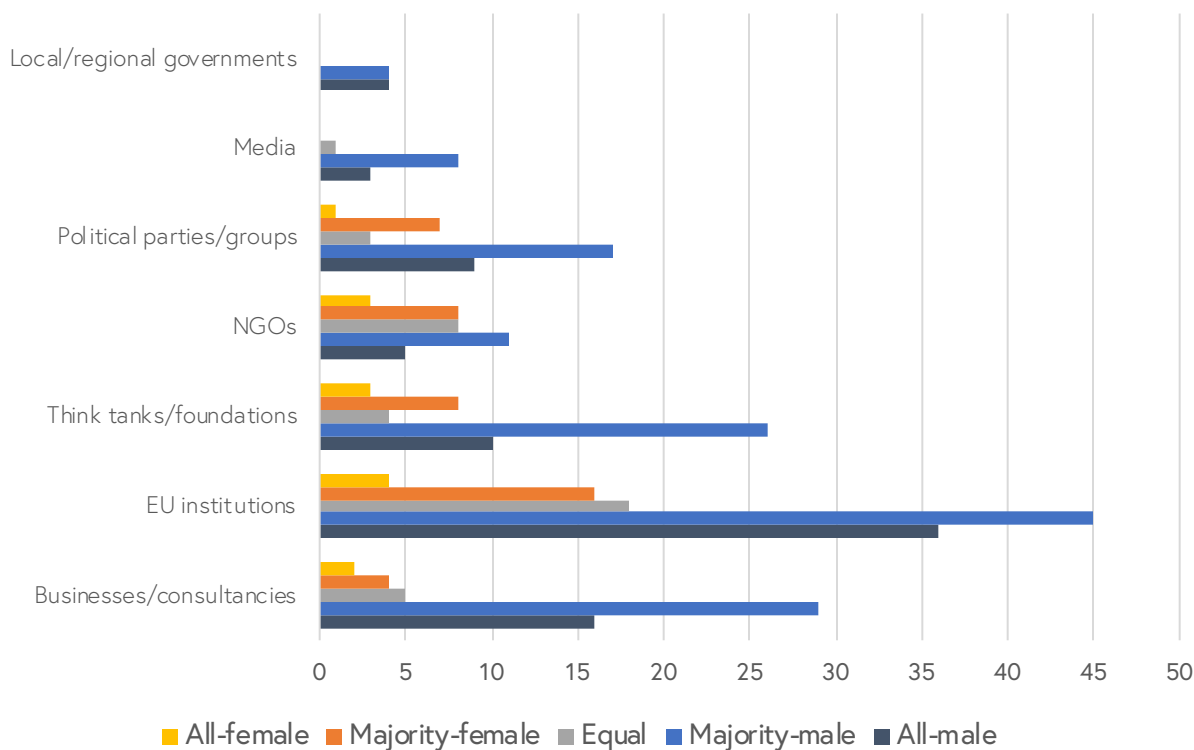
The stubborn '**glass ceiling**' for women's **representation** (or 'sticky floor' for the most disadvantaged like women of colour, poor women, women with disabilities or rural women) on panels and in politics more generally, speaks volumes to the barriers they face in getting involved, from their relative lack of material resources to support their move into politics to their additional reproductive and care work burden, which denies them the time necessary to engage in politics and perform masculinised behaviours that have been normalised across political cultures. A question that remains largely unanswered by researchers is whether women's numerical presence – from parliaments to panels – necessarily translates into women's substantive representation and influence. Further, will women act in the interest of women and in a manner responsive to them? What are 'women's interests' and will these be promoted once more women participate in a wide variety of political events, processes and structures?

As 'diversity on panels' continues to be understood only as a question of gender balance by many in Brussels, it is clear that the majority of event organisers believe that by including (some) women on panels, the job is done. Not only are **people of colour disproportionately underrepresented** in debates, when they do participate they tend to be invited to speak on certain topics like migration or culture. Their competencies are frequently assumed to be linked to parts of their **identity**, and in panel discussions they are often expected to be 'representatives' of their entire racial or ethnic group, as opposed to being considered as experts in a wide variety of careers and fields. The presence of a small proportion of underrepresented voices at events can constitute **tokenism**, namely, an attempt by organisers to avoid criticism and make it seem like an effort was made toward gender and racial equality by giving the floor to one woman, person of colour or minority. Genuine intentions of event organisers to be representative and inclusive are key.

## Conference organisers need to go beyond gender balance and consider inclusivity in a broader way.

Over the past four years, our Monitoring Month research exercises have focused exclusively on policy conferences taking place in the so-called 'EU bubble'. In the future, we may explore, incorporate or analyse trends in speaker diversity and representation across Europe more broadly. By running our year-round Twitter campaign, we have come across evidence that **women's representation on panels is even lower when looking at EU-wide trends**. A [study](#) by Open Society Foundations backs up our hypothesis as it found that only 26% of speaking roles were occupied by women between 2012-2017 at the most influential conferences across the EU, including the World Economic Forum and the Munich Security Conference. Speaker diversity in terms of race or ethnic background also needs to be taken into account, especially as Brexit looms large.

### Gender balance according to type of event organiser



“

Discussions about critical issues facing Europe must include all segments of society. The work that EU Panel Watch is doing is crucial to ensuring that the policy discussions and decisions made in Brussels, at EU institution level and at business and civil society levels, are as inclusive and thus, as effective as they can be. Friends of Europe seeks to uphold Europe's fundamental values of solidarity and workforce diversity and inclusiveness. Over 60% of our staff are women. We aim for our events to be represented by 50% woman speakers and participants. We also strive for greater inclusiveness in relation to race, ethnicity, age and (dis)ability. And, our flagship European Young Leaders programme is comprised of over 50% women.

”

**– Friends of Europe**

“

Thank you EU Panel Watch for the important work you are doing. It has definitely alerted organisations in Brussels to the need of being much more proactive and careful when organising events. And it is great to keep checking up on them! We at ECDPM have established a Gender Task Force to develop a comprehensive diversity and inclusion strategy: this will help us not only to mainstream gender in all our thematic work but also to make the Centre much more gender sensitive in all our activities.

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**– Virginia Mucchi, Head of Communications, European Centre for Development Policy Management**

“

Ensuring speaker diversity at CONCORD is not another task we have to fulfil - for us, it has become a reflex. Gender equality, women's rights and the fight against all forms of inequalities are at the core of CONCORD's 2022 Strategy. As a confederation of over 2,600 diverse NGOs, working in solidarity with a myriad of partners in the Global South, we try to ensure the voiceless are represented in panels and events, notably affected communities, women farmers, disabled people, workers, and organizations whose civic space is being shrunk.

”

**– Isabelle Brachet, CONCORD Europe**

# Recommendations

## Take a pledge to never organise or participate in an all-white male panel.

If you're an **event organiser**, take a pledge to never organise all-white male panels and strive for a diverse list of speakers to reflect wider societal views and standpoints. Can't "find" women speakers? Use the platforms like [The Brussels Binder](#) or [Expertes Francophones](#) (for French speakers). Improving gender diversity is only the beginning: look at other axes of oppression and structural exclusion. Consider the role, space and time you give to women, people of colour, youth, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups to express themselves and share their expertise. Make sure to involve men in conversations about gender equality – we need men to care too. Consider drafting internal guidelines for gender and diversity-sensitive event management, which is especially important to ensure continuity in case of staff turnover.

If you're a **moderator**, refuse to moderate all-male white panels. Ensure all speakers get equivalent speaking time and challenge speakers who interrupt or talk over other speakers. Hold men to account when they monopolise the discussion or engage in inappropriate behaviors like sexist and/or racial microaggressions. Your goal should be to ensure equality and respect between all who take the floor during the event.

If you're a **male speaker**, refuse to participate in all-white male panels and offer the organiser who approached you to pass on their request to a female colleague of yours. Don't forget to reflect on your own contributions to inclusivity, place collective needs above your own interests, and interrogate your own biases, so you don't (unintentionally) stereotype, patronise or infantilise other panelists. If you witness a woman speaker struggling to be heard, support or repeat what she said but give her all credit, call out 'mansplainers', and stand up to her 'maninterrupters'.

If you're a **female speaker**, join platforms such as [The Brussels Binder](#) or [Expertes Francophones](#), so conference organizers can find you when they are looking for speakers. Make your name and expertise known, but don't forget to promote the achievements of other women, especially those who are different from you or who face greater obstacles professionally. Carry a list of inspiring women with you, so when someone complains about not being able to find women for a certain opportunity, you will have names on hand to recommend.

If you're in the **audience**, report manels and other unequal panels to @EUPanelWatch on Twitter and use the hashtags #manel, #allmalepanel, #diversity, #diversededebate, #brusselsowhite, #POC, #genderbalance and #wherearethewomen.

“ At ENAR we are striving to walk the talk when it comes to speaker diversity. In practice, this means that we actively seek out diverse experts in relation to race/ethnicity and gender, and aim to be intersectional in our approach, taking into account diversity on the grounds of age, LGBT and disability. When we are invited to speak on an all-male panel, our policy is to challenge the organiser on this and refuse to take part if there is no change. EU Panel Watch's work is so important because the 'EU bubble' is such a 'pale, male and stale' environment. We also hope for a wider reflection about how can we make our institutions more representative of Europe's diversity.

– **Georgina Siklossy, Senior Communications and Press Officer, European Network Against Racism** ”

“ At Bruegel, we started tracking the gender ratio at our events in 2014, which was when we realized that female representation was at only 13%. Since then, we took several actions in order to improve representation in our debates by involving our fellows and staff, recommending female speakers, and, of course, by using the Brussels Binder's database, a practical tool that prevents the typical excuse: 'Oh, I could not find a female expert'. It was a considerable change in our internal culture, a fascinating one. Creating a new normal for panels requires efforts, but it also pays off. We gradually improved gender representation every year, and in 2018, 31% of our panelists were women. We aim to keep improving this, of course.

– **Paola Maniga, Head of Development, Bruegel** ”

“ At EED we regularly organize events to showcase our partners, who are mainly young and dynamic democracy activists (male and female), which makes gender balance on our panels easier and enables us to give young people a voice. Inspired by EU Panel Watch's Monitoring Month, we researched our events, and we are proud of the fact that in 2018 we had a 56% - 44% relation between men and women speakers. We only had one 'manel' in 2018, which is of course one too many. Because we work in the southern and eastern neighbourhoods, ethnicity-wise our events are naturally diverse with speakers from Arabic and Central Asian countries regularly participating.

– **Susanne Neeb, Events Coordinator, European Endowment for Democracy** ”

## GET INVOLVED

- ✓ Help spread the word about our latest Monitoring Month report by sharing it on your social media channels.
- ✓ Join our campaign by reporting manels and other unequal panels on Twitter at @EUPanelWatch – we'll take care of the rest.
- ✓ If you're attending another boring dude-fest, but can't risk making your rage public, you can safely report pale, stale and male policy debates on our [website](#).
- ✓ Want to do more? We are a volunteer-led campaign and are always looking for new members. You can join our team and help us run our Twitter campaign and blog, organise workshops on event management, coordinate and contribute to our Monitoring Month, and much more.

A big thank you to our volunteers,  
supporters and everyone active on Twitter –  
we couldn't do this without you!

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