

The Invisible Seat

African Diaspora Women & Political Power in Europe

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E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

Executive Summary

This report is the first published by Girl, Let's Learn, a civic think tank founded in Paris and dedicated to the political, economic and social empowerment of women. It examines a reality systematically overlooked by academic research and public debate: the political invisibility of women from the African diaspora in Europe.

They are millions. In France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, women of African origin represent a significant and growing share of the population — sometimes up to 8% in countries such as France. They work, pay taxes, raise children, build businesses. And yet, they remain virtually absent from the institutions where decisions are made that shape their daily lives.

This report identifies three levels of barriers — structural, institutional and cultural — that keep African diaspora women away from political power in Europe. It documents the rare exceptions and formulates concrete recommendations for institutions, political parties, civil society organisations and women themselves.

9M+
**A F R I C A N
 D I A S P O R A I N
 E U R O P E**
 Sub-Saharan African origin in the EU
 (Eurostat, 2020)

31.6%
**W O M E N I N E U
 P A R L I A M E N T S**
 average across EU member states
 (European Parliament, 2024)

<0.5%
**D I A S P O R A
 W O M E N I N
 P O W E R**
 estimated share among European MPs

KEY FINDINGS

→ Less than 0.5% of European parliamentarians are African diaspora women — a proportion dramatically low relative to their demographic weight.

→ Double discrimination — gender and origin — creates a systemic 'scissor effect' not addressed by existing equality policies.

→ The rare pioneers — such as Aminata Touré in Germany — demonstrate that access is possible, but remains exceptional.

→ The absence of disaggregated data by gender and ethnic origin makes the problem difficult to measure — and therefore to solve.

1. Introduction & Research Context

1.1 Why This Report

The question of women's political representation has received sustained attention in recent decades. Gender quotas, parity laws, and feminist advocacy have produced measurable — if still insufficient — progress across Europe. Yet within this broader conversation, one group remains systematically absent from both the data and the policy debate: women from the African diaspora.

Girl, Let's Learn was founded on a simple premise: that understanding power is the first step to exercising it. This report emerges from that conviction. It is written for African diaspora women who deserve to see their reality named and documented. It is also written for institutions, political parties, and policymakers who claim to champion inclusion — and must now confront the gap between their stated values and measurable outcomes.

“The seat you don't dare take, someone else will take it.”

— Girl, Let's Learn, 2026

1.2 Who Are We Talking About?

The African diaspora in Europe is not a monolithic community. It encompasses first-generation migrants born in Sub-Saharan, North or East Africa; second and third-generation Europeans of African descent, born and raised in Europe; and citizens with dual nationality navigating complex questions of belonging and identity.

By the numbers: Approximately 9 million people of Sub-Saharan African or Afro-Caribbean descent live in the European Union, representing around 2% of the total EU population. France alone is home to an estimated 5 million Black Europeans — roughly 8.4% of its population.

1.3 Methodology

This report is based on a synthesis of existing quantitative and qualitative research, complemented by desk research conducted by Girl, Let's Learn. Sources include data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), European Parliament, UN Women, International IDEA, and civil society reports.

A significant methodological challenge: most European countries do not collect disaggregated data on the ethnicity of elected officials. This data gap is itself a political problem — what is not measured cannot be addressed.

2. The State of Representation

2.1 Women in European Politics: The Baseline

As of 2024, women hold an average of 31.6% of seats in national parliaments across EU member states. Within the European Parliament elected in 2024, women represent approximately 38.5% of MEPs — up from just 16.6% in 1979. Progress has been uneven: Scandinavian countries approach parity while Hungary, Romania and Greece remain below 25%.

2.2 The Compounding Effect: Race and Gender

When race is added to the analysis, the picture becomes dramatically starker. African diaspora women face what researchers describe as ‘intersectional disadvantage’: the compounding effect of multiple axes of discrimination that cannot be reduced to gender alone, or to race alone, but emerge from their simultaneous interaction.

“We can’t talk about representation without talking about which women are represented. Parity between men and women means little if the women in power all look the same.”

— Aminata Touré, Vice-President, Schleswig-Holstein Parliament

2.3 Country Comparison

COUNTRY	AFRICAN DIASPORA	WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT	KNOWN DIASPORA WOMEN MPS
France	~5 million (8.4%)	37.3%	Very few — data not tracked
United Kingdom	~2.5 million (3.9%)	35.0%	Small but growing number
Germany	~530,000 (0.65%)	35.4%	Aminata Touré (Schleswig-Holstein)
Belgium	~350,000 (3.6%)	42.0%	Rare — data not tracked
Netherlands	~230,000 (2.8%)	40.0%	A small number of MPs

Sources: European Parliament (2024); IPU Parline Data (2024); national parliamentary websites; academic estimates.

3. Barriers to Political Participation

The political underrepresentation of African diaspora women in Europe is not the result of individual failure or lack of ambition. It reflects the operation of multiple, overlapping barriers — structural, institutional and cultural.

3.1 Structural Barriers

Access to Resources

Political participation requires resources: time, money, networks, and information. African diaspora women face higher rates of unemployment, under-employment, and compounded gender pay gaps. Unpaid care work — amplified by extended family obligations — further limits available time. First-generation migrants may also face restrictions linked to citizenship status.

Civic Literacy Gaps

Understanding how political systems work — how laws are made, how parties function, how to run for office — is not equally distributed. Formal civic education in European schools rarely addresses the specific realities of diaspora communities. Girl, Let's Learn was founded precisely to address this gap.

3.2 Institutional Barriers

Political Party Gatekeeping

Political parties are the primary gateway to elected office. Yet internal party cultures remain resistant to African diaspora women: candidate selection processes favour established networks from which diaspora women are largely excluded; tokenistic inclusion places diaspora candidates in unwinnable constituencies; mentorship and financial support are rarely available.

The Data Problem

Most European countries do not publish disaggregated data on the ethnic origins of elected officials. This is presented as a commitment to colour-blind equality. In practice, it makes systematic discrimination invisible and impossible to quantify — let alone address.

3.3 Cultural and Social Barriers

Intersectional Invisibility

African diaspora women occupy a paradoxical position: simultaneously hyper-visible as 'different' and invisible as political actors. They face racism from mainstream political environments and sometimes gender-based barriers from within their own communities, where political leadership may be coded as a male domain.

Media Representation

When African diaspora women appear in European media, they are overwhelmingly portrayed as migrants or victims — not as political actors or voices of authority. This media landscape both reflects and reinforces their political marginalisation.

“I had never seen anyone who looked like me in politics. Nobody told me I could be there. That is exactly why I made sure to be there.”

— Aminata Touré

4. Profiles of Political Pioneers

Against the backdrop of systemic barriers, a small but growing number of African diaspora women have broken through into European political life. Their stories are proof of concept — demonstrating that the barriers, while real, are not insurmountable.

4.1 Aminata Touré — Germany

Born in Senegal and raised in Germany, Aminata Touré became Vice-President of the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament — the first Black woman to hold such a position in a German state parliament. A member of the Green Party, she has advocated for migrants' rights, anti-racism policies, and inclusive democracy. Her election was historic.

4.2 Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala — Global Stage

While not a European parliamentarian, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's appointment as Director-General of the World Trade Organisation in 2021 — the first woman and first African to hold the role — is a landmark for African diaspora women in global governance.

4.3 The UK Parliament

The United Kingdom has seen the most notable growth in African diaspora women's political representation. MPs including Diane Abbott — the first Black woman elected to the UK Parliament in 1987 — have blazed trails that subsequent generations have followed. Yet those who have broken through report sustained racism and misogyny within political institutions.

4.4 The French Paradox

France presents a striking contradiction. With the largest African diaspora population in Europe — approximately 5 million — it has produced among the fewest African diaspora women in national political office. The appointment of Christiane Taubira as Justice Minister in 2012 remains exceptional — and her tenure was marked by sustained racist attacks.

5. Recommendations

The underrepresentation of African diaspora women in European politics is a political problem that requires political solutions.

5.1 To European Institutions and Governments

- Mandate disaggregated data collection on the ethnic and racial backgrounds of elected officials across EU member states.
- Develop targeted funding mechanisms for diaspora women's political leadership programmes.
- Review electoral systems and party financing rules to remove structural barriers to diaspora candidacy.
- Include diaspora women's political participation as an explicit indicator in European gender equality strategies.

5.2 To Political Parties

- Implement intersectional equality targets — not just gender parity, but parity reflecting the full demographic diversity of society.
- Audit candidate selection processes for systematic bias against diaspora women.
- Create dedicated mentorship, sponsorship and financial support for diaspora women entering politics.
- Place diaspora candidates in winnable positions — as a genuine commitment, not a symbolic gesture.

5.3 To Civil Society Organisations

- Document and share the stories of African diaspora women who have entered political life.
- Build coalitions across diaspora, feminist, and civic organisations to advocate for systemic change.
- Support civic education and political literacy within diaspora communities.

5.4 To African Diaspora Women

“The seat you don't dare take, someone else will take it.”

— Girl, Let's Learn

You belong in these spaces. Not as a representative of your community, not as a diversity hire — but as a fully qualified, fully entitled participant in the democratic life of your country. The barriers you face are real. They are also removable.

- Run. At every level — local councils, school boards, party committees, national assemblies.
- Know your rights. Understand the political system you live in. This is what Girl, Let's Learn was built for.

- Find your people. Seek networks of women who share your experience and ambitions.
- Tell your story. Your biography is not a liability. It is your most powerful political asset.

C O N C L U S I O N

6. Conclusion

The political invisibility of African diaspora women in Europe is not inevitable. It is the product of specific, identifiable, and addressable barriers. The women who have broken through — Aminata Touré, Diane Abbott, Christiane Taubira — demonstrate that the barriers are not absolute. But their exceptionalism reveals how far there is to go.

Girl, Let's Learn was founded on the conviction that power belongs to those who understand it — and that understanding power is a right, not a privilege. This report is our first act of research. It will not be our last.

“We are 50% of the world. It is time we made more than 25% of the decisions.”

— Girl, Let's Learn, 2026

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A B O U T G I R L , L E T ' S L E A R N

Girl, Let's Learn is a civic think tank founded in Paris, dedicated to the political, economic and social empowerment of women. Through research, education and community-building, we work to ensure that women understand and exercise the power that belongs to them.

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