

# Women In Power and Decision Making - Resource Document

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## Women in Power: Private Sector, Entrepreneurs, CEOs, and Boards

**Shaila Rao Mistry**

Prioritizing the inclusion of women in power and decision-making is a catalytic mechanism for achieving gender equity at all levels and sectors. It is a strategic imperative towards fulfilling several Beijing 1995, 12-point action plans for building a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable future. Driving immediate and foreseeable positive change, innovation, social justice, and sustainability requires the inclusion of women in high decision-making leadership in economy, business, and entrepreneurship; private and public sector finance and infrastructure, STEM and Artificial Intelligence; government and legislative bodies, and international organizations.

### **Achievements - Gaps: Impactful Leadership for Systemic Change and Inclusive Entities**

Women leaders in business and entrepreneurship are a critical component of women in power. As highly visible leaders, women entrepreneurs contribute directly to GDP, bringing diverse, innovative, out-of-the-box thinking, and sink or swim experiences to decision-making. As role models, they bring inclusive solutions and are versed in dismantling gender stereotypes and biases, and opening opportunities for coming generations of women and girls. These solutions are easily adaptable and transferable to other sectors. Following is the trajectory of women in power.

- In 2000, 5.4 million businesses in the US were women-owned, generating \$818 billion in revenue and employing around 7.1 million people. At the time there was no tracking or data of women CEOs or women on boards, nor loans and credit. Suffice it to say women have struggled to break barriers to leadership and access to capital and loans <sup>1</sup>
- By 2019 12 million women-owned businesses in the US, employed 9 million, and generated \$1.7 trillion in sales. Women-owned firms, 51% or more account for 39% of all privately held firms and contribute 8% of employment and 4.2% of revenues. <sup>2</sup>
- 2020 saw leading financial US institutions, Nasdaq /SEC requiring boards to have at least two diverse directors. UNGC -Target Gender Equality calling for companies to

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/women-business-ownership-in-america-on-rise.html> Census.gov  
US OECD library Global

<sup>2</sup> <https://advocacy.sba.gov/2024/03/12/facts-about-small-business-women-ownership-statistics-2024/>

meet ambitious targets for women's representation. California legislation - Women on Boards lead the way for others <sup>3</sup>

- Women in STEM, Technology, and AI leadership are critical to building a digitally inclusive future and unbiased coding and innovation to benefit girls and women. In the US, in 2013 only 14% of rising to 23% female tech leaders by 2023 23%.and 30% in Europe. The lack of funding and investment in female technology entrepreneurship demonstrates the absence of women in this sector. The predictive future points to significant talent gaps by 2027 and the urgency of ramping pipelines of leadership now.<sup>4</sup>
- By 2021, women held 8.1% of CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies and their numbers were growing at a faster rate than the national average, owning 42% of all businesses in the US. There was clear evidence of their growing powerful impact in the business world by breaking barriers and shattering glass ceilings <sup>5</sup>
- Women in STEM, technology and AI leadership are critical to building a digitally inclusive future and unbiased coding and innovation to benefit girls and women. In the US, in 2013 only 14% of rising to 23% female tech leaders by 2023 23%and 30% in Europe. Lack of funding and investment in female technology entrepreneurship demonstrates serious gaps in this sector by 2027. The predictive future also points to the urgency of ramping up pipelines of women to high leadership <sup>6</sup>

Progress overall is appreciated but alarmingly slow. Majority of Fortune Global 200 companies still have all-male boards with only 5 % of Russell 3000 companies showing gender-balanced boards. Women on Boards, CEOs, and entrepreneurs also face the same glass ceiling as their counterpart's corporate world. Small business represents 51% of all businesses and women-owned businesses are the largest growing. Biased financial lending and investment practices need to be addressed to support contributions and advancement of women CEOs.<sup>7</sup>

### **Barriers to Entry - Paradigm shifts to Fastrack Women in Power**

- Board-ready women face systemic and mindset resistance and blocked paradigms and barriers to fast-track into positions of power, or have their voices heard. Barriers include
- Gaining access to male networks, mentors, and opportunities to get on a board,
- Breaking the closed culture of male exclusivity on boards to inclusion of women.
- Overcoming required prior board experience and skills, often open to only males, such as technology, finance, and artificial intelligence

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<sup>3</sup> <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2021/08/19/sec-adopts-nasdaq-rules-on-board-diversity/> .

<sup>4</sup> McKinsey & Company: Women in Tech - The Best Bet to Solve Europe's Talent Shortage .

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/financial-services/women-leaders-financial-services.html> .

<sup>6</sup> McKinsey & Company: Women in Tech - The Best Bet to Solve Europe's Talent Shortage .

<sup>7</sup> <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2019/11/18/women-in-the-boardroom-a-global-perspective>

- Opportunity to reach critical mass, to effectively influence key decision-making
- Combatting biased male leadership traits that hinder women's advancement.
- Bias, discrimination: harassment, hostile work environments, and subtle biases persist.
- Lack of Flexibility in work-life family care responsibilities limits women's leadership roles<sup>8</sup>

### **Measurable Action for Success**

Working collaboratively with multi-sectoral leadership in the economy, political legal, finance, and STEM. Re-position women as co-drivers with all sectors of women leaders and shift in paradigm of diversity and inclusion.

Be intentional in policies, legislation, and action to overcome resistance to changing the status quo, and dismantling barriers to the pipeline of board-ready women. Market awareness that women inclusive boards perform better both financially and non-financially, diverse boards widen perspectives and widen the pool of ideas and talent. Create a paradigm shift in mindset towards Intentional listening and openness to new perspectives and ideas. Take committed measures towards an equal empowerment model, and shift from equal opportunity to equal empowerment.<sup>9</sup> Facilitate women's participation in male-dominated fields by

- A. Legislation and policies requiring companies to require equitable inclusion of women
  - B. Changing mindsets- organizational culture with critical inclusive action and messaging
  - C. Governments to require opening doors of opportunity of access to jobs and business,
  - D. Proactively inserting women in power positions and building pipelines to high leadership.
  - E. Investing in equitable practices of extending Loans and Credit to female entrepreneurs
  - F. Moving from gender neutrality to recognizing gender strengths to avoid skewed results.
  - G. Presenting Inclusive slates of candidates to achieve a critical mass representation of women in power in all sectors by seeking candidates dissimilar to the male majority
  - H. Intentionally increase access to capital, funding, and investment for women's businesses.
  - I. Training and mentorship for women-friendly infrastructure enlisting male leaders' allies.
- A. Prioritizing STEM training and Artificial Intelligence essential to leadership

### **End Notes -see below**

- 1) Realizing Gender Equality in Parliaments: A Guide for Parliamentarians in the OSCE Region, OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw 2021

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<sup>8</sup> [Women Leaders Make Work Better - APA .How Can We Create Space for More Female Leaders? - World Economic Forum. 14 Effective Ways to Ensure More Women Land in Leadership Roles - Forbes .](#)

<sup>9</sup> [End notes see below](#)

- 2) The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 3 (2003), defined gender balance as “representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life [that] should not fall below 40%”. Commitments of the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04, “OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality”; • Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/09, “Women’s Participation in Political and Public Life”.
- 3) Women in Parliament in 2023: The Year in Review, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024.
- 4) “Number of UN women leaders grew under Guterres, ”, Amy Lieberman, Devex.com, 2020  
<https://www.devex.com/news/number-of-un-women-leaders-grew-under-guterres-with-some-caveats-98389>
- 5) “Organisations internationales: objective parity  
<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/emplois-stages-concours/travailler-dans-les-organisations-internationales/actualites-et-postes-vacants/alertes-de-la-dfi/evenements/article/organisations-internationales-objectif-parite>
- 6) The Senior Women Talent Pipeline, “a career program and talent pool under the UN DOS aimed at promoting gender parity at senior levels in UN peace operations. <https://www.un.org/gender/swtp>
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## Participation of Women in the Political Process

### Constance Phlipot

*Definition:* Female leadership in governmental and legislative bodies is essential to ensuring critical decisions in social, economic and political life to reflect women’s concerns and promote gender equality. Women legislators tend to introduce more bills, meet more frequently with constituents and have overall higher attendance rates than their male counterparts, thereby increasing trust in the government and the party.<sup>10</sup> They are also more likely to introduce and adopt social and environmentally progressive laws thereby<sup>11</sup> increasing trust in the government

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Parity-Research-Women-Impact.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>

<https://www.eib.org/en/stories/female-leaders-climate#:~:text=Research%20from%20around%20the%20world,address%20climate%20change6%207>

and the party.<sup>12</sup> They are also more likely to introduce and adopt social and environmentally progressive laws.<sup>13</sup>

In this report the indicators of women's participation in governance and the political process are defined as the percentage of women elected as representatives in legislative bodies, the number of leadership positions held by women in those chambers, e.g., speaker and deputy speakers, and as chairs of important committees such as finance, defense, foreign affairs and human rights in the UNECE region and North America.

*Achievements:* Women have made significant progress in this region over the past decade. At 29.6 percent, the proportion of women in parliament is above the global average of 25%. Andorra has reached the goal of parity.<sup>14</sup> In the 2023 elections, the share of women elected to European parliaments exceeded 40 % in seven of 21 legislative chambers. In 17 countries female representation in one or both chambers increased by 1.2%, while it fell in five countries. Women advanced at the governmental level; currently, over a dozen European countries have female heads of government or state.<sup>15</sup> The number of women leading parliamentary chambers crept up 1.1% since the beginning of 2023 and 2.9 percent since 2021.

*Gaps:* Though progress in female representation is significant, the rate of increase is still far below that needed to achieve parity by 2030. Moreover, women still lag behind men in leadership of key legislative committees. Only in Germany and Belgium do women lead both legislative chambers. Men lead 42 of the 77 bi-cameral legislatures in Europe. The share of the five major committee chairpersonships held by women has hovered between 25-27% over the past five years. If the gender equality committees are excluded the percentage is 17-19%. (Between 13 and 20% of defense, finance, and foreign affairs committees are chaired by women, 30.6% of human rights.)<sup>16</sup>

*Challenges:* While mandated quotas are effective in increasing the number of female candidates and improving their chances to be elected, without further measures they are not sufficient to ensure women are elected. In most representational systems, it is still up to the parties to decide the order of candidates on the party list. An additional alarming development is the increase in violence directed against women politicians. In 2023, women leaders in Finland, the Netherlands, and Slovakia left politics due in part to threats of verbal and physical violence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Parity-Research-Women-Impact.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>

<https://www.eib.org/en/stories/female-leaders-climate#:~:text=Research%20from%20around%20the%20world,address%20climate%20change6%207>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023>

<sup>15</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-female-leaders>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/506885\\_2.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/506885_2.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ipu.org/digital-stories/women-in-parliament-in-2023-concerns-over-gender-based-violence>

*Existing Commitments:* The 1979 UN Convention on Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women affirmed the right of women “to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government,” calling on States Parties to ensure women’s equal rights to vote, stand for election and take part in formulating policy. Regional organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (COE), have reiterated this objective.<sup>18</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Target 5.5.1 (2015) is to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.”

*Way Forward:* Political parties, as the gatekeepers to the legislative process, as well as governments, need to commit to effective measures to ensure women not only are elected to legislative bodies but serve in important, decision-making roles. The candidate selection process should be transparent, not only to increase the number of women on the ballot, but to promote overall diversity. This would include adopting minimum criteria for eligibility, providing equal access to party resources and making information on the process widely available. Quota regimes must not be principally symbolic gestures, easily overcome by political party practices, but a practical tool to promote women.<sup>19</sup> Finally, a safe, family-friendly work environment in legislative and government bodies is necessary to encourage women to enter and remain in politics.

*Recommendations:*

1. Encourage states to develop the most appropriate and effective combination of voluntary and mandatory quotas (reserved seats and party lists with or without rank order mandates) depending on the type of electoral system (representational or first-past-the-post), and district size. Additionally, election financial regulations should be evaluated for their impact on female and minority candidates.
2. Encourage political parties to adopt voluntary practices to promote women to cabinet positions and support leadership training for women.
3. Take measures to protect women politicians against physical and verbal violence, including codes of conduct, and promote family-friendly workplaces in the legislature.

## Women in International Organizations

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<sup>18</sup> The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 3 (2003), which defined gender balance as “representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life [that] should not fall below 40%”. Commitments of the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04, “OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality”; and • Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/09, “Women’s Participation in Political and Public Life”.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/quotas>

## **Sallie Chaballier**

Power is defined as decision-making authority; the ability to shape policies. An international organization is defined as an organization that is established by a treaty or other type of instrument governed by international law and possesses its legal personality; composed of primarily member states, but may also include other entities, such as other international organizations, firms, and nongovernmental organizations.

### **Achievements:**

Women arguably are better represented in high-level positions in international organizations than in governments or the private sector. There have been some high-profile successes in recent years: in the European Union, the Presidents of the European Commission (first ever) and European Parliament (only the third ever) are women, as are the President of the European Central Bank and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Appointments of women to the United Nations senior staff have increased significantly under Secretary-General Guterres. However, “there have been great gains in the selection of women at the assistant secretary-general level, but you see most of those women are coming from North America and Europe.” (1)

### **Gaps:**

Significant gaps remain, particularly at senior levels. For example, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has found that while their female cadres were actually over-represented at intermediate levels in UN agencies, women were still underrepresented among senior UN officials.(2)

Even the institutions of the European Union have not achieved gender parity across the board despite the appointment of high-profile women leaders. For example, EU Member States do not have a legal mandate to nominate female Commissioners. As a result, the latest European Commission is likely to have fewer women Commissioners than previously despite Ursula van de Leyen’s commitment to gender parity. (3)

Despite an elaborate framework to promote women across all UN agencies, gender parity at the United Nations lags behind not only at the senior level but also in UN field operations. (4)

In the military sphere, “only 1 in 5 NATO Council representatives - those who have been politically appointed by Member States - are women. Women hold only 1 in 5 leadership positions amongst civilian staff at NATO. (5)

### **Challenges:**

It could be argued that meaningful change towards gender parity in international organizations will come only when enough women occupy senior decision-making positions to effect a change in patterns of appointing women systematically.

Obstacles to women's access and advancement in international organizations need to be identified and redressed. Institutional processes and practices need to foster a culture of gender parity.

There are presumably unequal results across the very large and diverse UNECE region: while institutions within the EU are doing a relatively good job in promoting gender parity, the countries of Central Asia or the Balkans can be assumed to be lagging, to infer from those countries' comparatively low ratings on, for example, the WEF Global Gender Gap Report or the Georgetown Women, Peace, and Security Index.

### **Existing Commitments:**

"...The full and equal representation of women and men at all levels of decision-making in executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government and the public sector and in all spheres of life is needed to promote peaceful, just, inclusive, and sustainable societies." (6)

A majority of EU member states in the UN ECE region have demonstrated at least a formal commitment to nominating more women to international organizations, with some countries explicitly espousing a feminist foreign policy. (7)

Although gender mainstreaming has been accepted policy in many international organizations since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were promulgated in 1995, the UN ECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting in 2019 found that "Although most countries have gender equality policies in place, not all of them were effectively costed and budgeted. Gender mainstreaming across all policy sectors is largely lacking in the region, particularly in the economic, financial, and environmental spheres; and in some parts, no gender mainstreaming has taken place. In some countries, gender equality initiatives were limited to short-term projects reliant on donor support, without state budgetary contribution." (8)

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Urge UN Member States to elect a female UN Secretary-General.
- 2) Recruit and retain women at all levels of international organizations and promote women to senior levels in greater numbers. Create an organizational culture of gender parity.
- 3) Accelerate gender mainstreaming across all facets of international organizations and United Nations agencies.

### **Ideas for Possible Innovative Action Points:**



Addressing the issue of holding Member States accountable is of critical importance.

Climate Change - from CSW65 Agreed Conclusions, point 14: “The Commission reaffirms the need to promote women’s full and effective participation and leadership in decision-making on the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, recognizing women’s and girls’ important role as agents of change, as well as to mainstream a gender perspective in the design, management, resourcing and implementation of climate change, environmental, disaster risk reduction, and biodiversity policies, plans, and programs.”

Women, Peace, and Security, CSW65 Agreed on Conclusions: “8. The Commission also recalls that 2020 marked the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Women and Peace and Security agenda, and reaffirms that the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace processes is one of the essential factors for the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.”

### **A Note on Civil Society**

Article 184 of the Beijing Platform for Action states: “Owing to their limited access to the traditional avenues to power, such as the decision-making bodies of political parties, employer organizations and trade unions, women have gained access to power through alternative structures, particularly in the non-governmental organization sector. Through non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations, women have been able to articulate their interests and concerns and have placed women’s issues on the national, regional, and international agendas.”

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are the one sphere where women have been able to secure and maintain leadership at the highest levels. Indeed, civil society provides a counterforce to governments and international organizations through pressure for accountability.

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(1) “Number of UN women leaders grew under Guterres, with some caveats”, Amy Lieberman, Devex.com, published 23 October 2020

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(4) See, for example, The Senior Women Talent Pipeline, “a career program and talent pool under the UN Department of Operational Support aimed at promoting gender parity at senior levels in UN peace operations.” <https://www.un.org/gender/swtp>

(5) “4 in 5 NATO Council Representatives are Men: The Need for More Female Representation”, published 3 July 2023. European Institute for Gender Equality, [https://eige.europa.eu/newsroom/news/4-5-nato-council-representatives-are-men-need-more-female-representation?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://eige.europa.eu/newsroom/news/4-5-nato-council-representatives-are-men-need-more-female-representation?language_content_entity=en)

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(8) UN Economic Commission for Europe, Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, 29 and 30 October 2019, Item 4 of the provisional agenda: Key trends on gender equality across the ECE region

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