

B+30/CSW 69 — Women in Power and Decision-Making

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WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, Supporting Organization

Definition and Vision

Prioritizing the inclusion of Women in Power and Decision-Making is a catalytic mechanism for achieving gender equity in all sectors and critical to fulfilling the Beijing 1995 12-point action plan for a sustainable and equitable future. Achieving immediate and foreseeable positive change for social justice and sustainability requires the inclusion of women in high decision-making leadership in all sectors of the economy, business, entrepreneurship, STEM, Artificial Intelligence, government, politics and international organizations. Female leadership and perspective are integral to ensuring that women's perspectives are included in policy making, treaties and instruments of authority. Likewise, women in legislatures are more likely to introduce and adopt social and environmentally progressive laws. ¹

Achievements

As highly visible leaders and role models, women entrepreneurs and CEOs are critical to Women in Power and Decision-making. The advancement of women entrepreneurs and CEOs since 1995 has contributed to GDP through innovative, out-of-the box thinking in decision-making, inclusive solutions and increased opportunities for future generations.

- In the U.S. in 2019 the 12 million women-owned businesses in the U.S. constituted 39% of all privately held firms, employed 9 million people and generated \$1.7 trillion in sales. ² In 2000 only 5.4 million business were owned by women.³
- Since 2020 the NASDAQ/SEC has required at least two diverse directors on boards of publicly traded companies. The share of women directors on corporate boards in the U.S. rose from 23% in 2018 to 32% in 2023.⁴ In Europe, the

¹ <https://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Parity-Research-Women-Impact.pdf>
<https://www.eib.org/en/stories/female-leaders-climate#:~:text=Research%20from%20around%20the%20world,address%20climate%20change6%207>

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

³ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/women-business-ownership-in-america-on-rise.html>

⁴ <https://www.conference-board.org/press/press-release-board-diversity-2023#:~:text=The%20share%20of%20reported%20female,2022%20to%2025%25%20in%202023.79781d4.pdf>

percentage of women on boards is highest in countries with mandatory quota legislation, ranging from 33% to 40%.⁵

- Women in STEM and AI leadership are critical to a digitally inclusive future, unbiased coding, and innovation. In the U.S. the percentage of female technology leaders rose from 14% in 2013 to 23 % in 2023. In Europe women hold 23% of all tech roles.⁶

Women have made significant progress in governance and politics since 1995 when only 11% of heads of state were women. Increased women's political representation is shown to be closely linked to promoting the legal equity of economic opportunity and overall economic performance.⁷

- At 29.6 percent, the proportion of women in parliament in this region is above the global average of 25%. In 2023 elections, the share of women elected to European parliaments exceeded 40 % in seven of 21 legislative chambers.⁸
- Women advanced at the governmental level, over a dozen women are heads of government or state in Europe as of August 2024. The U.S. elected its first female Vice President in 2020 and had a female Speaker of the House for a decade.

Women are increasingly represented at high levels in regional and international organizations.

- In the European Union, the Presidents of the European Commission and of the European Parliament are women, as is the President of the European Central Bank, the Secretaries General of the Council of Europe and of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A women has been selected as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.
- Appointments to the United Nations senior staff have increased significantly since 2017. In 2021 women represented 47 % of staff in professional and higher categories, compared to 45.3% in 2018.⁹

⁵ <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2019/11/18/women-in-the-boardroom-a-global-perspective/>

⁶ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/women-in-tech-the-best-bet-to-solveeuropes-talent-shortage>

⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/11/women-government-representation/>

⁸ Realizing Gender Equality in Parliaments: A Guide for Parliamentarians in the OSCE Region, OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw 2021 <https://www.osce.org/odihr/506885>

⁹ Improvement in the Status of Women in the UN System: Report of the Secretary General 2023 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/07/improvement-in-the-status-of-women-in-theunited-nations-system-2023>

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are the one sphere where women have been able to secure and maintain leadership at the highest level. Civil society provides a counterforce to governments and international organization through pressure for accountability.

Gaps

Despite these successes, progress is alarmingly slow, and most sectors are not on track to meet international commitments for parity.

- The majority of Fortune 200 companies remain all-male with only 5% of Russell 3000 companies showing some gender balance. Although 46% of small businesses in the U.S. are women-owned, biased lending practices hinder their advancement.¹⁰ Women on boards in all sectors and, CEO's, entrepreneurs and corporate counterparts face barriers to advancement.
- Even the institutions of the European Union have not achieved gender parity across the board, despite the appointment of high-profile women leaders. Despite an elaborate framework to promote women across all UN agencies, gender parity lags at the senior level and in UN field operations.
- Men lead 42 of the 77 bi-cameral legislatures in Europe, while women lead both legislative chambers only in Germany and Belgium. The share of the five major committee chairpersonships held by women has hovered between 25-27% over the past five years.¹¹
- In the military sphere, women hold only 1 in 5 NATO Council leadership positions.¹²

Challenges

Women face a prevailing mindset that undervalues their worthiness and hinders their advancement to high levels of business, government and international organizations. A "male exclusivity" culture makes it difficult to access critical networks, mentoring arrangements and other opportunities. Required prior experience in finance and technology previously closed to women is an additional obstacle to success. The role of

¹⁰ <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2019/11/18/women-in-the-boardroom-a-global-perspective/>

¹¹ Realizing Gender Equality in Parliaments: A Guide for Parliamentarians in the OSCE Region, OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw 2021 <https://www.osce.org/odihr/506885>

¹² [https://eige.europa.eu/newsroom/news/4-5-nato-council-representatives-are-men-need-more-femalerepresentation?](https://eige.europa.eu/newsroom/news/4-5-nato-council-representatives-are-men-need-more-femalerepresentation?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=Here%20are%20key%20numbers%3A,for%20only%2011%25%20of%20commanders.)

language_content_entity=en#:~:text=Here%20are%20key%20numbers%3A,for%20only%2011%25%20of%20commanders.

the male-dominated political parties as “gatekeepers” to the political process effectively excludes women. Lack of a mechanism to hold nations accountable for meeting their gender commitments in international organizations nullifies bold, well-meaning declarations. Furthermore harassment, hostile and non-family friendly work environments, and increasing physical and verbal violence against politicians serve to keep women from attaining leadership roles.

Action Points

Collaborate with multi-sectoral leadership in economy, political, legal, finance and STEM to re-position women as co-drivers in all sectors and shift the paradigm of diversity and inclusion. Include civil society as the largest mass of influencers of women at cabinet and other high levels.

Be intentional in promoting policies, legislation, and other actions that recognize women inclusive boards perform better both financially and non-financially. Create a paradigm shift in mindset towards intentional listening and openness to new perspectives towards “equal empowerment models “.

Action on all goals, whether short, medium or long term, needs to begin immediately.

Short Term

- Urge UN Member States to elect a female UN Secretary General.
- Encourage states to develop the most appropriate and effective combination of voluntary and mandatory quotas for election to legislative bodies.
- Support financial regulatory authorities’ institution of quotas for membership on corporate boards.
- Align policies, legislation, and other initiatives to support of women’s equal participation on corporate boards.

Medium Term

- Recruit and retain women at senior levels of international organizations and promote gender parity and gender mainstreaming.
- Develop codes of conduct in government and private workspaces to protect women from harassment, violence, hate speech and other hostile practices.
- Increase women’s access to capital and equitable loan and credit practices.
- Collaborate with leadership in all sectors (economy, political, legal, finance and STEM) to re-position women as co-drivers in creating a political and economic culture open to new perspectives and equal empowerment models.
- Include civil society, as the most influential voice for women and marginalized populations, in all levels of decision-making.

- Promote recognition that women inclusive boards perform better both financially and in society's interest.

Long Term

- Create a gender evaluation tool for hiring in UN agencies and develop mechanisms to hold states accountable through, e.g., allocation of high-ranking jobs.
- Promote financial reform in political parties to avoid negative impact on female and minority candidates. Encourage parties to adopt voluntary practices to promote women to cabinet positions and support leadership training for women.
- **Redress gender bias in financial practices and banking. Train decision makers to nondiscriminatory mindsets.** Provide training and mentoring for women in business and enlist allies among male leaders. Prioritize women's enrollment in STEM education. Develop gender neutrality rules and mechanisms in AI applications.

Way Forward

Sustained progress will require continued meaningful commitment to promoting policies, legislation and other actions that recognize the importance of female and diverse leadership in all sectors of society. We need to avoid becoming complacent when progress is made, to be aware of the possibility of backsliding and prepared to take remedial actions when that happens. We should rigorously evaluate results at national and international levels. To ensure that recent gains are not lost, continuous leadership training for decision -makers in all sectors in the need for and benefit of diversity and inclusion is essential for ensuring equity for women and girls.