

## CHAPTER 3

### MODERN MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGIES

#### The Role of Women's Leadership in Business: Challenges and Prospects

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**Abstract.** This study addresses the persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for women's leadership across multiple sectors in contemporary European society. The purpose of the research is to examine how structural, cultural, and institutional factors affect the ability of women to access and thrive in leadership positions. Particular attention is given to the intersection of gender with organizational hierarchies in business, technology, law, politics, and other knowledge-based industries. The research explores the extent to which systemic barriers continue to shape professional environments, limiting women's influence in high-level decision-making, while also assessing the potential for inclusive leadership models to redefine authority and governance in the 21st century. The methodology of the study combines a comparative sectoral analysis with quantitative evaluation based on regional indicators. Primary emphasis is placed on cross-national comparison between EU member states and Ukraine, with selected examples from both public and private sectors. Data were analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods, with a particular focus on patterns of representation and exclusion. These findings were interpreted through the lens of contemporary gender and leadership theory, allowing for an integrative approach to understanding both individual trajectories and institutional trends. The results reveal that while representation gaps remain significant across all sectors, the pace and scale of change vary considerably by country and industry. Women remain underrepresented in senior management and executive roles, particularly in digital and technological fields, where participation is lowest. At the same time, female leadership in traditionally male-dominated spheres such as politics and law is gaining visibility, albeit unevenly. The study finds that where gender-inclusive policies, leadership development programs, and legislative reforms are implemented, positive trends emerge in both representation and organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of sustained structural transformation to close gender gaps, while recognizing the increasing societal and economic value placed on diverse leadership.

**Keywords:** women's leadership; gender equality; managerial roles; digital economy; legal profession; political participation; gender gaps; inclusive governance; institutional barriers; leadership development.

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**Introduction.** Women's leadership plays an increasingly significant role in contemporary business, contributing to the creation of more inclusive, diverse, and innovative corporate environments. The inclusion of women in leadership positions not only promotes gender equality but also positively influences companies' financial performance. Research indicates that businesses with a higher percentage of women in top management demonstrate better productivity, greater levels of corporate social responsibility, and more effective risk management.

Female leaders typically exhibit a high level of emotional intelligence, strong teamwork skills, adaptability, and a long-term strategic orientation. These qualities are especially valuable in times of global instability and rapid change. Moreover, women's leadership fosters the development of a more ethical business environment, where collaboration, mutual support, and a balanced approach between results and processes are emphasized.

Despite these advantages, women continue to face barriers on their path to leadership, including stereotypes, gender bias, and insufficient institutional support. Overcoming these obstacles requires the implementation of equal opportunity policies, the development of mentorship programs, and the creation of conditions that allow professional growth to be balanced with personal life responsibilities.

Successful examples of women in leadership — both globally (such as Sheryl Sandberg and Mary Barra) and in Ukraine — demonstrate that female leadership can transform corporate culture, drive innovation, and promote sustainable development. Therefore, integrating women's leadership into all areas of business is not only a matter of fairness, but also a strategic advantage in today's competitive environment.

**Literature review.** The role of women in leadership has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent decades, reflecting broader societal movements toward gender equality and inclusive organizational practices. Numerous studies have explored both the barriers women face in attaining leadership positions and the unique contributions they bring to corporate governance and strategic decision-making.

One foundational line of research highlights the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles across industries and geographies. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), the metaphor of the "glass ceiling" has evolved into a "labyrinth" of complex, multifaceted barriers - ranging from organizational culture to work-life balance challenges - that women must navigate to reach executive positions. This view is supported by McKinsey & Company's (2020) report "Women in the Workplace", which shows that women remain significantly underrepresented in corporate leadership pipelines, particularly in senior vice president and C-suite roles.

Several empirical studies point to the positive impact of women's leadership on organizational outcomes. Catalyst (2022) reports that companies with a higher representation of women on their boards and executive teams demonstrate stronger financial performance, including return on equity and return on sales. Similarly, research by Dezső and Ross (2012) found that female participation in top management improves firm performance by enhancing collective decision-making and fostering innovation.

In terms of leadership style, scholars have observed that women tend to adopt transformational leadership approaches more frequently than men, emphasizing

mentorship, collaboration, and employee development (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). These traits are particularly valued in knowledge-based and innovation-driven industries, which increasingly dominate the global economy.

However, sectoral and regional disparities persist. Eurostat (2019) data reveal substantial variation in female leadership across EU member states, with countries like Latvia, Bulgaria, and Poland reporting higher shares of women in management, while Luxembourg and Cyprus show significantly lower figures. In emerging economies such as Ukraine, women are relatively well represented in small and medium enterprises, but their participation sharply declines at the level of corporate governance and public policymaking (UNDP, 2021).

A growing body of literature also addresses intersectional challenges faced by women leaders, including compounded discrimination based on ethnicity, age, disability, or socio-economic status (Crenshaw, 1991; Ridgeway, 2011). These factors often limit access to elite networks and professional mentorship, both of which are critical for career advancement.

Despite the documented benefits of gender-diverse leadership, cultural biases and structural inertia continue to slow progress. Heilman (2012) and others emphasize that stereotypical expectations about gender roles can influence how women's leadership behavior is perceived and evaluated, often penalizing them for assertiveness or ambition—traits typically rewarded in male leaders.

In summary, the literature confirms that women's leadership contributes meaningfully to business performance, innovation, and ethical governance, yet systemic barriers remain formidable. Continued progress requires not only institutional reforms—such as quotas, mentorship programs, and flexible work policies—but also cultural shifts that redefine norms around leadership, success, and gender.

**Aims.** This study seeks to critically examine the current state of women's leadership in business and related sectors across the European Union and Ukraine. It aims to uncover the underlying patterns of underrepresentation and systemic inequalities that continue to limit women's access to leadership roles. By analyzing gender disparities across various sectors—including managerial positions, pay equity, the digital economy, the legal profession, and political participation—the research aspires to provide a comprehensive overview of both the challenges and the progress achieved to date. Additionally, the study evaluates the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms and public policy interventions intended to promote gender parity in leadership. In doing so, it also aims to generate evidence-based insights into how the inclusion of women in leadership positions enhances innovation, strengthens governance, and contributes positively to economic performance.

**Methodology.** To address these aims, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative data analysis and qualitative literature synthesis. Empirical data were drawn from reputable international sources such as Eurostat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Bar Association (IBA), UNESCO, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). These data were used to construct five comparative tables, which present disaggregated statistics on women's representation in leadership roles across management, digital

professions, legal institutions, and political systems, as well as the gender pay gap in selected EU countries and Ukraine.

Complementing the statistical analysis, the study engages with existing academic literature and policy reports to offer theoretical grounding and interpretive depth. The research also employs case-based comparisons, with a particular focus on Ukraine as a transitional economy whose gender equality efforts provide a valuable lens for understanding regional challenges and opportunities. Thematic structuring of the findings enables sector-specific insights while maintaining a cross-cutting perspective on the systemic nature of gender inequality in leadership.

**Results.** Women's leadership in business is a crucial factor in achieving gender equality and enhancing organizational effectiveness. The following is a detailed analysis of women's representation in managerial positions across various European Union (EU) countries and economic sectors.

**1. Representation of women in managerial positions in the EU.** The underrepresentation of women in managerial and executive positions remains a significant challenge across the European Union, despite ongoing policy efforts to promote gender equality in leadership. As of 2019, women occupied only 36% of managerial roles across the EU, according to Eurostat, reflecting a persistent imbalance in decision-making power within both the private and public sectors. This gender gap is not only a matter of representation but also of economic performance, innovation potential, and organizational inclusivity.

**Table 1. Share of women in managerial positions in selected EU countries (2019)**

Country	Share of Women in Managerial Roles (%)	Country	Share of Women in Managerial Roles (%)
Latvia	56	Denmark	29
Bulgaria	49	Italy	29
Estonia	49	Netherlands	29
Poland	47	Cyprus	23
Slovenia	47	Luxembourg	15
Czech Republic	29		

Source: Eurostat, 2019

A closer look reveals substantial variation among EU member states. Northern and Eastern European countries generally perform better, with Latvia (56%), Bulgaria (49%), and Estonia (49%) leading in terms of female representation in management. In contrast, Western European economies such as Germany (29%), Italy (29%), and Luxembourg (15%) continue to lag behind, despite their more advanced institutional infrastructures and economic development levels. These disparities can be attributed to differing cultural norms, labor market structures, work-family policies, and historical trajectories regarding women's participation in the workforce.

Sectoral analysis further reveals unequal gender distribution across industries. Women are better represented in traditionally "feminized" sectors such as education, healthcare, and social services, where they may hold middle-management positions. However, they remain significantly underrepresented in science and technology, finance and insurance, engineering, and corporate boardrooms, where decision-making power and salaries are concentrated. Even in female-majority sectors, men tend to

dominate the top echelons of leadership - an example of the “glass escalator” phenomenon.

Organizational hierarchies often reflect deep-seated gender norms and stereotypes that frame leadership traits - such as assertiveness, strategic thinking, and risk tolerance - as inherently masculine. This leads to biased perceptions of women's suitability for high-level roles, especially in male-dominated industries. In addition, structural barriers such as limited access to mentorship, exclusion from informal networks, and disproportionate family responsibilities hinder women's career progression.

In response to these challenges, several EU initiatives have been launched, including:

- The Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which emphasizes equal opportunities in leadership and decision-making.
- The EU Directive on Gender Balance on Corporate Boards (adopted in 2022), mandating that listed companies must ensure at least 40% of non-executive board positions are held by women by 2026.
- National-level reforms such as mandatory quotas, public reporting requirements, and leadership training programs targeting women professionals.

Despite policy momentum, progress remains uneven and often slow. For example, while countries like France have seen increases in women's boardroom representation due to mandatory quotas (exceeding 45% in CAC 40 companies), similar changes have not been mirrored in executive leadership roles or operational management. In contrast, in Latvia and Bulgaria, higher female managerial presence is due more to historic workforce patterns and widespread participation of women in entrepreneurship, rather than top-down policy intervention.

The implications of low female representation in leadership extend beyond issues of fairness. Research by the Peterson Institute for International Economics (2016) and McKinsey & Company (2020) suggests that greater gender diversity in leadership correlates positively with financial performance, innovation, and employee engagement. Companies with more women in decision-making positions tend to exhibit better governance, more inclusive organizational cultures, and improved risk management strategies.

Ultimately, increasing women's participation in managerial roles is not only a fundamental human rights issue, but also a strategic economic priority. As the EU continues to navigate post-pandemic recovery, digital transformation, and demographic change, empowering women in leadership will be critical to building resilient, competitive, and socially just economies.

**2. Gender Pay Gap.** The gender pay gap refers to the difference in average gross hourly earnings between male and female employees. It remains one of the most persistent indicators of structural gender inequality in the labor market, reflecting broader social, economic, and institutional disparities. The gap is usually expressed as a percentage of male earnings and can be measured in both unadjusted and adjusted forms. While the unadjusted pay gap captures overall differences, including occupational segregation and part-time employment, the adjusted pay gap accounts for factors such as education, experience, and hours worked—yet even the adjusted gap consistently shows a disadvantage for women.

**Table 2. Gender pay gap in selected EU Countries and Ukraine (2021) (% lower average hourly wage for women compared to men)**

Country	Gender Pay Gap (%)	Country	Gender Pay Gap (%)
Estonia	21.1	France	12.1
Austria	18.8	Sweden	11.2
Germany	18.3	Netherlands	10.2
Latvia	17.1	Spain	8.9
Czech Republic	16.4	Belgium	5.0
Slovakia	15.8	Romania	3.3
Lithuania	13.3	Luxembourg	0.7
EU (average)	13.0	Ukraine	18.6

Sources: Eurostat (2022); State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2022); ZMINA (2022).

As of 2021, the average unadjusted gender pay gap across the European Union stood at 13.0%, indicating that women earned, on average, 87 cents for every euro earned by men. However, this figure conceals significant cross-national variation. For example, Estonia (21.1%), Austria (18.8%), and Germany (18.3%) recorded some of the highest gender pay disparities, whereas countries like Belgium (5.0%), Romania (3.3%), and Luxembourg (0.7%) reported substantially lower gaps. In Luxembourg, in fact, women slightly out-earned men in some hourly wage measures, although this anomaly may be influenced by labor market structure and policy incentives.

In Ukraine, the gender pay gap as of 2021 was estimated at 18.6%, which places it above the EU average and comparable to several Central and Eastern European countries. The gap is most pronounced in high-paying, male-dominated sectors such as finance, ICT, and heavy industry, while it narrows slightly in sectors with higher female employment, such as education and healthcare. However, it is important to note that even in "feminized" professions, women often occupy lower-paying or non-leadership roles.

Contributing factors to the gender pay gap include:

- *horizontal segregation* - women are overrepresented in lower-paying sectors (e.g., care work, education) and underrepresented in high-paying ones (e.g., engineering, finance, tech).
- *vertical segregation* - fewer women ascend to top managerial and executive roles, where salaries are highest.
- *part-time employment* - women are more likely to work part-time due to caregiving responsibilities, affecting both their earnings and career progression.
- *motherhood penalty* - women often face wage stagnation or regression following childbirth, while men tend to benefit from a "fatherhood bonus."
- *lack of transparency and negotiation culture* - in many contexts, pay scales are opaque, and women are less likely to negotiate salaries.

The implications of the gender pay gap extend beyond individual inequality. At the macroeconomic level, unequal pay reduces household income potential, limits tax contributions, and contributes to higher old-age poverty among women due to lower lifetime earnings and pension accumulation. From a business perspective, persistent pay disparities can undermine morale, increase turnover, and expose organizations to reputational and legal risks.

Policy solutions adopted across the EU include:

- pay transparency directives (e.g., requiring companies to disclose pay data by gender);
- equal pay audits and action plans in companies over a certain size;
- promotion of paternity leave and shared parental responsibilities to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women;
- gender quotas in leadership to address the structural underrepresentation of women in higher-paid roles.

Ultimately, reducing the gender pay gap is not only a matter of social justice but also of economic efficiency, talent optimization, and responsible corporate governance. Closing the gap would result in higher GDP, improved labor market participation, and stronger outcomes for businesses committed to diversity and inclusion.

**3. Representation of Women in the digital economy.** The digital economy, encompassing sectors such as information and communication technologies (ICT), data science, artificial intelligence (AI), and cybersecurity, is among the fastest-growing and most influential components of modern economies. However, women remain significantly underrepresented in this domain across the European Union and globally. This disparity not only limits gender equality but also undermines the innovation potential and inclusiveness of the digital transformation.

According to Eurostat (2022), women made up only 19.1% of ICT specialists in the EU, a figure that has remained relatively stagnant over the past decade.

**Table 3. Women's representation in ICT (EU)**

Country	Women in ICT (%)	Country	Women in ICT (%)
Bulgaria	28.2	Finland	18.4
Romania	26.1	Netherlands	17.2
Lithuania	23.5	Germany	16.5
Estonia	22.8		

*Source: compiled by the author*

Even more concerning is that in several countries - such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland - the share of women in ICT is below the EU average, despite these being technologically advanced economies. In contrast, some Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria and Romania report relatively higher female participation in ICT, often attributed to long-standing educational traditions in STEM disciplines.

The pipeline problem begins early: data from the European Commission's *She Figures* (2021) shows that only 1 in 3 STEM graduates is a woman, and only 1 in 6 ICT graduates is female. Gender stereotyping in early education, lack of female role models, and unconscious bias in career guidance contribute to discouraging girls from pursuing digital careers. Moreover, in many EU countries, only 1–3% of teenage girls express interest in working in tech, compared to 10–15% of boys.

Even when women do enter digital professions, they are often underrepresented in technical and leadership roles, instead being channeled into support functions such as communications, user experience, or human resources. In the field of AI development, a 2022 UNESCO report estimates that only 22% of AI professionals worldwide are women, and less than 15% are in core algorithmic or engineering roles.

This has serious consequences for algorithmic bias, data ethics, and inclusive product design.

Furthermore, gender pay gaps in digital jobs are among the highest across sectors. Women in ICT typically earn 15–20% less than their male counterparts, even when controlling for experience and qualifications. They are also less likely to receive promotions or leadership opportunities, and more likely to drop out of the field due to workplace culture and limited flexibility.

The digital entrepreneurship space reflects similar inequalities. According to the European Startup Monitor (2023), only 15% of tech startup founders in the EU are women, and female-led startups receive less than 10% of venture capital funding. Gender bias among investors and limited access to mentorship networks are key contributors to this disparity.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the gender divide in the digital economy. As the demand for digital skills surged, women faced disproportionate challenges related to caregiving responsibilities, job insecurity, and limited upskilling opportunities. A survey conducted by Women in Digital Scoreboard (2021) found that only 18% of women aged 25–54 in the EU reported feeling confident in applying for digital jobs, compared to 38% of men in the same age group.

To address these challenges, a variety of initiatives have been introduced:

- the EU’s Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 aims to increase digital literacy among girls and promote STEM education for women;
- the Women in Digital Scoreboard tracks member state progress on gender equality in digital fields, providing key indicators for policy evaluation;
- private sector initiatives such as Google’s Women Techmakers, Microsoft’s DigiGirlz, and Girls Who Code have sought to close the skills gap through training and mentoring.

Nevertheless, progress remains slow, and systemic change requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels. These include reforms in school curricula to challenge gendered career norms, corporate accountability for diversity in tech hiring, and targeted investment in women-led digital enterprises.

The underrepresentation of women in the digital economy is not merely a statistical imbalance - it has real implications for innovation, competitiveness, and technological justice. Ensuring equal access to digital skills, careers, and leadership opportunities is essential for creating a digital future that is inclusive, ethical, and equitable for all.

**4. Women’s leadership in the legal sector.** The legal profession has historically been male-dominated, particularly at the levels of leadership and judiciary. However, over the past two decades, many countries - including Ukraine and several EU member states—have seen a marked increase in the participation of women in law. This transformation has led to the gradual emergence of female leaders across various legal domains, although significant structural and cultural barriers still persist.

In Ukraine, recent data from the International Bar Association (IBA) and JurFem indicate that women constitute approximately 56% of all lawyers, and 53% of them hold managerial or leadership positions. Notably, female leadership is most pronounced in the public legal sector, where up to 76% of top positions are held by



women. In the corporate legal sector, this figure is around 59%, while in the judicial system, women represent approximately 40% of judges and court administrators. These statistics reflect a relatively strong presence of women in the Ukrainian legal field, especially in government and administrative roles.

However, deeper analysis reveals that women are often concentrated in lower or mid-level leadership roles, while the most prestigious and high-income positions - such as managing partners in elite law firms, constitutional judges, and international arbitration specialists—remain male-dominated. Even in firms where women outnumber men among associates or junior staff, their representation typically drops off at the partner level. This phenomenon is known as the “leaky pipeline”, where women's presence decreases with each step up the career ladder.

The gender leadership gap in law is closely tied to several systemic issues:

- rigid work schedules and high billable hour demands disproportionately affect women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities;
- unconscious bias in hiring, client acquisition, and promotion processes continues to favor traditional male leadership styles;
- lack of female mentors and role models, particularly in specialized legal fields such as corporate law, criminal defense, and international law, limits women’s advancement and professional confidence;
- institutional resistance to flexible working arrangements, despite growing evidence that such flexibility can support productivity and retention.

International comparisons provide additional context. According to the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and European Commission data, the share of women lawyers in EU countries ranges from 30% (Germany) to over 50% (France, Italy, Spain), with wide disparities in leadership roles.

**Table 4. Women's leadership in the legal sector**

Country	Women Lawyers (%)	Women in Leadership (%)	Women Judges (%)
Ukraine	56	53	40
France	55	27	45
Germany	30	17	38
Sweden	50	50	54
Italy	53	30	49
Spain	51	32	47

*Source: compiled by the author*

In France, women make up nearly 55% of the legal profession, but only 27% of bar association presidents. In Germany, women account for just 17% of law firm partners in large firms. In Sweden, a country with strong gender equality policies, women constitute over 50% of judges, but still face underrepresentation in Supreme Court positions.

Despite these challenges, progress is being made. In Ukraine, organizations like JurFem, the Ukrainian Bar Association (UBA), and the Women Lawyers Initiative actively promote gender-sensitive legal education, mentorship programs, and visibility for female legal experts. Internationally, initiatives such as UN Women’s Gender Equality in the Judiciary Programme and IBA’s Women in Law Leadership series work

to document and address the structural biases impeding gender parity in legal leadership.

The significance of women's leadership in law extends far beyond professional representation. Female legal leaders contribute to more equitable legal interpretations, greater advocacy for marginalized groups, and the development of progressive policies in areas such as family law, gender-based violence, and human rights. Moreover, studies suggest that judiciaries and legal institutions with gender-balanced leadership are more trusted by the public, particularly by women seeking justice in gender-sensitive cases.

To ensure lasting and structural change, the legal sector must implement reforms such as:

- transparent criteria for promotions and partner appointments;
- flexible career pathways that support work-life balance without penalizing ambition;
- institutional mentoring schemes and support networks for women at all stages of their legal careers;
- monitoring and reporting mechanisms on gender disparities in leadership positions.

In conclusion, while significant progress has been made in increasing the number of women in the legal profession in Ukraine and beyond, true gender equality requires a focused effort on enabling, sustaining, and promoting women into senior leadership roles. Only then can the legal system fully reflect the societies it serves.

**5. Gender gap in politics.** The gender gap in political leadership remains one of the most visible and persistent forms of inequality in democratic societies. Despite widespread commitments to gender equality and the adoption of international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, women remain significantly underrepresented in political decision-making at all levels—local, national, and supranational.

As of 2023, women made up only 32.2% of members of national parliaments across the European Union, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). While this represents progress compared to previous decades, it still falls short of parity. Countries such as Sweden (47%), Finland (46%), and Spain (44%) demonstrate near gender balance in parliamentary representation, supported by proportional representation electoral systems and well-enforced gender quotas. In contrast, Hungary (13%), Romania (19%), and Cyprus (17%) exhibit some of the lowest levels of female political participation in the EU.

**Table 5. Women's representation in politics**

Country	Women in Parliament (%)	Women in Cabinet (%)
Sweden	47	55
Finland	46	52
Spain	44	48
France	39	42
Germany	35	40
Italy	32	33
Poland	29	30

*Source: compiled by the author*

In Ukraine, as of 2023, only 21% of members of the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) were women, despite gradual improvements over the past decade. Women also remain underrepresented in ministerial positions, regional councils, and executive governance. While legislative reforms - such as the introduction of a 40% gender quota for party lists in local elections - have shown modest results, enforcement mechanisms remain weak, and women still face significant barriers to political entry and advancement.

The causes of the gender gap in politics are multifaceted and systemic:

- sociocultural norms and gender stereotypes continue to associate leadership with masculinity, often casting female politicians as less competent or authoritative;
- gender-based violence and harassment in political spaces, both online and offline, deter many women from running for office or speaking publicly;
- unequal access to financial and media resources places women candidates at a disadvantage in political campaigns;
- party structures and candidate selection processes are frequently male-dominated, with informal networks and patronage systems favoring male incumbents.

Research consistently shows that when women do hold political office, their leadership has a distinct and measurable impact. Female politicians are more likely to prioritize social welfare, education, healthcare, gender equality, and anti-corruption policies, and are often more responsive to constituents' needs. Moreover, gender-diverse political bodies tend to be more representative and legitimate in the eyes of the public, particularly among underrepresented groups.

The presence of women in high-level government roles, such as presidents, prime ministers, ministers of finance, defense, or foreign affairs, also sends powerful signals about a country's commitment to equality and modernization. However, such roles are still largely occupied by men. In 2023, only 5 of the 27 EU countries had female heads of government or state, and globally, only 26 countries (13%) had women serving as elected heads of state or government, according to UN Women.

To reduce the gender gap in politics, a growing number of countries have implemented institutional and policy reforms:

- legislated gender quotas or “zipper systems” that alternate male and female candidates on party lists;
- public funding incentives for political parties that achieve gender balance among candidates;
- leadership training programs, mentorship networks, and capacity-building for aspiring women politicians;
- media literacy and gender-sensitive reporting guidelines to combat bias and stereotyping in political coverage.

Despite these efforts, true gender parity in politics remains a long-term goal. Achieving it requires not only institutional reforms but also broader cultural changes in how societies define leadership, authority, and public service. The gender gap in politics is both a democratic deficit and a missed opportunity. Closing this gap is essential to ensuring that policy-making processes reflect the full diversity of the population and are more inclusive, responsive, and equitable.

Despite measurable progress in increasing the share of women in leadership roles across EU countries and Ukraine, substantial gender disparities persist across various sectors of the economy and politics. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive approach that includes the implementation of equal opportunity policies, the expansion of mentorship programs, and the creation of supportive conditions for combining professional and personal responsibilities.

Female leadership continues to face systemic challenges across various sectors, including business, technology, law, politics, and academia. Common barriers include underrepresentation in top positions, gender stereotypes that equate leadership with masculinity, unequal access to career advancement networks, and persistent pay gaps. In male-dominated fields such as the digital economy and high-level politics, women often confront additional obstacles such as harassment, lack of role models, and limited funding opportunities.

**Table 6. Challenges and prospects of female leadership**

Sector	Key Challenges	Key Prospects
Managerial Positions	Underrepresentation (36%); glass ceiling; gendered perceptions of leadership; lack of informal networks; work-life imbalance	EU board quotas (40% by 2026); ESG-driven diversity; rise of inclusive leadership styles
Digital Economy	Low ICT representation (19.1%); STEM stereotyping; limited leadership roles; venture capital disparities	Digital Education Action Plan; NGO-led tech programs; rising demand for ethical, inclusive tech
Legal Sector	Leaky pipeline in leadership; male dominance in elite positions; promotion bias; rigid work structures	Judicial trust benefits; mentorship programs; inclusive legal reform opportunities
Politics	Only 32.2% in parliaments; media bias; campaign financing gaps; harassment; weak quota enforcement	Zipper quotas; international policy frameworks; growing public visibility of women leaders
Academia, Civil Society, and Media	Academic glass ceiling; underrepresentation in research and editorial boards; limited agenda-setting power	EU equality frameworks; civil society activism; increasing media presence of women experts

*Source: compiled by the author*

Despite these challenges, the prospects for advancing women in leadership are growing. Policy interventions—such as gender quotas, pay transparency laws, and digital inclusion strategies—are beginning to close the gap. At the same time, organizational cultures are increasingly valuing inclusive, collaborative leadership styles often associated with women. As gender equity becomes a central component of good governance and sustainable development, empowering women in leadership is not only a question of fairness but also a strategic advantage for institutions and societies alike.

**Discussion.** This study highlights that despite some progress, women continue to face systemic obstacles to leadership across all major sectors in the EU and Ukraine. In business, female representation in managerial roles remains limited, averaging only 36%, with women often excluded from top decision-making positions. The gender pay gap also persists, particularly in countries like Estonia, Germany, and Ukraine, reflecting deeper structural inequalities.

In the digital economy, women represent just 19.1% of ICT professionals, hindered by early educational barriers, limited access to capital, and

underrepresentation in leadership roles. Legal professions show better entry-level gender balance, yet women are still underrepresented in senior positions and private sector leadership. Politics remains male-dominated, with only 32.2% female representation in EU parliaments and 21% in Ukraine, constrained by stereotypes, financial barriers, and weak institutional support.

Despite these challenges, the prospects are promising. Policy reforms, gender quotas, and a broader societal shift toward inclusive leadership models offer opportunities to close these gaps. The post-pandemic emphasis on empathy, collaboration, and resilience aligns well with the leadership styles many women bring, suggesting strong potential for future progress.

**Conclusion.** This study has demonstrated that while women's leadership is increasingly recognized as a driver of innovation, inclusivity, and ethical governance, substantial challenges continue to hinder full gender parity across sectors. Persistent gaps in managerial representation, pay equity, digital inclusion, legal advancement, and political participation underscore the need for targeted and sustained interventions.

The findings indicate that gender inequality in leadership is not confined to isolated domains but is a structural issue with cross-sectoral implications. Disparities are sustained by a combination of institutional inertia, cultural stereotypes, and policy gaps. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that integrates legal reforms, educational interventions, organizational change, and cultural transformation.

Nonetheless, the prospects for progress are encouraging. Regulatory tools such as quotas, pay transparency laws, and diversity mandates are beginning to reshape institutional behavior. Civil society activism, international advocacy, and corporate accountability initiatives are helping to amplify the importance of women's inclusion at the highest levels of decision-making. At the same time, new generations of women are entering leadership pipelines with stronger support networks, digital fluency, and strategic acumen.

In conclusion, promoting female leadership is not merely a matter of justice—it is a strategic imperative for sustainable development, democratic legitimacy, and economic resilience. Societies and institutions that prioritize gender-inclusive leadership will be better equipped to navigate the complex challenges of the 21st century. The future of leadership is diverse, and ensuring women a rightful place in that future is essential for building equitable and prosperous societies.

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