

GENDER LEADERSHIP IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

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Introduction. Gender leadership is becoming one of the key factors in the transformation of modern business, as ensuring equality between women and men contributes to increased innovation, improved management efficiency, and organizational resilience. In European countries, gender equality holds a special place in social and economic policy, yet even in this region, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions. At the same time, the experience of leading European countries demonstrates that integrating women into leadership roles positively impacts business and economic development as a whole [1; 2].

One of the most important aspects of this issue is the distribution of women in leadership positions across different sectors of business in European countries. Although many nations are actively working to reduce the gender gap, significant differences between countries still persist. Another serious issue is the gender pay gap, which remains relevant even in countries with high levels of economic development.

The analysis of gender indices, such as the Global Gender Gap Index, as well as business equality indices, allows for an assessment of European countries' achievements in ensuring equal opportunities for women [3]. These indicators also showcase progressive practices that could serve as examples for other regions [4]. It is particularly important to compare the situation in different European countries to identify the best approaches to overcoming gender inequality and implementing effective policies.

The article explores the role of women in the transformation of business through the analysis of statistics on their representation in leadership positions, gender pay gaps, and a comparison of the situation in European countries. The study focuses on key factors that either facilitate or hinder women's advancement to leadership roles, as well as the importance of implementing gender equality principles in business practices to strengthen Europe's economic potential.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing various approaches, styles, and theories that have evolved over decades and remain crucial for understanding management processes. In particular, transformational, transactional, style-based, and behavioral leadership are actively studied in contemporary science. Research demonstrates the evolution of leadership concepts and the importance of adaptive management approaches in changing socio-economic conditions.

In the article by Z.A. Khan, A. Nawaz, and I. Khan, key leadership theories and styles that developed in the 20th century are examined, emphasizing the evolution from focusing on personal qualities of leaders to studying their impact on organizations, which helps in developing effective leadership strategies [5]. A.R. Bwalya analyzes different leadership styles, their characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages, highlighting the importance of adaptability in choosing the appropriate leadership style based on organizational needs [6].

T.P. Chernyavska and A.S. Yermakova study the gender dimension of leadership, examining the differences between male and female managers in domestic enterprises [7]. O.S. Drugova emphasizes the importance of gender balance in leadership positions and the need to combat stereotypes to support women in leadership roles, which is critical for economic development [8]. M. Mousa et al. conduct a systematic analysis of best practices for advancing women into leadership, focusing on mentorship and transparent career paths [9]. H. Kluge and N. Azopardi-Muskatt highlight the negative impact of the insufficient representation of women in leadership roles on the healthcare workforce crisis and advocate for policies that address gender inequality [10]. H. Müller and I. Thömmel study women's leadership in the EU, focusing on the support and barriers to women's career growth within EU institutions [11]. D. Foreman underscores the importance of moving beyond symbolic representation of women in public policy and calls for structural changes to ensure women's voices have a real impact on decision-making [12].

Thus, the integration of theoretical foundations of leadership with empirical studies on gender characteristics allows for a deeper understanding of contemporary management trends and the role of women in business and society.

Objectives of the article. The aim of the study is to analyze gender leadership in European countries, specifically examining the role of women in business transformation, identifying barriers to gender equality in leadership positions, and evaluating policies and practices that promote increased participation of women in business and political structures.

The main material of the study. This article analyzes the current state of gender equality in the European Union and individual European countries, with a focus on women's participation in political and business structures. Special attention is given to the gender gap in political institutions, particularly in the European Parliament, government cabinets, and corporate environments. Key trends, challenges, and successful practices that contribute to increasing women's representation in leadership positions are discussed. Factors influencing women's participation in decision-making processes are also highlighted, along with an analysis of the effectiveness of existing gender-oriented policies at various levels of governance.

Below, we analyze the share of women in the boards of the largest companies in Europe in 2022, in %.

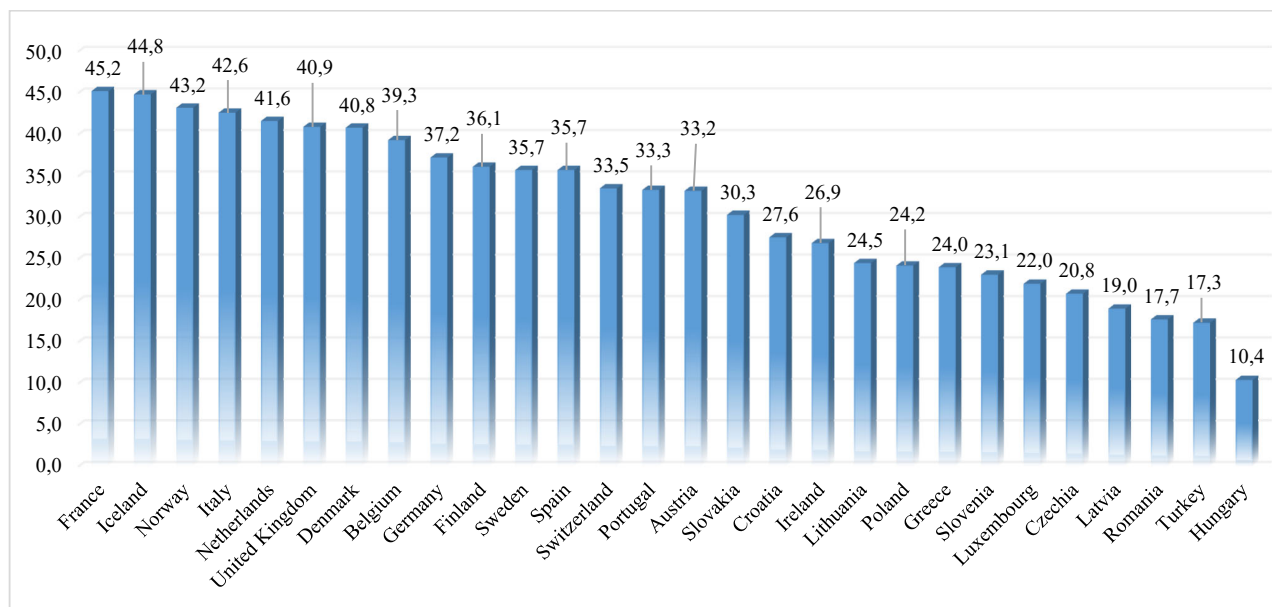


Figure 1. Share of Women on the Boards of the Largest Companies in Europe, 2022 (%)

Source: compiled by the authors based on [13]

The highest percentages of women on company boards are observed in France (45.20%), Iceland (44.80%), Norway (43.20%), and Italy (42.60%). These countries likely have active gender equality policies, including legislated quotas for women's representation in leadership.

Countries like the Netherlands (41.60%), the United Kingdom (40.90%), Denmark (40.80%), and Belgium (39.30%) also show high percentages, reflecting a cultural emphasis on equality in these regions.

Germany (37.20%) and Austria (33.20%) have higher figures compared to neighboring countries like the Czech Republic (20.80%), Slovakia (30.30%), and Poland (24.20%), indicating gradual progress toward gender equality, though a noticeable gap remains in Central and Eastern Europe.

In countries like Romania (17.70%), Turkey (17.30%), and Hungary (10.40%), women's representation is the lowest. This may be due to socio-cultural barriers or a lack of active government policies supporting women in business.

Countries such as Finland (36.10%), Sweden (35.70%), Spain (35.70%), and Portugal (33.30%) fall in the mid-range, indicating stable trends towards women's involvement in leadership.

Key conclusions include that countries with high representation, like France and Norway, benefit from the implementation of quotas, which play a crucial role in increasing women's participation. Northern, Western, and partly Southern Europe show better results compared to Central and Eastern Europe. Countries with lower figures should consider adopting incentives or quotas to enhance gender equality levels.

This suggests that the success of achieving gender balance largely depends on political will, culture, and the country's economic model.

Next, we will analyze the share of women in the government cabinets of the European Union from 2004 to 2024.

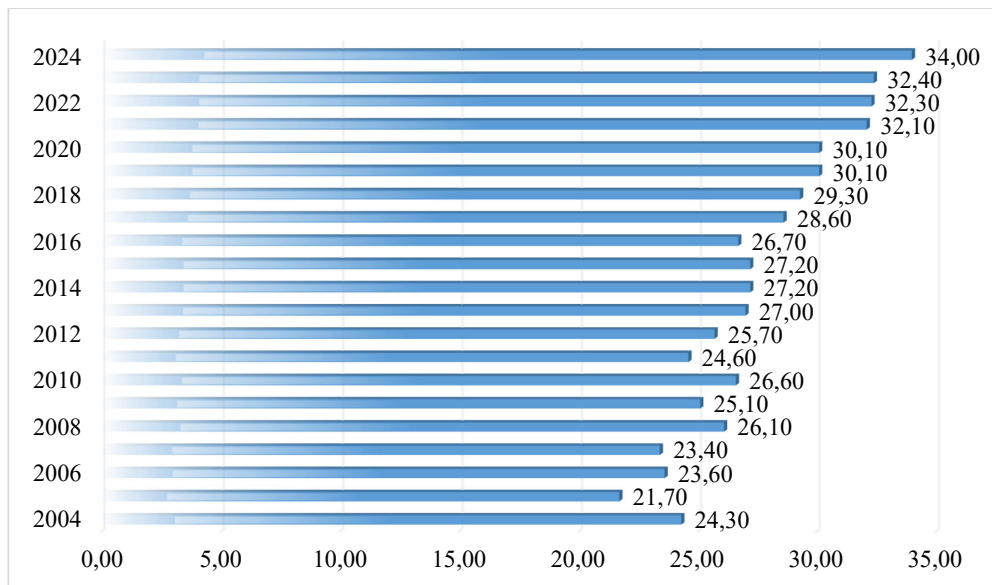


Figure 2. Share of Women in Government Cabinets of the European Union (28 EU Countries) from 2004 to 2024, in %

Source: compiled by the authors based on [14]

The analysis of the dynamics of the share of women in government cabinets of European Union countries from 2004 to 2024 shows gradual but uneven growth in gender representation at the executive level.

In 2004, the share of women was 24.3%, and in 2010, it was 26.6%. During this period, the growth rate was moderate (+2.3 percentage points), but it varied from year to year. For example, in 2005, the share decreased to 21.7%, which is the lowest figure during the study period. The share of women fluctuated between 24.6% and 27.2%, demonstrating slow changes. This indicates some stagnation in the implementation of gender equality policies in the executive branch.

Since 2017, a more intensive increase has been observed: from 28.6% in 2017 to 34% in 2024. The most significant progress occurred between 2021 and 2024, when the share of women increased from 32.1% to 34%. Over the 20 years, the share of women in government cabinets increased by 9.7% (from 24.3% in 2004 to 34% in 2024).

Although progress has been made over the past two decades, the share of women remains below 50%, which indicates the persistence of gender imbalance. The most positive dynamics are observed in the last decade, highlighting the importance of current initiatives aimed at gender equality.

It is necessary to continue supporting legislative quotas for women in the executive branch, expand leadership development programs for women in politics, and continue monitoring and analyzing the impact of gender representation on government effectiveness.

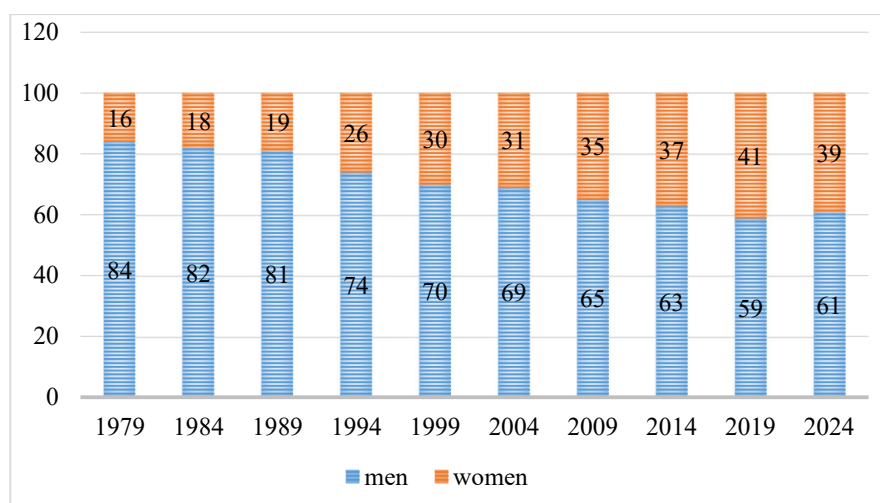


Figure 3. Gender Distribution in the European Parliament 1979-2024, %

Source: compiled by the authors based on [15]

The analysis of gender distribution in the European Parliament from 1979 to 2024 shows significant growth in women's representation, although men continue to dominate.

In 1979, during the first electoral cycle of the European Parliament, women made up only 16%, while men constituted 84%. Over the next 15 years, the proportion of women increased to 26% in 1994, indicating a gradual but slow progress (+10 percentage points). The growth in women's share became more noticeable during this period, rising from 26% in 1994 to 35% in 2009 (+9 percentage points). This period was characterized by the introduction of policies aimed at gender equality in representative bodies.

In 2019, women reached their highest share ever, accounting for 41%, while men's share dropped to 59%, coming close to parity for the first time. From 1979 to 2024, the share of women in the European Parliament grew by 23 percentage points (from 16% to 39%), while the share of men decreased from 84% to 61%.

Possible factors influencing this trend:

- The implementation of gender quotas in many EU countries, which increased the number of women candidates.
- Gender equality became an important value for European society, leading to higher demand for women politicians.
- In 2024, the decrease in women's representation may be attributed to changing political circumstances in some countries.

The share of women in the European Parliament has more than doubled over 45 years, which is a positive sign of the gradual implementation of gender equality principles. However, men still hold an advantage, and the decline in 2024 may signal the need for additional measures to achieve gender parity.

The analysis of the gender pay gap in the European Union from 2010 to 2022 shows gradual reduction, although it remains significant even in 2022. Over the 12 years from 2010 to 2022, the gender pay gap decreased by 3.1 percentage points, reflecting positive progress toward achieving gender equality in financial work conditions.

In particular, in 2010, the gender pay gap in the EU was 15.8%, and it gradually decreased in the following years. The most significant reduction occurred between 2010 and 2015, when the gap fell from 15.8% to 15.5%, after which the pace of decrease slowed slightly. However, even after this reduction, the gender pay gap remained at 12.7% in 2021-2022, indicating that the issue of gender inequality in pay had not been fully resolved.

The decrease from 15.8% to 12.7% over these years can be interpreted as the result of political initiatives and measures aimed at improving gender equality, such as the introduction of legislative acts on pay transparency, promoting equal opportunities for men and women in careers, and implementing policies on work-life balance.

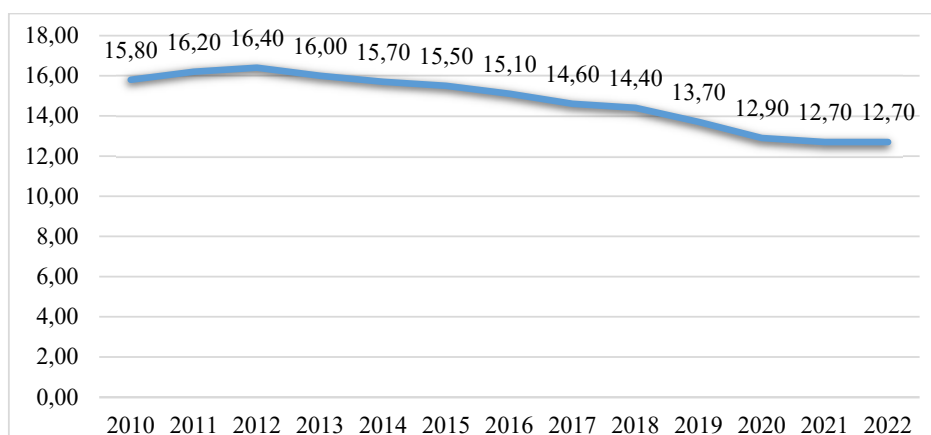


Figure 4. Gender Pay Gap in the European Union 2010–2022, %

Source: compiled by the authors based on [16]

However, while this trend is positive, the reduction in the gender pay gap is occurring rather slowly. The main causes of remaining inequality include factors such as vertical and horizontal segregation in the labor market (differences in industries and positions held by men and women), with women often working in lower-paid sectors, as well as career interruptions due to family responsibilities.

Thus, while progress has been made, achieving full equality in pay will require continuing the implementation of effective policies aimed at reducing gender stereotypes, encouraging women to work in high-income sectors, and providing greater support in balancing professional and personal life.

Conclusions. The conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of gender representation in leadership positions, government cabinets, and the European Parliament indicate significant, though slow, progress in achieving gender equality over the past decades. In the European Union, the share of women in government cabinets gradually increased from 24.3% in 2004 to 34% in 2024, signaling positive progress, albeit with certain fluctuations, particularly during the 2010–2015 period when the share stabilized at around 27%. This marks a gradual but steady advancement toward greater gender equality in EU governments.

Regarding gender representation in the European Parliament, the share of women has also been steadily increasing, from 16% in 1979 to 39% in 2024. This indicates progress in achieving gender equality in the political sphere, although, given that men still hold the majority of seats, it can be concluded that continued efforts are needed to encourage women's participation in politics in order to reach full equality.

To further strengthen gender equality in these areas, several recommendations should be considered. First, it is essential to continue implementing policies such as quotas and other measures aimed at increasing women's participation in leadership positions and political life, which have already shown positive results in some EU countries. Second, efforts must be made to overcome social stereotypes regarding women's roles in society and politics, as well as to create conditions for women's professional development through support for their career growth, especially in fields traditionally dominated by men. Third, it is important to ensure equal access for women to resources, learning, and development opportunities, and to encourage their involvement in making critical decisions at various levels of government. While the gender pay gap in the European Union is narrowing, further efforts and innovative policies are necessary to achieve full equality.

Thus, although gender progress in the European Union is evident, much remains to be done to achieve true gender equality, particularly in the areas of political participation and governance at all levels.

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UDC 658.5:305.42(4),
JEL J16, M12, M14, P16

Olha Kyrychenko, Senior Lecturer at the Department of World Economy and International Economic Relations, Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University. **Mykola Kyrychenko**, Senior Lecturer at the Department of World Economy and International Economic Relations, Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University. **Gender leadership in European countries: The role of women in business transformation.**

This article explores gender equality trends in the European Union, focusing on women's participation in leadership roles, government cabinets, and political institutions, particularly the European Parliament. It shows that while gender equality at high levels of governance and business is improving, further efforts are needed for true equality. The study highlights an increase in women's representation in government and political bodies, but they remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles, signaling the need for more proactive measures. In the European Parliament, a rising proportion of women reflects the effectiveness of gender-focused policies, though male dominance persists, requiring continued quotas and support programs. The analysis of women in leadership positions in major European companies shows progress, though full gender balance has yet to be achieved. More active corporate policies are needed to reduce gender imbalances. Overall, the article emphasizes the importance of continued efforts to ensure gender equality, focusing on career advancement and equal access to opportunities.

Keywords: leadership, business transformation, women, gender equality, gender pay gap, Europe, European Union, European Parliament.

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Кириченко Ольга Вячеславівна, старший викладач кафедри світового господарства і міжнародних економічних відносин Одеського національного університету ім. І.І. Мечникова. **Кириченко Микола Віталійович**, старший викладач кафедри світового господарства і міжнародних економічних відносин Одеського національного університету ім. І.І. Мечникова. **Гендерне лідерство в європейських країнах: роль жінок у трансформації бізнесу.**

Стаття глибоко аналізує тенденції та динаміку гендерної рівності в Європейському Союзі, зокрема в контексті участі жінок у високих керівних структурах, урядових кабінетах та політичних інституціях, таких як Європарламент. Автори досліджують ключові фактори, які сприяють або перешкоджають досягненню гендерної рівності в цих сферах, зосереджуючи увагу на значенні політичних стратегій і підтримки гендерної рівності як на рівні державних органів, так і в корпоративному середовищі. Вони підкреслюють, що, хоча гендерна рівність на високих рівнях влади та в бізнесі поступово зростає, цей процес є тривалим і потребує постійної роботи для досягнення реальної рівності. Дослідження показує, що частка жінок у урядових кабінетах та політичних органах зростає, що є результатом змін у політичних стратегіях, спрямованих на підтримку рівності, а також активної політики національних урядів та ЄС. Однак, незважаючи на позитивні тенденції, жінки все ще недостатньо представлені на високих керівних посадах, що вказує на необхідність більш активних заходів для створення рівних можливостей у політиці та бізнесі. У Європарламенті спостерігається поступове збільшення частки жінок серед депутатів, що свідчить про ефективність гендерно орієнтованих політик, спрямованих на забезпечення рівності. Проте, незважаючи на ці досягнення, значна кількість чоловіків продовжує домінувати в політичних органах, що вимагає впровадження квот і програм підтримки для забезпечення рівного доступу до політичних можливостей та усунення гендерних бар'єрів. Аналіз участі жінок у керівних органах найбільших компаній Європи також демонструє позитивні зрушення, хоча гендерний баланс у бізнесі ще не досягнутий. На керівних посадах продовжують домінувати чоловіки, що свідчить про необхідність посилення корпоративних політик, спрямованих на подолання гендерного дисбалансу. Важливо активніше впроваджувати стратегії, що сприяють зниженню перешкод для кар'єрного зростання жінок, таких як наставництво, створення чітких кар'єрних шляхів і забезпечення прозорих процедур просування. Загалом, стаття наголошує на важливості продовження зусиль для забезпечення гендерної рівності в усіх сферах, починаючи від політичної участі і завершуючи бізнес-середовищем. Основними аспектами, на яких необхідно зосередити увагу, є підтримка кар'єрного зростання жінок, забезпечення рівного доступу до ресурсів і можливостей, а також зміцнення політичної та корпоративної волі для досягнення гендерної рівності в усіх секторах.

Ключові слова: лідерство, трансформація бізнесу, жінки, гендерна рівність, гендерний розрив оплати, Європа, Європейський Союз, Європейський парламент.