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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Gender balance in business leadership: a contribution to smart, sustainable and
inclusive growth**

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The last decades have witnessed significant progress in women's educational attainment, labour market participation and position in the European society as a whole. Today, more women than men graduate from universities: 60% of university graduates are women. Today, more women work in Europe than ever before: their employment rate exceeded 60% and the EU is making more use of its talent and better use of its skills. Today, it is clear that women and men cannot be discriminated against on grounds of gender.

The EU has contributed to this progress through a multitude of measures such as legislation, dedicated funding and action programmes, specific measures for the advancement of women, social dialogue and dialogue with civil society. Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It has become a well-established area of policy action as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Gender equality has progressively been integrated in all EU policies, and is now well anchored in employment and cohesion policies, research, education, development cooperation and the Europe 2020 process to name some examples.

This has been possible because since its early days, the European Union has been given by Member States the competence and the authority to act on gender equality. Back in 1957, the Treaty of Rome already included the principle of equal pay for equal work for women and men. With the *Defrenne* case in 1971¹, the Court of Justice of the European Union confirmed that this principle was directly applicable, thereby giving citizens the right to directly rely on it in national courts and paving the way for modern European gender equality law.

As the EU Treaties empower the European Commission to adopt measures to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, the Commission has over the years taken a number of legislative steps in the field of employment, in particular the principle of equal pay and the principle that women and men must have the same promotion and training opportunities². It has also proposed legal instruments establishing equal treatment in social security and for self-employed workers and assisting spouses³, thereby considerably improving their social security protection. Important legislation has also been promoted in the field of reconciliation between private and professional life⁴.

¹ Judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 25.05.1971 (C-80/70).

² For example: Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 July 2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.

³ For example: Directive 2010/41/EU of 7 July 2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC.

⁴ Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC.

The European Commission strongly promotes gender equality also within its own ranks. It has adopted in 2010 its own internal Strategy⁵, aiming to build further on the considerable progress made over recent years in terms of representation of women among its staff. The Strategy defines targets for the representation of women at senior and middle management levels as well as at non-management administrator level, to be reached by the end of 2014. Thanks to these targets, on 1 October 2012, the Commission counted 27.2% female senior managers (including the Commission's Secretary General) and 28.7% female middle managers⁶, which is a good starting point for making further progress by 2020. Moreover, following President Barroso call to Heads of State and Governments to see gender balance as a common goal and shared responsibility and to pay particular attention to the presence of women in the College, today, one third of the College's members are women.

Despite progress, the road to effective equality remains, however, long and full of obstacles. Gender imbalances in economic decision-making are emblematic of this reality, and the situation in corporate boards is particularly disappointing with little signs of improvements. Across the EU, company boards are currently dominated by one gender: 86.3% of board members are men while women represent just 13.7% (15% among non-executive directors). 96.8% of the chairpersons are men and only 3.2% are women.

Women and men should have the same opportunities and be given the same possibilities to take leadership positions. This principle was clearly set out in the European Commission Strategy for Equality between women and men 2010-2015. It is not only a question of gender equality. There is also a well-established economic and business case for increasing the presence of women in business leadership positions. An efficient use of human capital constitutes the most important determinant of an economy's competitiveness and is key for addressing the EU's demographic challenges and for competing successfully in a globalised economy. Numerous studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between gender diversity at top-level management and a company's financial performance and profitability. Improving female representation on the boards of listed companies in the Union can therefore have a positive impact on companies' performance.

Labour market equality contributes to economic growth. Enhancing women's presence in the board of companies listed on the stock exchange in the EU not only positively affects the appointed women, but has also the potential to attract female talent to the company and increases the presence of women at all levels of management and in the workforce. Therefore, making full use of the female talent pool improves return on education for both individuals and the public sector. Ultimately, making full use of the female talent pool contributes to the fulfilment of the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, notably its 75% employment target.

Throughout the years, the European Union has taken a number of non-binding measures aimed at improving the participation of women in decision making. In

⁵ Communication to the Commission on a Strategy on Equal Opportunities for the period 2010-2014, SEC(2010) 1554/3.

⁶ In 1995, the share of women in senior management posts was 4% and 10.7% in middle management posts.

particular, on proposals from the Commission, two recommendations were adopted by the Council on this subject, in 1984⁷ and 1996⁸. However, these (non-binding recommendations) did not bring any palpable progress. As a consequence, the low level of participation of women in positions of responsibility developed into a growing matter of concern.

2010 and 2011 saw a renewed commitment at EU level for the promotion of gender equality on the boards of the largest listed companies. The Commission identified 'Equality in decision making' as one of the priorities of the Women's Charter⁹ and of its Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015¹⁰. In March 2011, the Commission launched the 'Women on the Board Pledge for Europe'¹¹, a call for publicly listed companies in Europe to voluntarily commit to increasing women's presence on their boards to 30% by 2015 and 40% by 2020. The European Parliament, in its resolution on women and business leadership of 6 July 2011¹², urged companies to attain the critical threshold of 30 per cent female membership of management bodies by 2015 and 40 per cent by 2020. It called on the Commission, if the steps taken by companies and the Member States were found to be inadequate, to propose legislation by 2012, including quotas. The European Parliament reiterated that call for legislation in its resolution of 13 March 2012 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2011¹³. Moreover, in their 2012-14 work programme, the European social partners have reaffirmed their commitment to further action to promote women in decision-making.

In March 2012, the Commission took stock of the situation¹⁴, finding an average annual improvement of just 0.6 percentage points over the past years. At this slow rate of progress, it would take more than 40 years before companies naturally reach gender balanced representation in boards. For this reason, the Commission launched a public consultation on possible action to tackle this imbalance. It also conducted an impact assessment on the costs and benefits of improving gender balance on the boards of listed companies.

This Communication presents the state of play of women's under-representation in business leadership positions. It highlights the main obstacles to women's career progression and explains how a new EU legislative initiative, as proposed by the Commission in conjunction with this Communication¹⁵, to improve gender balance in the boards of listed companies would make change structural and irreversible. As the reasons for the under-representation of women in business leadership are

⁷ Council Recommendation 84/635/EEC of 13 December 1984 on the promotion of positive action for women.

⁸ Council Recommendation 96/694/EC of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process.

⁹ COM(2010) 078 final.

¹⁰ COM(2010) 491 final.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/redoing/womenpledge/index_en.htm.

¹² 2010/2115(INI).

¹³ European Parliament Resolutions 2010/2115(INI) of 6 July 2011 and 2011/2244(INI) of 13 March 2012

¹⁴ European Commission (2012), *Women in economic decision-making in the EU: Progress report*, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/index_en.htm.

¹⁵ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures COM(2012) XXX.

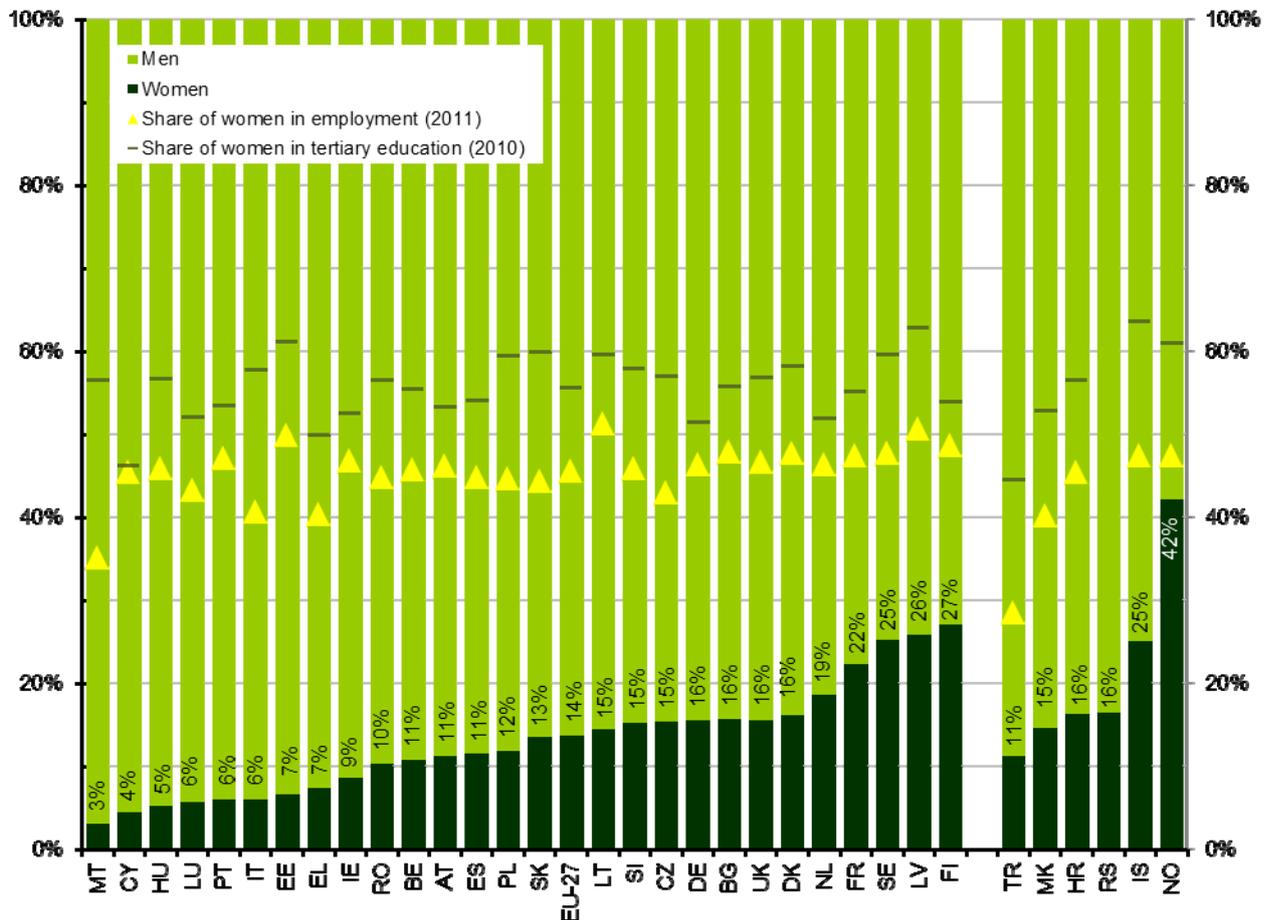
multifaceted, the Commission proposes a set of accompanying measures to improve the gender balance in business leadership in order to help Member States implement legislative proposals and improve gender equality in decision-making at all levels.

2. THE STATE OF PLAY OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CORPORATE BOARDS IN THE EU

Women's participation in corporate boards remains low

Despite representing around 45 % of people employed in the EU and 56% of people in tertiary education, women only represent 13.7% of board members in the major publicly listed companies in the EU (see Figure 1). Women occupy a quarter of the seats on boards of large listed companies in Finland, Latvia and Sweden and just over a fifth in France. But there are fewer than one in 10 in Ireland, Greece, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg and Hungary, fewer than one in 20 in Cyprus and around one in 30 in Malta¹⁶.

Figure 1 — Women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies, January 2012



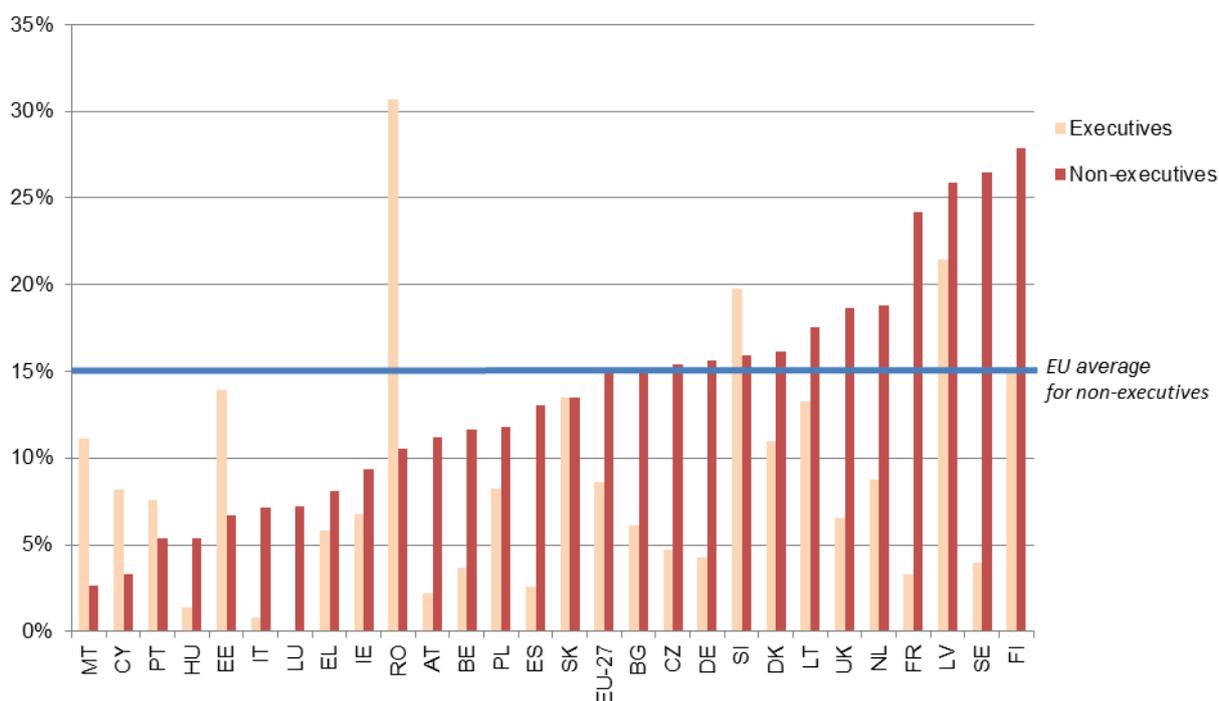
Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision making and Eurostat, Labour Force Survey.

Note: In countries with unitary (one-tier) systems, the board of directors is counted (including non-executive and executive members). In countries with two-tier systems, only the supervisory board is counted.

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/business-finance/quoted-companies/index_en.htm.

Among non-executive directors of the major publicly listed companies in the EU the women represent only 15% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Women on the boards of the largest listed companies: executive and non-executive members (January 2012)



Source: European Commission's Database on women and men in decision-making

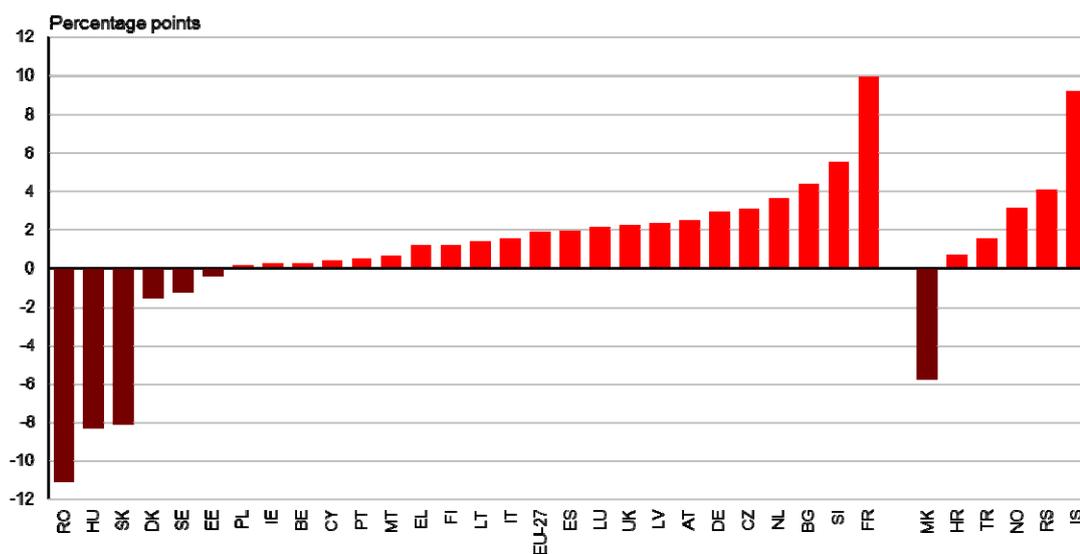
Note: In a one-tier system data on non-executives refer to non-executive members of the board and data on executives to executive members of the board. In a two-tier system data on non-executives refer to members of the supervisory board and data on executives to members of the executive/management board. Occasionally, it is possible for the supervisory board to include one or more executive members (e.g. CEO and CFO). In this case these are included in the executive figures, though individuals participating in both boards are counted only once. Non-executive figures in this case still refer to the total members of the supervisory board and could, therefore, include some executives but the numbers concerned are not significant and should not affect the final result.

Progress is slow and uneven across EU Member States

Between the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2012, the share of women on boards rose from 8.5% to 13.7%, changing on average by only 0.6 percentage points per year. A slight improvement of 1.9 percentage points was recorded between October 2010 and January 2012, linked to intensive public debate initiated by the Commission's and the European Parliament's calls for action. This was followed in some Member States by concrete steps to accelerate the pace of change.

However, progress remains slow as more than six out of every seven board members are men (86.3%) and the performance of individual countries varies. France, which adopted a legally binding quota in January 2011, saw the most notable improvement (10 percentage points) accounting for more than 40% of the total change EU-wide, while some Member States even recorded a negative trend (Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Sweden, Denmark and Estonia).

Figure 3 — Change in the share of women on corporate boards, October 2010-January 2012



Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision making.

3. WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES FOR GENDER BALANCE IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Gender imbalances in corporate leadership positions are only the ‘tip of the iceberg’

Gender imbalances in corporate leadership positions are important, but are only the tip of the iceberg of a more widespread situation of inequalities in our society. There are several causes of this and they build up over the course of a woman’s or man’s life. Although the number of women in leadership roles is increasing, the evidence shows that there are still many barriers to overcome.

The causes stem from traditional gender roles, the division of labour, women’s and men’s educational choices, and women’s concentration in few occupational sectors

Big differences in the type of education followed by women and men remain. Women are still under-represented in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects¹⁷, which are most in demand on the labour market. These gender differences are related to students’ attitudes towards subjects, such as motivation and interest, which are shaped early in life¹⁸ and which are also linked to the perception of women’s and men’s different roles in society.

Once in the labour market, women tend to concentrate in a small number of occupations which are often paid less and less valued. This can impact negatively on their chances of accessing the highest positions in companies. Almost 29% of women in work in the EU are employed in just six of the 130 standard occupational

¹⁷ To tackle this issue, the Commission promoted a Code of Best Practices for Women in ICT (2010).

¹⁸ OECD (2012) – *Gender initiative: gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship*.

categories¹⁹ whereas the top six occupations for men account for almost 20% of total men in work. Across economic activities²⁰ women make up almost 83% of those working in health and social work and just over 71% of those employed in education, while they account for just over 62% of total employment in retailing²¹.

The lack of support to balance care responsibilities with work remains a major challenge

The lack of a comprehensive and balanced offer of flexible work measures remains a major barrier to women's rise to leadership²². Only ten EU Member States have met the Barcelona objective²³ of 33% childcare coverage rate for children under three, while only nine Member States have met the Barcelona objective of a 90% coverage rate for children between three years old and the mandatory school age²⁴.

This has an unbalanced repercussion on women's and men's work patterns

Women continue to adapt their work patterns to the lack or inadequacy of measures to reconcile work and private life. The employment rate of women decreases with the number of children, while the employment rate of men increases with the first and the second child. Women face more frequent career interruptions and higher incidences of flexible work arrangements and part-time work than men. This has a heavy impact on women's possibility to work full time, benefit from training opportunities and progress in their careers on a level-playing field with men. Ultimately, it has a negative impact on their pay and pensions. It is recognised that working part-time and career interruptions are obstacles to promotion into senior positions.

¹⁹ ESTAT, ISCO-08, 3-digit level.

²⁰ ESTAT, NACE Rev 2, 2-digit level.

²¹ ESTAT (2011) EU-LFS.

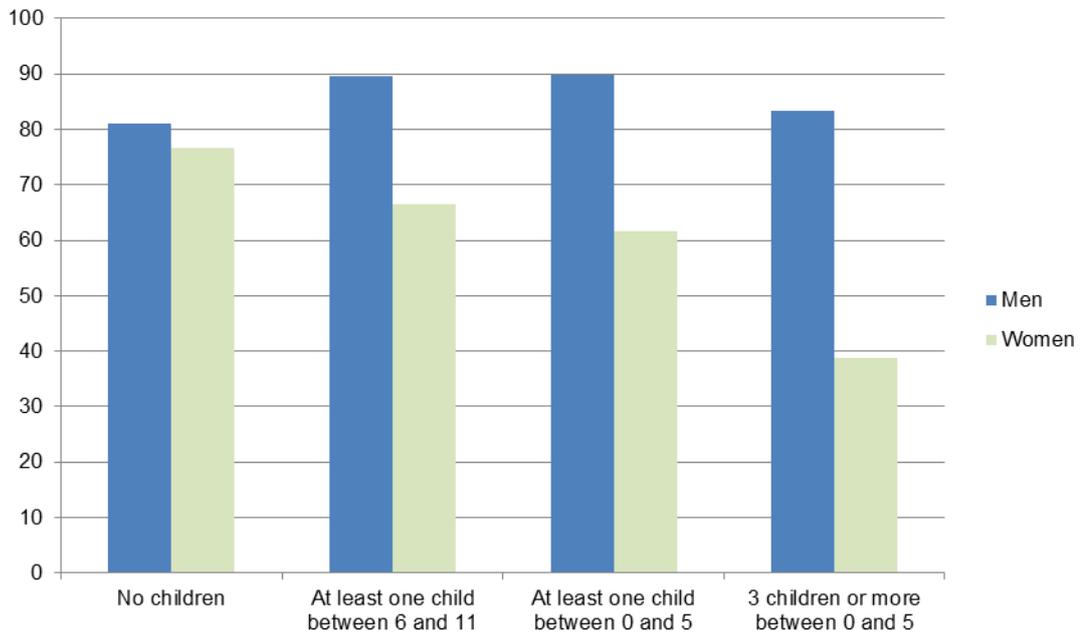
²² Firm-level survey by World Economic Forum, quoted in OECD (2012).

²³ The objectives – defined by the Barcelona European Council in 2002 – aim at ensuring suitable childcare provision by the EU Member States.

²⁴ ESTAT (2010) EU-SILC.

Figure 4 – Employment rate according to the parental status (aged 25-49) – 2011

(Difference in percentage points in employment rates with the presence of one child under 12 and without the presence of any children)



Source : Eurostat, European Labour Force Survey, annual averages.

The glass ceiling is still a major limit

Experience shows that even women who have successfully overcome the above mentioned obstacles and are ready to be ‘boarded’ are ultimately faced with continuing barriers to their advancements to the highest levels of decision-making often referred to as the ‘glass ceiling’, regardless of their willingness to advance and their academic and professional qualifications.

Women on the board of FTSE 100 companies in the UK have better educational credentials than men²⁵ on average. The same holds true for women joining corporate boards in Norway²⁶.

In September 2011, the European Business Schools and Senior Executive Women launched a call for action to fight against the glass ceiling. They established in 2012 a list of "Board Ready Women" (with around 7,500 names) to make clear that there are more than enough eminently qualified women to help lead Europe's and the world's corporations and that is time to shatter the ceiling that has kept women from ascending to board of directors positions²⁷.

Women have a comparative disadvantage as compared to men as they must overcome preconceptions about requirements for leadership positions, discrimination

²⁵ Singh et al. (2008), ‘Newly appointed directors in the boardroom: How do women and men differ?’, European Management Journal, 26(1).

²⁶ Norwegian Institute for Social Research.

²⁷ <http://www.edhec.com/html/Communication/doc-womenboard/BoardReadyWomen.pdf>.

and stereotyping²⁸. Subtle barriers, including the perception that women are either not interested or incapable of performing certain tasks, or that these posts are ‘male’ jobs, continue to keep most women stagnating at lower management levels in companies.

According to a Eurobarometer survey from 2011, 88% of Europeans think that women should be equally represented in business leadership positions and 78% of them think that the European business community is dominated by men who do not have sufficient confidence in women’s abilities²⁹.

In a survey of 500 senior women from corporations and professional firms across Europe³⁰, two-thirds of those interviewed highlighted stereotypes and preconceptions about women’s roles and abilities as the most important obstacle they faced.

The lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion practice

The current lack of women in senior positions influences companies’ decisions, including their attitude towards gender equality and the appointment of more female board members, both in the short and long term. This is exacerbated by the lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion processes. Appointments to boards rely heavily on personal and professional contacts of current board members.

The lack of transparency of appointments for board positions remains an obstacle to women’s career progression. This issue was highlighted by several stakeholders who answered the public consultation launched by the Commission³¹.

Increasing the share of women on corporate boards can attract female talent to companies and lead to a higher representation of women at all levels of management. It is also expected to have a positive spill-over effect on female employment in the companies concerned and on long-term economic growth throughout the whole economy. Promoting adequate mentoring, sponsorship, training opportunities and role models are necessary to increase the number of women in the talent pipeline in management operations and in senior executive roles, from where board candidates are often recruited.

4. MEASURES TAKEN AT MEMBER STATE LEVEL TO IMPROVE GENDER BALANCE IN CORPORATE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

A range of initiatives has been undertaken in the Member States

The importance of swiftly improving women’s presence in business leadership, in particular on corporate boards, is high on the political agenda not only at EU level, but also at national level. A range of initiatives has been undertaken by governments, social partners, individual businesses and other stakeholders to accelerate progress.

²⁸ Liff and Ward (2001) ‘Distorted Views through the Glass Ceiling: the Construction of Women’s Understandings of Promotion and Senior Management Positions’.

²⁹ Special Eurobarometer 376 (2011), Women in decision making.

³⁰ Catalyst and the Conference Board Europe (2002), *Women in Leadership: A European Business Imperative*.

³¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/opinion/120528_en.htm.

Voluntary initiatives

Several EU Member States have developed voluntary initiatives and tools to address the under-representation of women in senior leadership positions³². These measures have the advantage of greater flexibility and a greater sense of ownership for the companies that undertake such measures. However, despite promoting positive developments, they have not triggered marked progress.

Legislative measures with binding quotas

Figures show that legislative measures yield more substantial progress compared to voluntary initiatives, especially if they are accompanied by sanctions. This is most clearly demonstrated by the impact of the now well-established Norwegian legislation, which imposes a legally binding quota of 40% with the dissolution of the company as sanction in case of non-compliance, and – within the EU – by the situation in France where a legally binding quota of 20% within 3 years (2014) and 40% within 6 years (2017) is in force. Other EU Member States have adopted as well different types of quota rules (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain)³³.

5. BUILDING ON THE ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS CASE: A NEW EU LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER-BALANCED PARTICIPATION ON THE BOARDS OF LISTED COMPANIES

The economic and business case confirmed

Previous efforts to attain gender-balanced participation in corporate leadership positions have not yielded a substantive outcome and there is an ever widening gap between Member States in the EU, both in terms of factual progress made and in the type of measures taken at national level.

The EU cannot afford this systematic gender imbalance at the top level of economic decision-making and the resulting waste of talent and resources.

There is an economic and business case for gender diversity on boards, including recent research³⁴. Gender diversity in the boardroom has been shown to lead to innovative ideas, increased competitiveness and performance, and improved corporate governance. It is a sign of openness to more viewpoints and respect for differences among stakeholders — shareholders, investors, employees and customers — signalling the company's recognition of the complexity of world markets and its preparedness to compete effectively at the global level.

³² European Commission (2012), 'Women in economic decision-making in the EU: Progress report'.

³³ *Idem*.

³⁴ Most recently: Credit Suisse, Research Institute (August 2012), 'Gender diversity and corporate performance'; other important studies: Catalyst (2004), 'The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity'; McKinsey (reports of 2007, 2008 and 2010), 'Women Matter'; Deutsche Bank Research (2010), 'Towards gender-balanced leadership'; Ernst & Young (2012), 'Mixed leadership'.

Given the lack of sufficient and sustainable progress in achieving gender balance on boards and the fact that it is a challenge faced by all EU Member States, the European Commission has explored a range of options for targeted measures to improve female participation in decision-making at European level.

The analysis of these options shows that making full use of the EU's female workforce will contribute to sustainable growth and the competitiveness of the EU economy, particularly in face of demographic change and the current crisis.

The need to act at EU level

Continuing at the current pace will not lead to a substantial increase of women on the boards of listed companies throughout the EU. The scattered and divergent regulation or the absence of regulation at national level as regards gender balance on company boards leads to discrepancies in the number of women among executive and non-executive directors and different rates of improvements across Member States. It may also pose barriers to the internal market by imposing divergent corporate governance requirements and sanctions on European companies.

The potential for gender equality, competitiveness and growth can be better achieved through coordinated action at EU level rather than through national initiatives of varying scope, ambition and effectiveness. Therefore, the Commission proposes a legislative measure to improve gender balance on the boards of companies listed on stock-exchanges.

Focusing on listed companies

Due to their economic importance, visibility and impact on the EU market, an EU level legislative measure should only apply to listed companies, i.e. companies in a Member State whose securities are open for trading on a regulated market³⁵. Listed companies that are SMEs should be exempted, as the obligation to reach the target could create a disproportionate administrative burden for them.

In addition to their economic importance — with a total turnover equivalent to 68% of the EU GDP — listed companies are also highly visible. They set standards for the whole economy and they can expect their practices to be followed by other types of companies.

Setting objectives

The legislative measure, based on Article 157(3) TFEU, establishes a minimum objective of 40% of the under-represented sex among non-executive directors on boards of listed companies, to be achieved by 2020, or by 2018 for listed companies that are public undertakings. It obliges companies below this level of representation to make appointments to those positions in order to attain this objective on the basis of a selection procedure based on pre-established, clear, neutrally formulated and unambiguous qualification criteria in line with the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The objectives set under this proposal should only apply to non-executive directors in order to strike the right balance between the need to increase

³⁵ Within the meaning of Article 4(1) point (14) of Directive 2004/39/EC.

the gender diversity of boards on the one hand and the need to minimise interference with day-to-day management of a company on the other hand.

In order to achieve that objective and in line with the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, Member States shall ensure that in the selection of non-executive directors, priority will be given to the candidate of the under-represented sex if that candidate is equally qualified as the candidate of the other sex in terms of suitability, competence and professional performance, and if an objective assessment taking account of all criteria specific to the individual candidates does not tilt the balance in favour of a candidate of the other sex.

As regards executive directors, listed companies should be obliged to set their own commitments, to be met within the same timeframe as the objectives for non-executive directors.

An effective monitoring and enforcement system

Member States should provide for effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions if these obligations are breached.

Listed companies are required to provide information on the gender composition of their boards to competent national authorities. This information should be published on the company's website and, if the company in question does not meet the objective, it should include a description of measures the company has taken so far and intends to take in order to meet the objective in the future.

In accordance with the principle of proportionality, EU action should be limited in time and the legislative measure will be repealed as soon as sustainable progress in the gender composition of boards is achieved.

6. A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY TO UNDERPIN THE NEW EU LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE

Improving female participation on the labour market and in leadership positions

The Commission proposes to complement the legislative measure with a comprehensive approach combining policy measures and financial support. Some are the continuation of on-going measures, while others are new³⁶. Moreover, the Commission will urge Member States to complement activities currently proposed for the private sector also in the public sector, notably with regards to the boards of national central banks, which are mainly composed by men (83% on average in EU-27).

In partnership with national governments and other stakeholders

The Commission will cooperate with all stakeholders — governments, social partners, enterprises, business schools, etc. — supporting them in their work and in

³⁶ The Commission is also considering general measures that have as their objective increasing the diversity in the boards of companies through enhanced transparency in order to facilitate an effective oversight of the management and robust governance of companies.

designing and implementing EU-wide activities to improve female participation in the labour market and achieve gender balance in leadership positions.

Within this framework, the Commission will:

a) *Support initiatives to combat stereotyped representations of the role of women and men in society, labour market and leadership positions*

- Encourage executive search firms to prepare a voluntary code of conduct at EU level addressing gender diversity and best practice, in order to put gender diversity on the agenda in the appointment process.
- Encourage business schools to promote gender diversity in leadership positions and to build awareness in the corporate and academic sectors through their curricula and activities.

b) *Contribute to the creation of a social, economic and business environment supportive of a balanced participation of women and men in leadership positions*

- Contribute to the development of policies to reconcile work, private and family life, including the use of innovative approaches resulting from the use of ICT, that support women's and men's participation in the labour market and in decision-making positions. In 2013, the Commission will report on policies to reconcile work, private and family life, also taking stock of progress made towards the achievement of the "Barcelona targets" for childcare facilities³⁷, highlighting remaining challenges and providing policy guidance.
- Strengthen the gender aspect of the Europe 2020 Strategy to help achieve the 75 % employment rate target by 2020. This will be done by stepping up cooperation with the Member States, including in the framework of the Employment and the Social Protection Committees. Specific attention will be devoted to the gender equality aspect of the European semester outputs, including the follow-up of Country Specific Recommendations related to women's labour market participation.
- Contribute to the fight against gender stereotypes and the promotion of gender equality at all levels of education and training, including in particular through the European Social Fund and the EU Lifelong Learning Program and its successor; furthermore, in particular in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Social Fund programming, pay specific attention to the transition between education and the labour market, and to the gap between educational attainment and professional development, particularly of women, with a view to

³⁷

At the European Council meeting in Barcelona in 2002, the Heads of States and Governments agreed that Member States should provide childcare facilities by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. The lack of childcare facilities is addressed in the Europe 2020 Strategy. In the European semester 2012, nine Member States (AT, CZ, DE, HU, IT, MT, PL, SK and UK) have received a country specific recommendation on that matter.

eliminate obstacles they meet in their choice of career, especially as regards mathematics, sciences and technologies.

c) *Promote awareness about the business and economic case for gender equality and balanced representation of women and men in decision making*

- Support awareness-raising activities by promoting exchanges and disseminating experiences and good practices.
- Support awareness-raising activities at company level. This will be done by creating, disseminating and implementing in all EU Member States and in cooperation with the business world, training modules for small, medium and large enterprises and exchanging good practices by and among enterprises.

d) *Support and monitor progress towards a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making positions across the EU*

- Increase accountability by regularly reporting on progress made in the EU Member States and by widely disseminating the results.
- Contribute to the improvement and availability of data by continuing to collect, disseminate and develop comparable data at EU level through the Commission's database on women and men in decision making.
- Monitor whether the legally binding instrument has been correctly transposed and implemented at national level and report at regular intervals to the European Parliament and the Council on the progress made.
- Encourage Member States to follow the call of the European Parliament to improve the gender balance situation in national central banks, thereby also improving the conditions for gender balance in the Governing Council of the European Central Bank.

The Commission will finance, where appropriate, the above non-exhaustive list of activities under the PROGRESS Programme and, without pre-judging the on-going negotiations for the Multiannual Financial Framework, under the future financial instrument covering the gender equality policy area. This will be achieved in particular by publishing restricted and open calls for proposals in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

The Commission will work with the Member States to make full use of the co-financing opportunities offered by the Structural Funds, including the future programming period, in order to promote women's access to employment and career progression and to improve the work-life balance, in particular through the provision of affordable and quality childcare facilities.