

# Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work

## 6. Domain of power

The first woman President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was elected in 2019, breaking the long-standing absence of women in the top positions in the EU system. With no woman having previously led the European Council, the European Central Bank or the Commission, the appointment of a woman President of the Commission, followed by the appointment of Christine Lagarde as President of the European Central Bank, marks a long overdue change.

In line with this breakthrough, the new Commissioners have the best gender balance to date, with 12 women (46% ) and 15 men (56% ), as Member States responded to calls to nominate more women candidates. The European Parliament, which has not had a women leader since 2002, passed the 40% threshold for each gender's representation in its constitutive session in July 2019, with women making up 304 (41% ) of the 747 Members of the European Parliament. This represents an increase of 4 p.p. on the 2014 election result (37% ).

The European Commission has brought the issue of gender balance in decision-making and politics to the fore, as one of the five priority areas of the EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025, thereby underlining the importance of having women in leadership positions in politics and the economy. The Commission states that it will continue to push for the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a directive on improving gender balance in corporate boards and, in the meantime, calls on Member States to proactively improve that balance.

Through funding and promoting best practice, the Commission will promote the participation of women (as both voters and candidates) in the 2024 European Parliament elections, in collaboration with the European Parliament, national parliaments, Member States and civil society. Gender balance in economic decision-making also forms part of the SDGs, as part of which the shares of women board members in the largest publicly listed companies are measured.

The lack of women's presence in decision-making bodies established around the world specifically to tackle COVID-19 is striking, despite the World Health Organization (WHO) underlining the importance of balance in this respect (WHO, 2020d). The overwhelming majority of healthcare workers in the EU are women, who make up 70% of health professionals and 80% of health associate professionals (EIGE, 2018b).

This majority does not translate into participation in leadership positions in the healthcare sector, with only 30% of health ministers in the EU. As gender continues to be a key determinant of health, women's inclusion in crisis response decision-making is crucial (Davies and Bennett, 2016).