

# Women on Boards



## BPW - International

### REPORT WOMEN ON BOARDS – 2024

Dr. Eufemia Ippolito

#### BPW Europe Working Group Chair " Women on Boards"

2023 was a historic year for women, from the Women's World Cup to many other events. It was the year of the Matilda effect and, in addition to women's sport, cybersecurity, gender reporting reform and Respect@Work legislation were all hot topics of discussion. This year has seen several women "resign" from high-profile roles: from WOB co-founder Ruth Medd and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to WOB member Dr Wendy Craik, who resigned from the RBA, to former commissioner for sexual discrimination Kate Jenkins and Optus CEO Kelly Bayer Rosmarin. That same year, we celebrated the appointment of women in key roles, including Michelle Bullock as the new governor of the RBA, Dr Anna Cody as the new sex discrimination commissioner and Sheena Wilson as the new president of the WOB. But Europe and the world need more women in decision-making positions, as all research shows that diverse teams perform better than homogeneous ones.

**DIVERSITY IN EUROPEAN BOARDS:** With an average of 38% women on boards, Member States with binding gender quotas are progressing faster than other countries. However, persistent disparities between countries are highlighted. Nine Member States have not yet taken any action and legislation and are now behind schedule. CEO are still mostly men. Few women hold the most influential positions at board level, with only 19% of women serving as board chairs. Corporate boards remain poorly diverse in terms of nationality and age. Additionally, long tenures on boards often prevent them from bringing in diverse perspectives. Regardless of the legislative measures adopted, companies must take further steps towards inclusion. EWOB research confirms that legislation and strong goals are crucial to creating meaningful change.

**PERCENTAGES IN VARIOUS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ON WOMEN ON BOARDS 2023:** Looking at the characteristics of the board members, it can be seen that 59% of the directors appointed in 2023 have top management experience, but only 38% of them are women, down compared to 47% in 2022. In general, however, there are still many situations (31%) in which female representation on boards remains below 40%, with women holding the most senior positions on

boards of directors in only 29% of companies. In fact, if female participation has grown over the years thanks to laws on gender quotas, top positions remain difficult to reach and the so-called glass ceiling in many cases remains intact. Women, however, prove to be more competent and prepared in STEM subjects. Over the past year, a greater percentage of female directors brought experience in technology (33%) and sustainability (27%) than their male colleagues, 23% of whom have a technology background and 18% have experience in sustainability matter. Overall, among the skills required of directors appointed in 2023, 36% have political experience (down from 41% in 2022), 27% have professional experience in the technology sector (down from 22% in 2022) and 22 % have professional sustainability experience (down from 23% in 2022).

The lower growth rate of women on European boards compared to last year must be read in light of the increase that occurred in previous years and the gradual reaching of the threshold of 40% of director positions without executive positions occupied by women, as envisaged by the “Women on Boards Directive” to be implemented by 2026. In Italy the current regulation already provides for compliance with this threshold and therefore the real challenge for our country will be to obtain similar percentages also for top management figures.

Another paradox is the fact that, although decreasing, the percentage of directors with political experience (36%) remains higher than the percentage of those with technological experience (27%) and ESG skills (22%). If we look at the number of board directors appointed in Italy over the past year, 36% of the new directors have experience in the technological field, compared to 19% in 2022, while 24% brought expertise in the ESG/sustainability field.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) presents the findings of the 2023 Gender Equality Index. The index shows overall progress on gender equality in the EU. Out of a maximum of 100 points the EU's score is on average 70.2, compared to 68.6 in 2022. The disparity between Member States is significant: some observe notable improvements, others record stagnation or even a loss of points in their score. **The percentage of women on company boards rose to 33%, corresponding to the percentage of women in national parliaments.**

#### **Our commitment:**

During 2023 we continued to urge the institutions, through the exercise of subsidiarity, for the concrete application of **the 2022 European Directive "Women on Boards"** in all European Union countries and to remove the obstacles that still exist to the full realization of female empowerment and leadership. We also conducted a survey, the results of which were highlighted in the report. However, it is clear that, globally, women still face barriers that make it difficult for them to be selected for top positions. It is necessary to continue to push the competent authorities to promote flexible actions and working methods through the adoption of European and national laws. In particular, we dealt with issues aimed at offering development opportunities in the workplace and organized courses on Leadership.

At the University of Bari Aldo Moro we are organizing the Short Master:

**“Female professionals for corporate governance”**

EDUCATIONAL objectives: (knowledge, skills and competences that students will be able to acquire). Executive Training for Professional Women.

**Objectives: LEADERSHIP governance, legal and compliance.**

The commitment and future challenge is to organize, at European Universities, Short Masters in "Women on Boards" involving the members of our European Clubs and involving the members of the BPW Europe "Women on Board" Working Group.

**Continue... our Road Map:**

- Support the European campaign "Women on Boards " disseminating links, brochures and the material through social networks (facebook, twitter etc);
- To engage in these activities the Young
- To monitor every three months the results of the campaign " EWOB (European Women on Boards)
- To present the results and to compare with other countries.
- To organize meetings on the topic of "Women on Boards" to raise awareness of this topic and to make our members aware of the results of our European survey.

So, Thank you in advance for your attention, I am available for any collaboration.


Eufemia

**Dr. Eufemia Ippolito**

**BPW Executive Finance Officer 2021/2024**

**BPW Europe Working Group Chair " Women on Boards"**

**Past National President FIDAPA-BPW Italy**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eufemia Ippolito", is displayed on a light blue background.

**February 5, 2024**