

WOMEN LEADERS: TRANSFORMATION OF LEADERSHIP IN MODERN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

In modern society, the role of women leaders becomes increasingly important, driven by global social, economic, and cultural changes. This article examines the evolving nature of leadership in the context of gender equality, analysing the barriers women face in attaining leadership positions and enablers of their success. It considers the characteristics of female management styles and their impact on corporate culture and organisational effectiveness. Particular attention is given to the role of stereotypes, institutional constraints, and social expectations, which create unique challenges for women leaders. Based on an analysis of current research and statistical data, the author offers recommendations for fostering an inclusive environment that supports the development of women's leadership. This article will be of interest to researchers in management, sociology, and gender studies, as well as practitioners seeking to enhance organisational effectiveness through diversity and inclusion.

Keywords: Women Leaders, Gender Leadership, Management Style, Gender Stereotypes, Career Barriers, Organisational Effectiveness, Social Change, Leadership Qualities.

INTRODUCTION

Modern society has witnessed significant changes in how leadership is perceived and practiced, largely due to the increasing prominence of women in management. Historically, leadership positions in most cultures and social systems have been held by men. However, in recent decades, a steady rise in the number of women leaders is noted, driven by global socio-economic shifts and evolving gender roles. This article explores key aspects of this leadership transformation, focusing on women's inclusion in management, and analyses the challenges and opportunities they encounter on their path to leadership positions.

LITERATURE ON WOMEN LEADERSHIP

The theoretical underpinnings of women leadership as a social phenomenon have long been a subject of active study across various disciplines. However, traditional leadership theories often overlooked the gender dimension, focusing instead on universal traits like charisma, decisiveness, and strategic thinking. Contemporary research demonstrates that female leadership possesses unique characteristics that differentiate it from male leadership. Women leaders often exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence, empathy, and collaborative skills, enabling them to effectively manage teams amidst uncertainty and complex social dynamics. Women leaders contribute to corporate sustainability and define a "typical profile" of a sustainable woman leader and enhance our understanding on the relationship between sustainability and female leadership, providing empirical evidence on the topic (Pierli et al., 2022; Alexeeva-Alexeev et al., 2025). Findings suggest that women CEOs are likely to lead

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women-owned firms which support (sustainable) innovation through developing new products for new markets, allocating more investment in R&D, product innovation and business processes, although with some nuances. Furthermore, some researchers argue that women may, in fact, be more effective leaders than men (Buss et al., 2024; Kruse, 2023). This opinion was also expressed by political leader.² Furthermore, women's activism and leadership within the informal networks of their community are grounded in an unspoken connectedness to "something greater than themselves". This unspoken connectedness is an often-unconscious foundation of beliefs and values that act as a motivational force which enhances women's transformational leadership (Malone, 2007: 97-120).

FACTORS INHIBITING WOMEN FROM LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Despite progress, women leaders continue to encounter numerous barriers to success. One of the most significant obstacles is gender stereotyping, which shapes societal expectations of women's roles (Baker, 2014). Traditionally, women are perceived as nurturing and emotional, traits often seen as conflicting with the stereotypical image of a strong, decisive leader. These stereotypes create the so-called "glass ceiling," limiting women's career advancement. Furthermore, women often face double standards: their successes are sometimes viewed as exceptions, while their mistakes are judged more harshly than those of their male counterparts. Female leaders are often seen as embodying ethical and responsible management. Their leadership style, characterised by empathy, team care, and a focus on sustainable development, aligns with modern expectations of corporate social responsibility.

Although the number of women in middle management positions has grown quite rapidly in the last two decades, the number of female CEOs in large corporations remains extremely low. There are many explanations for why women have not risen to the top, including lack of line experience, inadequate career opportunities, gender differences in linguistic styles and socialization, gender-based stereotypes, the old boy network at the top, and tokenism. Also, differences between female leadership styles and the type of leadership style expected at the top of organizations, feminist explanations for the underrepresentation of women in top management positions, and the possibility that the most talented women in business often avoid corporate life in favour of entrepreneurial careers (Oakley, 2000) or the lack of supportive family policies in the workplace can hinder women's ability to ascend to leadership due to conflicting demands of work and family. In addition, the lack of robust networking opportunities for women can hinder their access to critical resources and information necessary for leadership roles (Ibarra, 1993).

However, it is crucial to avoid idealising female leadership, as this can create new stereotypes. Leadership qualities are not gender-specific, and effective management requires a blend of diverse approaches and styles. While the life experiences of men and women differ, partly due to women's reproductive role and socio-cultural norms, these differences should not negatively impact women's opportunities or lead to discrimination. Rather, they should be acknowledged and addressed to ensure equal access to economic, social, and political opportunities. Modern global development and the complexities of globalisation also influence the situation of women. Protecting women's rights contributes to stronger democracies, increased well-being, stability, and tolerance.

² Former U.S. president Barack Obama stated, "I'm absolutely confident that for two years if every nation on earth was run by women, you would see a significant improvement across the board on just about everything... living standards and outcomes".

Beyond social barriers, institutional constraints also hinder women's access to leadership positions. These include a lack of corporate support structures, the absence of flexible work arrangements necessary for balancing professional and personal life, and the underrepresentation of women in governance bodies. Many organisations still operate under patriarchal management models that fail to recognise the needs and potential of women leaders. Companies with greater gender diversity in management achieve better financial results and higher employee satisfaction. Achieving gender equality is a development priority. Gender equality envisions a society where both women and men have equal opportunities, rights, and obligations in all aspects of life. Equality between women and men means that both sexes have equal access to education and healthcare, management roles and positions of power, and equal opportunities to achieve financial independence through employment or entrepreneurship, enabling them to fulfil their personal and professional needs and interests.

Women leaders often employ distinct management approaches that foster inclusive and supportive organisational cultures. A key characteristic of the female management style is its emphasis on collaboration and collective decision-making. Women leaders tend to prioritise staff development, creating opportunities for professional growth and promoting work-life balance for employees. Furthermore, they are more likely to utilise a transformational leadership style, inspiring and motivating their teams, which is particularly valuable in periods of rapid change and uncertainty.

TURKMENISTAN'S COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY: GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT AND NATIONAL POLICIES

In his address to the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Chairman of the *Halk Maslahaty* (People's Council) of Turkmenistan, stated, "The core element of the global development strategy is gender equality. We set ourselves a lofty goal – to achieve full gender equality and empower all women and girls. Fulfilling this task is our common duty and shared responsibility"³. During the Summit, the Turkmen delegation members met with UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who expressed satisfaction that gender equality issues were included in the Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴ The meeting also highlighted Turkmenistan's leading role at the national and regional levels in ensuring women's and girls' equal access to education, quality healthcare, decent work, and participation in political and economic decision-making. Discussions focused on specific ways to expand cooperation with the UN in implementing the National Action Plan on Gender Equality.

Several Summit events addressed gender relations. Turkmenistan's participation was guided by the principle articulated by its President in his Summit address: that gender equality is central to the global development strategy. At a UN Women high-level interactive dialogue on "Combating Inequality, Empowering Women," the Turkmen delegation shared information about Turkmenistan's national policies and achievements in this area. The delegation also participated in the high-level event, "The Meeting of World Leaders on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action," initiated by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Chinese President Xi Jinping. At this meeting, over 80 heads of state emphasised

³ Speech of the National Leader of the Turkmen people, Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly. September 25, 2015, New York City.

⁴ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/Gender> Equality

the need for increased investment in gender equality, achieving parity for women at all decision-making levels, and eliminating social problems that contribute to discrimination and violence against women.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan guarantees men and women equal rights, freedoms, and opportunities. National legislation provides legal mechanisms and guarantees for balanced gender participation in government structures, ensuring equal opportunities for women's economic independence, business development, career advancement, and the equitable exercise of rights and responsibilities within the family. Women comprise 46% of the workforce in Turkmen institutions and enterprises, demonstrating their broad exercise of the constitutional right to work. Women hold prominent positions in the highest levels of state power and administration, as well as in science, education, culture, art, healthcare, and sports, and are actively expanding their involvement in business. Gender equality in public administration is reflected in the extent of women's representation in positions that influence policy formation at the district, regional, and national levels.

As shown in Table 1, the proportion of seats held by women in local government remained at 22% during the period from 2018 to 2022. Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament remains above 25%.

Table 1. Proportion of seats held by women in local government and in the national parliament (%).⁵

Year	Proportion of seats held by women in local government	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament
2018	22.05	24.08
2019	22.05	25.2
2020	21.9	25.57
2021	21.9	25.43
2022	21.68	25.73
2023	29.42	25.6

Business and entrepreneurship have become a significant area of female activity. Integrating gender considerations enhances the effectiveness of programmes and policies. Developing women's entrepreneurship offers an alternative to unemployment and poverty, contributing to social stability. Currently, 46.8% of women are employed in the non-state sector of the economy.

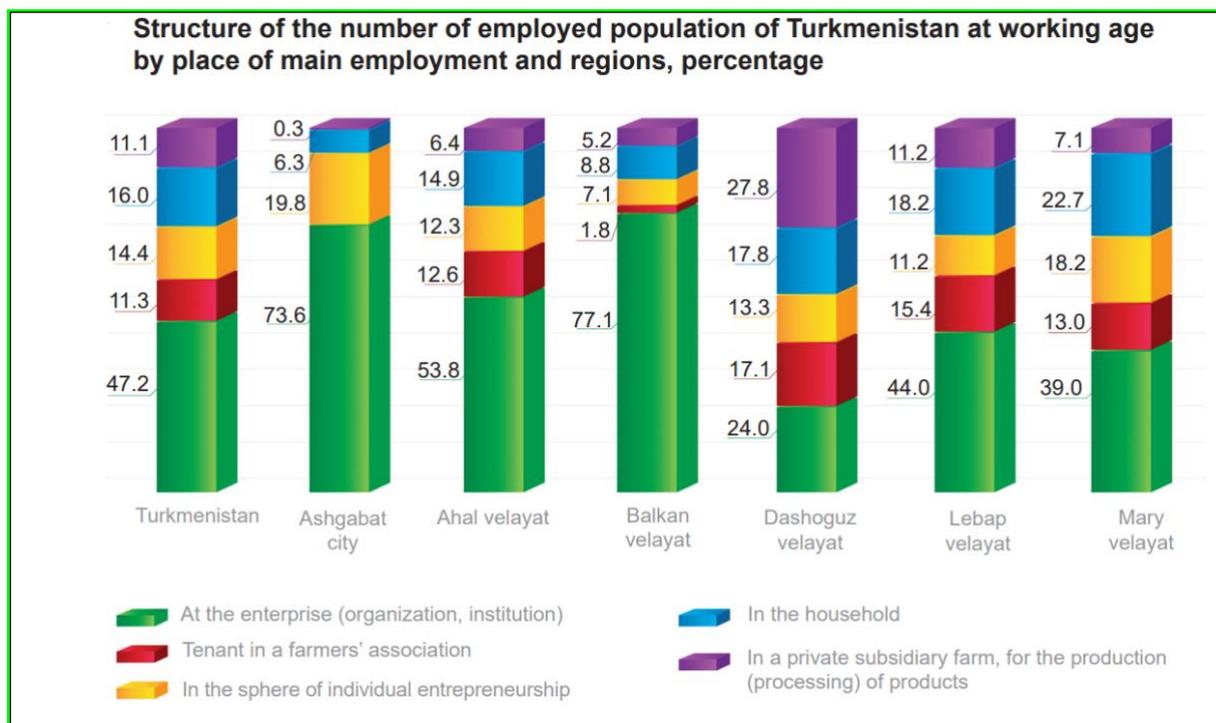
Table 2 presents the distribution of women employment by level of education and type of employment. 527,837 women are employed, of which 48,486 are employers and 29,451 are individual entrepreneurs. All women have education.

⁵ Source: State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan. Population. Employment.

Table 2. Women employment distribution across the public and non-public sectors in Turkmenistan by employment status and level of education. ⁶

		Level of education						
		Post-graduate. Professional	Higher professional (incl. master's degree)	Incomplete (non graduated) higher professional	Secondary professional (specialised secondary)	Professional and technical (initial professional)	General secondary (complete secondary)	Basic secondary (incomplete secondary)
Total	984,001	45	97,139	1,982	104,082	53,164	721,098	6,491
including: employed	527,837	44	85,303	1,673	84,296	40,660	312,429	3,432
employer, including enterprise owner (co-owner)	48,486	1	1,975	65	2,444	1,365	42,350	286
individual entrepreneur	29,451	-	2,407	45	2,641	1,751	22,435	172
self-employed, no employees	378,227	-	7,454	199	14,701	9,388	343,884	2,601

Figure 1. Employed population of Turkmenistan by place of employment and region (%) ⁷



⁶ Source: State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan. Population. Employment, 2025.

⁷ Source: State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan. Population. Employment, 2025.

Figure 2. Employed population of Turkmenistan by employment status and region (%) ⁸

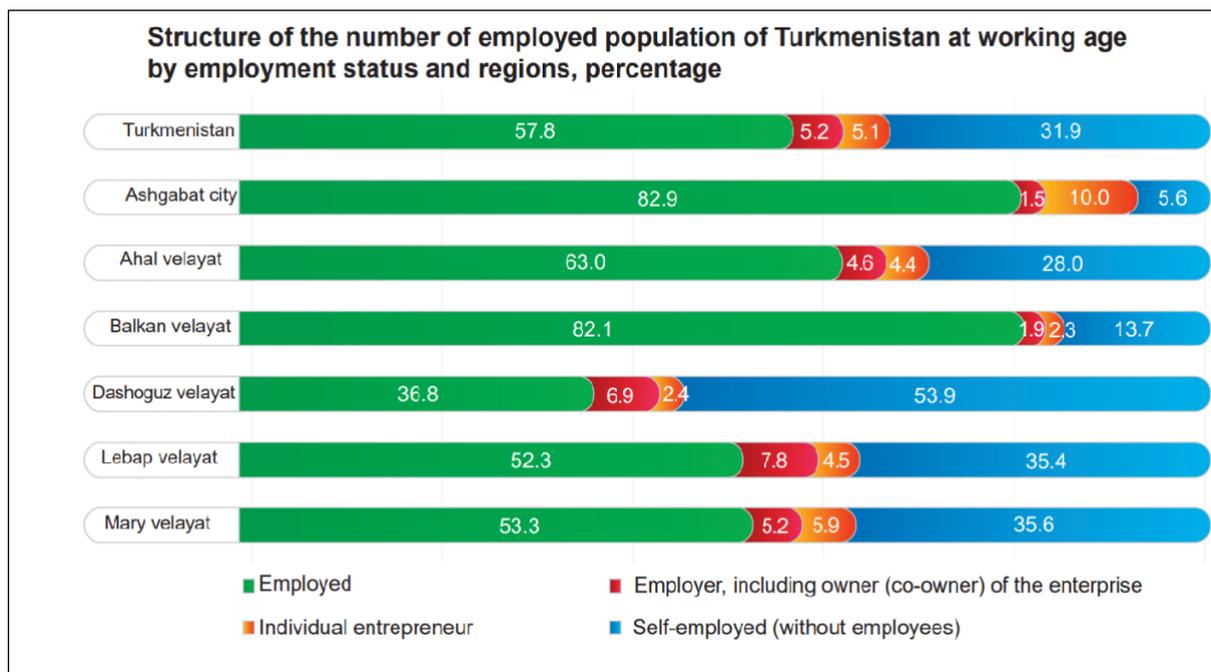


Table 3 presents the proportion of women engaged in managerial positions in Turkmenistan.

Table 3. Proportion of women in managerial positions in Turkmenistan (%)⁹

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	24.1	23.9	23.8	22.1	23.8	22.1	22.4	22.4

The family, as the fundamental unit of society, plays a crucial role in achieving gender equality. It is within the family that future generations are nurtured, individuals develop, respect and love are learned, and traditions are passed down. The family provides a protective environment and offers hope for the future to all its members – women, men, children, and the elderly. Strong families create a strong and successful state.

The five-thousand-year history of the Turkmen people includes the tradition of raising a strong and noble generation, a duty each family continues. Women play a vital role in preserving and protecting family values, drawing on the rich experience of raising children and nurturing new generations.

Aksoltan Atayeva, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Turkmenistan to the UN, observes, “The common perception of male leadership superiority stems from long-held cultural and social attitudes. Modern reality refutes any gender predisposition to leadership; it is necessary to demonstrate that women diplomats are equally effective. Since 1995, the number of women permanent representatives to the UN has increased from 7 to 38. Progress is being made, albeit slowly. Women possess a unique talent in negotiation and diplomacy.”¹⁰

⁸ Source: State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan. Population. Employment, 2025.

⁹ Source: State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan. Population. Employment, 2025.

¹⁰ <https://news.un.org/en/> UN News Global perspective Human stories.

Ambassador Atayeva, who has represented Turkmenistan at the UN for 28 years and serves as dean of the diplomatic corps in New York, emphasises the importance of recognising women's role.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: ADDRESSING INTERNAL CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN LEADERS

The international community and governments acknowledge the significance of women's participation in decision-making, particularly through the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda, and support gender equality. There is a growing number of women influencing international politics. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres's commitment to gender equality significantly impacts women's representation in diplomacy. It is particularly encouraging that some countries in the Muslim world, including those in Central Asia, have made progress in women's representation.¹¹

Education and mentoring are crucial for fostering the development of female leadership. Access to quality education and targeted programs designed to cultivate leadership skills in women helps them overcome internal barriers such as self-doubt and fear of failure. Mentorship from successful female leaders is equally vital, providing aspiring professionals with opportunities to learn from experienced individuals and receive support in their career journeys. Furthermore, establishing professional support networks among women facilitates knowledge and experience sharing, strengthening their position within the management landscape. High moral character, conscientiousness, responsiveness, and loyalty are admirable traits often associated with women. Turkmen women, renowned for their craftsmanship, create exquisite carpets and embroideries, showcasing their talent and dedication. This art, passed down through generations, serves as a form of education.

The increasing number of women leaders has significant implications for both individual organisations and society as a whole. Women leaders often champion the implementation of more sustainable and socially responsible management practices, contributing to the resolution of global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and gender discrimination. Moreover, the presence of women in leadership positions inspires young girls to pursue ambitious goals, creating positive role models and further dismantling gender stereotypes. This represents the positive impact of female leadership on society. As noted by Myahri Byashimova, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, "Gender equality is a development priority in Turkmenistan, and the country has made significant progress in achieving it across the social, political, and economic spheres of life."¹²

BREAKING STEREOTYPES: THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

The future of women's leadership hinges on how effectively societies and organisations adapt to evolving realities. A key area of focus is implementing strategies that actively promote gender equality. This encompasses not only formal measures, such as quotas for women in governing bodies, but also the creation of supportive environments that enable women to balance their professional and personal lives. Flexible work schedules, remote work options,

¹¹ UN News Global perspective Human stories. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/>

¹² Influential women and girls from Turkmenistan advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment. Available at: <https://turkmenistan.un.org/en>

and parental support programs are becoming increasingly important tools in the pursuit of equal opportunities.

Furthermore, efforts to shift cultural norms and dismantle stereotypes must continue. Educational initiatives designed to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality should be integrated into both school curricula and corporate training programs. It is essential that, from an early age, girls and boys learn that leadership is not gender-specific and that success in management depends on individual qualities, skills, and experience, not gender.

Technology also plays a crucial role. Digitalisation and automation create new opportunities for women, enabling them to overcome geographical and temporal barriers. Virtual learning platforms and professional development networks are becoming valuable resources, particularly for women in regions with limited access to traditional education and career paths.

International organisations, such as the UN and the World Economic Forum, are actively promoting initiatives to achieve global gender equality. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include the objective of ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in all aspects of life, including governance and decision-making. Implementing these initiatives requires collaborative efforts from governments, businesses, and civil society.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of leadership in modern society, driven by the increasing inclusion of women in management, is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Despite barriers, women leaders demonstrate high effectiveness and contribute significantly to the development of organisations and society. Further progress towards gender equality in leadership requires continued efforts to eliminate social and institutional constraints, as well as sustained support for initiatives that develop women's leadership skills. Only in an inclusive environment that values diversity and equality can sustainable and harmonious societal development be achieved.

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