



# DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

THE INCREDIBLE WAY  
WOMEN LEADERS ARE FACING COVID-19

**GENDER**

*By Prof. Dr. Angela Donaggio*



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# THE INCREDIBLE WAY WOMEN LEADERS ARE FACING COVID-19

*Countries with female leaders have less than half coronavirus deaths compared with countries led by men*

*By Prof. Dr. Angela Donaggio*

The COVID-19 crisis has a huge impact on everyone’s lives. Epidemics, wars, and revolutions have always changed the history of humankind as pointed out by renowned anthropologist Jared Diamond. The same is likely to happen this time.

This pandemic forces us to face our vulnerability on a daily basis. We are in the midst of the biggest global crisis in the last 100 years. On the flip side, the new coronavirus exposed fake leaders by showing their inconsistency, incapacity, and irrelevance to solve the world’s problems. And, more importantly, it put a spotlight on the truly strong, resilient, and virtuous leaders that are making a positive difference for all of us.

I am happy to say, although not surprised, that a disproportional ratio of the strongest

leaders who stood out positively during this unprecedented crisis are women, especially the young. **This is not rhetoric: it is data.**

Specifically, I identified the 12 countries led by women with a population greater than 2 million and GDP per capita above US\$ 2,000. Next, I selected a set of comparable countries in terms of population, GDP and geographic location. In the case of Sweden (Pop. of around 10 million), I added three countries led by women – Denmark, Finland and Norway – with a population of around 5 million each. **The table below shows the ten comparison pairs.**

For each group, I computed the number of deaths by COVID-19 until **May 6th** from worldometer.info and divided it by its total population.

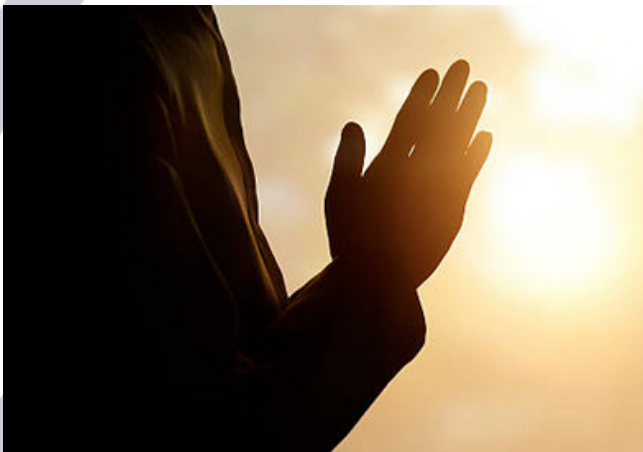
**The incredible way women leaders are facing COVID-19 (6th May, 2020)**

Countries Led by Women	Countries Led by Men
Germany	France
Taiwan	Australia
Belgium	Netherlands
Serbia	Belarus
Switzerland	Austria
Denmark + Finland + Norway	Sweden
Singapore	Hong Kong
Slovakia	Croatia
New Zealand	Malaysia
Georgia	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Total Pop. 269.479.137	Total Pop. 235.727.447
# Deaths/MM: 69,2	# Deaths/MM: 147,5

There is a stark difference in the outcomes: **Countries led by women had 69.2 deaths per million inhabitants whereas countries led by men had 147.5 deaths per million.** Until this date, therefore, countries led by women have less than half the deaths of comparable countries led by men.

These figures confirm that countries led by women are doing very well during the crisis. **Disproportionately well.** That is, it would be expected to find some countries doing well and others poorly regardless of male or female leadership. This is not the case. Whether or not this is mere coincidence, I intend to address it in an upcoming text.

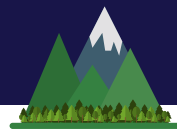
**"In addition to this positive quantitative differential, there is also a qualitative difference in the way female leaders have been handling this crisis. In particular, they have exhibited three pivotal virtues in the fight against COVID-19: humility, determination, and empathy."**



## Humility

Female leaders have recognized their countries' vulnerability when facing the unknown virus. Unlike countries with overconfident leaders full of fallacious statements, the female prime ministers and presidents were not ashamed to adopt a humble stance towards the unknown, focusing on the most important value: their citizens' health and life.

**Angela Merkel** provides a great example of it. Early on, she gave the difficult – and unpopular – news that 70% of Germany's population would eventually be contaminated according to projections. She requested everyone to take the virus as seriously as possible, as her government would.



## Determination

Women leaders were capable of making hard and fast decisions with determination. They were not afraid to see their popularity drop – even if this could harm their prospects in future elections. Taking the health of the population as their priority, it became relatively simple for them to define the path to follow.

New Zealand's Prime Minister **Jacinda Arden** provides an excellent example. She immediately closed the country's borders despite the relevance of tourism to its economy. She also ordered a one-month lockdown even before the first death by COVID-19.

The country, with a population of over 4 million, has had no new cases of contamination for days and has totaled 21 deaths so far.

Another great example with a positive impact beyond the country's borders comes from Iceland's Prime Minister **Katrín Jakobsdóttir**. Thanks to her decision to test more than 13% of its population, we know that at least 50% of people are likely to be asymptomatic. This initiative has helped governments to design better policies to fight the pandemic all over the world.



The female leaders made difficult decisions without forgetting their humanity. In several situations, they showed empathy and genuine care for people. Unfortunately, empathy is usually not prioritized as a critical trait of leadership in politics or business. So, most other leaders did not show empathy in their response to the crisis.

A beautiful example of empathy comes from **Erna Solberg**, the Norway's Prime Minister. She had the empathic and brilliant idea of holding press conferences only for children. At the events, banned for adult journalists, she answered questions from children across the country saying that it was okay to be scared when so many things happen at the same time. She did this in a respectful and empathic way, speaking the children's language.

Another example of empathy and focus on the common good came from Finnish Prime Minister **Sanna Marin**, the youngest of all with 34 years old. She asked the country's biggest digital influencers to speak directly to young people about the pandemic and its prevention. This means understanding your audience and knowing how to communicate with them.

**Humility, determination, and empathy are not unique to women.** These are human characteristics that, unfortunately, are not valued by many (male) today's leaders.

Positions of responsibility, power, and prestige – such as the countries or companies' leadership – must be occupied by competent people who genuinely listen and care for the people they lead.

We cannot afford continuing to waste 50% of talents – women – both in politics and in companies. **That is why prioritizing gender diversity in leadership positions has never been so relevant.** It is nowadays a matter of life and death.



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