

International Labour Organization

Women in business and management

Scaling success

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Preface

Gender equality, equal opportunity and treatment, and non-discrimination are fundamental to the mandate of the ILO. Since its establishment in 1919, the ILO has recognized that lasting peace, social justice and sustainable economic progress cannot be achieved while women and men face unequal opportunities or discriminatory treatment in the world of work. This commitment is enshrined in the ILO Constitution and reinforced through the Organization's international labour standards, including the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), both of which are recognized as fundamental Conventions. Together, they affirm the rights of everyone to equality of opportunity and treatment and to equal remuneration for work of equal value.

More than a century after the founding of the ILO, these principles remain as relevant as ever. Across the world, women have achieved unprecedented gains in education, skills development and labour market participation. Yet persistent inequalities continue to limit their opportunities, progression, earnings and representation in leadership positions. These inequalities are not only a matter of rights and fairness. They also represent a significant loss of talent, productivity and economic potential for enterprises, labour markets and societies.

This report is particularly timely. It follows the conclusions of the International Labour Conference's 2026 general discussion on Advancing the Transformative Agenda for Gender Equality in the World of Work, which affirmed that gender equality is a human right and core to the mandate of the ILO. The Conference recognized that gender equality is both a social justice imperative and an economic necessity for sustainable enterprises, and highlighted the importance of advancing women's opportunities as workers, leaders and entrepreneurs. It further noted that women remain under-represented in leadership positions and that addressing structural barriers that limit their career progression is a shared responsibility of governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and enterprises themselves. The evidence presented in this report contributes directly to the implementation of that transformative agenda by identifying where progress is occurring, where challenges remain, and what measures can help drive meaningful change.

It is against this background that the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO-ACT/EMP) is pleased to present *Women in business and management: Scaling success*, the third global report in this series. Building on earlier editions published in 2015 and 2019, this report provides the most comprehensive assessment to date of gender equality and diversity in enterprises. Drawing on three global ILO enterprise surveys conducted over more than a decade, complemented by labour market data, secondary research and enterprise case studies, it offers a unique longitudinal perspective on how enterprise practices, outcomes and the business case for gender equality have evolved over time.

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey, on which the report bases its findings, is the most geographically extensive in the history of this series, capturing the perspectives of nearly 12,000 enterprises across 99 countries. The scale and diversity of this evidence base provide valuable insights into how enterprises are responding to changing labour markets, evolving workforce expectations and growing recognition of the importance of gender equality and diversity for enterprise success.

The findings present a picture of both progress and unfinished business. There is considerable cause for encouragement. More enterprises than ever report positive business outcomes from initiatives that promote gender equality and diversity. Women's representation in senior leadership positions has increased in many contexts. The evidence linking gender equality to stronger business performance, including improved profitability, innovation, talent attraction and retention, resilience and reputation has become increasingly robust.

At the same time, the report demonstrates that progress remains uneven. Women continue to be under-represented in management and leadership positions, particularly in the functions and sectors that often serve as pathways to the highest levels of decision-making. Gender pay gaps remain widespread. Women continue to encounter structural barriers that limit their opportunities to enter, participate in

and progress within the labour market. In many cases, enterprises understand the importance of gender equality and diversity but struggle to translate commitment into implementation.

The findings also underscore an important reality: advancing gender equality is not solely a social objective. It is also a business imperative. As economies and enterprises navigate demographic shifts, skills shortages, technological transformation and the transition to more sustainable economic models, access to the widest possible pool of talent will be critical. Enterprises that successfully attract, retain and develop women's talent at all levels are likely to be better positioned to innovate, adapt and compete in a rapidly changing world.

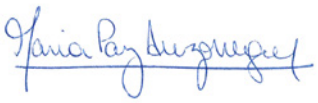
ILO-ACT/EMP has been at the forefront of supporting this agenda for many years. Through its collaboration with employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) around the world, ILO-ACT/EMP has developed extensive expertise in strengthening the capacity of EBMOs and their enterprises to understand and realize the business case for gender equality and diversity. Through research, capacity-building and practical tools, ILO-ACT/EMP has supported employers in translating principles into action and evidence into results.

This work reflects a broader conviction that employers are not merely beneficiaries of gender equality; they are essential partners in achieving it. Employers and their representative organizations play a critical role in shaping workplace cultures, developing talent pipelines, promoting equal opportunity and treatment, and creating the conditions in which women can thrive and advance. Their leadership is indispensable if the objectives embodied in the ILO Constitution, fundamental Conventions and the transformative agenda for gender equality are to become a reality.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that effective solutions exist. Enterprises across all regions are showing that progress is possible and that the benefits are tangible. The challenge before us is therefore not one of understanding what works, but of scaling and sustaining action. This requires strengthening accountability, investing in leadership pipelines, addressing barriers to progression, expanding opportunities in high-growth sectors and functions, and embedding gender equality into enterprise strategies and governance frameworks.

It is our hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for EBMOs, enterprises, policymakers and all those working to build more inclusive, productive and resilient workplaces.

The business case is clear. The evidence is stronger than ever. The task now is to scale success.



Maria Paz Anzorreguy

Director

ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities

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This report is the result of a collective effort involving colleagues, employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs), enterprises and experts from across the ILO's global network. It reflects the contributions of many individuals and institutions whose expertise, commitment and support made this publication possible.

The report was conceptualized and led by Jae-Hee Chang, who provided the overall strategic direction, managed its development and co-authored the report. The report forms part of the long-standing work of the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO-ACT/EMP) on advancing gender equality and diversity in enterprises and strengthening the capacity of employers and their organizations to realize the business case for women in business and management.

Linda Vega Orozco served as the lead economist for the project. She played a central role in the design and implementation of the 2025 global enterprise survey, the development of the survey methodology, the analysis of enterprise survey data and labour market trends, and the generation of the quantitative evidence that underpins the report's findings.

Mariska van der Linden was responsible for extensive secondary research and the development of the enterprise case studies, and co-authored the report. Her contributions were instrumental in translating the evidence into practical insights and illustrating how enterprises around the world are advancing gender equality and diversity in practice.

Special recognition is owed to Deborah France-Massin, former Director of ILO-ACT/EMP, whose leadership, vision and commitment were instrumental in establishing and advancing the Women in Business and Management series. Her support helped shape all three global reports and laid the foundations for much of ILO-ACT/EMP's work on gender equality and diversity with employers and their organizations worldwide.

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the entire global ILO-ACT/EMP team. Particular thanks are extended to ACT/EMP specialists in headquarters and field offices around the world, whose engagement was essential to the successful dissemination of the 2025 enterprise survey. Their close relationships with EBMOs significantly contributed to the breadth and quality of responses received. The report also benefited greatly from the feedback, technical inputs and peer review provided by a core group of ACT/EMP specialists throughout the development of both the survey instrument and the report. We thank Randall Arias, Wade Bromley, Laura Greene, Jose Manuel Medina Checa and Andrés Yurén for their support.

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The authors are especially grateful to the EBMOs around the world that have consistently supported the Women in Business and Management initiative over many years. Their commitment to advancing gender equality and diversity in enterprises has been fundamental to the success of this work. Through the dissemination of the enterprise survey among their member enterprises, EBMOs played a decisive role in ensuring the unprecedented scale and global reach of the 2025 survey.

Special thanks are also extended to the EBMOs that facilitated contacts with enterprises and supported the development of the case studies featured in this report. Their assistance enabled the documentation of practical examples from different regions and sectors, providing valuable insights into the measures enterprises are implementing to promote gender equality and diversity, and the results they are achieving.

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Executive summary

This report examines the state of gender equality and diversity in business at a moment of measurable progress and unrealized potential. Drawing on three large-scale ILO Women in Business and Management enterprise surveys (2013, 2018 and 2025), alongside three decades of global labour market data, it provides a comprehensive longitudinal assessment of how enterprise practices, outcomes and the business case for gender diversity have evolved over time. The 2025 survey – the most geographically extensive in the series – captures responses from nearly 12,000 enterprises across 99 countries.

The evidence points to a consistent conclusion: while gender equality and diversity have advanced, the pace and depth of progress remain insufficient to fully capture the associated economic and business benefits that the evidence now clearly demonstrates.

Key insights

Across labour markets and enterprises, a critical imbalance persists. Women are more educated than ever and increasingly present in the workforce, yet this progress is not translating into equivalent outcomes in employment, progression, leadership or earnings. The constraint is not the supply of qualified women, but the capacity of labour markets and enterprises to convert this supply into equal opportunities and treatment. This represents a significant and measurable inefficiency for enterprises and for economies as a whole.

At the same time, the business case for gender equality and diversity has strengthened considerably. A growing majority of enterprises report improved business outcomes associated with gender equality initiatives, including higher profitability, enhanced innovation, stronger talent retention and improved reputation. Enterprises with women in top leadership positions are more likely to achieve these outcomes, underscoring the importance of representation at the highest levels of decision-making.

These findings highlight a dual reality: measurable progress and demonstrated benefits on the one hand, and persistent structural barriers and unrealized potential on the other.

The business case for gender diversity continues to strengthen

The evidence linking gender equality and diversity to business performance is now robust and increasingly widely recognized. More enterprises than ever report positive outcomes from gender equality initiatives, and the scale of these benefits is significant. Profit gains are both widespread and, in many cases, substantial, while improvements in innovation, workforce engagement and reputation further reinforce the strategic value of diversity.

Leadership diversity emerges as a particularly important driver. Enterprises with women in chief executive officer (CEO) and board leadership roles are more likely to report stronger business outcomes than enterprises without women in these positions, indicating that gender diversity at the top has measurable effects on organizational performance. At an aggregate level, closing gender gaps in employment and leadership has the potential to generate substantial gains in global economic output, highlighting that the benefits of gender equality extend beyond individual enterprises to entire economies.

- **Most enterprises report that gender equality and diversity initiatives improve business outcomes.** In 2025, 68.5 per cent of enterprises reported positive results from gender equality and diversity initiatives, an increase of 11.1 percentage points compared to 2018.
- **Profit gains are both widespread and substantial**. Of those enterprises that reported increased profits, 87.4 per cent recorded gains of at least 5 per cent linked to initiatives promoting women in

management. More than one in ten enterprises (13.4 per cent) reported profit increases exceeding 20 per cent.

- **Women leaders make a measurable difference**. Enterprises led by a female CEO are 6.4 per cent more likely to report better business outcomes than enterprises led by a male CEO, while enterprises with a female board chair are 17.5 per cent more likely to report better business outcomes than those with a male board chair.

Gender imbalances in the labour market persist, despite some improvements

Over the past three decades, women have made significant gains in education and skills acquisition, now outpacing men in higher education globally. Yet this progress is not being matched by equivalent labour market outcomes, pointing to enduring structural constraints, including occupational segregation, unequal care responsibilities and persistent social norms that shape labour market participation and career progression. From an economic perspective, these dynamics represent a significant inefficiency, as enterprises and economies fail to fully utilize available talent.

Women's labour force participation has nonetheless demonstrated resilience in the face of recent disruptions, recovering to levels higher than those found before the COVID-19 pandemic. This underscores both women's capacity to re-enter and contribute to the workforce at scale, and the importance of creating conditions – through upskilling and reskilling programmes – that make this possible.

- **Labour market participation gaps remain substantial.** Less than half (48.6 per cent) of women are economically active. The modest narrowing of the gender gap over time is driven more by declining participation among men than by significant gains among women.
- **Women's entrepreneurship has increased but remains limited.** While the number of women employers has nearly doubled over the past 30 years, women still account for only 22.8 per cent of business owners.
- **A growing disconnect exists between education and labour market outcomes.** Women now outpace men in higher education globally – in 2023 nearly half of all women (46.4 per cent) attended university compared to 40.3 per cent of men – yet remain under-represented in key sectors, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, comprising about 35 per cent of tertiary STEM graduates worldwide.
- **Progress in access to management has not translated into gender balance in leadership.** Women account for less than a third (30.5 per cent) of managerial positions globally, with significantly lower representation at higher levels of responsibility.
- **Gender pay gaps remain widespread**. On average, women earn US$0.78 for every dollar earned by men, with gaps often widening at senior levels.

Progress in the private sector is real but uneven

The private sector has made measurable progress in advancing gender equality and diversity, particularly at senior levels. More enterprises than ever have women across management levels, and the share of women in senior leadership positions, including CEOs and board members, has also increased over time. These developments are significant, particularly given the catalytic role that leadership plays in shaping broader organizational outcomes.

However, this progress at senior levels is not supported by equivalent gains in the management pipeline below. Gender balance has declined in junior and middle management even as it has improved at the

top – and without sustained investment in earlier career stages, the pipeline feeding future leadership will narrow, rendering current gains structurally fragile.

- **Overall workforce composition shows modest improvement, but gender balance remains limited.** The share of enterprises with gender-balanced workforces (40–60 per cent of either gender) dropped by 6.2 percentage points between 2013 and 2025.
- **Women's representation in executive leadership has increased.** In 2025, 28.2 per cent of enterprises had a woman CEO, up from 23.4 per cent in 2013 (+4.8 percentage points). In 2025, the share of enterprises with at least 30 per cent women on boards rose by 7.2 percentage points, from 38.3 to 45.5 per cent, while the proportion with a woman board chair more than doubled, from 13.1 to 30.9 per cent.
- **Progress at senior levels contrasts with weaker pipelines below.** Between 2013 and 2025 gender balance increased at senior (+1.6 percentage points) and top (+5.0 percentage points) management levels, but declined in junior (–1.4 percentage points) and middle management (–6.4 percentage points).
- **Women leaders are catalysts for broader diversity.** Enterprises with female board chairs are 37.8 per cent more likely to have boards with at least 30 per cent women compared to those chaired by men. Enterprises with a female CEO are 12.6 per cent more likely to have a gender-balanced workforce than those led by men.
- **Gender imbalances across functions and sectors limit progression pathways.** Today, there are more women senior managers across all functions, but progress has been uneven. Women remain concentrated in human resources (62.5 per cent) and finance and administration (55.4 per cent), while under-represented in roles linked to profit and loss (19.8 per cent) and research and development (26.3 per cent), which are functions most closely associated with pathways to executive leadership.

Policies, monitoring frameworks and voluntary targets make a measurable difference

A central finding of the report is that the key challenge is no longer identifying effective approaches but ensuring their implementation. While most enterprises report having gender equality and diversity policies in place, fewer are translating these into concrete initiatives. In fact, the share of enterprises implementing such initiatives has declined in recent years, including in areas widely recognized as highly effective.

This implementation gap has direct implications for business performance. Enterprises that move beyond policy commitments, by adopting targeted measures, using gender metrics and setting voluntary targets, are significantly more likely to report improved outcomes and profitability. Execution, rather than intent, is therefore the primary driver of results.

- **Specific measures are strongly associated with improved performance.** Enterprises report that the most effective initiatives for promoting gender equality and diversity are maternity leave and support programmes (74.7 per cent), preventing and addressing violence and harassment (74.1 per cent), and equal pay initiatives (70.1 per cent).
- **Monitoring frameworks improve outcomes.** Enterprises with gender metrics are 17.0 per cent more likely to report better business outcomes than enterprises without gender metrics, and 8.3 per cent more likely to report increased profits.
- **Voluntary targets drive results.** Enterprises with gender diversity targets at the senior management level are 15.3 per cent more likely to report better business outcomes than enterprises without such targets.

- **However, implementation is declining.** The share of enterprises implementing gender equality and diversity initiatives fell from 37.4 per cent of enterprises in 2018 to 26.5 per cent in 2025. This decline includes reductions in two of the most effective measures identified by enterprises: maternity leave and support programmes (–11.3 percentage points) and equal pay (–19.6 percentage points).
- **Environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks provide an important pathway for advancing gender equality and diversity.** ESG adoption is widespread (70.8 per cent), and most enterprises integrating ESG also incorporate gender considerations (81.5 per cent). The relationship between ESG and gender equality and diversity is mutually reinforcing: enterprises with ESG policies and/or practices are more likely to employ women across management, including middle (+9.8 per cent), senior (+12 per cent) and top (+6.1 per cent) management, while those with a female CEO are 6.8 per cent more likely to have ESG policies and/or practices, and enterprises with a woman chair of the board are 17.1 per cent more likely to do so.

Looking forward

The imperative to address these challenges is intensifying in the context of broader structural transformations. Demographic change is already exerting pressure in many regions: population ageing is contributing to shrinking labour forces in some economies, while others are experiencing youth bulges and growing labour forces. Meanwhile, the digital and green transitions provide opportunities for growth but also carry risks, particularly from automation, with evidence suggesting that women may be disproportionately affected. In this environment, the full utilization of available talent – including women – is not only an equity objective but an economic necessity.

Enterprises that succeed in advancing gender equality are likely to be better positioned to navigate these transitions, attract and retain talent, meet growing stakeholder expectations and capture emerging opportunities. The rise of ESG means that investors, customers and regulators are increasingly scrutinizing enterprises' social performance, adding further impetus to action.

The evidence presented in this report points to a clear and actionable priority: moving from commitment to consistent implementation. This requires strengthening management pipelines, addressing structural barriers to progression, expanding women's access to key functions and sectors, and embedding gender equality within core business strategies and accountability frameworks.

Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action across multiple levels. Governments play a critical role in creating enabling environments, including through child care provision, family-friendly policies and effective gender equality legislation. At the same time, employer and business membership organizations have an equally important role in supporting enterprises to move from intent to execution – embedding gender equality into core strategies, strengthening leadership pipelines and using metrics and targets to drive accountability.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that advancing gender equality at all levels is a pathway to stronger enterprise performance and more resilient economies. The business case is compelling, the effective measures are known and the frameworks for implementation are available. The priority now is to implement them consistently and at scale.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AI	artificial intelligence
CEO	chief executive officer
CSR	corporate social responsibility
DEI	diversity, equality and inclusion
EBMO	employer and business membership organization
ESG	environmental, social and governance
GDP	gross domestic product
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBC	responsible business conduct
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WEPs	UN Women and UN Global Compact's Women's Empowerment Principles

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Diverse and inclusive workplaces can help enterprises draw on the widest possible pool of talent.

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1

Introduction

▸ Scope of survey

Survey responses

11,957

Country coverage

99

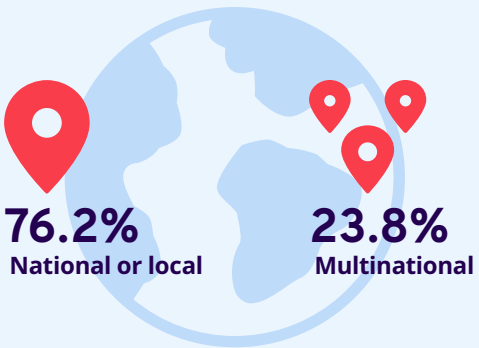
Enterprise size

Small enterprises
45.7%

Medium enterprises
20.0%

Large enterprises
34.3%

Enterprise type



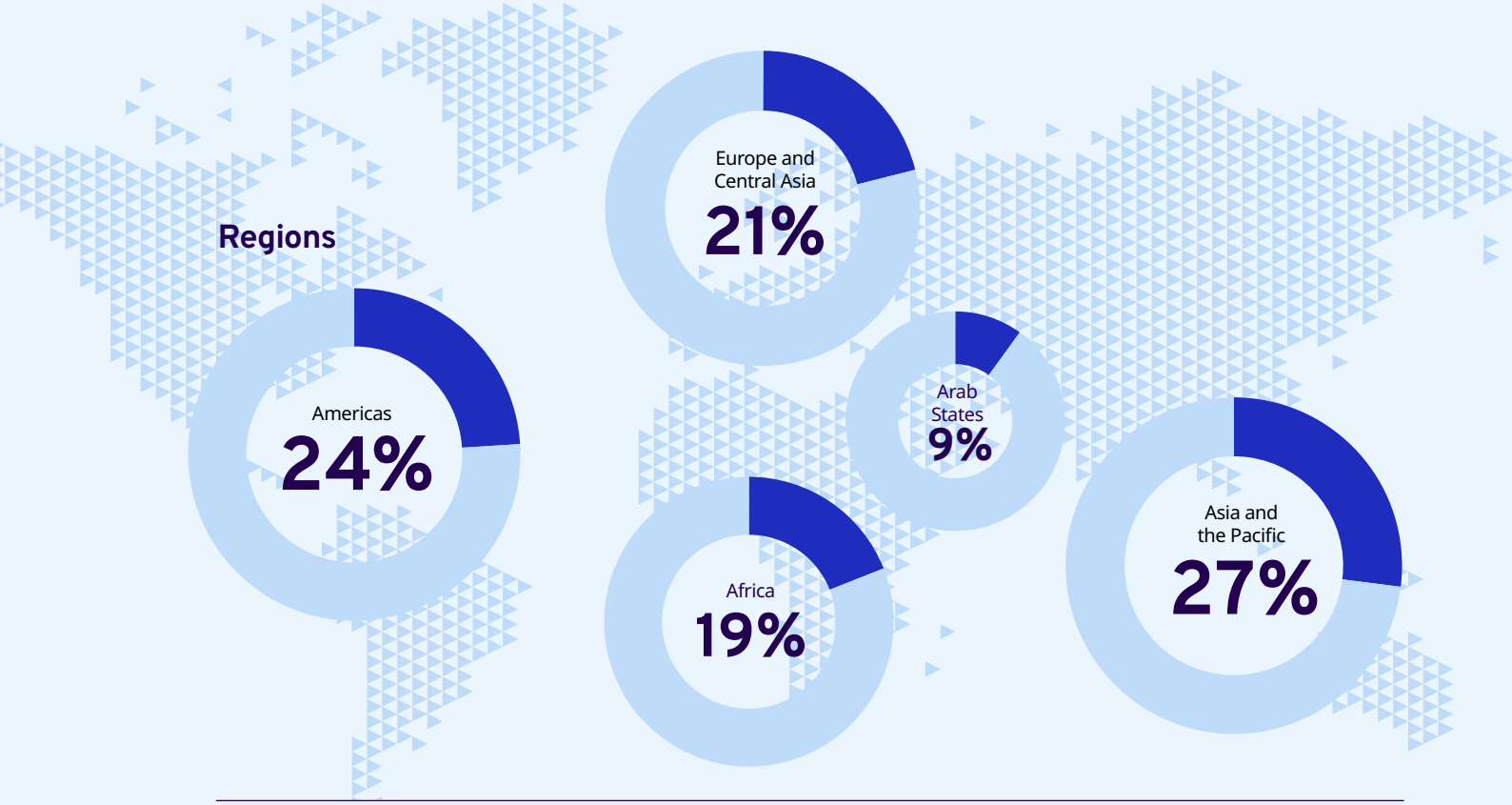
76.2%
National or local

23.8%
Multinational

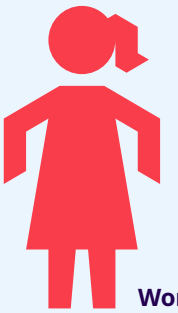
Economic sectors

Manufacturing	14%
Other service activities	13%
Education	9%
Shop-keeping, sales or trade activities	9%
Construction	7%
Information and communications	6%
Financial or insurance activities	6%
Human health or social work	5%
Hotels or restaurants	5%
Other economic sectors	27%

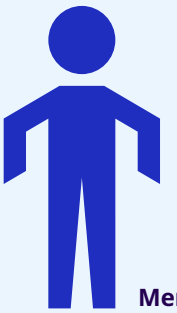
Regions



Gender



Women
51.4%



Men
48.6%

Employment type



Part-time
15.9%



Full-time
84.1%

Seniority



38.2%
Led a department or business unit



29.0%
Managed a team



32.8%
No management responsibilities

Gender equality and diversity in business: A strategic imperative at a turning point

In 2026, gender equality and diversity in the world of work stand at a moment of both progress and opportunity. Over the past three decades, significant advances have been made. Women's educational attainment has increased dramatically, gender gaps in labour force participation have narrowed, and more women are entering business leadership and entrepreneurship. These trends point to a steady, albeit gradual, movement towards more inclusive labour markets and workplaces globally.

Crucially, the intrinsic link between gender equality and diversity and robust business performance has never been more clearly established. A continually expanding body of global evidence unequivocally demonstrates that diverse and inclusive workplaces foster stronger innovation, better decision-making, and improved talent attraction and retention, and ultimately lead to improved financial performance. This compelling business case for gender equality and diversity is now well documented across diverse sectors and regions and continues to gain strength as new data emerge.

This reinforces a fundamental reality for enterprises: the talent that women bring to the workforce is not only significant but indispensable. Women constitute a highly skilled, educated and still underutilized pool of talent. For enterprises navigating competitive and rapidly changing environments, fully leveraging this talent is becoming a key determinant of resilience, adaptability and long-term success. Therefore, advancing gender equality is not solely a matter of equity but also a strategic economic priority, understood not as a constraint, but as a powerful driver of performance and a source of competitive advantage for businesses and economies alike.

Despite this progress and clear imperative, important gaps persist. Women continue to be under-represented in management and leadership positions, facing structural barriers to advancement. Bridging these gaps offers a strategic opportunity to unlock productivity gains, mitigate the impact of tightening labour markets, and ensure the optimal utilization of human capital.

A changing global context: Key drivers of transformation

The urgency of advancing gender equality and diversity in business is heightened by a set of structural transformations that are reshaping labour markets and economies.

First, demographic trends and labour market dynamics are increasing the need to tap into underutilized talent pools. Ageing populations in many regions, combined with persistent skills shortages, mean that economies and enterprises cannot afford to overlook the potential of women. Ensuring women's full participation is increasingly central to sustaining growth and competitiveness.

Second, rapid technological change and digitalization are transforming the nature of work and the demand for skills. These changes are not gender neutral. Women remain under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and in technology-driven workforces. Without targeted action, technological change risks widening gender gaps, even as it creates new opportunities.

Third, the transition to more sustainable and environmentally friendly economies is generating significant job growth, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy. However, these sectors remain male dominated, and women are often concentrated in lower-value or administrative roles.

Fourth, the growing importance of environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks is reshaping how business performance is defined and measured. Gender equality and diversity are increasingly recognized as a key component of the "social" dimension of ESG frameworks. Investors, regulators,

employees and consumers are placing greater emphasis on diversity and inclusion,[1] making gender equality and diversity strategic considerations for enterprises.

Taken together, these trends are redefining gender equality and diversity as a strategic priority for businesses.

Towards a transformative agenda for gender equality and diversity

These developments align with the ILO's transformative agenda for gender equality adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2019 at its 108th Session (ILO 2019a), and considered in a general discussion leading to a resolution in 2026 at its 114th Session (ILO 2026a). Incremental progress, while important, has proven insufficient to close persistent gaps. Structural barriers, including discriminatory norms, unequal access to opportunities, occupational segregation and unequal care responsibilities, continue to shape outcomes for women in the world of work.

A transformative agenda implies moving beyond isolated initiatives towards systemic change. This includes embedding gender equality in business strategies, aligning policies with measurable targets and accountability mechanisms, and addressing structural factors that limit women's participation and advancement.

About this report

This global report contributes to the transformative agenda by providing one of the most comprehensive global evidence bases on gender equality and diversity in business. It draws on three large-scale ILO Women in Business and Management enterprise surveys (subsequently referred to as "ILO enterprise surveys") conducted in 2013 (ILO 2015), 2018 (ILO 2019b) and 2025, offering a unique longitudinal perspective on how enterprise practices, motivations and outcomes have evolved over time.[2]

The 2025 enterprise survey, the most geographically extensive in the series, includes responses from nearly 12,000 enterprises across 99 countries. It examines why enterprises engage in gender equality, what actions they take and what results they achieve.

These insights are complemented by global labour market data spanning three decades, as well as secondary research. In addition, this report is informed by the case studies of five companies acting on gender equality and diversity (see Annex 3 for the full case studies). These case studies outline challenges, successes and results, and aim to inspire other enterprises. The case studies span different world regions and sectors.

Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a global overview of women's participation in the labour market, including trends in employment, entrepreneurship, education, management and earnings. Chapter 3 examines the business case for gender equality and diversity. Chapter 4 analyses women's representation in the private sector across different levels of management and leadership.

1 "Diversity" in the workplace refers to the similarities and differences that exist between people and that can impact employment and business opportunities and outcomes. "Inclusion" refers to the experience people have in the workplace and the extent to which they feel valued for who they are, the skills and experience they bring and the extent to which they have a strong sense of belonging with others at work (Shapiro 2022).

2 The report takes into account differences in sample composition across survey rounds. While the samples are comparable for the 2025 and 2018 surveys, both in size and composition, the sample size for the 2013 survey was significantly smaller and did not include any developed countries. In this report, comparisons over time have been made where supported by the data.

Chapter 5 explores the policies and practices that are most effective in promoting gender equality and diversity within enterprises. The report concludes by identifying key priorities for future action.

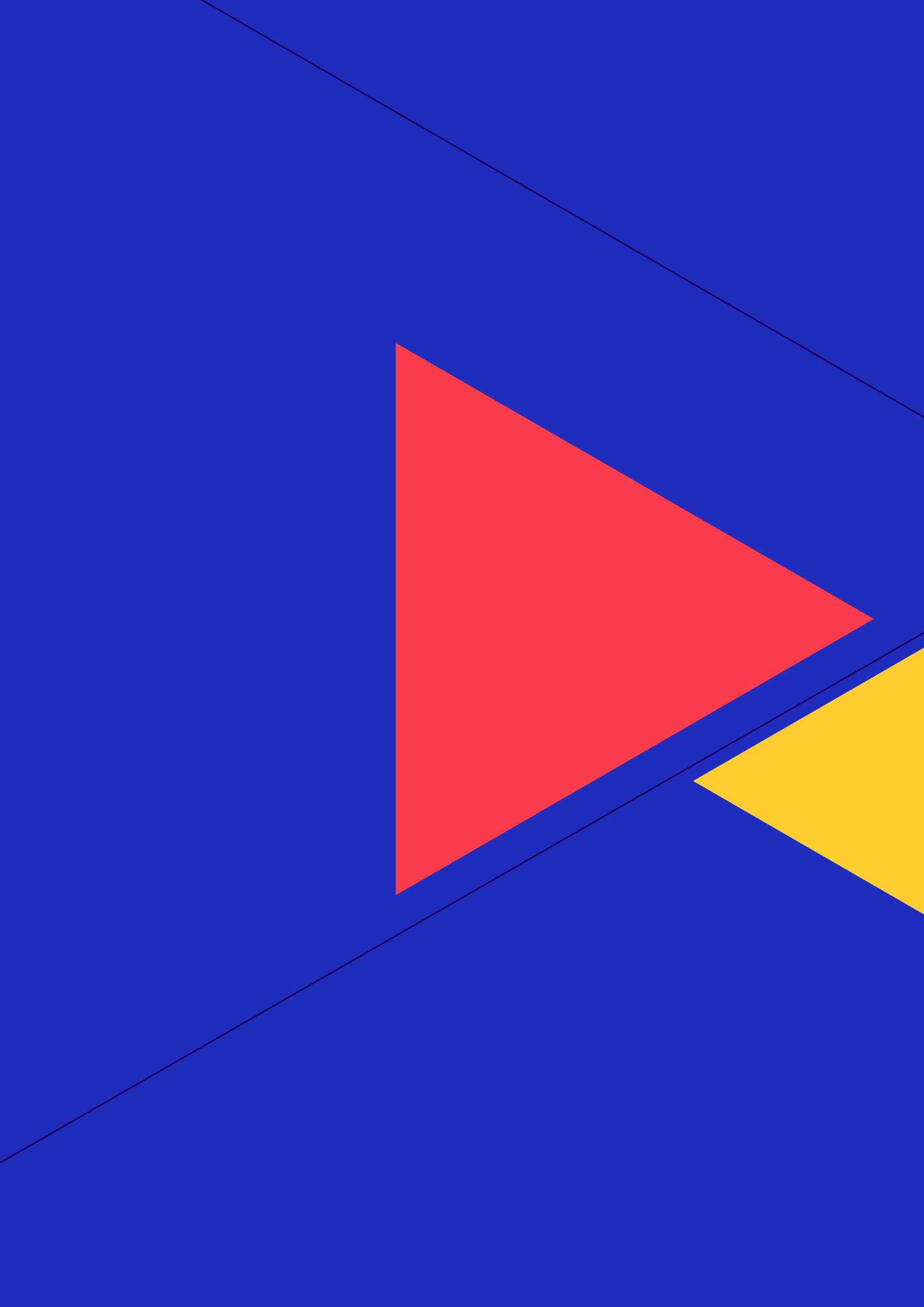
Methodological overview

The findings presented in this report are based primarily on the 2025 ILO enterprise survey, which was carried out between June and September 2025. The survey was implemented by a professional survey firm using its global enterprise panel and was also distributed through employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) to enterprises worldwide.

The sample reflects broad global coverage across regions, enterprise sizes and sectors. Responses were received from 11,957 enterprises in 99 countries. Regionally, 27.2 per cent of enterprises were based in Asia and the Pacific, 24.1 per cent in the Americas, 20.8 per cent in Europe and Central Asia, 19.0 per cent in Africa, and 8.9 per cent in the Arab States. In terms of enterprise size, 45.7 per cent were small enterprises (2–100 employees), 20.0 per cent were medium-sized enterprises (101–250 employees), and 34.3 per cent were large enterprises (more than 250 employees).

This sample covered a wide range of economic sectors, with strong representation from manufacturing, services, education, trade and construction. Respondents included employees at different levels of seniority, including senior leaders, middle managers and non-managerial staff, allowing for analysis across organizational hierarchies.

Further details on the survey methodology and full sample characteristics, including additional regional, sectoral and respondent breakdowns, are provided in Annex 1.





Women's participation in the world of work has advanced, but persistent barriers continue to shape their employment opportunities and career progression.

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2

Women in the labour market: Trends, gaps and outcomes

This chapter analyses long-term labour market data from the ILO and other sources to trace the evolution of women's labour force participation, entrepreneurship, tertiary education and earnings. These insights provide essential context for interpreting the results of the ILO enterprise surveys in subsequent chapters.

Overall, the evidence points to gradual but uneven progress. Gender gaps in labour force participation, entrepreneurship, education, management and leadership, and earnings have narrowed over time but remain substantial across all regions. At the same time, the data reveal a persistent imbalance: women are better educated than ever before, yet this is not fully translating into equal participation in the labour market or representation in leadership.

Labour market disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have further highlighted both vulnerabilities and resilience. While women were disproportionately affected in the short term, participation rates have recovered, underscoring women's capacity to re-enter and contribute to the workforce. The longer-term significance lies in how such shocks have exposed structural barriers, particularly those related to care responsibilities and sectoral segregation, that continue to shape outcomes.

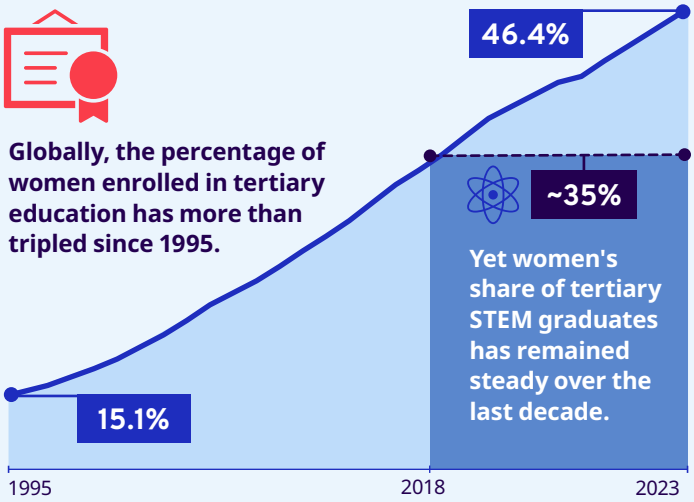
Looking ahead, major transformations, including digitalization and the green transition, are reshaping labour markets. These shifts create new opportunities for women but also carry risks of reinforcing existing inequalities if access to emerging sectors and skills remains uneven. For enterprises, these trends point to significant untapped potential. Persistent gender gaps in employment and leadership represent not only a social challenge, but also a missed economic opportunity.

Global labour markets have made meaningful progress toward gender equality but structural gaps remain.

Over three decades, the labour force participation gap has closed by only 3.8 percentage points.



More women are earning degrees than ever before, but they remain under-represented in the most influential career paths.

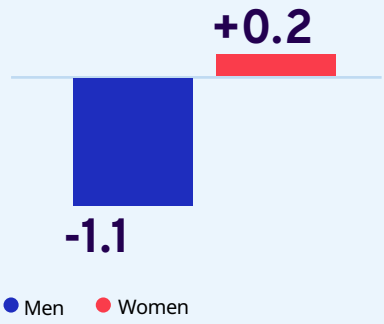


Globally, the percentage of women enrolled in tertiary education has more than tripled since 1995.

Yet women's share of tertiary STEM graduates has remained steady over the last decade.

Women's labour force participation has shown resilience in the face of recent disruptions.

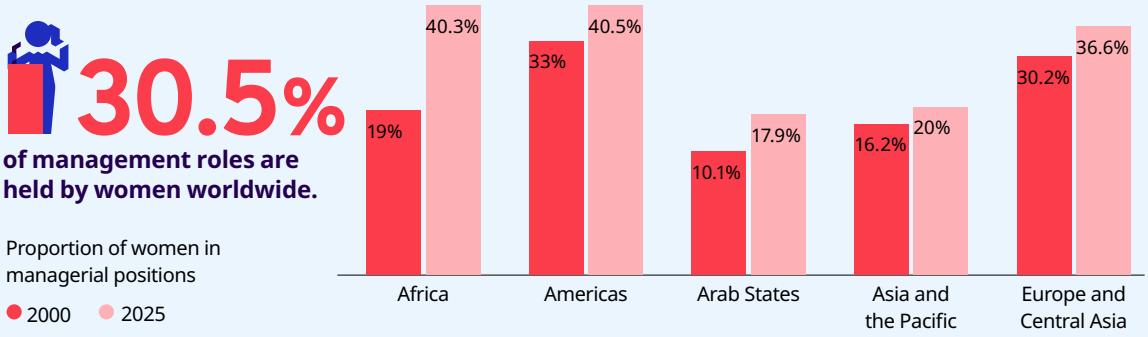
Since COVID-19, women's labour force participation has surpassed 2019 levels, while men's has yet to fully recover.

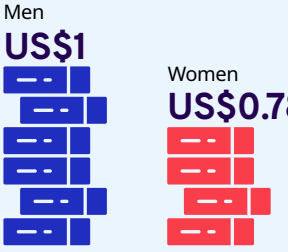


There are now more women in management, but gender balance still remains out of reach.

30.5%

of management roles are held by women worldwide.





Closing the gender pay gap remains essential to equal opportunity. Globally, women earn just US$0.78 for every dollar men make, a gap driven not by qualifications or hours worked but by structural barriers that limit equal pay and place unpaid care work disproportionately on women.

Key trends

- **The global gender gap in labour force participation is slowly narrowing but less than half (48.6 per cent) of women of working age are economically active.** In 1995, the difference between female and male participation rates was 27.9 percentage points, whereas in 2026 it is predicted to stand at 24.1 percentage points – an improvement of 3.8 percentage points.
- **Women's labour force participation has remained resilient despite recent disruptions, recovering to slightly above its pre-COVID-19 level,** while men's participation remains below 2019 levels globally.
- **More women are business owners.** The number of women employers has nearly doubled in the last 30 years, from 15.1 million in 1995 to 32.7 million in 2025. Yet women accounted for only 22.8 per cent of business owners in 2025.
- **Globally, the share of women enrolled in tertiary education has more than tripled over the past 30 years.** In 2023 nearly half of all women (46.4 per cent) attended university compared to 40.3 per cent of men. However, between 2018 and 2023, women comprised around 35 per cent of tertiary STEM graduates worldwide, limiting their involvement in high-growth and innovation-driven sectors.
- **Women remain under-represented in management, particularly at senior levels.** Despite gradual progress, women account for only 30.5 per cent of managerial positions globally. This aggregate figure masks sharper disparities at higher levels of responsibility, where there are even fewer women.
- **On average, for every dollar a man earns, a woman makes only US$0.78.** Most of this pay gap cannot be explained by labour market factors such as differences in education levels or working hours, but reflects structural barriers, including occupational segregation, undervaluation of women's work and the impact of care responsibilities on career progression.

Labour force participation: Slow progress and structural constraints

Global overview

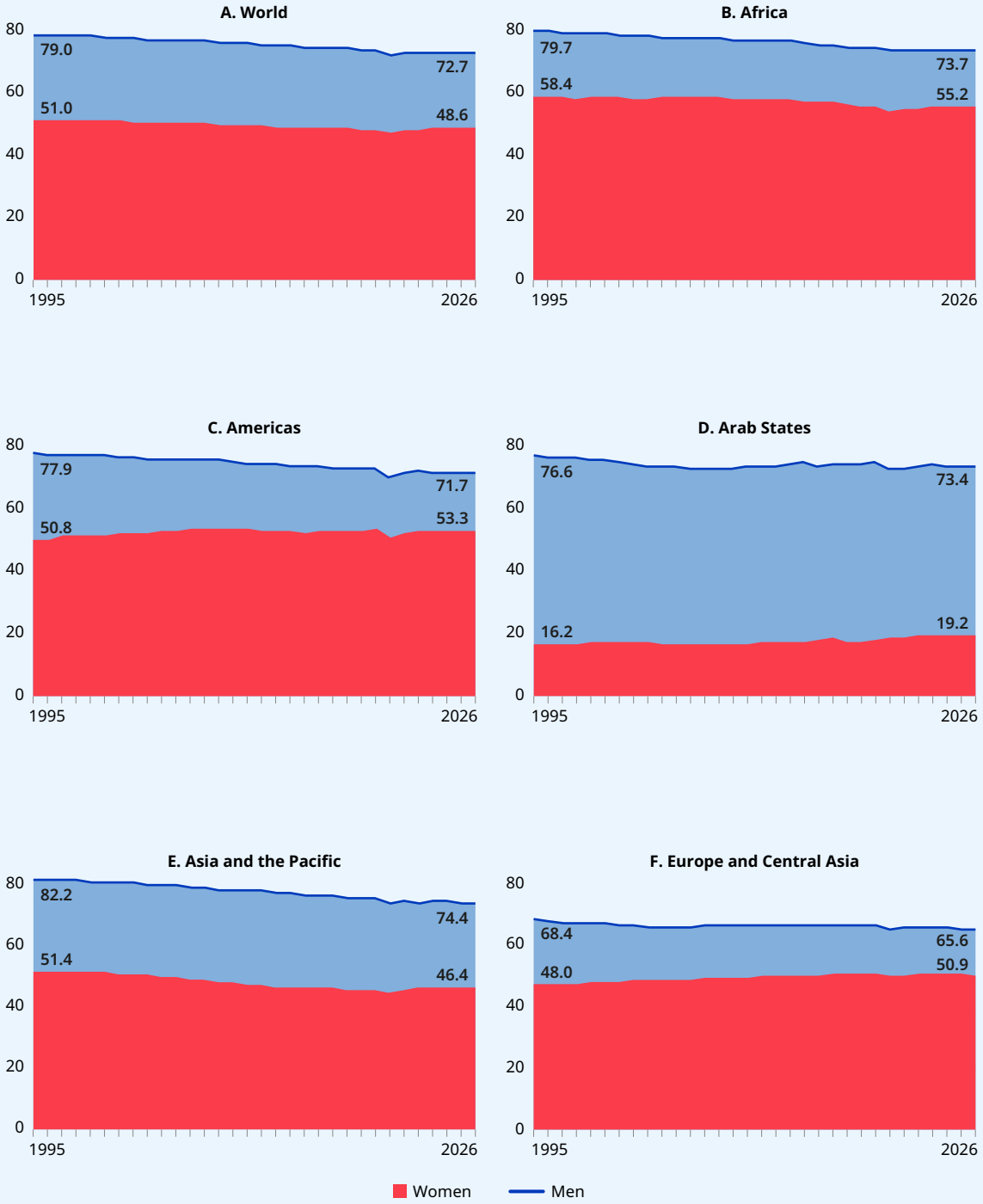
Analysis of global ILO data over the past 30 years shows that gender gaps in labour force participation[3] persist despite modest improvements. In 1995, the difference between female and male participation rates was 27.9 per cent, whereas in 2026 it is predicted to stand at 24.1 per cent – a reduction of just 3.8 percentage points (figure 1).

This narrowing gap is not primarily the result of a strong increase in women's participation. In fact, the share of women in the labour force has slightly declined from 51.0 per cent in 1995 to 48.6 per cent in 2026. Men's participation has also decreased – from 79.0 per cent to 72.7 per cent – but from a higher baseline and at a faster pace. As a result, the gender gap has narrowed mainly because fewer men are participating rather than because substantially more women are entering the labour market.

These trends suggest that available labour supply is changing in complex ways. Structural factors such as demographic shifts, including ageing populations in many regions and high levels of youth inactivity in others, are reshaping labour market participation. At the same time, rising educational attainment, particularly among women, is not fully translating into employment opportunities, pointing to mismatches between skills supply and labour market demand. Additionally, gender-specific barriers, such as unequal care responsibilities and social norms, continue to constrain women's participation more than men's.

3 The labour force participation rate is a measure of the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work; it provides an indication of the size of the supply of labour available to engage in the production of goods and services, relative to the population at working age.

▶ **Figure 1. Labour force participation rates for women and men, and the gender gap, 1995–2026, world and by region** (percentage)



Note: In each panel, the red-shaded area represents women's participation rate, the top line represents men's participation rate, and the light-blue shaded area represents the gender gap.

Source: ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

Overall, progress towards gender equality in labour force participation remains slow and uneven. From an economic perspective, this represents a significant inefficiency: economies and enterprises are not fully utilizing the available talent pool. Increasing women's participation in the labour market would not only improve equity outcomes, but also generate substantial gains in productivity and growth, as explored further in Chapter 3.

Regional variations

The gender gap in labour participation rates has narrowed across all regions but differences are stark. Extrapolated figures for 2026 show that women in Africa will have the highest labour market participation rate at 55.2 per cent, while for women in the Arab States the rate remains below 20 per cent. More than half of women in the Americas (53.3 per cent) and in Europe and Central Asia (50.9 per cent) will be active in the labour market, whereas 46.4 per cent of women in Asia and the Pacific will participate (figure 1).

These disparities are even more evident when looking at gender gaps. The largest gender gap is observed in the Arab States (54.2 per cent), followed by Asia and the Pacific (28.0 per cent), Africa (18.5 per cent), the Americas (18.4 per cent), and Europe and Central Asia (14.7 per cent).

The data indicate that the labour supply is expanding unevenly across different regions. Differences in participation cannot be explained by education levels alone, which have improved globally. Instead, they reflect the continued influence of institutional, legal and social barriers, which shape women's ability to enter and remain in the workforce.

Labour market shocks and women's resilience

Recent years have shown how labour market shocks can affect women and men differently. The COVID-19 pandemic provides an example of how existing gender inequalities can be amplified during periods of crisis.[4] Employment losses globally were steeper for women (5.0 per cent) than for men (3.9 per cent) (ILO 2021). This generally increased the long-standing gender gaps in labour force participation rates. As school closures due to lockdowns required more at-home supervision of children, women were much more likely to drop out of the labour force than men in order to provide such care. In addition, this reflects women's concentration in sectors most affected by lockdowns and reduced hours or temporary inactivity (ILO 2026b).

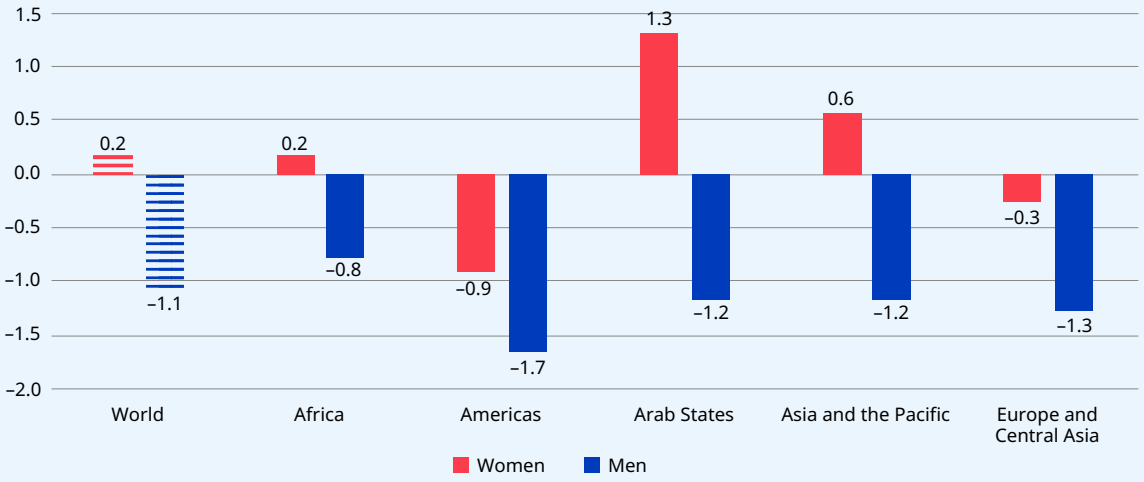
However, recovery patterns have been notable. Since the crisis, women's labour force participation has largely rebounded globally, while men's participation remains below pre-pandemic levels. In 2026, women's participation rates are slightly higher than in 2019 (+0.2 percentage points), whereas men's remain lower (–1.1 percentage points). Recovery has varied across regions. Women's participation has increased most strongly in the Arab States (+1.3 percentage points), while recovery has been slower in the Americas (–0.9 percentage points). However, even in the Americas female participation rates have recovered more than those for men (–1.7 percentage points) (figure 2).

These patterns highlight an important dynamic: while crises tend to expose and exacerbate structural inequalities, they also reveal the resilience of women in the labour market. Women's capacity to re-enter employment following economic shocks represents a significant, yet under-recognized, source of labour market strength.

At the same time, recovery periods can create opportunities for enterprises to reshape their workforces. As enterprises rebuild and adapt, they may draw more actively on available and increasingly skilled female talent pools. The stronger rebound in women's labour force participation relative to that of men suggests that, in some contexts, businesses re-engaged women workers at a faster pace, whether to address skills shortages, respond to changing business needs or strengthen workforce diversity.

4 The most disruptive event from a labour market perspective since the last ILO Women in Business and Management report, published in 2019, was the COVID-19 pandemic.

▶ **Figure 2. Changes in labour force participation rates for women and men from pre-COVID-19 (2019) to post-COVID-19 (2026), world and by region** (percentage points)



Source: ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

More women are now business owners or employers

The number of women employers[5] has nearly doubled in the last 30 years – from 15.1 million in 1995 to 32.7 million in 2025 – according to ILO labour market data. This represents significant progress in women's participation in entrepreneurship. However, women account for only 22.8 per cent of business owners or employers, up only slightly from 17.4 per cent 30 years ago.

This gender gap reflects a range of structural barriers that limit women's ability to start and grow businesses. Access to finance remains a key barrier. Women entrepreneurs are less likely to obtain financing for their businesses, and when they do, it is likely to be on less favourable terms than men.[6] Women often lack the formal property titles required for loan collateral, and in some jurisdictions, they still face legal or cultural restrictions on independent borrowing.

Despite these barriers, female business ownership has increased in all regions since 1995 (figure 3). The highest shares of women employers are found in Europe and Central Asia (26.4 per cent) and the Americas (26.2 per cent), followed by Africa (25.8 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (20.1 per cent). The Arab States (7.8 per cent) has the lowest proportion of female employers.

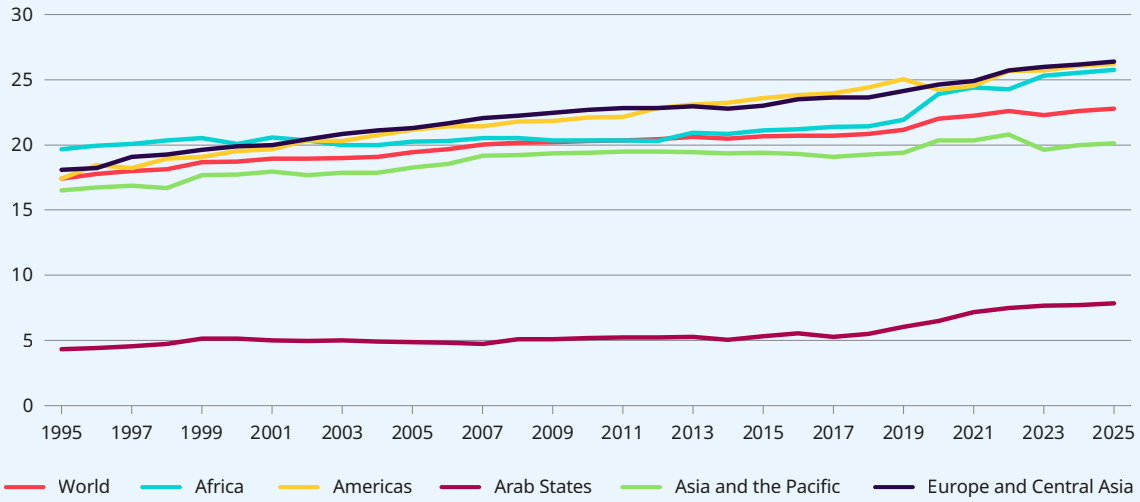
The COVID-19 crisis did not significantly disrupt female entrepreneurship at a global level. In fact, women's share of business ownership slightly increased between 2019 and 2020, from 21.2 to 22.0 per cent, again demonstrating resilience amid economic challenges.

While the rise in women's entrepreneurship is an important development, it is not always a straightforward indicator of progress. Where access to decent, formal employment is limited, self-employment and entrepreneurship are more of a necessity than a choice. In these cases, the increase in female business owners often reflects the lack of opportunities in the formal labour market, rather than an expansion of high-quality entrepreneurial pathways (ILO 2019c).

5 To be classified as an employer, an individual must employ at least one person.

6 See, for example, OECD and GWEP (2025).

▶ **Figure 3. Women as a share of employers, world and by region, 1995–2025** (percentage)



Source: ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

More women than ever before participate in higher education

Over the last 30 years, women's participation in higher education has increased at an unprecedented pace. ILO analysis of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data shows that globally, the percentage of women enrolled in tertiary education has more than tripled, from 15.1 per cent in 1995 to 46.4 per cent in 2023 (figure 4).

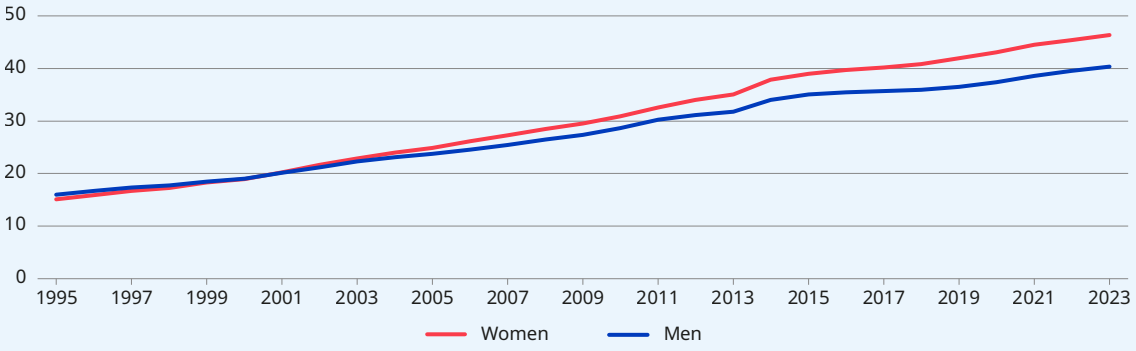
In most regions, women not only match but surpass men in access to higher education. In 2023, nearly half of all women (46.4 per cent) were enrolled in tertiary education compared to 40.3 per cent of men. With labour markets increasingly supplied by highly educated women, addressing future skill shortages will depend in large part on how effectively this talent is integrated into the economy (figure 5).

Regional trends illustrate the scale and breadth of this transformation. Since 1995, women's enrolment has increased sevenfold in East Asia and the Pacific and eightfold in South Asia. In Western and Central Africa, the Arab States, and Latin America and the Caribbean, women's enrolment has more than tripled. Currently, North America, and Europe and Central Asia have the highest levels, with nearly nine out of ten women attending university. In Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as East Asia and the Pacific, about seven out of ten women are enrolled – an impressive milestone compared to just one generation ago.

Men's enrolment has also increased, but at a slower pace. As a result, gender gaps in higher education have reversed in many regions. For example, in Europe and Central Asia, 74.0 per cent of men are enrolled in higher education compared to nearly 90 per cent of women. In North America, the gap is similarly pronounced, with 64.8 per cent of men enrolled compared to 94.2 per cent of women.

Despite substantial gains in women's education across all regions, labour force participation and entrepreneurship are not automatically rising in parallel. This disconnect points to the importance of non-educational barriers, such as care responsibilities, labour laws, cultural norms and workplace practices, in shaping economic outcomes.

▶ **Figure 4. Gross enrolment ratios for tertiary education for women and men, world average, 1995–2023** (percentage)



Source: UNESCO UIS (2025).

More women are in management but gender balance remains out of reach

The share of women in management roles has increased worldwide and across all regions since 2000. Based on ILO estimates derived from national labour force and household surveys, women now account for 30.5 per cent of management roles, up from 24.5 per cent in 2000 (figure 6). Despite this progress, men continue to hold the majority of decision-making roles, particularly at higher levels of management.[7]

Regional differences remain pronounced. The Americas record the highest share, with women representing 40.5 per cent of managers, followed closely by Africa, and Europe and Central Asia, where women comprise about a third of managers. In contrast, women remain significantly under-represented in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States, where they hold around one in five management roles.

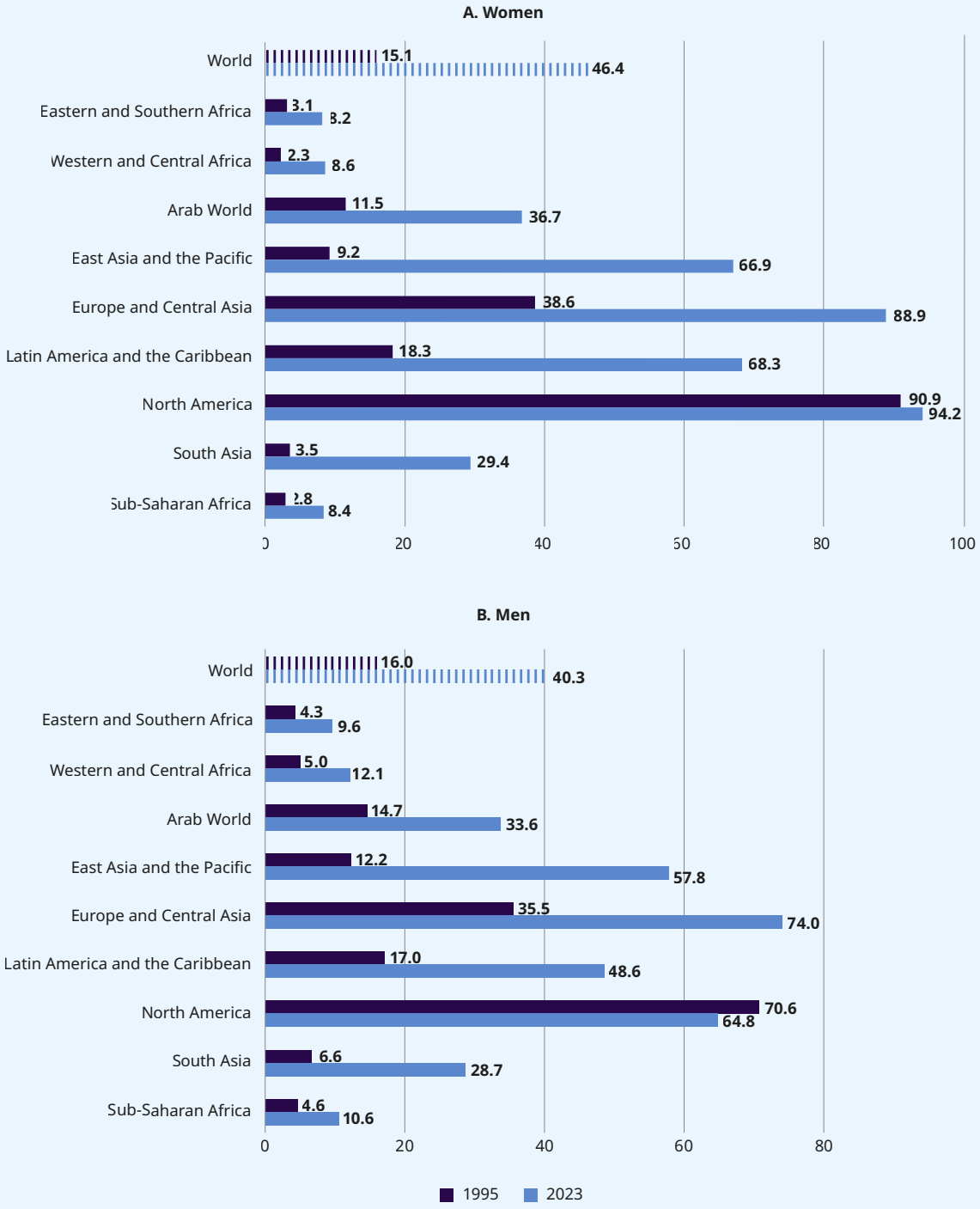
Additional country-level evidence underscores the uneven nature of these trends. Global maps that illustrate the share of women in junior, middle and senior management positions (that is, all management), and the share of women in middle and senior management positions are provided in Annex 2, based on the latest available national data. The annex further presents regional breakdowns for countries with available data, allowing for a more detailed assessment of women's representation across different levels of management.

Women's under-representation is even more pronounced at the highest levels of enterprise leadership. World Bank 2023 data[8] indicate that, globally, less than one in five enterprises have a woman as the top manager. Regional patterns mirror those observed for overall management but with wider gaps. East Asia and the Pacific had the highest share of women-led enterprises, at nearly 35 per cent (figure 7). In Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern and Southern Africa, the figure is closer to 20 per cent. In Europe and Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage drops even further to approximately 17 per cent, with Western and Central Africa at 13.4 per cent. The lowest representation was found in South Asia, where fewer than one in ten enterprises (9.2 per cent) were led by women, and in the Arab World, where the share drops below 5 per cent.

7 Employment in managerial positions is calculated based on data on employment by sex and occupation. It is the number of women in management as a percentage of employment in management, based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO). Two different measures are presented: one referring to all management (category 1 in ISCO-08 or ISCO-88) and another referring to senior and middle management only, thus excluding junior management (category 1 in both ISCO-08 and ISCO-88 minus category 14 in ISCO-08 and category 13 in ISCO-88).

8 World Bank, "World Bank Enterprise Surveys", https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/enterprisesurveys.

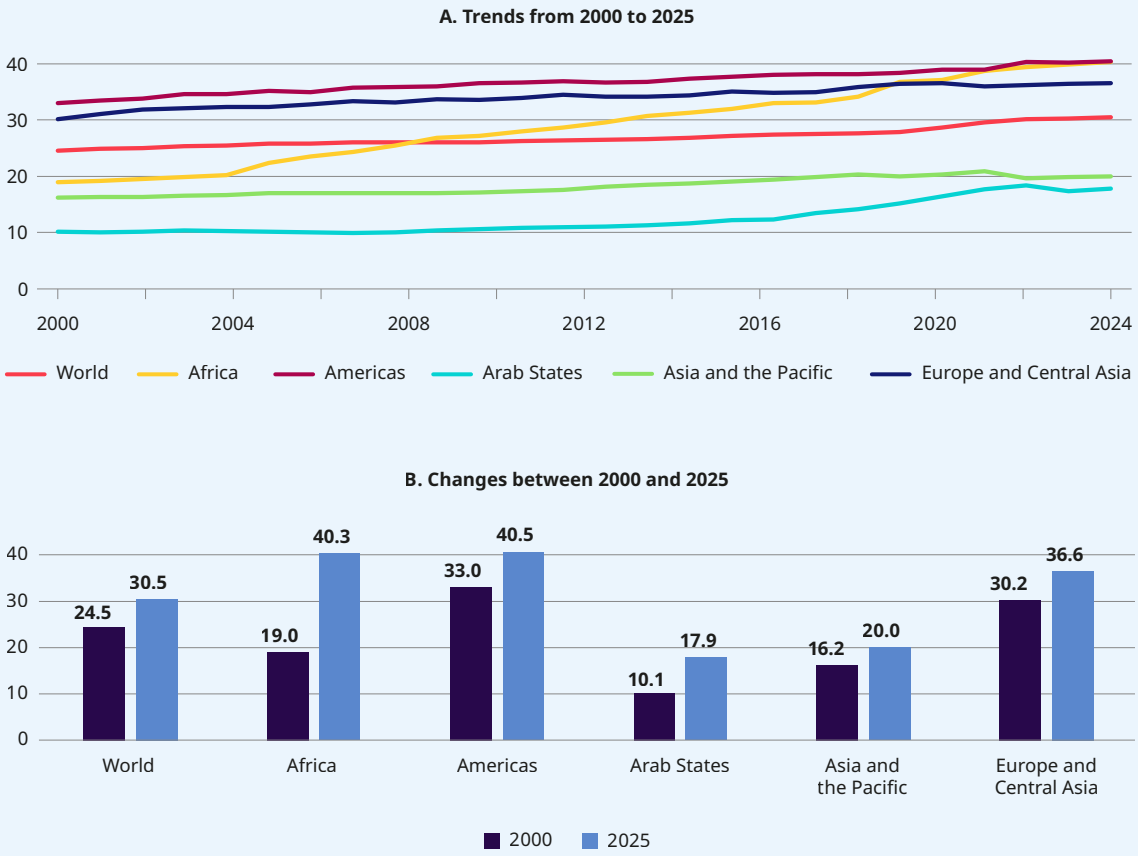
▶ **Figure 5. Gross enrolment ratios for tertiary education, women and men, world and by World Bank regional grouping, 1995 and 2023 or latest** (percentage)



Note: Data for Africa (Eastern, Southern, Western, Central and sub-Saharan) refer to 2021. World Bank groupings as of June 2025.

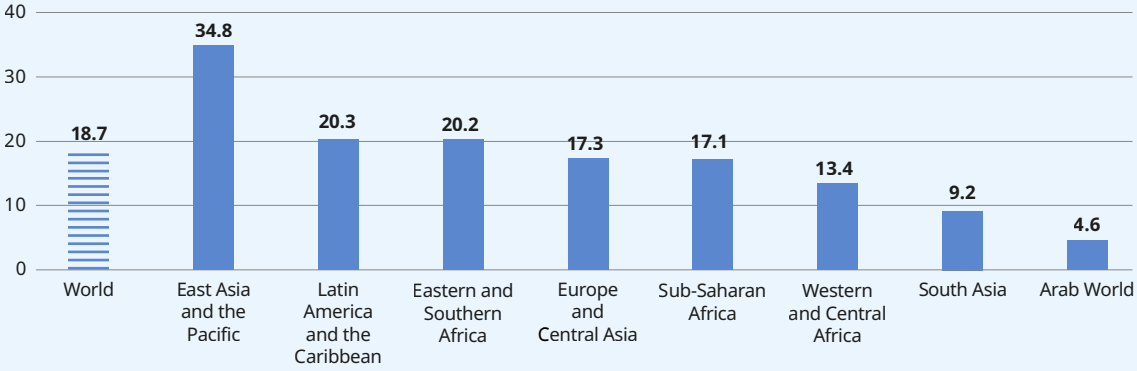
Source: UNESCO UIS (2025).

▶ **Figure 6. Proportion of women in managerial positions, world and by region, 2000–25** (percentage)



Source: ILO modelled estimates, April 2026.

▶ **Figure 7. Share of enterprises with women as the top manager, world and by World Bank regional grouping, 2023** (percentage)



Note: Data refer to 2023.

Source: World Bank Enterprise Surveys, https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/enterprisesurveys.

Demographics and the imperative for talent acquisition

The global demographic landscape in 2026 is characterized by stark divergence between regions, creating unique pressures on labour markets and a compelling case for enterprises to broaden their talent searches.

In high-income countries, employment is forecast to decline in 2026 – a sharp reversal from the 1.1 per cent average annual growth seen in the previous decade (ILO 2026c). This contraction is primarily driven by ageing populations and a growing number of retirees, which is accelerating a structural downward trend in labour force participation. For enterprises in these regions, the "demographic squeeze" means that traditional talent pools are shrinking, making the recruitment and retention of women, who remain 24.2 percentage points less likely than men to be in the labour force, not just a social goal but a key requirement for operational continuity and growth (ILO 2026c).

In contrast, low-income countries, particularly in Africa and Southern Asia, are expecting strong population growth and large youth cohorts to enter the labour market. Employment in these regions is expected to grow by 3.1 per cent in 2026 (ILO 2026c). However, in these economies the "demographic dividend" faces risks: without sufficient decent work opportunities, this surge in human capital could lead to increased informality and working poverty. Young women in these regions are vulnerable, being 14.4 percentage points more likely than men to be in the NEET (not in employment, education, or training) category (ILO 2026c). For enterprises operating in or sourcing from these high-growth regions, the strategic opportunity lies in building inclusive pipelines that capture this "youth bulge". By investing in the skills and leadership of young women, businesses can catalyse productivity growth and secure a competitive advantage in the world's most dynamic emerging markets.

Digital and green transitions offer opportunities and risks

Although women now outnumber men globally in higher education, their participation in STEM fields remains considerably lower. Between 2018 and 2023, women comprised about 35 per cent of tertiary STEM graduates worldwide, and this share has stayed relatively steady over the past decade (UNESCO 2024a). On average, about 15 per cent of female graduates earn STEM degrees compared to about 35 per cent of male graduates.[9] This under-representation is present across all regions, emphasizing the significant gap between women's strong presence in universities overall and their limited involvement in fields that drive innovation and future economic growth.

This gap is particularly significant in the context of ongoing digital transformation. Advances in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and data analytics, are impacting labour markets and the demand for skills. As recent ILO research shows, AI is advancing at an unprecedented pace and is reshaping the demand for skills across labour markets (ILO 2026d), and its impacts are not gender neutral. Women represent around 30 per cent of the AI workforce globally, indicating that there is scope to increase their participation in this growing field.

The same research also shows that some female-dominated occupations, such as business administration and clerical support, are almost twice as likely to be exposed to automation risks as male-dominated ones such as construction, manufacturing and trade (29 versus 16 per cent). Differences are also observed in the share of jobs at higher automation risk (16 per cent of female-dominated versus 3 per cent of male-dominated occupations).

A similar pattern is evident in the transition to a greener economy, which has strong jobs growth potential. For instance, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimates that the renewable energy workforce, 16.2 million strong in 2023, may expand to 30 million jobs by 2030 and nearly 40 million by 2050 (IRENA 2025). Again, this shift is not gender neutral. Overall, green occupations are male dominated,

9 See Annex 2 for shares of women and men among tertiary STEM graduates by region.

with men accounting for over 70 per cent of employment in such occupations (Adamczyk et al. 2026). In the renewable energy sector, just 32 per cent of full-time jobs are held by women and they comprise only 28 per cent of STEM-related roles (such as engineers, data scientists and technical specialists). Instead, jobs held by women are significantly concentrated in administrative roles, which account for 45 per cent of female employment in renewable energy (IRENA 2025).

Taken together, the green and digital transitions are likely to reshape labour markets in ways that could either narrow or widen existing gender gaps. Strengthening women's access to STEM education and careers, alongside targeted upskilling and reskilling initiatives, will be critical to supporting more inclusive outcomes. One global study of 2,000 leading companies found that while 26 per cent of companies had professional development programmes for women employees, only 10 per cent had committed to reskilling or upskilling programmes explicitly linked to transition-related impacts (WBA 2026). Given the incontrovertible business benefits of employing women (as evidenced in Chapter 3), expanding such efforts would help ensure that businesses are able to benefit from a broader and more diverse talent pool.

Women continue to earn less than men

Despite significant gains in education and labour market participation, women continue to earn less than men across all regions. According to ILO data for 2025, women earn 22 per cent less than men. This means that for every dollar a man earns, a woman makes only US$0.78 (Carrillo et al. 2025).

Additionally, women employees and managers earn less than their male counterparts in over 70 per cent of countries with available data.[10] Importantly, the gender pay gap tends to widen at higher levels of responsibility. In roughly six out of ten countries globally, the gender pay gap among managers is wider than among all employees, indicating that pay disparities between women and men increase as they progress in their careers (ILO 2024).

Only a small share of the gender pay gap can be explained by observable factors such as differences in education, working hours, or sectors and occupations (ILO 2018). ILO analysis shows that in high-income countries, education contributes on average less than 1 percentage point of the gap. The majority remains unexplained and reflects structural factors, including gender bias and stereotypes, the undervaluation of women's work, along with barriers linked to caregiving responsibilities – often referred to as the "motherhood penalty".

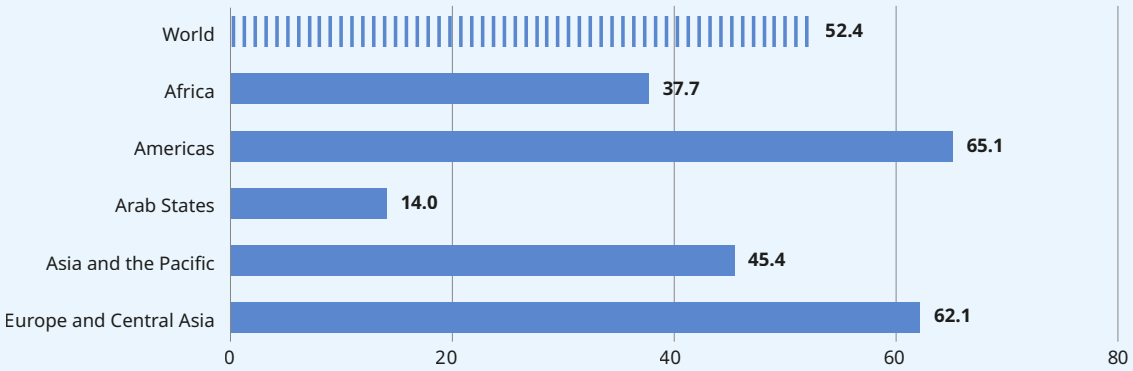
The impact of these disparities extends beyond wages alone. Lower labour force participation rates combined with lower earnings result in significantly reduced overall labour income for women. In 2025, women's labour income globally was just US$0.52 for every dollar earned by men, slightly up from US$0.47 in 2004 (Carrillo et al. 2025). Regional differences are pronounced. The gap in labour income is the most pronounced in the Arab States, with women just earning US$0.14 for every dollar earned by men, and the least pronounced in the Americas and in Europe and Central Asia, with women's labour income at US$0.65 and US$0.62, respectively, for every dollar earned by men (figure 8).

What the evidence suggests

The evidence presented in this chapter points to a persistent imbalance in global labour markets. While women have made significant gains in education and are increasingly represented among the skilled workforce, this progress is not translating into equivalent outcomes in employment, entrepreneurship, management and leadership positions or earnings.

10 A detailed breakdown of the gender pay gaps among total employees and managers, by region and country, is provided in Annex 2.

Figure 8. Women's labour income as a percentage of men's labour income, world and by region, 2025



Source: ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

Four key dynamics emerge.

- **First, labour market participation gaps remain substantial.** The modest narrowing observed over time is driven less by rising participation among women than by declining participation among men, indicating that the underlying barriers limiting women's access to employment remain largely unchanged.
- **Second, there is a growing disconnect between education and labour market outcomes.** Women now outpace men in higher education globally, yet remain under-represented in key sectors, particularly in STEM fields and entrepreneurship. This suggests that labour markets are not fully absorbing or utilizing the available pool of female talent.
- **Third, progress in access to management has not translated into gender balance in leadership.** Although the share of women in managerial positions has increased across all regions, women remain under-represented overall and markedly so at higher levels of responsibility.
- **Fourth, inequalities persist and have often deepened within the labour market.** Gender pay gaps remain widespread, and in many contexts widen at higher levels of responsibility. Combined with lower participation rates and limited access to senior roles, this results in significantly lower overall labour income for women.

At the same time, recent labour market disruptions highlight an important counterpoint: women's participation shows strong recovery dynamics. This suggests that, when opportunities are available, women are able to re-enter and contribute to the workforce at scale.

Collectively, these findings point to a central challenge: not the supply of qualified women, but the ability of labour markets and enterprises to translate this supply into equitable employment, progression and leadership opportunities.

Addressing this challenge will require closer alignment between education systems, labour market demand, and enterprise practices, particularly in sectors and roles where women remain under-represented. It will also require paying sustained attention to the structural factors that shape entry, retention and progression, including those that limit women's access to leadership positions.



Gender inclusive workplaces can broaden access to talent, skills and perspectives across sectors and occupations.

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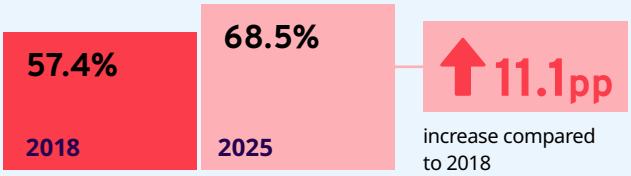
The business case for gender diversity

Gender equality and diversity[11] are recognized not only as social imperatives, but also as drivers of business performance. Evidence from the 2025 ILO enterprise survey shows that more enterprises than ever experience and recognize the tangible benefits of gender equality and diversity, including higher profits. Enterprises with women in leadership positions particularly stand to benefit. The cumulative impact of enterprise-level actions extends beyond individual enterprises: a growing body of evidence indicates that advancing gender equality and diversity in employment and leadership can generate substantial gains at the macroeconomic level, including significant increases in gross domestic product (GDP).

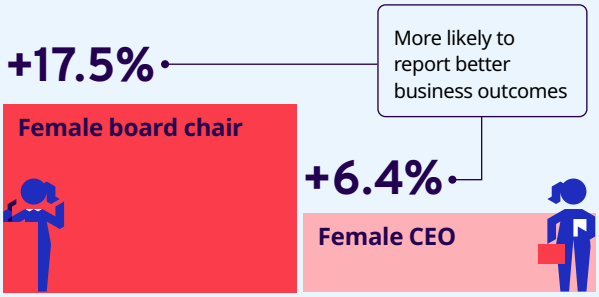
11 "Gender diversity" is understood as equitable representation of women and men across all levels of an organization.

More enterprises than ever experience and recognize the tangible benefits of gender equality and diversity, including higher profits.

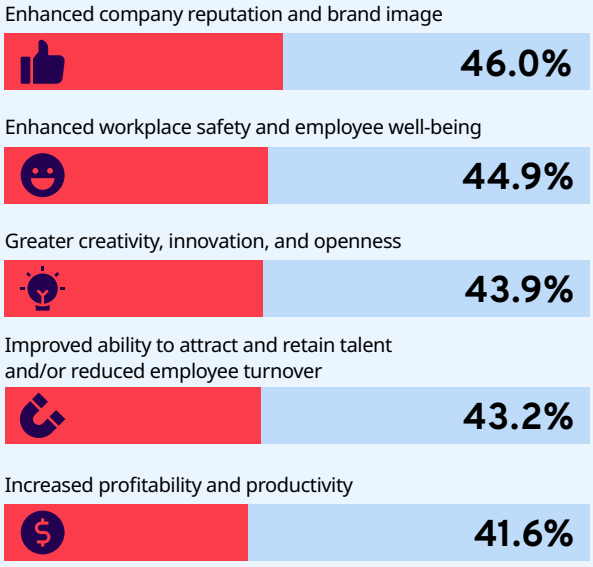
7/10 **report improved business outcomes as a result of gender equality and diversity initiatives.**



Leadership diversity is associated with stronger business outcomes.

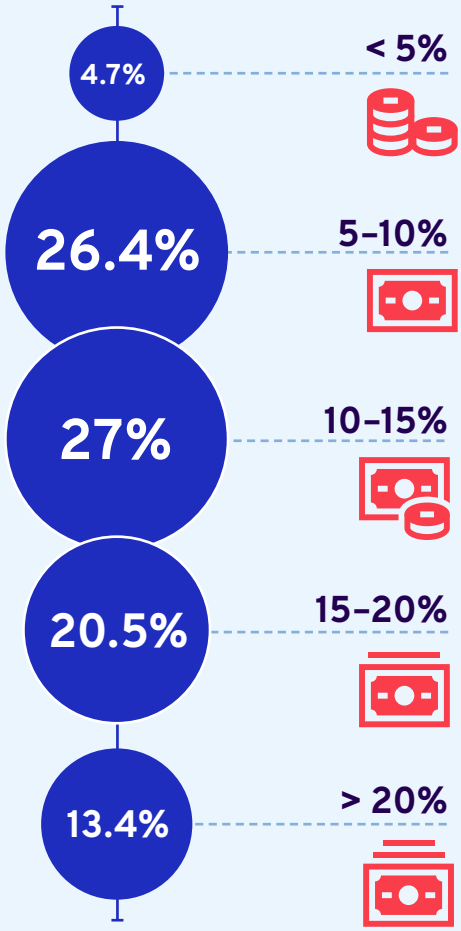


Top 5 improved business outcomes associated with initiatives on gender equality and diversity:



Profit gains are both widespread and substantial.

Share of enterprises experiencing improved profits:





The cumulative impact of advancing gender equality and diversity is substantial. Existing estimates suggest that **closing gender gaps in employment and leadership could add trillions of dollars to global GDP.**

Key insights from the ILO 2025 enterprise survey

- **A majority of enterprises report improved business outcomes**. Seven out of ten (68.5 per cent) enterprises report improved business outcomes as a result of gender equality and diversity initiatives, an increase of 11.1 percentage points compared to 2018. This suggests that such initiatives are increasingly embedded as part of core business strategy rather than treated as peripheral measures.
- **Profit gains are both widespread and substantial**. Of those enterprises that reported increased profits, 87.4 per cent indicated gains of at least 5 per cent linked to initiatives promoting women in management. More than one in ten enterprises (13.4 per cent) reported profit increases exceeding 20 per cent.
- **Leadership diversity is associated with stronger outcomes**. Enterprises led by a female CEO are 6.4 per cent more likely to report better business outcomes than those led by a male CEO, while enterprises with a female board chair are 17.5 per cent more likely to do so than those with a male board chair. These "gender diversity premiums" point to the importance of representation at the highest levels of decision-making.
- **Aggregate gains extend beyond the enterprise level.** The cumulative impact of advancing gender equality and diversity across enterprises is substantial. Existing estimates suggest that closing gender gaps in employment and leadership could add trillions of dollars to global GDP.

More businesses report improved outcomes from gender equality and diversity initiatives

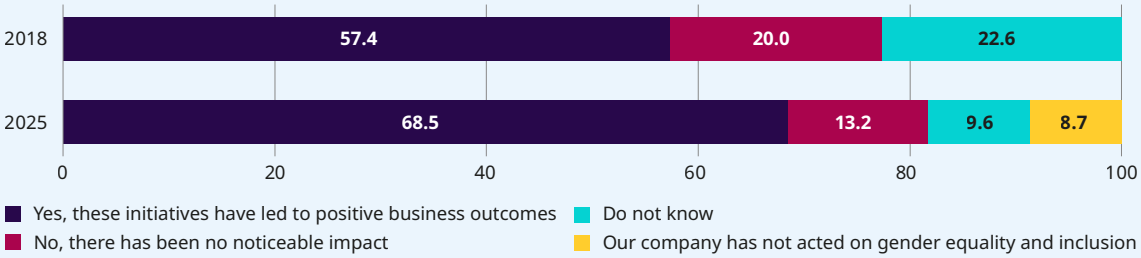
A growing body of research demonstrates the business benefits of gender equality and diversity at enterprise level. While women and men have equal potential, they often bring different experiences, perspectives and approaches to decision-making, risk-taking and collaboration (Ostry et al. 2018). These complementarities can enhance problem-solving, innovation and overall enterprise performance. In contexts where one gender is under-represented, increasing diversity can therefore yield measurable economic gains.

Macroeconomic evidence reinforces these enterprise-level findings. According to the International Monetary Fund, countries with the widest gender gaps in labour force participation could see a 35 per cent increase in GDP by closing those gaps. Notably, while 80 per cent of this growth would stem from increased labour supply, the remaining 20 per cent would come from productivity gains driven by the diverse perspectives, skills and ideas that women and men uniquely contribute (Dabla-Norris and Kochhar 2019).

Earlier evidence at the enterprise level points in the same direction. The 2018 ILO enterprise survey found that promoting women in management roles can boost business performance by up to 20 per cent (ILO 2019b). Recent research also shows that gender diversity is associated with higher market valuation, with some studies indicating that gender-diverse enterprises can outperform peers in terms of share price performance (Morgan Stanley 2023).

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey confirms and strengthens this evidence. Globally, 68.5 per cent of enterprises reported improved business outcomes from gender equality and diversity initiatives. This is up from 57.4 per cent in 2018 and represents an increase of 11.1 percentage points. At the same time, the share of enterprises that saw no impact from these initiatives declined from 20.0 per cent in 2018 to 13.2 per cent in 2025 (figure 9).

▶ **Figure 9. Enterprises reporting improved business outcomes from gender equality and diversity initiatives, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Have your company's initiatives on gender equality and inclusion to promote women in management contributed to improved business outcomes?". The 2018 survey did not include the option "our company has not acted on gender equality and inclusion". This question was not asked in the 2013 survey.

Source: 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

Regional patterns highlight important differences in the scale of reported benefits. In 2025, enterprises in Africa reported the highest share of positive business outcomes (76.8 per cent), followed by the Arab States (74.6 per cent) and the Americas (72.8 per cent). In Europe and Central Asia, a lower – though still substantial – share of enterprises (54.1 per cent) reported improved outcomes (figure 10).

These differences partly reflect variations in baseline levels of gender equality and diversity. In regions where women have historically been under-represented in formal employment and management, initial efforts to promote inclusion may yield larger and more immediate gains as enterprises tap into previously underutilized talent pools. In contrast, in regions where gender equality measures are more established or institutionalized, improvements in business performance may be more gradual and less immediately visible.

Enterprise size also makes a difference. Medium-sized enterprises are more likely to report positive business outcomes, with 73.7 per cent indicating improvements linked to gender equality and diversity initiatives, compared to 67.2 per cent of small enterprises and 67.1 per cent of large enterprises. This pattern may reflect differences in organizational flexibility and capacity to implement targeted initiatives, an issue explored in subsequent chapters.

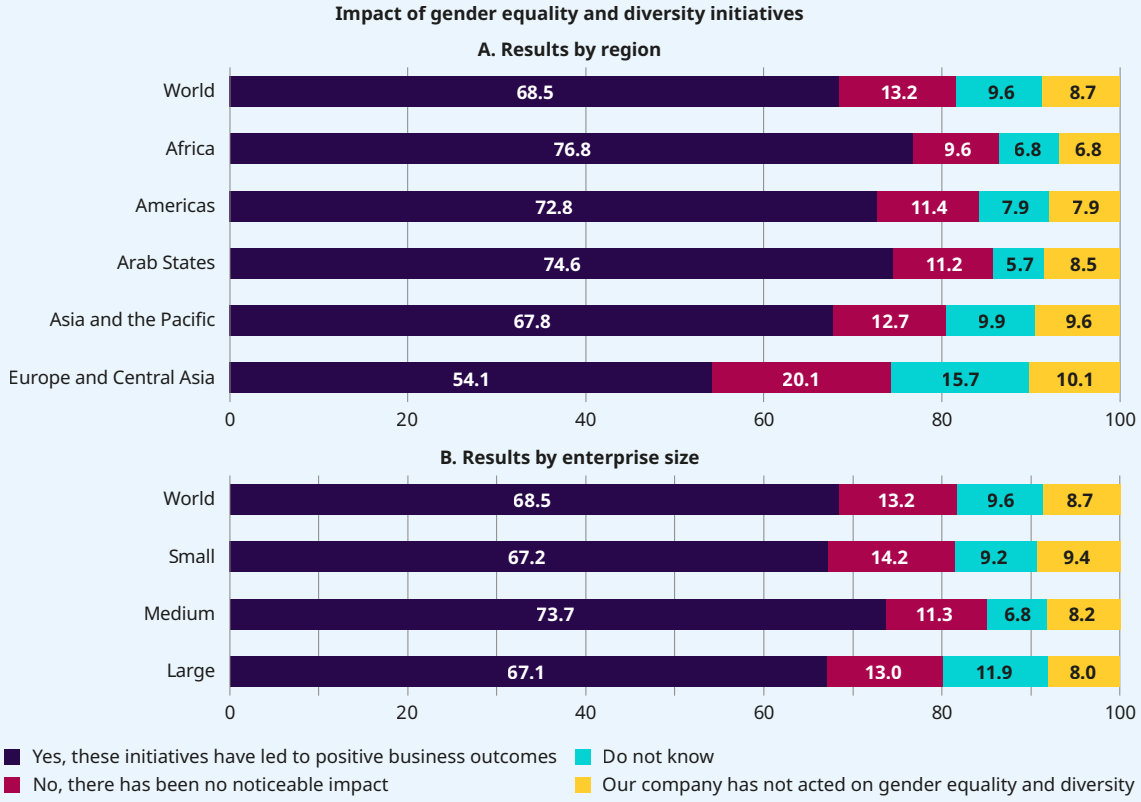
The 2025 ILO enterprise survey highlighted a broad range of positive business outcomes associated with initiatives on gender equality and diversity (figure 11). The five most frequently reported outcomes are:

- Enhanced company reputation and brand image (46.0 per cent)
- Enhanced workplace safety and employee well-being (44.9 per cent)
- Greater creativity, innovation, and openness (43.9 per cent)
- Improved ability to attract and retain talent and/or reduced employee turnover (43.2 per cent)
- Increased profitability and productivity (41.6 per cent)

Notably, outcomes related to reputation, workplace safety and innovation were reported more frequently than direct financial gains such as profitability and productivity. This suggests that enterprises perceive gender equality and diversity initiatives as generating value across a broad set of strategic dimensions, including those that contribute to longer-term performance. In contexts where there is increasing emphasis on ESG considerations and stakeholder expectations, such outcomes can strengthen enterprise positioning and competitiveness.[12]

12 For more information on ESG and its links with gender equality and diversity, see Chapter 5.

▶ **Figure 10. Enterprises reporting improved business outcomes from gender equality and diversity initiatives, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Have your company's initiatives on gender equality and diversity to promote women in management contributed to improved business outcomes?"

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

It is equally noteworthy that the business outcomes identified cover both "hard" metrics (namely profitability and productivity) and "soft" but strategic enablers (such as brand, creativity and resilience). This balance shows that gender equality and diversity are integral across multiple dimensions of performance.

"Beyond company values and accessing talent, our gender inclusion efforts are about reputation. You want to be out there as a brand that cares about equality and equity."[13]

▶ Nassejje Solomy Luyombo — General Manager, Human Resources — Centenary Bank — Uganda

13 This quote is taken from the enterprise case study on the gender equality and diversity initiatives of Centenary Bank, Uganda, details of which can be found in Annex 3.

▶ **Figure 11. Enterprises reporting improved business outcomes associated with specific gender equality and diversity initiatives, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: The responses "Do not know or cannot determine" and "Other" are not shown in this figure.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Motivations behind gender equality and diversity initiatives

The ILO 2025 enterprise survey asked respondents to identify the main drivers behind the development and implementation of gender equality and diversity initiatives. Enhancing overall company performance was the most frequently cited motivation, followed closely by compliance with legal obligations and alignment with company values and culture. Attracting, developing and retaining talent and responding to employee expectations were also important drivers (figure 12).

On the whole, the motivations reported by enterprises closely mirror the business outcomes associated with these initiatives. In particular, the emphasis on improving company performance aligns with the reported gains in profitability, reputation, innovation and talent retention.

At the same time, important distinctions emerge. Drivers such as legal compliance, alignment with organizational values and responsiveness to employee expectations feature prominently among motivations but are less directly reflected in reported business outcomes. This may indicate that enterprises initially adopt gender equality and diversity initiatives in response to regulatory, cultural or workforce pressures, but subsequently experience tangible benefits in terms of operational and commercial performance. These findings point to an evolution in how enterprises approach gender equality and diversity: from externally or internally driven obligations towards more performance-oriented integration within business practices.

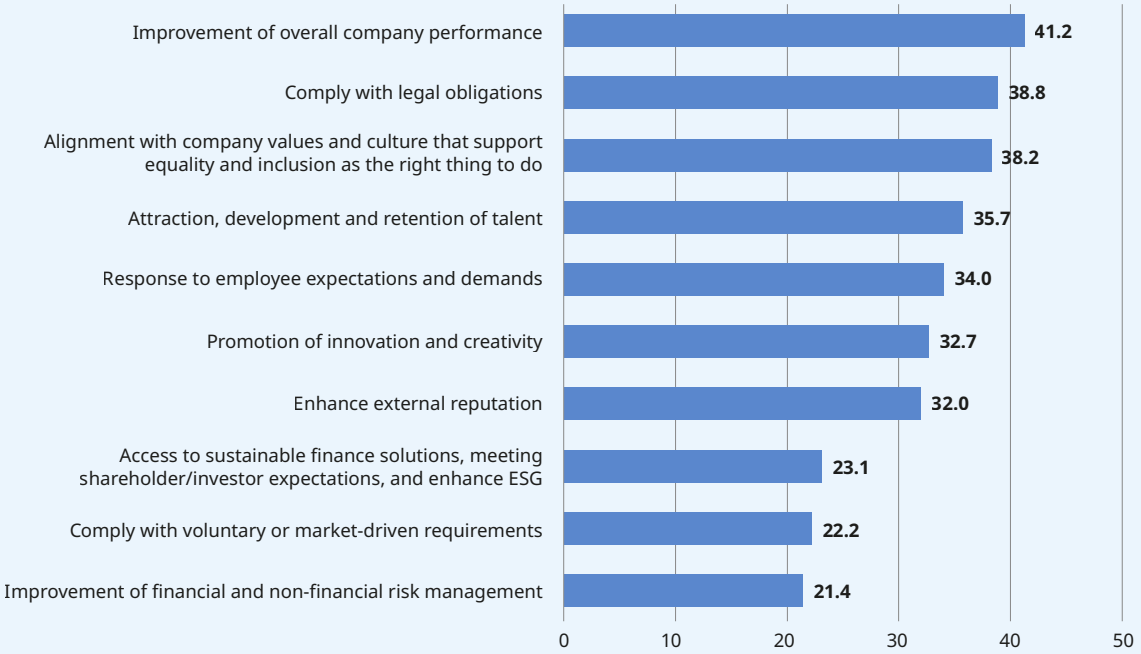
Most enterprises that promote women in management report increased profits

Evidence from the 2025 ILO enterprise survey confirms that initiatives promoting women in management are associated with tangible financial gains. Among enterprises that reported improved business outcomes, 41.6 per cent reported increased profitability. Of these enterprises, the vast majority

(87.4 per cent) reported profit increases of at least 5 per cent, a pattern broadly consistent with the survey results from 2018.

A notable share of enterprises reported substantial gains. In 2025, 13.4 per cent reported profit increases of more than 20 per cent as a direct result of initiatives that promote women in management (figure 13). This proportion increases to 17.4 per cent for large enterprises, suggesting that scale and resources amplify the positive impact of gender equality and diversity efforts.

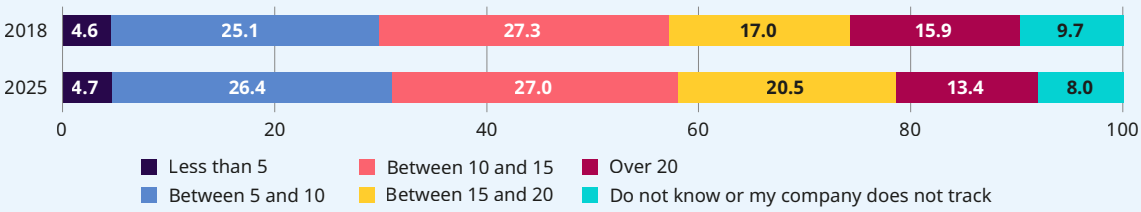
▶ **Figure 12. Main drivers of gender equality and diversity initiatives, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "What are the main drivers motivating your company to implement action for gender equality and diversity?". The response "Do not know or none of the above" is not shown in this figure.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

▶ **Figure 13. Enterprises reporting increased profits associated with gender equality and diversity initiatives that promote women in management, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Source: 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

A comparison with the 2018 data shows a broadly stable distribution of outcomes, with some shifts within ranges. The share of enterprises reporting profit increases of 15–20 per cent rose to 20.5 per cent in 2025 from 17.0 per cent in 2018, while the proportion reporting gains of above 20 per cent declined slightly (from 15.9 per cent to 13.4 per cent). The share reporting increases of 10–15 per cent remained broadly unchanged. This suggests that profit gains are becoming more widespread across enterprises even if the highest returns were less frequently reported in 2025.

"HPS is a Moroccan success story, and we want to lead our business community by example. Our work on gender equality and diversity, and on inclusion more broadly, is important here. Inclusive companies have a better reputation, stronger brand loyalty, and improved access to talent".[14]

▶ Mohamed Asri — CSR Director — HPS — Morocco

Regional patterns further illustrate differences in the magnitude of reported gains (figure 14). Enterprises in Africa, the Arab States, and Asia and the Pacific reported larger profit increases from gender equality and diversity initiatives than those in the Americas, Europe, and Central Asia. About half of the enterprises in Africa, the Arab States, and Asia and the Pacific reported profit gains of between 10 and 20 per cent associated with gender equality and diversity initiatives, compared to four out of ten enterprises in the Americas, and Europe and Central Asia. In Africa, two in ten enterprises reported increases exceeding 20 per cent, compared with around one in ten in other regions. Across all regions, roughly a quarter of enterprises reported profit increases ranging from 5 to 10 per cent.

Differences by enterprise size also emerge. Medium-sized and large enterprises were more likely than small enterprises to report higher profit gains. Six out of ten medium-sized enterprises reported profit increases of between 10 and 20 per cent, compared to about half of small and large enterprises. Additionally, a slightly higher percentage of large enterprises (17.4 per cent) than small (11.0 per cent) and medium-sized (12.2 per cent) enterprises reported profit increases of over 20 per cent. By contrast, small enterprises were more concentrated in the 5 to 10 per cent range. Across all size categories, only a small minority reported gains of less than 5 per cent.

Women leaders improve business outcomes, with effects strengthening over time

A growing body of evidence shows that women's representation in leadership is associated with stronger business performance. For instance:

- According to Swiss bank Credit Suisse, enterprises with more women in senior and top leadership roles see higher returns on equity (10 per cent) and better operational results (42 per cent) compared to their less diverse peers (CSRI 2021).
- Enterprises with a woman CEO are, on average, less leveraged, have less volatile earnings, and are more likely to have higher survival rates than those led by male CEOs (Faccio, Marchica and Mura 2016).

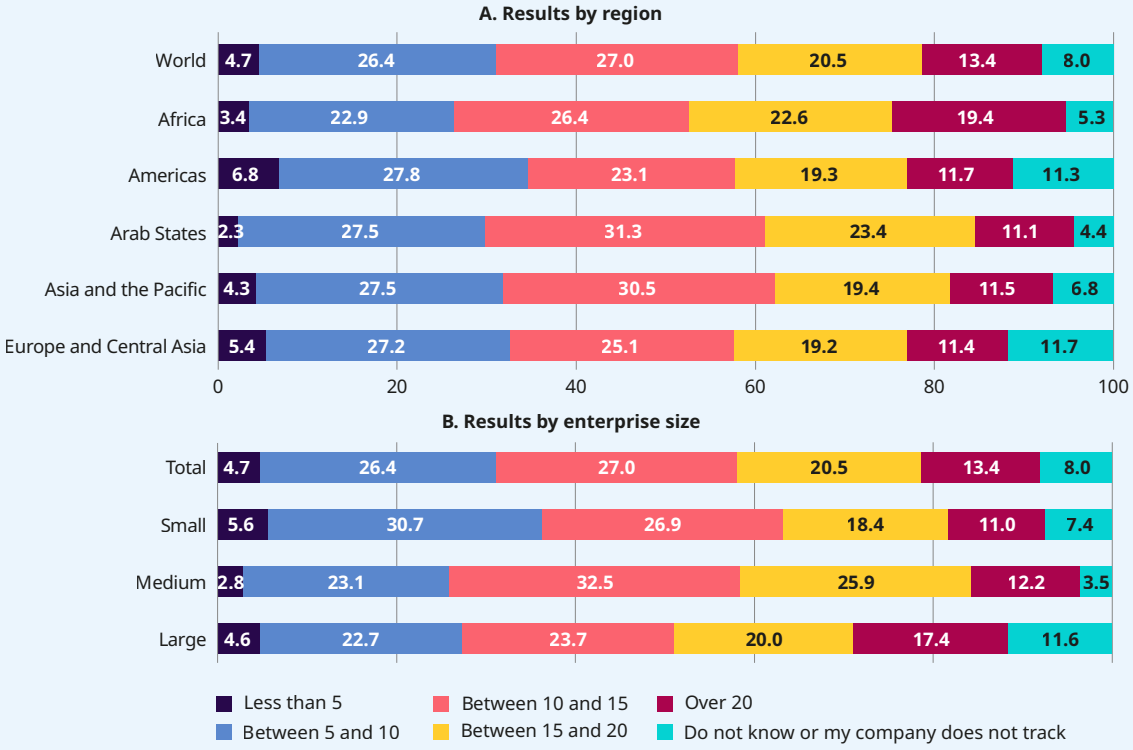
14 This quote is taken from the enterprise case study on the gender equality and diversity initiatives of HPS, Morocco, which can be found in Annex 3.

- Research by McKinsey (Hunt et al. 2023) across 23 countries shows that enterprises in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams (that is, the 25 per cent of enterprises with the highest representation of women on executive teams) significantly outperform those in the bottom quartile in terms of profitability. The difference in the likelihood of financial outperformance between these two groups, referred to here as the "gender diversity premium", increased from 15 per cent in 2015 to 39 per cent in 2023. Similarly, enterprises with more gender-diverse boards are 27 per cent more likely to outperform others financially.

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey reinforces these findings. Enterprises led by a female CEO were 6.4 per cent more likely to have better business outcomes than those with a male CEO, compared to 3.5 per cent in 2018, indicating that the positive association between female leadership and enterprise performance has strengthened over time.

The association between women's leadership and business outcomes is particularly pronounced at the board level. Compared with enterprises with a male board chair, those with a female board chair are 17.5 per cent more likely to report better business outcomes and 8.5 per cent more likely to report increased profitability and productivity. This represents a substantial increase compared to 2018, when such enterprises were only 3.2 per cent more likely to report improved outcomes. Conversely, enterprises with all-male boards were significantly less likely (24.7 per cent) to report positive business outcomes, underscoring the importance of diversity in governance structures.

Figure 14. Reported profit increases associated with gender equality and diversity initiatives, by region and enterprise size, 2025 (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "If your company has experienced improved profits, by what percentage has it increased?". This question was asked of enterprises that reported that initiatives on gender equality and diversity increased profitability and productivity.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Tackling gender gaps boosts economic growth

While the benefits of gender equality and diversity are evident at the enterprise level, their aggregate impact at the macroeconomic level is considerably larger. A wide range of studies show that reducing the gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship can generate substantial gains in economic output and wealth.

- Estimates for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries suggest that closing gender gaps in labour force participation could increase global output by about 7 per cent, equivalent to approximately US$7 trillion (Holland and Ell 2023).
- Other studies estimate gains of up to 20 per cent in global GDP if gender employment gaps were eliminated (Pennings 2022).
- Equalizing women's and men's lifetime earnings could increase global wealth by US$160.2 trillion or 14 per cent (Wodon and de la Brière 2018).
- If all countries were to match the progress toward gender parity of the best performer in their region, it could produce a boost to annual global GDP of as much as US$12 trillion (Woetzel et al. 2015).

These estimates underscore the fact that persistent gaps in gender equality impose substantial costs: gender inequality is estimated to reduce global output by 16 per cent (Ferrant and Kolev 2016). Overall, the evidence indicates that advancing gender equality in both employment and leadership is a powerful lever for improving business performance and driving economic growth. The benefits observed at the enterprise level scale up to substantial gains for national and global economies.

What the evidence suggests

The findings presented in this chapter reinforce a clear and consistent message: gender equality and diversity are increasingly associated with improved business performance. A growing share of enterprises report positive outcomes from related initiatives, including higher profitability, enhanced innovation, stronger talent retention and improved reputation. At the same time, the evidence shows that these benefits are not yet fully realized, as gender gaps in employment and leadership persist across regions and sectors.

Three key implications emerge.

- **First, advancing gender equality is increasingly a strategic business consideration.** The high and rising share of enterprises reporting improved business outcomes indicates that gender equality and diversity initiatives are becoming embedded in core business practices. The positive association between women's representation in leadership, particularly at CEO and board levels, and enterprise performance further highlights the importance of integrating gender diversity into decision-making structures.
- **Second, the largest gains are likely to arise from closing remaining gaps in leadership and workforce participation**. While many enterprises report benefits from initial efforts, the evidence suggests that deeper and more sustained gains depend on addressing barriers to women's progression into senior and top management. This is particularly relevant in regions and contexts where women remain under-represented, and where expanding access to leadership positions can unlock additional performance gains.

- **Third, enabling environments play a critical role in shaping enterprise outcomes.** The effectiveness of enterprise-level initiatives is closely linked to broader institutional and policy frameworks. Measures that support women's entry into, retention in and progression within the labour market – such as child care provision, family-friendly policies and equal pay frameworks – can reinforce and amplify the impact of enterprise-level actions. At the same time, gaps between legal provisions and their implementation may limit these effects.

These findings point to the importance of coordinated action across stakeholders. Enterprises, EBMOs and governments each have a role to play in translating the demonstrated business case for gender equality into more widespread and sustained practice.



Supporting women's career progression is critical to building stronger pathways into management and leadership.

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4

Women in the private sector: Representation, progression and leadership gaps

This chapter examines recent trends in gender diversity in the private sector, focusing on women's representation across workforces, management levels, executive leadership and corporate governance, while also exploring occupational and functional imbalances, including in sector-specific contexts. It is based on the results of the ILO enterprise surveys from 2013, 2018 and 2025. It considers how progress has evolved over time, highlighting where gains have been strongest and where challenges remain, and how these can be addressed.

Gender diversity in the private sector has continued to move in a positive direction since the first ILO enterprise survey in 2013. The growing presence of women among CEOs, board members and board chairs demonstrates that barriers to leadership are gradually being reduced. This progress reflects, in part, sustained efforts by enterprises to promote gender equality and diversity.

Yet these gains have been achieved from a relatively low baseline and there is plenty of scope for improvement. A fully gender-balanced workforce at all levels remains a distant prospect. Even in sectors with high concentrations of women, such as education, senior leadership positions continue to be predominantly held by men. More than half of enterprise boards have less than 30 per cent female representation, while all-male boards persist. In addition, "leaky pipelines", combined with limited representation of women at lower management levels, pose a risk to sustaining progress over time.

Leadership pathways remain uneven. While women's representation in senior management has increased across a wide range of functions, including traditionally male-dominated areas, their continued under-representation in key roles, particularly those linked to responsibility for profit and loss, and research and development, points to persistent bottlenecks in progression.

Governance structures can play an important role in accelerating change. The evidence shows strong associations between female leadership at the top and broader gender diversity within enterprises. Enterprises with women board chairs tend to have higher shares of women on boards, and those led by women CEOs often exhibit greater overall gender balance, highlighting the catalytic role of leadership.

Enterprise size also emerges as an important factor. Medium-sized enterprises (101–250 employees) often stand out for their stronger performance compared to small and large enterprises across several indicators of gender equality and diversity, suggesting that they may offer useful insights into effective practices.

Enterprises have progressed toward a more balanced workforce composition, with fewer companies concentrated at the extremes of very high male or female representation.

The proportion of enterprises with intermediate representation (30–39 per cent women) increased, even though full gender balance (40–60 per cent) saw a slight decline.

+21.3 pp
Intermediate female representation

-6.2 pp
Share of gender balanced enterprises

Women's presence in management has increased but still declines with seniority.



Women CEOs remain a minority, yet female-led enterprises show stronger diversity.



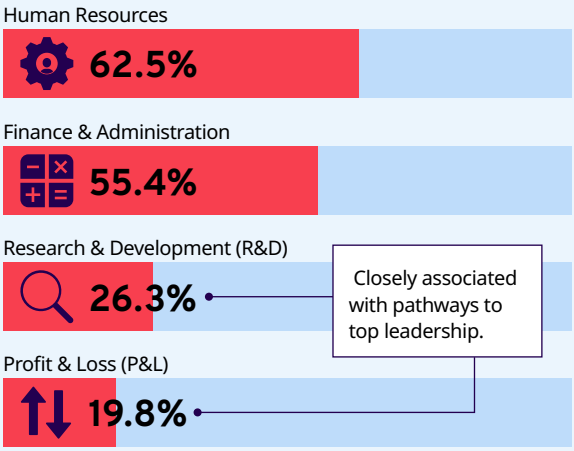
28.2%
of enterprises had a woman CEO in 2025

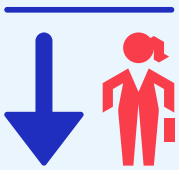
12.6%
higher likelihood of a gender-balanced workforce when an enterprise has a female CEO.



Functional representation is improving but remains uneven.

Women's representation in senior management has increased across all functions since 2018 but they remain under-represented in functions most closely linked to top leadership.





Sectoral patterns reveal glass ceilings are still in place. Women are under-represented in senior management across all sectors. This highlights that overall workforce composition does not automatically translate into equality in leadership.

Key insights from the ILO 2025 enterprise survey

- **Workforce composition shows modest improvement, but gender balance remains limited.** Fewer enterprises report highly gender-skewed workforces in 2025 than in 2013. The proportion of enterprises with intermediate female representation (30–39 per cent women) increased by 21.3 percentage points over this period. However, the share of enterprises with gender balance (40–60 per cent of either gender) dropped by 6.2 percentage points. Medium-sized enterprises are most likely to achieve gender balance (42.7 per cent) compared to small (27.3 per cent) and large (37.9 per cent) enterprises.
- **Women's presence in management has increased but declines with seniority.** The share of enterprises employing women at all management levels combined increased from 51.6 per cent in 2018 to 57.9 per cent in 2025. However, representation decreases at higher levels: while 69.0 per cent of enterprises employed women as junior managers, only 35.5 per cent did so at the top executive level. Overall, fewer than one in five companies (19.2 per cent) worldwide attained gender balance in overall management in 2025.
- **Progress at senior levels contrasts with weaker pipelines below.** Between 2013 and 2025, gender balance increased at senior (+1.6 percentage points) and top (+5.0 percentage points) management levels but declined in junior (–1.4 percentage points) and middle (–6.4 percentage points) management. This weakens the pipeline for future leadership. Medium-sized enterprises outperformed global averages on gender balance across all management levels by 2.2 percentage points.
- **Women CEOs remain the exception**. In 2025, 28.2 per cent of enterprises had a woman CEO, up from 23.4 per cent in 2013 (+4.8 percentage points). Medium-sized enterprises again lead (32.8 per cent). Women CEOs act as gender diversity catalysts: enterprises with a female CEO are 12.6 per cent more likely to have a gender-balanced workforce than those led by men.
- **Board diversity is improving, but gaps persist.** In 2025, 45.5 per cent of enterprises with boards reached the 30 per cent threshold for women on boards, up from 38.3 per cent in 2013 (+7.2 percentage points). Medium-sized enterprises performed best (56.1 per cent) compared to small (46.4 per cent) and large (just 38.5 per cent) enterprises.
- **The proportion of enterprises with a woman chair increased markedly**, from 13.1 per cent in 2013 to 30.9 per cent in 2025 (+17.8 percentage points). This is important because boards chaired by women were 37.8 per cent more likely to have over 30 per cent female board members compared to enterprises with a male board chair. However, only three in ten enterprises had a woman chair, and 5.5 per cent of boards remained all-male.
- **Functional representation is improving but remains uneven.** Women's representation in senior management increased across all functions since 2018, with the largest gains in general management (+15.1 percentage points) and operations (+8.8 percentage points). This indicates progress in access to strategic roles.
- **Critical bottlenecks persist in key functions**. In 2025, women remained under-represented in functions most closely linked to top leadership, including profit and loss (19.8 per cent of enterprises employed women as senior managers) and research and development (26.3 per cent of enterprises employed women as senior managers).
- **Sectoral patterns reveal glass ceilings.** Women are under-represented in senior management across all sectors. Even in female-dominated sectors such as education, only 30.5 per cent of enterprises had achieved gender balance at senior management level in 2025. This highlights the fact that overall workforce composition does not automatically translate into equality in leadership.

Gender diversity in enterprises shows modest improvements

Between 2013 and 2025, enterprises made gradual progress towards a more gender-balanced workforce composition. In 2025, fewer enterprises were concentrated at the extremes of very high female or male representation. Instead, a growing share of enterprises fell within intermediate ranges of gender diversity, particularly those with 30–39 per cent women. However, this shift had not translated into a higher proportion of gender-balanced workforces (defined as 40–60 per cent of either gender).

Between 2013 and 2025, the share of enterprises with predominantly female workforces declined by 6.6 percentage points, while those with predominantly male workforces decreased by 8.5 percentage points. Over the same period, the proportion of enterprises where women accounted for less than 29 per cent of employees fell from 31.2 per cent to 22.7 per cent, indicating a reduction in highly male-dominated workplaces (figure 15).

At the same time, the proportion of enterprises with moderate female representation (30–39 per cent) increased markedly, by 21.3 percentage points. However, the share of enterprises achieving gender balance (40–60 per cent of either gender) declined by 6.2 percentage points. This suggests that while extreme imbalances are becoming less common, progress towards full gender balance remains uneven.

Regional patterns reinforce this finding (figure 16). In 2025, enterprises in Africa and the Americas reported the highest shares of gender-balanced workforces (about 36 per cent), followed closely by Europe and Central Asia (about 35 per cent). In contrast, lower shares are observed in Asia and the Pacific (around 32 per cent) and the Arab States (about 28 per cent).

Medium-sized and large enterprises were more likely than small enterprises to report gender-balanced workforces. Around 40 per cent of medium-sized and large enterprises reported between 40 and 60 per cent of women employees, compared to 27.3 per cent in small enterprises. Conversely, small enterprises were more likely to have low female representation: 27.5 per cent of small enterprises reported fewer than 29 per cent women, compared to 22.3 per cent of large enterprises and 12.4 per cent of medium-sized enterprises.

Steady progress in women's presence in management and leadership, but the leaky pipeline persists

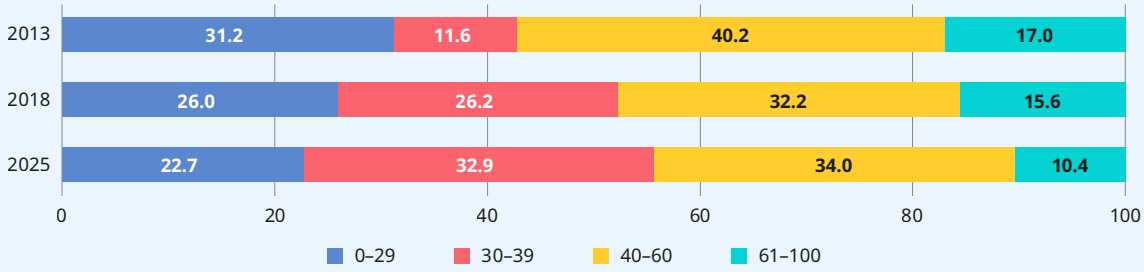
The share of enterprises employing women across management and leadership levels has increased steadily. Between 2018 and 2025, it rose from 51.6 per cent to 57.9 per cent, an increase of 6.3 percentage points. These figures reflect the presence of women in management roles, rather than women's share within those roles, and therefore capture whether women have entered these positions. Across all management levels – junior, middle, senior and executive – the proportion of enterprises employing women increased, indicating gradual improvements in women's access to management positions. The largest increase was at senior management level (+8.3 percentage points), while gains at the top executive level were more modest (+4.3 percentage points) (figure 17).

While these trends point to broader entry of women into management, they also reveal a persistent structural pattern: the likelihood of enterprises employing women declines with seniority. In 2025, 69.0 per cent of enterprises employed women as junior managers, compared to just 35.5 per cent at the top executive level. This gap indicates that women's presence narrows at higher levels, pointing to a bottleneck in career progression, often described as a "leaky pipeline", whereby women are progressively under-represented at each successive level of management.

This trend was reflected across regions, although levels of women's presence in management varied (figure 18).

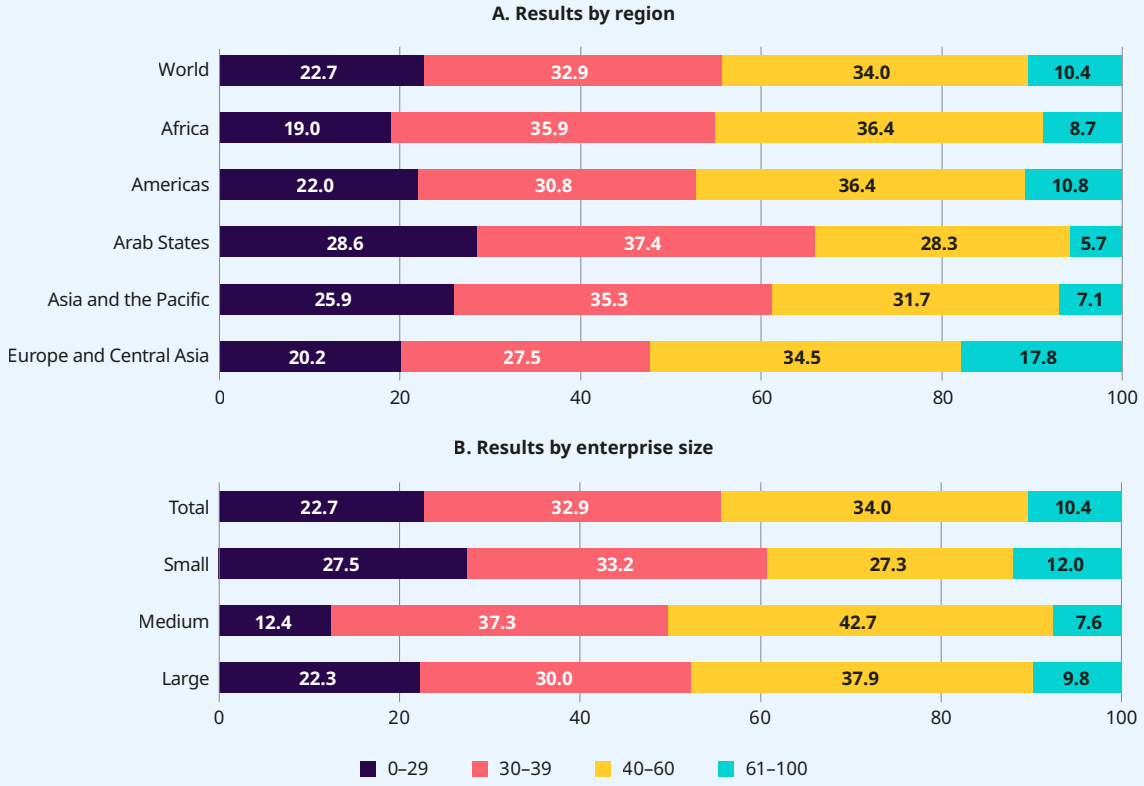
- The Arab States had the lowest share of enterprises employing women at all managerial levels.
- Around seven out of ten enterprises in Africa (74.1 per cent), the Americas (71.1 per cent), and the Asia and the Pacific region (69.9 per cent) reported employing women in junior management roles, compared to about six out of ten enterprises in the Arab States (60.3 per cent), and Europe and Central Asia (64.3 per cent).

▶ Figure 15. Distribution of enterprises by women's share of the workforce, 2013, 2018 and 2025 (percentage of respondents)

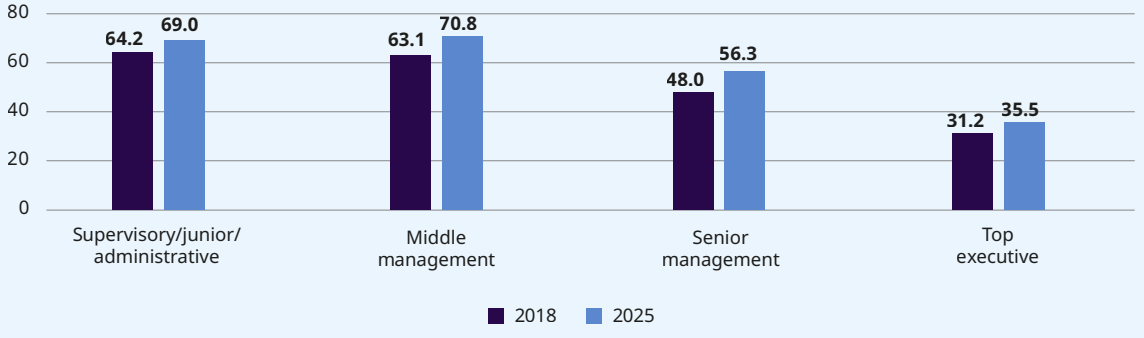


Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

▶ Figure 16. Proportion of female employees by region and enterprise size, 2025 (percentage of respondents)



▶ Figure 17. Enterprises employing women at different management levels, 2018 and 2025 (percentage of respondents)



Source: 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

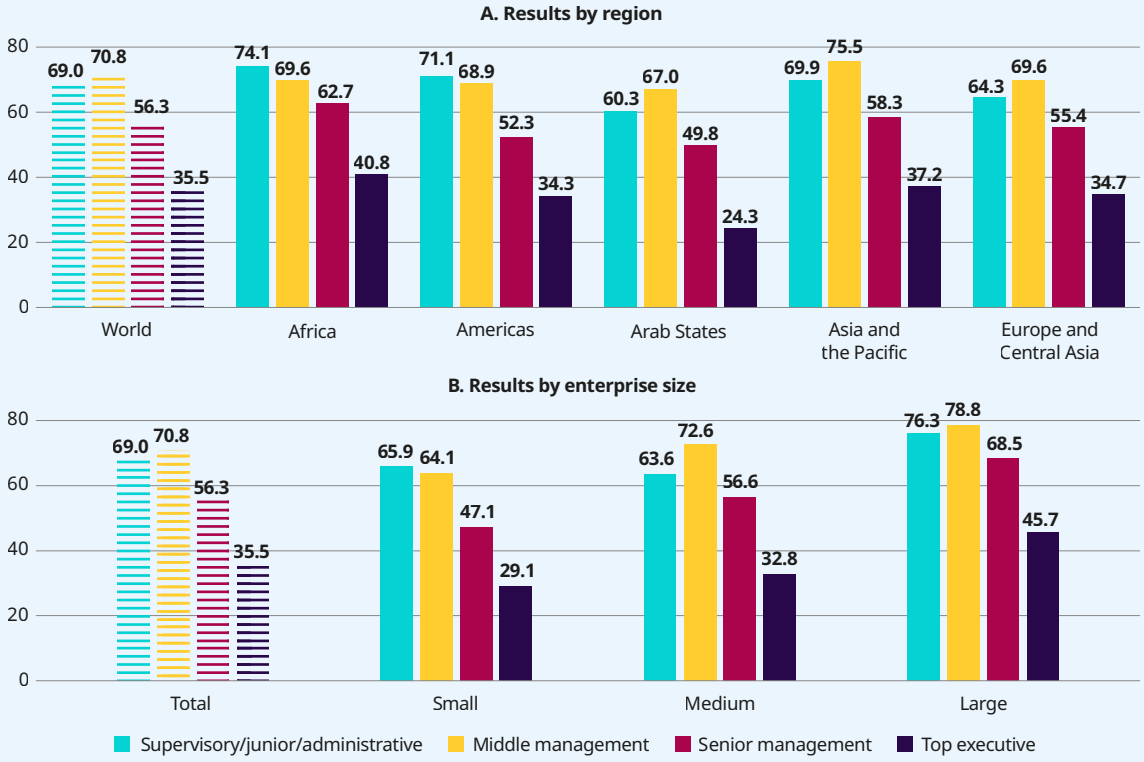
- The highest proportion of enterprises reporting women as middle managers was in Asia and the Pacific (75.5 per cent), compared to about seven in ten in other regions.
- At the senior management level, approximately six out of ten enterprises in Africa (62.7 per cent), and Asia and the Pacific (58.3 per cent) reported employing women, compared to about half in other regions.
- At the top management level, four out of ten enterprises in Africa (40.8 per cent) employed women compared to roughly a third in other regions, except for the Arab States (24.3 per cent).

In some regions, notably the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia, the share of enterprises employing women was lower at junior management level than in middle management level. This pattern may indicate constraints in the early stages of entry into management, which could limit the pool of women available for progression into senior roles over time.

Enterprise size also influences women's presence across management levels. Large enterprises are more likely to employ women at various management levels, reflecting greater organizational scale and more formalized structures. However, even among large enterprises, the likelihood of employing women declines at higher levels.

- At the junior management level, the share of enterprises reporting the employment of women was relatively similar among small (65.9 per cent) and medium-sized (63.6 per cent) enterprises, but higher among large enterprises (76.3 per cent).
- At the middle management level, the share increased with enterprise size: 64.1 per cent of small enterprises, 72.6 per cent of medium-sized enterprises, and 78.8 per cent of large enterprises employed women at this level.

▶ **Figure 18. Enterprises employing women at different management levels, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Please select all the managerial roles in which women are employed in your company".

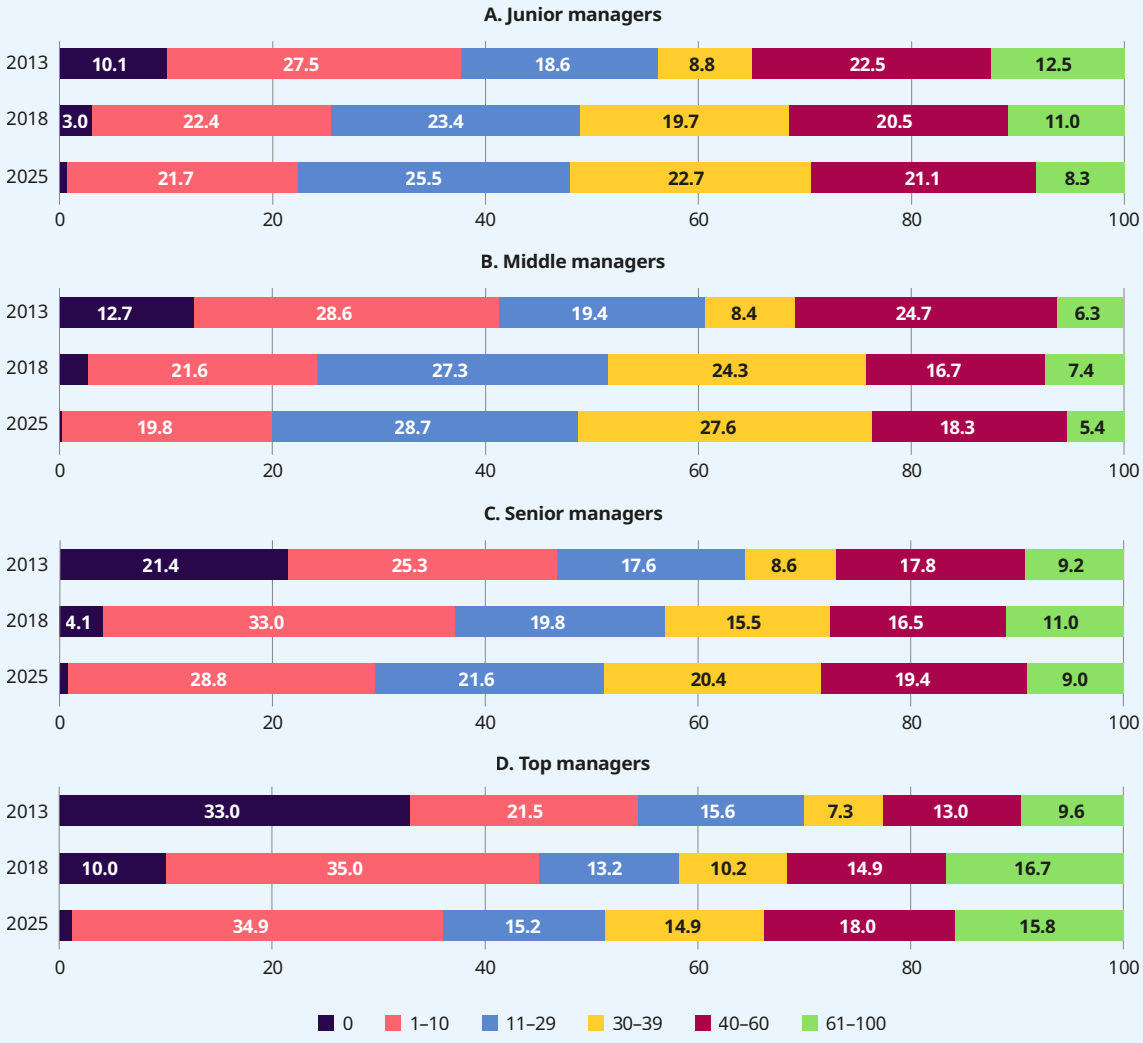
Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

- At senior management level, differences were more pronounced, with 47.1 per cent of small enterprises, 56.6 per cent of medium-sized enterprises, and 68.5 per cent of large enterprises reporting the employment of women at this level.
- The proportion of enterprises employing women at the top management level was comparatively low across firm sizes, although it was higher in large enterprises (45.7 per cent) than in medium-sized (32.8 per cent) and small enterprises (29.1 per cent).

Weak gender balance in junior and middle management puts senior talent pipelines at risk

The 2013, 2018, and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys provide insights into the distribution of women across management levels, including the extent to which enterprises achieve gender balance (40 to 60 per cent of either gender). The findings reveal a divergence across the management hierarchy: while progress has been made at senior levels, gender balance has stagnated or declined at early stages of the pipeline (figure 19).

Figure 19. Women's representation at different management levels in enterprises, 2013, 2018 and 2025 (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Please indicate the approximate percentage of women in each of your organization's managerial roles".

Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

- At junior management level, the share of enterprises achieving gender balance declined slightly from 22.5 per cent in 2013 to 21.1 per cent in 2025 (–1.4 percentage points).
- At middle management level, the decline was more pronounced, with the share falling from 24.7 per cent to 18.3 per cent (–6.4 percentage points).
- At the senior management level, gender balance increased modestly from 17.8 per cent to 19.4 per cent (+1.6 percentage points).
- At top management level, the share rose most substantially, from 13.0 per cent to 18.0 per cent (+5.0 percentage points).

These trends suggest that progress at senior and top levels may reflect focused efforts to increase women's representation in leadership, as well as shifting norms around women in executive roles. However, limited progress in junior and middle management raises concerns about the sustainability of these gains.

Junior and middle management roles form the core pipeline for future senior leaders. Weaker gender balance at these levels limits the pool of women available for advancement, increasing the risk that progress at higher levels may stall or reverse over time. This challenge is particularly significant given that, in 2025, fewer than one in five enterprises globally (19.2 per cent) attained gender balance in management roles overall.

These issues were also evident at regional level in 2025 (figure 20).

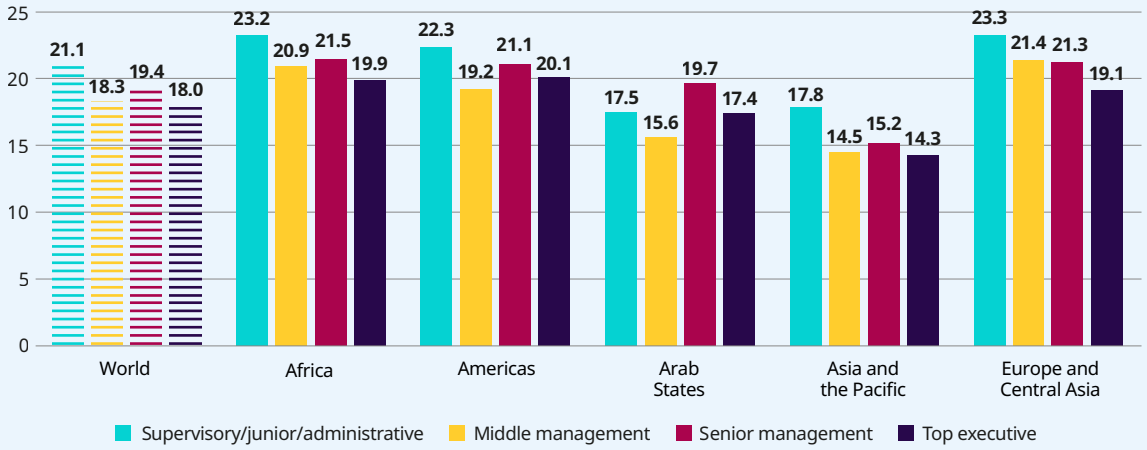
- Leaky pipelines were present in all regions.
- Pipeline bottlenecks were most pronounced at early management stages. In all regions, with the exception of Europe and Central Asia, fewer enterprises had achieved gender balance at the middle management level than at the senior management level. This suggests a critical constraint in the transition from junior to middle management.
- Some regions outperformed global averages. Enterprises in Africa, the Americas, and Europe and Central Asia reported higher shares of gender balance at all management levels.
- Other regions lagged behind. In the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific, fewer enterprises achieved gender balance across all management levels. One exception was senior management in the Arab States, where 19.7 per cent of enterprises achieved gender balance, slightly above the global average (19.4 per cent).

Enterprise size also influences gender balance across management levels, with distinct patterns emerging across enterprise types (figure 21).

- Small enterprises showed weaker gender balance at early stages of management but relatively stronger outcomes at higher levels. In 2025, around 18.3 per cent of small enterprises had achieved gender balance at junior management level and 16.8 per cent had done so at middle management level. This rose to 21.5 per cent at senior level and 18.5 per cent at top management level.
- Large enterprises displayed a more pronounced "leaky pipeline". While 24.0 per cent had achieved gender balance at junior management level, this declined steadily to 18.4 per cent at middle management level, 17.1 per cent at senior level and 15.7 per cent at top management level.
- Medium-sized enterprises performed most consistently across all levels. Around 21.6 per cent had achieved gender balance at junior level, 21.1 per cent at middle management level, 20.4 per cent at senior level and 22.5 per cent at top management level – the highest share among all enterprise sizes at the top level.

These patterns point to different types of pipeline challenges across enterprise sizes. Large enterprises experience a steady decline in gender balance as seniority increases. Small enterprises face earlier-stage constraints, particularly in building a balanced pipeline at middle management level. Medium-sized enterprises, while performing strongly overall, still showed some weakening at senior levels relative to top management, indicating potential bottlenecks in progression.

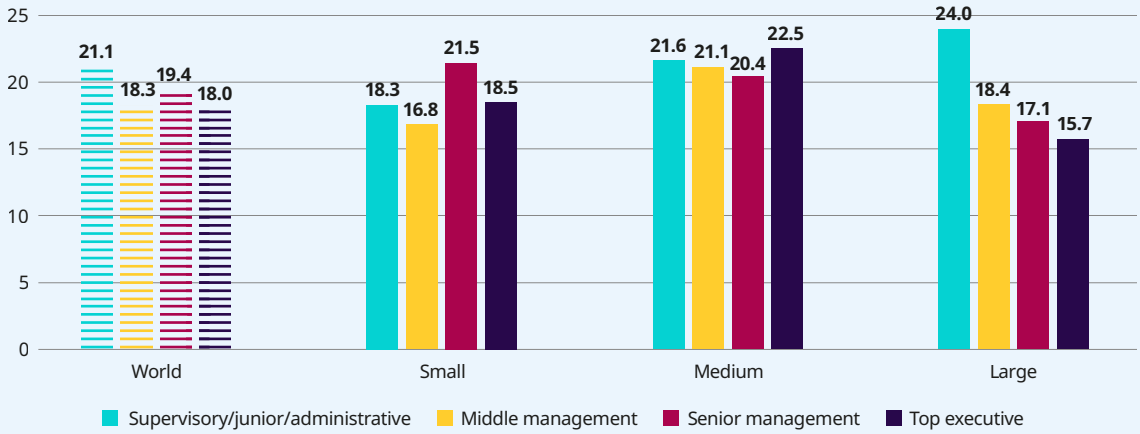
▶ Figure 20. Women's representation at different management levels in enterprises, 2025
(percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Please indicate the approximate percentage of women in each of your organization's managerial roles".

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

▶ Figure 21. Women's representation at different management levels, by enterprise size, 2025
(percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Please indicate the approximate percentage of women in each of your organization's managerial roles".

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

More women are in business leadership, but women leaders are still the exception rather than the norm

Chapter 3 demonstrated that enterprises with women CEOs and board chairs have better business outcomes, with these "gender diversity premiums" strengthening over time. Leadership therefore plays a critical role not only in shaping inclusive workplaces, but also in driving performance. However, persistent gaps in leadership reflect broader structural constraints, including the "leaky pipelines" identified earlier, which limit the number of women reaching top positions.

The C-suite: Progress but still far from parity

Global estimates often suggest that women account for only 5 to 6 per cent of CEOs, particularly in listed companies (Deloitte 2024). These figures are often based on large, publicly traded enterprises and may not fully capture the diversity of the broader private sector. The ILO 2025 enterprise survey had a more diversified sample, including unlisted national enterprises and smaller enterprises, thereby providing a more comprehensive perspective.

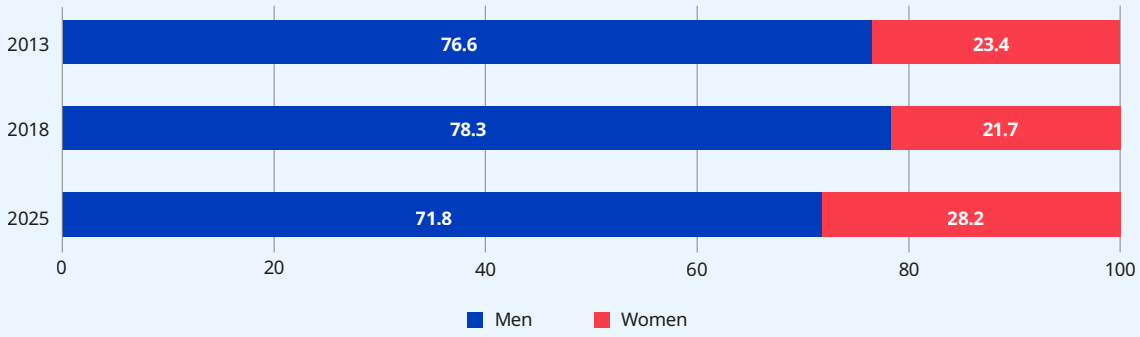
According to the 2025 ILO enterprise survey, among enterprises reporting that they had a CEO, 28.2 per cent had a woman CEO. This represents an increase of 4.8 percentage points from 23.4 per cent in 2013, despite a temporary dip in 2018 (figure 22). While these figures indicate steady progress, women CEOs remain a minority, and gender balance at the highest level of leadership is still far from being achieved.

Enterprises led by women tend to exhibit stronger gender diversity overall. In 2025, enterprises with a female CEO were 12.6 per cent more likely to have a gender-balanced workforce than those led by men. This means that leadership composition can influence broader organizational outcomes, reinforcing the role of senior decision-makers in shaping workplace diversity.

The patterns were similar across several regions, with women heading about 30 per cent of enterprises in Africa, the Americas, and Europe and Central Asia. Lower shares were observed in Asia and the Pacific (26.3 per cent) and the Arab States (20.9 per cent), indicating continued regional disparities (figure 23).

In terms of business size, medium-sized enterprises were most likely to have women CEOs (32.8 per cent), with small enterprises following just behind (31.9 per cent) and large enterprises (21.0 per cent) lagging. This pattern is consistent with earlier findings showing that small and medium-sized enterprises tend to exhibit stronger gender diversity at senior management levels than large enterprises.

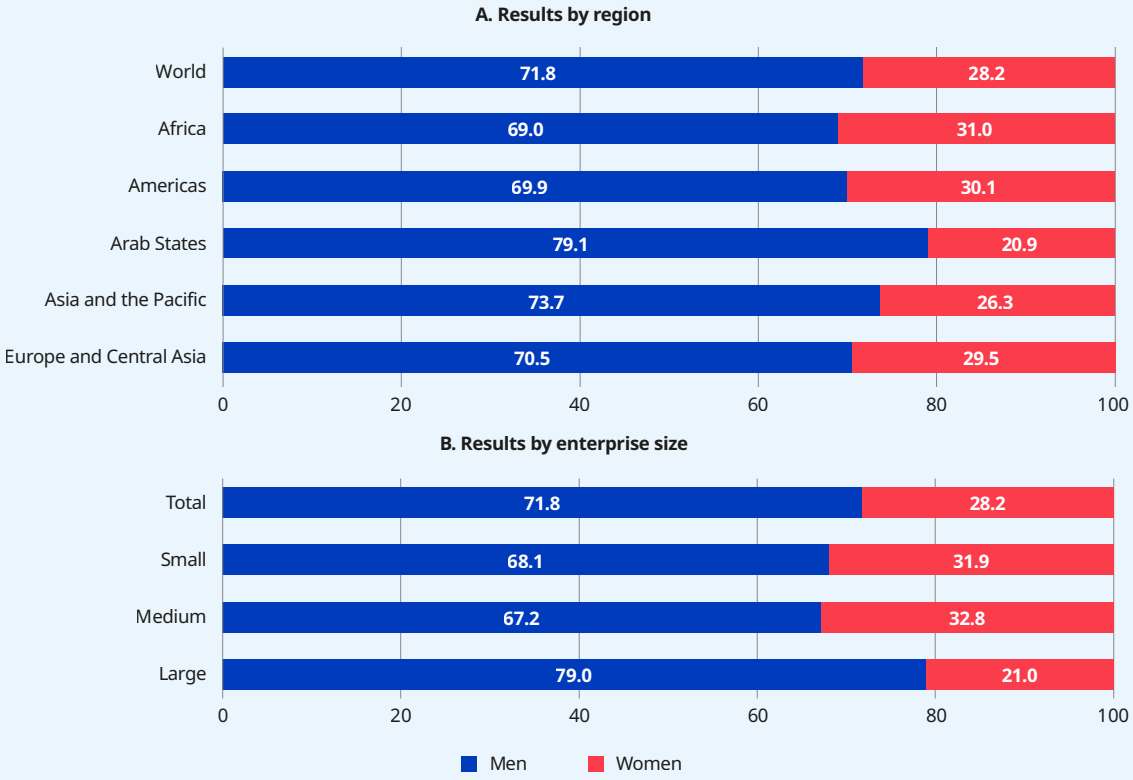
▶ **Figure 22. Enterprises with a woman CEO, 2013, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Is the CEO a man or woman?".

Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

▶ **Figure 23. Enterprises with a woman CEO, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Is the CEO a man or woman?". This question was asked of enterprises that reported having a CEO.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Board composition: Progress towards critical thresholds, but gaps remain

While the previous section highlighted the role of CEOs in shaping enterprise outcomes, corporate boards represent another key lever of leadership and governance. The composition of boards not only reflects gender diversity at the highest level but also plays an important role in influencing enterprise strategy and performance.

Evidence suggests that the benefits of gender diversity become more pronounced once a critical mass is reached. The 2019 ILO Women in Business and Management report (ILO 2019b) showed that the beneficial effects of gender equality and diversity begin to accrue when women hold 30 per cent of leadership positions. This was reinforced by the ILO enterprise survey, which found that in 2025, enterprises with at least 30 per cent women on their boards were 18 per cent more likely to achieve positive business outcomes from gender equality and diversity initiatives than those below this threshold.

Over the 12 years from 2013 to 2025, an increasing number of enterprises achieved the threshold of 30 per cent female board members (figure 24).

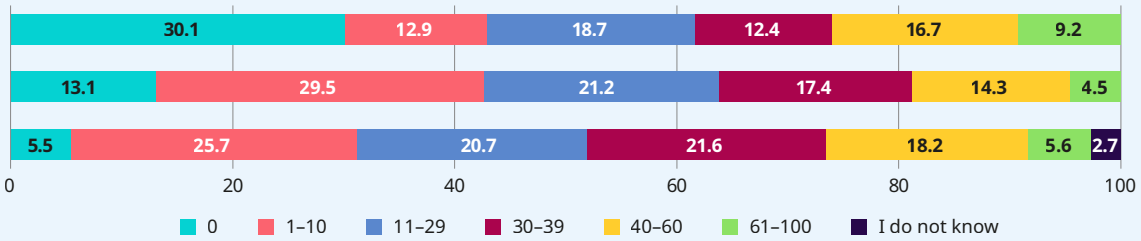
- In 2025, 45.5 per cent of enterprises with boards had at least 30 per cent women on those boards, up from 38.3 per cent in 2013 (+7.2 percentage points).
- The share of enterprises with gender-balanced boards (40–60 per cent of either gender) increased modestly from 16.7 per cent to 18.2 per cent (+1.5 percentage points).
- The proportion of enterprises with all-male boards declined sharply to 5.5 per cent, compared to 30.1 per cent in 2018 (–24.6 percentage points).

These figures are encouraging, yet all-male boards are not yet a thing of the past. More than half of enterprises have not attained the critical 30 per cent threshold that leads to solid business benefits. Moreover, the share of enterprises with gender-balanced boards has grown only modestly. This indicates that, while progress has been made, many enterprises could derive significant value from improved gender diversity at board level.

At regional level, variation is seen in the extent of progress. About half of enterprises in Africa (51.9 per cent) and in Europe and Central Asia (49.1 per cent) reported having more than 30 per cent women on their boards, compared to lower shares in the Americas (45.2 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (41.0 per cent), and the Arab States (39.5 per cent). The highest shares of enterprises with gender-balanced boards were in Africa (22.5 per cent) and Europe and Central Asia (21.1 per cent) (figure 25).

Differences by enterprise size mirror patterns observed elsewhere in the report. Over half (56.1 per cent) of medium-sized enterprises reported having more than 30 per cent women on boards, compared to 46.4 per cent of small enterprises and 38.5 per cent of large enterprises. Gender-balanced boards were also more common among medium-sized enterprises (around 22 per cent) compared to 19.0 per cent of small enterprises and 15.3 per cent of large enterprises.

▶ **Figure 24. Women's representation on company boards, 2013, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Please indicate the approximate percentage of female board members in your company". This question was asked of enterprises that reported having a board of directors. The 2013 and 2018 surveys did not provide the option "I don't know".

Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

Female board chairs are catalysts for gender diversity

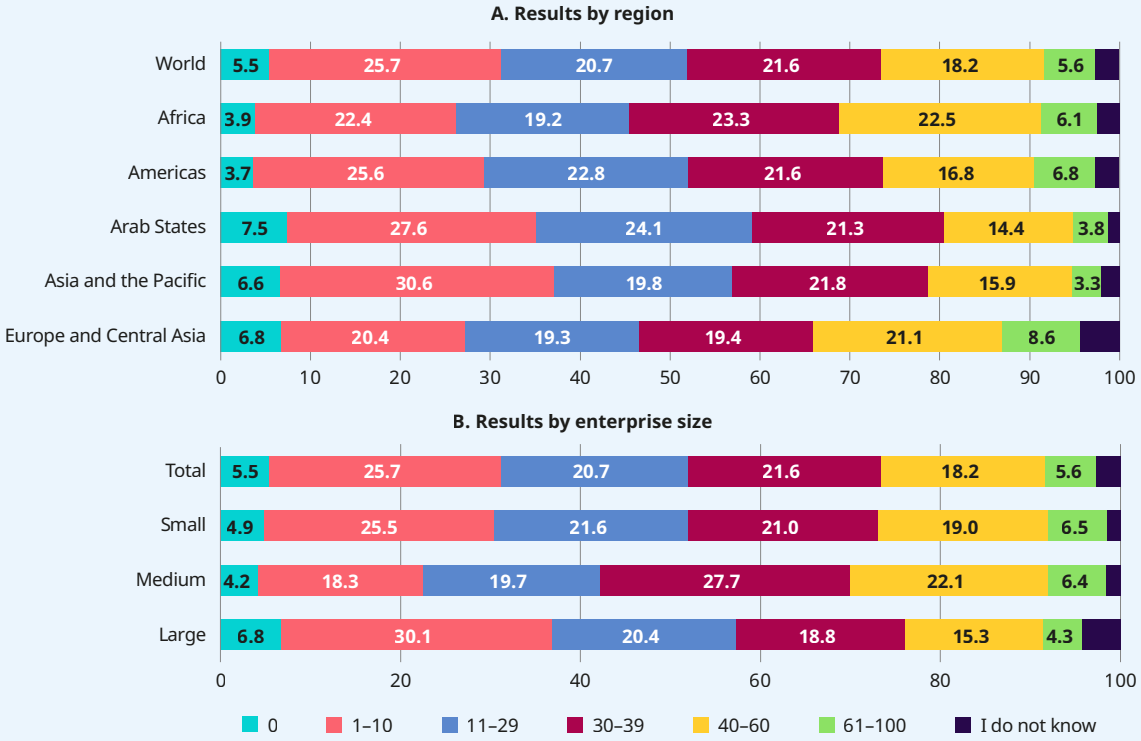
It is not just board composition but also leadership at board level that is evolving. The proportion of enterprises with a woman serving as board chair increased markedly from 13.1 per cent in 2013 to 30.9 per cent in 2025 (+17.8 percentage points) (figure 26). This upward trend highlights meaningful progress in women's participation in the highest levels of corporate governance, even though women remain under-represented, with fewer than one third of enterprises having a female board chair.

This development is particularly important given the influence of board leadership on overall diversity outcomes. The 2025 ILO enterprise survey showed that enterprises with female board chairs are 37.8 per cent more likely to have boards with at least 30 per cent women compared to those chaired by men. This means that leadership at the top can play a catalytic role in shaping board composition and, more broadly, advancing gender diversity within enterprises.

The Americas had the highest share of enterprises with women as board chairs (35.2 per cent), followed by Africa (33.2 per cent), Europe and Central Asia (30.6 per cent), the Arab States (27.8 per cent), and Asia and the Pacific (27.0 per cent) (figure 27).

Small and medium-sized enterprises were more likely to have women as board chairs compared to large enterprises. Almost 37 per cent of small enterprises have female board chairs, compared to 35.1 per cent of medium-sized enterprises and 22.3 per cent of large enterprises.

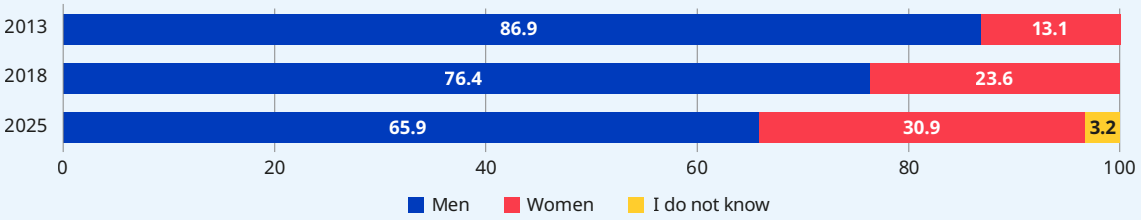
▶ Figure 25. Women's representation on company boards, by region and enterprise size, 2025
(percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Please indicate the approximate percentage of female board members in your company". This question was asked of enterprises that reported having a board of directors.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

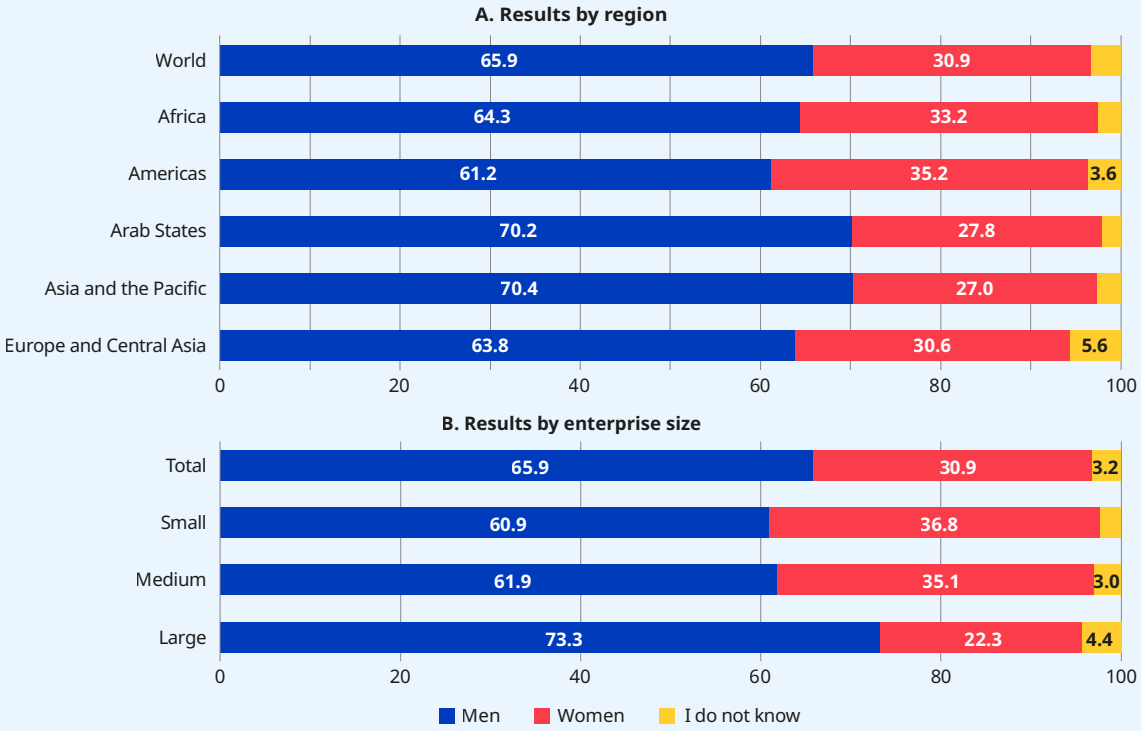
▶ Figure 26. Gender of the chair of the board, 2013, 2018 and 2025



Note: The 2013 and 2018 surveys did not provide the option "I don't know".

Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

▶ **Figure 27. Enterprises with a woman board chair, by region and enterprise size, 2025**
(percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Is the chair of the board a man or a woman?". This question was asked of enterprises that reported having a board of directors.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Progress across functions and sectors, but barriers persist

Barriers to women's advancement in the private sector operate along multiple dimensions. In addition to "glass ceilings", which limit progression to senior levels, "glass walls" confine women to specific functions or sectors. Together, these dynamics create structural imbalances that constrain both individual career progression and enterprise performance.

As already seen, there has been steady progress in women's representation in management and leadership positions. This is true across all function areas covered by the ILO enterprise surveys. The most notable increases in the share of enterprises employing women as senior managers between 2018 and 2025 were observed in the following functions (figure 28):

- General management: from 33.5 per cent in 2018 to 48.6 per cent in 2025 (+15.1 percentage points).
- Operations: from 24.0 per cent in 2018 to 32.8 per cent in 2025 (+8.8 percentage points).
- Corporate social responsibility: from 22.5 per cent in 2018 to 29.6 per cent in 2025 (+7.1 percentage points).

These gains suggest that more enterprises are employing women in functions that are central to organizational decision-making, including areas that have traditionally been male dominated, such as general management and operations. However, important disparities persist across functions. Women

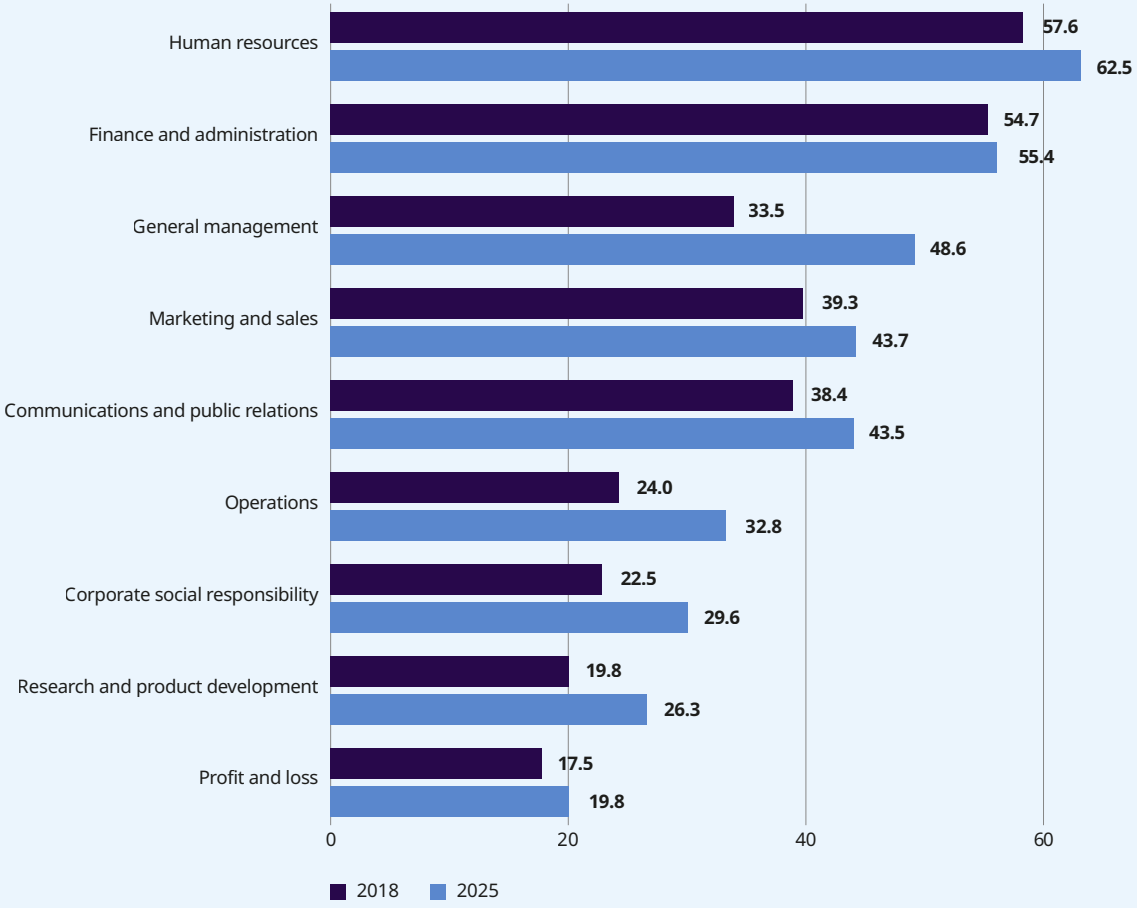
remain concentrated in certain roles while under-represented in others, particularly those most closely associated with pathways to top leadership.

- In 2025, the highest shares of enterprises reporting women among senior managers were in functions such as human resources (62.5 per cent) and finance and administration (55.4 per cent).
- By contrast, they were under-represented in functions such as profit and loss (19.8 per cent) and research and development (26.3 per cent).

These latter functions are often critical stepping stones to CEO and board-level positions, as they provide direct responsibility for core business operations, strategy and revenue generation. Limited access to such roles can therefore restrict women's progression to the highest levels of leadership, reinforcing existing "glass ceiling" effects.

Sectoral patterns reinforce these findings. Unequal gender distribution in senior management is evident across all sectors, with relatively few enterprises achieving gender balance. In 2025, the education sector recorded the highest share of enterprises with gender-balanced senior management (30.5 per cent), while manufacturing showed the lowest (16.3 per cent) (figure 29).

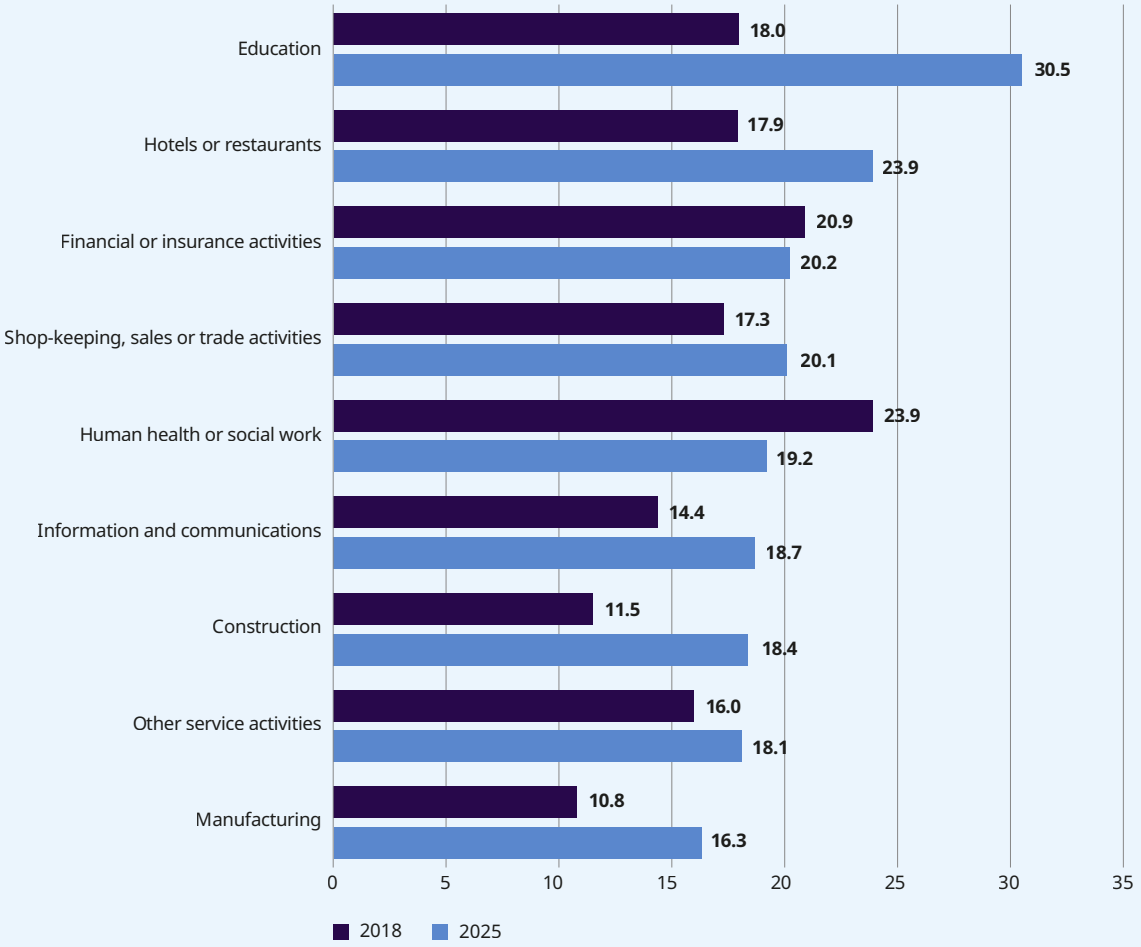
Figure 28. Enterprises employing women as senior managers, by function, 2018 and 2025
(percentage of respondents)



Note: Responses to the option "My company doesn't have any of these areas/there are no women who work for any of these areas for senior management" are not shown in the figure.

Source: 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

▶ **Figure 29. Enterprises with gender balance at the senior management level, by sector, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Source: 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

However, since 2018, most sectors made progress in terms of achieving gender balance at senior management level, with the education sector again leading the way (+12.5 percentage points). The exceptions to this trend were financial and insurance activities, where progress in achieving gender balance at senior management level stagnated (–0.7 percentage points), and human health or social work, where gender balance worsened (–4.7 percentage points).

Assessing progress on gender equality and diversity requires consideration of the proportion of women in the overall workforce of these sectors, and not just at management levels. For example, women are over-represented in some sectors, such as education, and under-represented in others, such as manufacturing. These differences impact both the available talent pool and progression patterns.

The education sector's relatively high proportion of women masks significant vertical segregation. Women dominate teaching roles, accounting globally for 93 per cent of pre-primary teachers, 68 per cent of primary teachers and 52 per cent of secondary teachers (UNESCO 2024b). However, they remain under-represented in leadership positions. In the 2025 ILO enterprise survey, only 27.8 per cent of education enterprises reported having a female majority (61–100 per cent) in top executive roles, 15.3 per cent in senior management, 11.0 per cent in middle management, and 16.9 per cent in junior management positions.

Manufacturing presents a different challenge: low female workforce participation, compounded by a lack of balance in management. Just 29 per cent of manufacturing workers globally are women (Moutray 2022). Correspondingly, few enterprises report a female majority in management: 11.3 per cent at the top executive level, 5.1 per cent in senior management, 2.9 per cent in middle management, and 5.1 per cent in junior management positions.

These contrasting sectoral patterns highlight that gender imbalances operate through different mechanisms. In education, the challenge lies in translating a large female workforce into leadership representation, pointing to strong "glass ceiling" effects. In manufacturing, the issue is both entry and progression, reflecting a combination of "glass walls" and "glass ceilings". In both cases, overall workforce composition alone is not a reliable indicator of gender equality and diversity in leadership.

What the evidence suggests

The evidence presented in this chapter highlights the central role of leadership, governance and organizational structures in shaping gender diversity within enterprises. Women remain under-represented at the highest levels, but where they are present – as CEOs, board members or board chairs – they are associated with stronger gender balance across organizations. The findings suggest that leadership positions act as key leverage points: increasing women's representation at the top not only reflects progress, but can also accelerate it by influencing recruitment, promotion and governance practices throughout the enterprise.

At the same time, progress remains uneven. While more enterprises report the presence of women in management and leadership, gender balance is far from being achieved. Persistent "leaky pipelines" mean that women are less likely to progress to senior and top roles, and weak gender balance at junior and middle management levels risks constraining future leadership pools.

Three key dynamics emerge.

- **First, progress at the top is not yet supported by sufficiently strong pipelines.** Gains in CEO representation, board composition and board leadership contrast with stagnation or decline in gender balance at earlier stages of management. Strengthening entry and progression at junior and middle levels will be critical to sustaining advances in senior leadership.
- **Second, gender imbalances across functions and sectors limit progression pathways.** Women remain concentrated in certain functions, such as human resources and administration, and under-represented in roles linked to profit and loss, and research and development. Similarly, sectoral patterns show that both under-representation (as in manufacturing) and vertical segregation (as in education) constrain leadership outcomes. These structural patterns restrict access to the experiences required for advancement.
- **Third, enterprise characteristics shape outcomes.** Medium-sized enterprises consistently demonstrate stronger performance across workforce composition, management and leadership, while large enterprises tend to exhibit more pronounced declines in gender balance at higher levels. These differences suggest that organizational structures and practices play an important role in enabling or constraining progress.

The findings point to the importance of addressing both entry into and progression within the workforce. Efforts to expand participation in under-represented sectors, improve access to strategic functions, and strengthen leadership pipelines are likely to have the greatest impact. Additionally, enterprises that integrate gender equality and diversity into talent management, leadership development and governance practices are better positioned to achieve sustained progress.

The role of enabling environments is also critical. EBMOs can support enterprises by promoting awareness, facilitating access to talent and encouraging more balanced participation across sectors

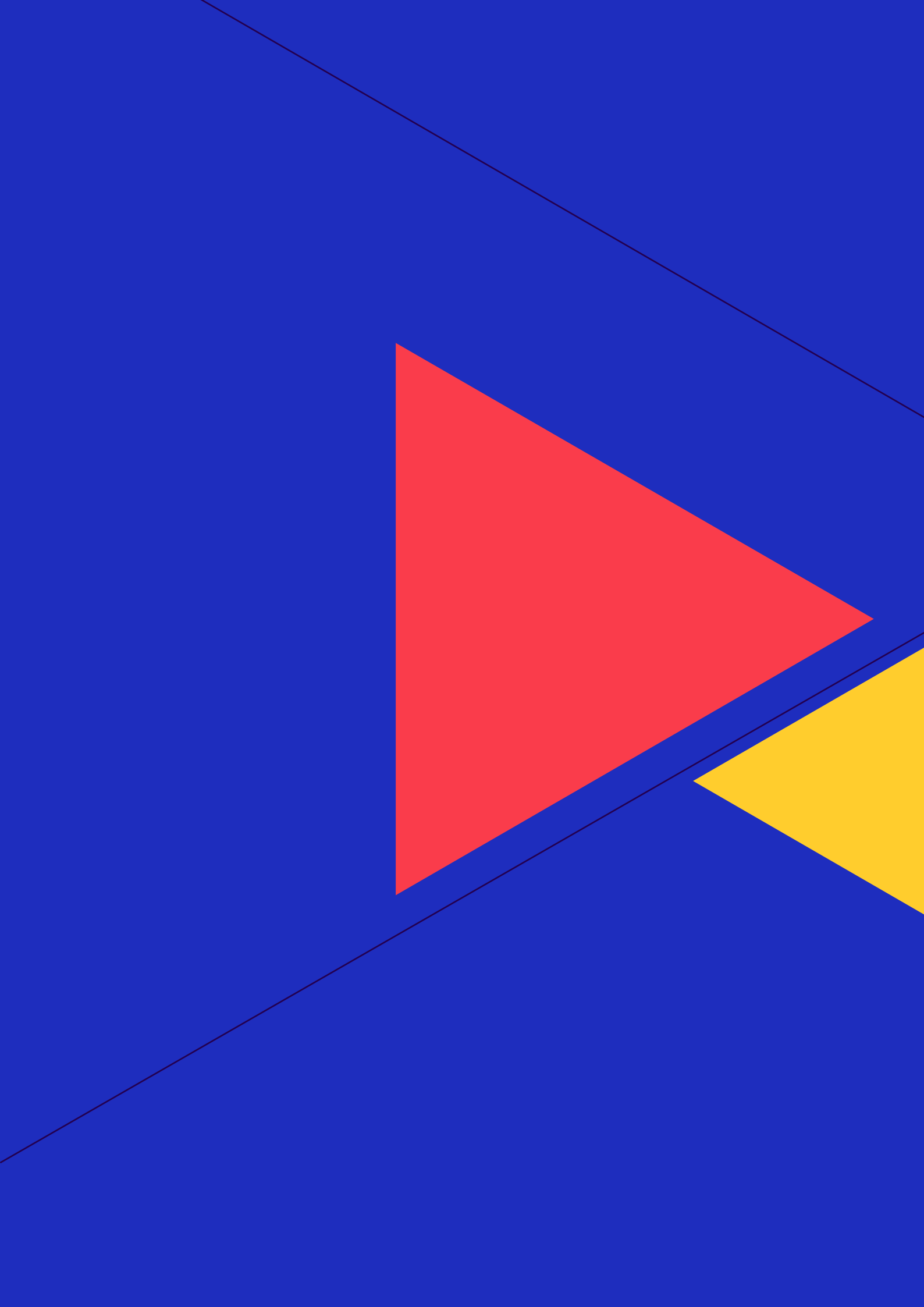
and occupations. Strengthening linkages between education systems and labour markets can further help expand the pool of qualified candidates and support more inclusive career pathways.

Overall, the evidence suggests that while progress is being made, achieving gender balance in the private sector will depend on sustained, coordinated efforts to address structural barriers across the full employment lifecycle – from entry to leadership.

"A company with a nurturing culture, with fair recruitment, promotion, and remuneration, will get the best talent, both women and men. And when women know they have a future in the company, they shine."[15]

▶ Rosemarie P. Rafael — Founder and Chairperson — Airspeed — Philippines

15 This quote is taken from the enterprise case study on the gender equality and diversity initiatives of Airspeed, the Philippines, which can be found in Annex 3.





Workplace policies, targeted initiatives and leadership commitment can help turn gender equality and diversity objectives into action.

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5

Enterprise initiatives that make the difference

This chapter examines how enterprises translate commitments on gender equality and diversity into concrete policies and practices, and the extent to which these efforts are effectively implemented. While earlier chapters demonstrated the business case for gender equality and diversity, this chapter focuses on the mechanisms through which enterprises operationalize these principles, and where the gaps remain.

Despite the demonstrated benefits of gender equality and diversity, an important implementation gap persists. While a majority of enterprises report having gender equality and diversity policies (or equivalent frameworks) in place, fewer are translating these into concrete initiatives. This gap means that many enterprises are not fully realizing the potential business benefits associated with gender equality and diversity efforts, and that progress achieved to date may not be sustained.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks have emerged as a key driver of enterprise action in this area. These broad sustainability and human rights frameworks both support and are reinforced by gender equality and diversity efforts. Evidence from the 2025 ILO enterprise survey shows that ESG adoption is widespread and associated with stronger outcomes, including higher representation of women in management and leadership positions, and improved business performance. At the same time, enterprises with greater representation of women in top positions are more likely to adopt ESG policies and practices, indicating a mutually reinforcing relationship.

Differences across enterprise size persist. Medium-sized enterprises (101–250 employees) continue to perform strongly across multiple dimensions, including in the adoption and effectiveness of gender equality and diversity initiatives, as well as the use of ESG-related policies, disclosure practices, and gender metrics.

While a majority of enterprises report gender equality and diversity policies in place, fewer are translating these into concrete initiatives.

Enterprises with a gender equality and diversity policy have more women in middle, senior and top management. They are:

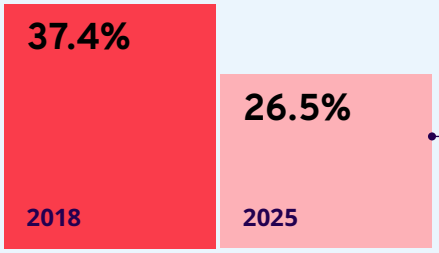
29.4% more likely to experience **positive business outcomes**

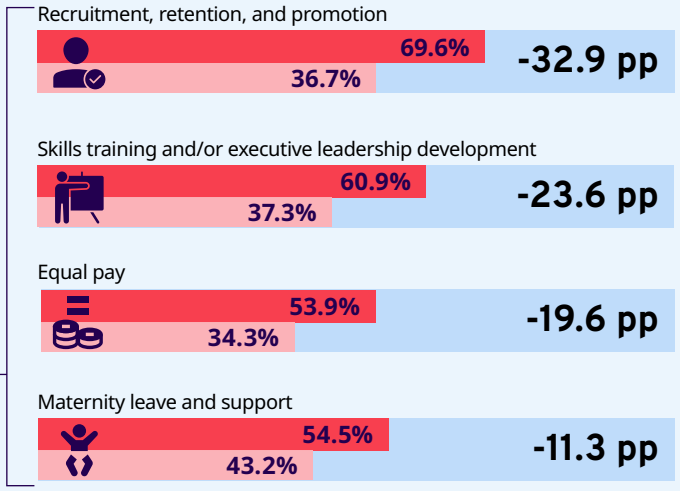
17.9% more likely to experience **increased profits**

Despite widespread recognition of their importance, the share of enterprises implementing gender equality and diversity initiatives has decreased.

Between 2018 and 2025, implementation has decreased:

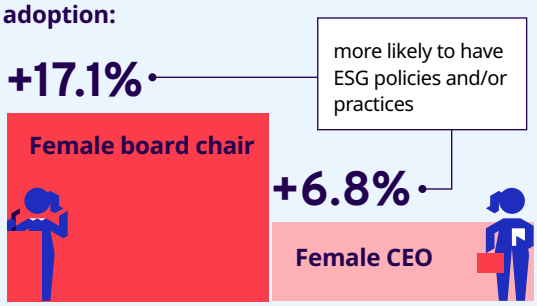
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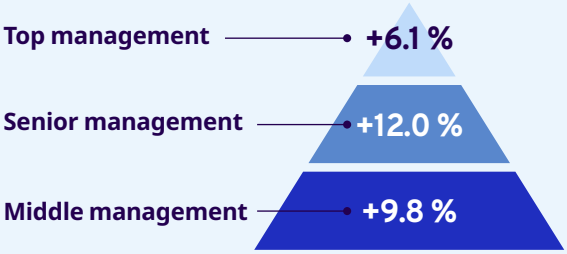


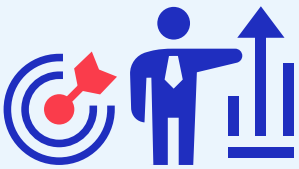
ESG is both shaped by and drives gender equality and diversity.

Female leadership drives ESG adoption:



Enterprises with ESG policies and/or practices are more likely to employ women across management:





Measurement and targets matter. Enterprises that pair policy frameworks with targeted initiatives, monitoring and ESG integration are better positioned to turn gender equality and diversity into measurable business outcomes.

Key insights from the 2025 ILO enterprise survey

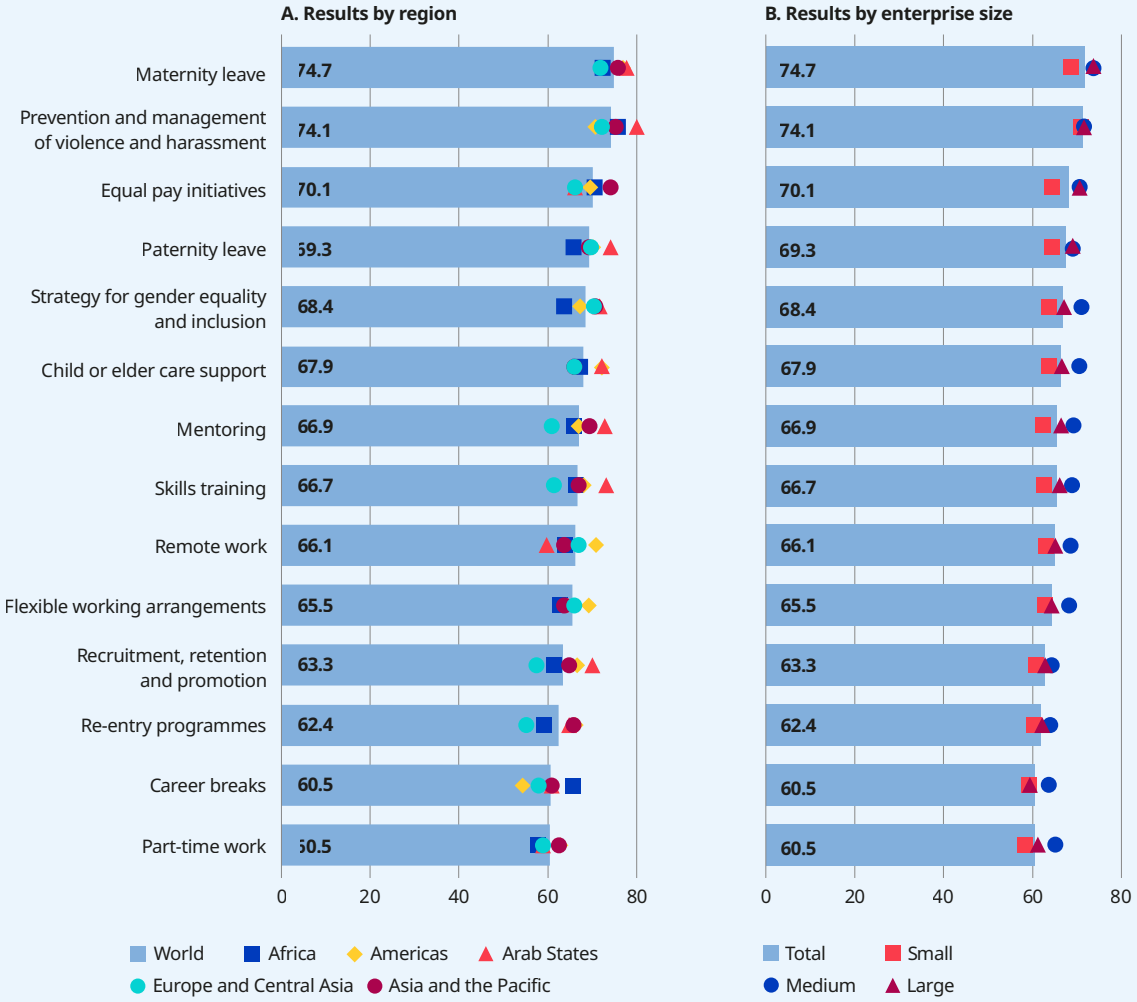
- **Enterprises identified a core set of effective interventions.** The most frequently cited initiatives for promoting gender equality and diversity were maternity leave (74.7 per cent), preventing and addressing violence and harassment (74.1 per cent), and equal pay initiatives (70.1 per cent).
- **Enterprises with a gender equality and diversity policy (or equivalent) had more women in middle, senior, and top executive management**. They were also 29.4 per cent more likely to experience positive business outcomes and 17.9 per cent more likely to experience increased profits compared to enterprises without such a policy. However, a quarter (25.2 per cent) of enterprises still lacked such policies and may have been missing out on these benefits.
- **Implementation of gender equality and diversity initiatives remained uneven and had declined.** Despite widespread recognition of their importance, the share of enterprises implementing gender equality and diversity initiatives had decreased (–10.9 percentage points). In 2018, 37.4 per cent of enterprises on average reported implementing initiatives in various gender equality and diversity areas, compared to 26.5 per cent in 2025. This strong decline included reductions in two of the most effective measures identified by enterprises: maternity leave and support programmes (–11.3 percentage points) and equal pay (–19.6 percentage points).
- **ESG both drives and is shaped by gender equality and diversity.** ESG adoption was widespread (70.8 per cent), and among the enterprises which had done so, 81.5 per cent had incorporated gender considerations into their ESG strategies to a great or moderate extent. Enterprises with ESG policies and/or practices were more likely to employ women in middle management (+9.8 per cent), senior management (+12.0 per cent) and top management (+6.1 per cent) positions. Enterprises with a female CEO were 6.8 per cent more likely to have ESG policies and/or practices, while enterprises with a woman chair of the board were 17.1 per cent more likely to have these policies and practices in place.
- **Measurement and targets matter. Enterprises with gender metrics were 17.0 per cent more likely than those without such metrics to experience better business outcomes and 8.3 per cent more likely to see increased profits.** They were also nearly twice as likely to report profit increases above 20 per cent (17.0 per cent compared to 9.2 per cent among those without metrics). However, 17.0 per cent of enterprises did not use gender metrics and were missing out on the associated benefits. Similarly, enterprises with gender diversity targets at the senior management level were 15.3 per cent more likely to see improved business outcomes than enterprises without such targets. However, 57.2 per cent of enterprises did not have such targets in place and may have been missing out on the associated benefits.

Maternity leave, preventing and addressing violence and harassment, and equal pay initiatives are most effective

According to the 2025 ILO enterprise survey, some gender equality and diversity initiatives are perceived as more effective than others. Over 70 per cent of enterprises identified the following measures as highly effective in promoting equality and diversity (figure 30):

- maternity leave (74.7 per cent),
- preventing and addressing violence and harassment (74.1 per cent),
- equal pay initiatives (70.1 per cent).

▶ **Figure 30. Enterprises rating specific gender equality and diversity initiatives as highly effective, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: The figure includes responses from enterprises that reported their initiatives for equality and diversity as extremely or very effective.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Other effective initiatives, reported by about two thirds of enterprises, included paternity leave (69.3 per cent), a strategy for gender equality and diversity among senior managers (68.4 per cent), child or elder care support (67.9 per cent), mentoring (66.9 per cent), and skills training (66.7 per cent).

While perceptions of effectiveness were broadly consistent across regions, there was some variation. The Arab States stand out, with 80.0 per cent of enterprises reporting the high effectiveness of initiatives to prevent and address violence and harassment – the highest scoring of any initiative by enterprises in any region.

The prominence of this issue reflects its growing recognition in both policy and business contexts. Violence and harassment at work remain widespread, affecting an estimated one in five people at work (ILO, LRF and Gallup 2022), and have gained increased visibility through regulatory developments and international labour standards, including the ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

Violence and harassment at work have also been shown to damage productivity and profits.[16] The 2025 ILO enterprise survey shows that enterprises with initiatives to prevent and address violence and harassment at work were 9.9 per cent more likely to report enhanced workplace safety and employee well-being. This underscores the fact that such initiatives are not only critical from a rights perspective but also contribute to improved organizational performance.

Looking at the perception of effectiveness of gender equality and diversity initiatives by enterprises of different sizes, medium-sized enterprises once again stand out. They reported the highest effectiveness of initiatives across all areas, including maternity leave (76.9 per cent), violence and harassment prevention and response (74.6 per cent), equal pay efforts (73.4 per cent), paternity leave (71.0 per cent), a strategy for gender equality and diversity among senior managers (73.8 per cent), and child or elder care support (73.1 per cent). Small enterprises, by contrast, reported lower levels of effectiveness across most measures compared to medium-sized and large enterprises.

As shown in the previous chapter, medium-sized enterprises also perform more strongly in terms of workforce composition, management, and leadership diversity. Their higher reported effectiveness therefore aligns with broader patterns of stronger gender equality outcomes. While the underlying drivers are not fully understood, this suggests that organizational characteristics, such as structure, flexibility or resource allocation, may play an important role in enabling more effective implementation of gender equality and diversity initiatives.

Gender equality and diversity policies are associated with improved business outcomes

Regression analysis of the 2025 ILO enterprise survey data show a strong positive association between the presence of gender equality and diversity (or similar) policies and improved business outcomes. While this relationship does not necessarily imply causality, it indicates that enterprises with formal policy frameworks are more likely to translate gender equality commitments into measurable results.

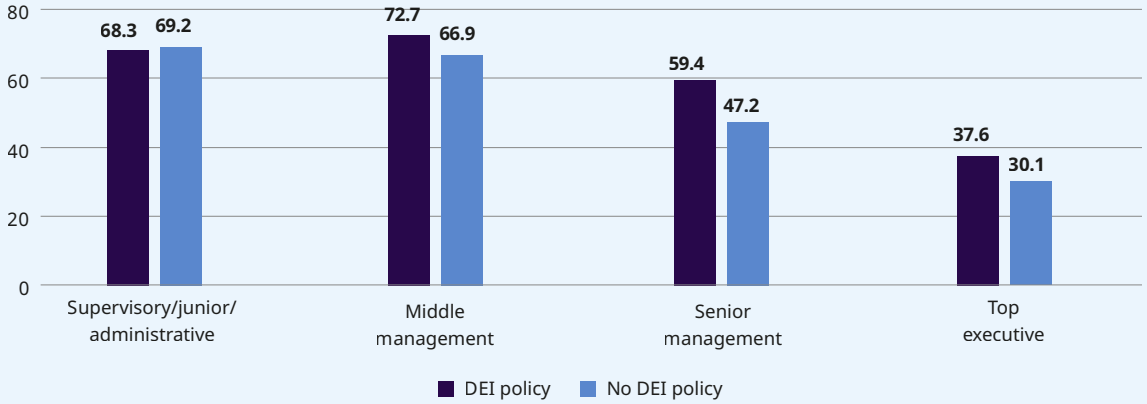
- Enterprises with a gender equality and diversity policy are 29.4 per cent more likely to experience positive business outcomes, as a result of their gender inclusion efforts, than enterprises without such policies. In other words, enterprises with such a policy are 4.01 times more likely to experience better business outcomes than others.
- They are also 17.9 per cent (or 2.43 times) more likely to experience increased profits than enterprises without such a policy.

These improved business results go hand in hand with more women in management and leadership positions. Enterprises with a gender equality and diversity policy in place are more likely than others to employ women as managers, including in middle (+5.8 per cent), senior (+12.2 per cent) and top executive (+7.5 per cent) management positions (figure 31). They are also more likely to have women in key leadership roles, including as board chairs (+16.2 per cent) and CEOs (+13.8 per cent), and to achieve at least 30 per cent women on their boards (+20.3 per cent).

Given these associations, it is notable that a large majority of enterprises (three quarters) report having such policies in place (figure 32). This share remained relatively stable over the 2013–25 period, increasing from 73.1 per cent to 74.8 per cent. This suggests that formal policy frameworks are now widely established across the private sector. However, around a quarter (25.2 per cent) of enterprises in 2025 still did not have such policies and may therefore be less likely to realize the associated benefits.

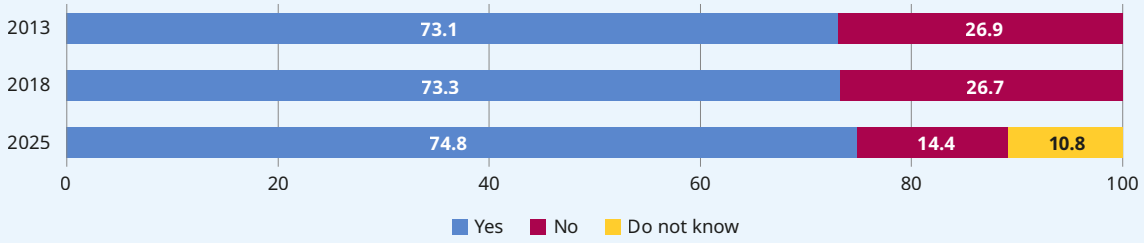
16 See, for example, Au, Dong and Tremblay (2023), Hartman (2020) or Brown et al. (2016).

▶ **Figure 31. Enterprises that employ women at different managerial levels according to whether or not they have a diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) policy or similar, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

▶ **Figure 32. Enterprises with an equal employment opportunity or diversity and inclusion policy, 2013, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



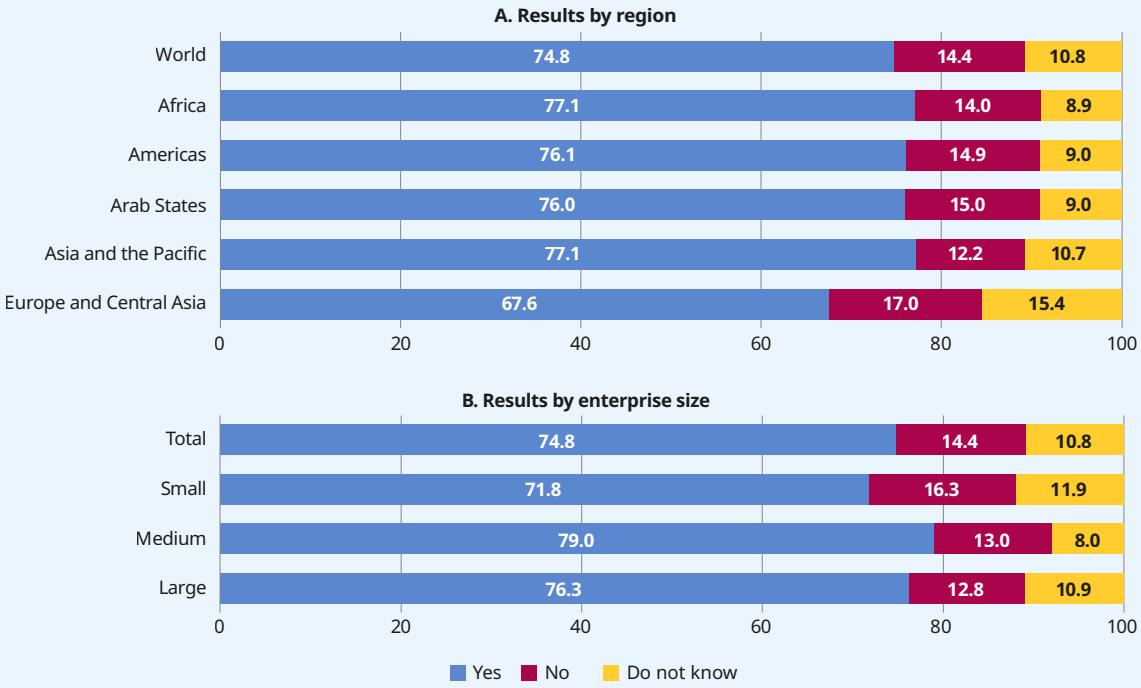
Note: Respondents answered the question: "Does your company have an equal employment opportunity policy or a diversity and inclusion policy?". The answer option "do not know" was not included in the 2013 and 2018 surveys.

Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

In 2025, variation in policy adoption among world regions and enterprises of different sizes was relatively limited (figure 33). Approximately eight in ten enterprises in most regions had an equal employment opportunity or diversity and inclusion policy, but in Europe and Central Asia the share decreased to around seven in ten enterprises. Differences by enterprise size were also modest. Medium-sized enterprises were most likely to report having a policy in place (79.0 per cent), followed by large enterprises (76.3 per cent) and small enterprises (71.8 per cent).

These findings suggest that formal policy frameworks are widely established across the private sector. At the same time, as shown earlier, the presence of such policies is associated with stronger gender diversity outcomes across management and leadership levels, indicating that they can serve as practical levers for change. However, a significant minority of enterprises – around a quarter – still operate without such policies and may therefore be less likely to realize these benefits.

▶ **Figure 33. Enterprises with an equal employment opportunity or diversity and inclusion policy, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Does your company have an equal employment opportunity policy or a diversity and inclusion policy?".

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Fewer enterprises implement gender equality and diversity initiatives

Despite widespread adoption of gender equality and diversity policies, the share of enterprises implementing concrete initiatives has declined (figure 34). The comparison between the 2013 and 2018 ILO enterprise surveys already indicated a downward trend in the proportion of companies adopting these initiatives. When comparing 2018 and 2025 data (similar sample sizes), the decline is evident across all major initiatives.

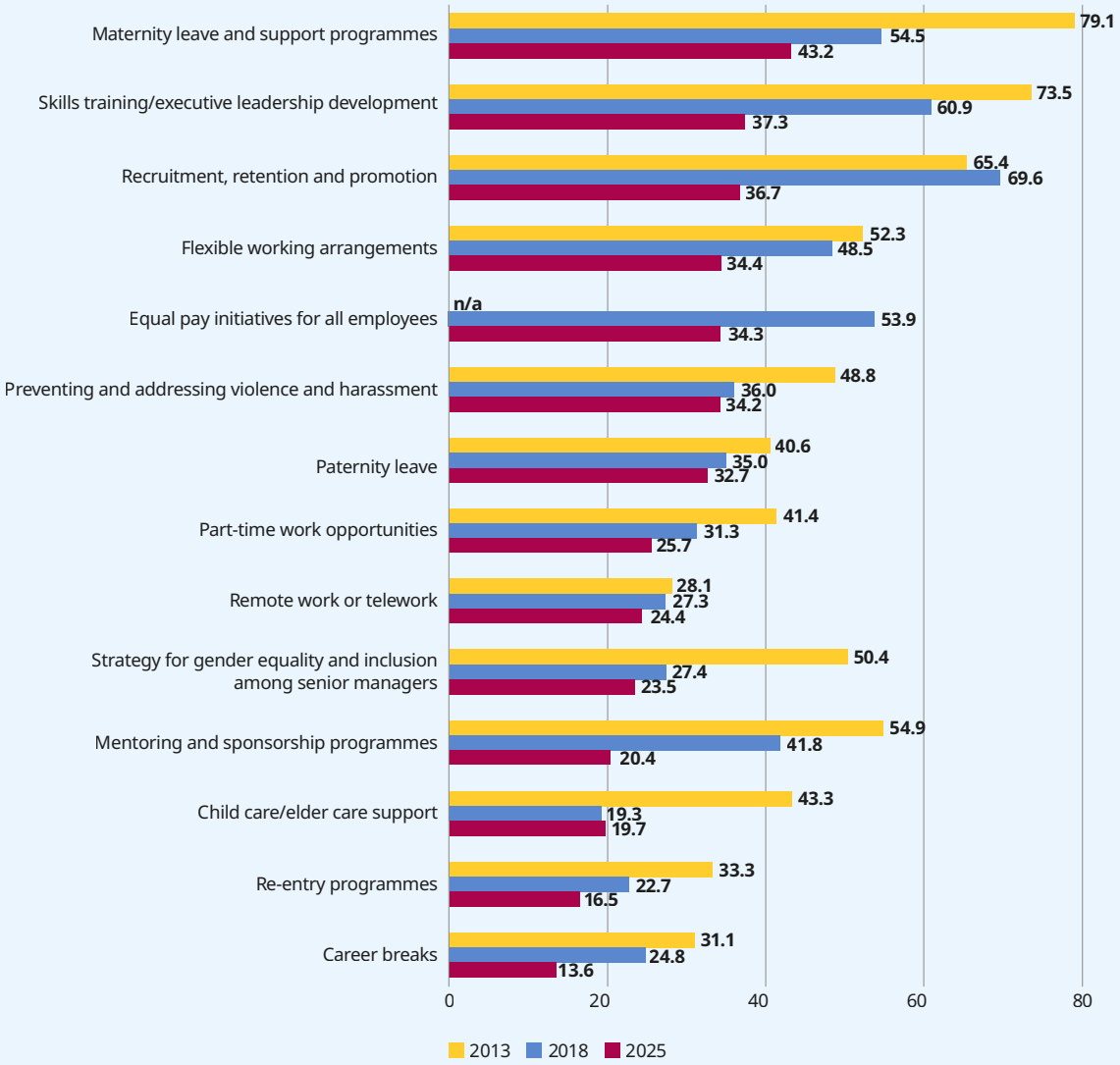
In 2018, on average 37.4 per cent of enterprises reported implementing initiatives in different areas of gender equality and diversity, compared to 26.5 per cent in 2025, a drop of 10.9 percentage points. This decline includes a notable drop in two of the initiatives deemed most effective by the private sector in achieving gender diversity: maternity leave and support programmes (–11.3 percentage points) and equal pay (–19.6 percentage points).

Across individual measures, all areas – with the exception of child care and elder support (+0.4 percentage points) – showed declines. The most important declines are listed below.

- Recruitment, retention, and promotion initiatives aimed at women declined sharply from 69.6 per cent in 2018 to 36.7 per cent in 2025 (–32.9 percentage points).
- Skills training and/or executive leadership development programmes dropped from 60.9 per cent to 37.3 per cent (–23.6 percentage points).

- Mentoring and sponsorship programmes more than halved, from 41.8 per cent to 20.4 per cent (–21.4 percentage points).
- Equal pay initiatives decreased from 53.9 per cent to 34.3 per cent (–19.6 percentage points).
- Flexible working arrangements dropped from 48.5 per cent to 34.4 per cent (–14.1 percentage points).

▶ **Figure 34. Enterprises implementing gender equality and diversity initiatives, by area, 2013, 2018 and 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Source: 2013, 2018 and 2025 ILO enterprise surveys.

Note: Respondents answered the question: "Select the areas where your company implements initiatives to promote equality and diversity". The 2013 survey did not include the option "Equal pay initiatives for all employees".

The reasons behind the observed reduction in gender equality and diversity initiatives require further investigation. However, several plausible explanations emerge:

- **Resource constraints and competing organizational priorities**. Enterprises may be reallocating attention and resources in response to broader pressures, including geopolitical uncertainty, financial conditions and the growing demands of digital transformation.
- **Perceived sufficiency of existing measures.** Some enterprises may consider current policies, initiatives and monitoring frameworks to be adequate, despite evidence that significant gaps in gender diversity remain.
- **Integration into broader ESG frameworks.** Gender equality and diversity actions may increasingly be embedded within wider ESG strategies and therefore not be reported as stand-alone initiatives.
- **Shift towards broader inclusion agendas.** Some enterprises may be expanding diversity efforts to cover multiple groups, resulting in less targeted interventions for women.

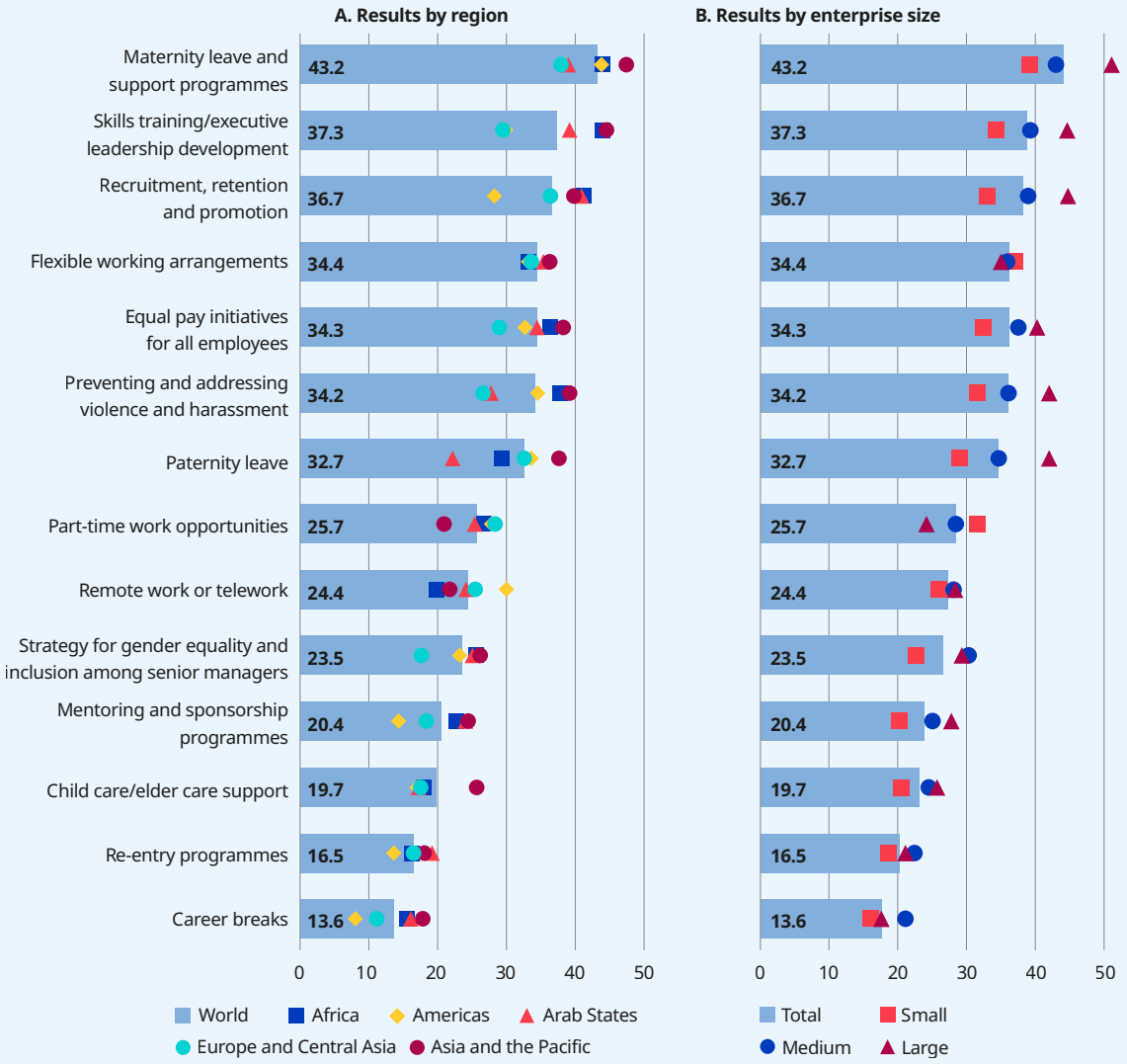
These interpretations are consistent with emerging external evidence. For example, global research on more than 15,000 mid-market enterprises in 35 economies shows that 21.9 per cent of mid-market firms plan to relax, or have already relaxed, some of their gender equality and diversity initiatives, the most common of which relate to senior leadership positions (35.6 per cent of enterprises) (Grant Thornton 2026).

Looking at different world regions, the 2025 data show that regions may prioritize different types of gender equality and diversity initiatives depending on the context (figure 35). Programmes for skills training or executive leadership development were more frequently adopted in Africa and in Asia and the Pacific, with almost half of enterprises participating, compared to other areas. About two out of five enterprises undertook initiatives to enhance recruitment, retention, and advancement in all regions except the Americas, where three out of ten companies engaged in such efforts. Initiatives supporting flexible work arrangements and equal pay were relatively evenly distributed across regions, with roughly three out of ten companies implementing these practices. Efforts to prevent and address violence and harassment were most common in Asia and the Pacific (39.2 per cent) and least common in the Arab States (28.3 per cent), and Europe and Central Asia (26.6 per cent).

These variations suggest that enterprises tailor their approaches to the most pressing constraints they face. Skills and leadership initiatives may be more prominent where women's participation is higher but progression remains constrained, while recruitment and retention measures may be prioritized where talent pipelines are limited. Similarly, initiatives addressing violence and harassment may be more prevalent where regulatory frameworks or public awareness are stronger.

Looking at enterprise size, large and medium-sized enterprises were more likely than small enterprises to have adopted initiatives promoting equality and diversity in various areas. These areas included maternity leave and support programmes; skills training and executive leadership development; recruitment, retention and promotion; equal pay initiatives for all employees; preventing and addressing violence and harassment; paternity and parental leave; mentoring and sponsorship programmes; and child care and elder care support. Interestingly, part-time work opportunities were more common in small and medium-sized enterprises (three out of ten) than in large ones (two out of ten).

▶ **Figure 35. Enterprises implementing gender equality and diversity initiatives, by area, region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Select the areas where your company implements initiatives to promote equality and diversity". Responses to the option "other" are not included in this figure.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

ESG both drives and is shaped by gender equality and diversity

ESG frameworks are becoming an increasingly important feature of enterprise strategy. Businesses are adopting ESG approaches in response to growing expectations from investors, governments, employees and consumers, who are placing greater emphasis on sustainability, social responsibility and long-term performance. These stakeholders are concerned not only with enterprises' environmental and social impacts, but also with how ESG considerations influence financial outcomes and resilience. Recent evidence underscores the strength of this trend.

- A global survey of 2,000 CEOs across 128 countries in 2025 found that 88 per cent believed that the business case for sustainability was stronger than five years previously, and that nearly all (99 per cent) planned to maintain or expand their enterprises' ESG commitments (UN Global Compact and Accenture 2025).
- In a worldwide ILO survey of EBMOs in 2025, eight out of ten reported that enterprise demand for ESG services had risen in the previous five years (ILO 2025). Moreover, four out of five EBMOs expected demand for ESG services for businesses to grow in the next one to three years.

Against this backdrop, gender equality and diversity are an integral component of the "social" dimension of ESG. The 2025 ILO enterprise survey therefore examined how ESG policies and practices relate to gender outcomes within enterprises.

▶ What is ESG?

ESG is a broad framework used to assess an enterprise's practices and performance on sustainability and ethical issues.

- **Environmental (E):** Conservation of the natural world. This includes, for example, energy use, waste, pollution, natural resource conservation, and treatment of animals.
- **Social (S):** Consideration of people and relationships. This includes the company's relationships with its employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities where it operates. It includes factors such as respect for human rights, labour practices, diversity and inclusion, health and safety, and community engagement. Importantly, it includes *gender equality and diversity*.
- **Governance (G):** Standards for running a company. This covers issues such as executive pay, audits, internal controls, shareholder rights, effectiveness of the board of directors, risk management, and transparency.

ESG reporting or disclosure is the process by which companies publicly share their performance in each of these three areas.

ESG is widespread, associated with improved outcomes, and incorporates gender dimensions

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey data show that ESG adoption is widespread across the private sector. In 2025, 70.8 per cent of enterprises reported having ESG and/or responsible business conduct (RBC) approaches in place, either through informal systems (44.9 per cent) or formal written policies (25.9 per cent) (figure 36).

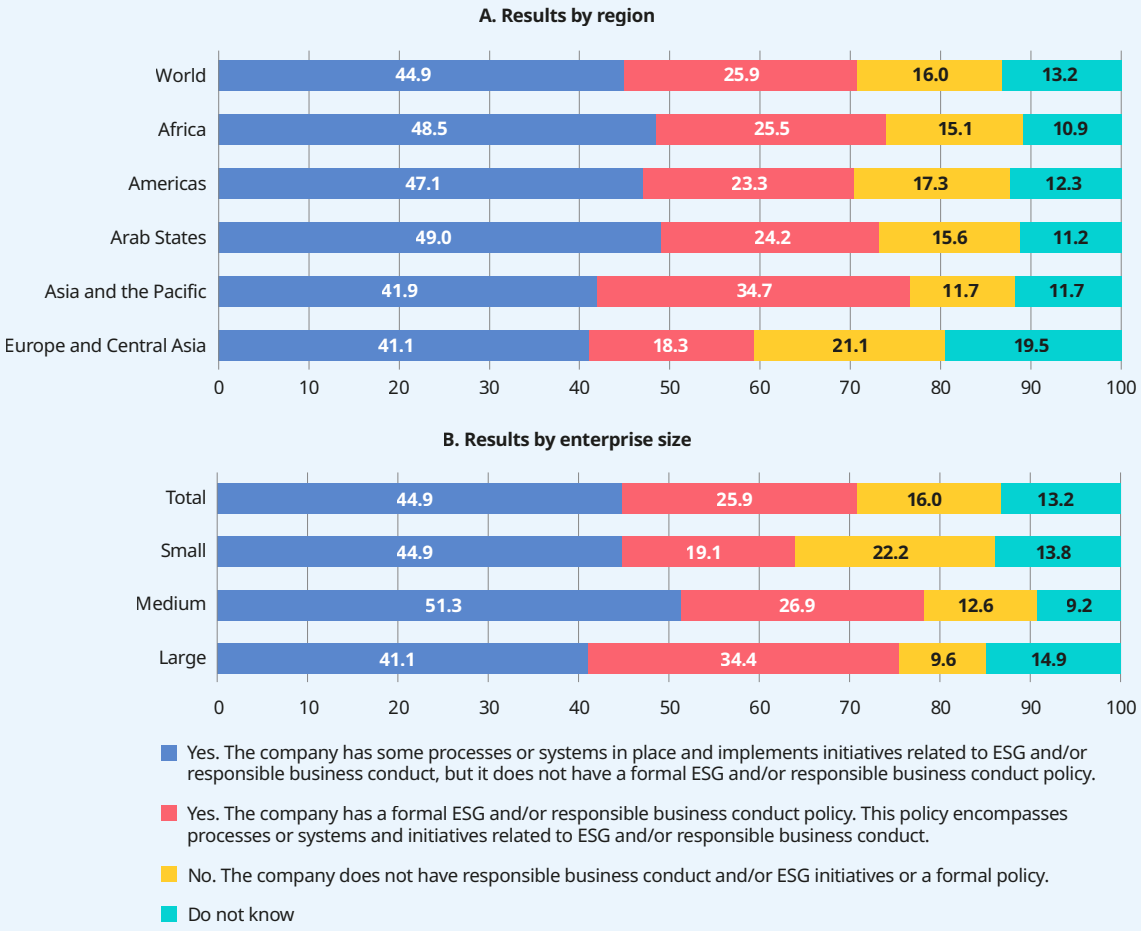
Notably, enterprises with ESG approaches were more likely to report improved performance.

- They were 33.9 per cent, or five times, more likely to achieve better business outcomes.[17]
- They were also 21.7 per cent more likely to report increased profits.

At the regional level, the Asia and the Pacific region reported the highest levels of ESG uptake (76.6 per cent), followed by Africa (74.0 per cent) and the Arab States (73.2 per cent), while Europe and Central Asia reported lower levels (59.4 per cent). By enterprise size, medium-sized enterprises were most likely to have adopted ESG approaches (78.2 per cent), followed by large enterprises (75.5 per cent) while smaller enterprises lagged behind (64.0 per cent).

17 In other words, enterprises with a formal policy, informal processes or systems for ESG were 5.07 times more likely to report better business outcomes than those without.

▶ **Figure 36. Enterprises with environmental, social and governance (ESG) and/or responsible business conduct (RBC) approaches, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Does your company have a general strategy for RBC and/or ESG policy?".

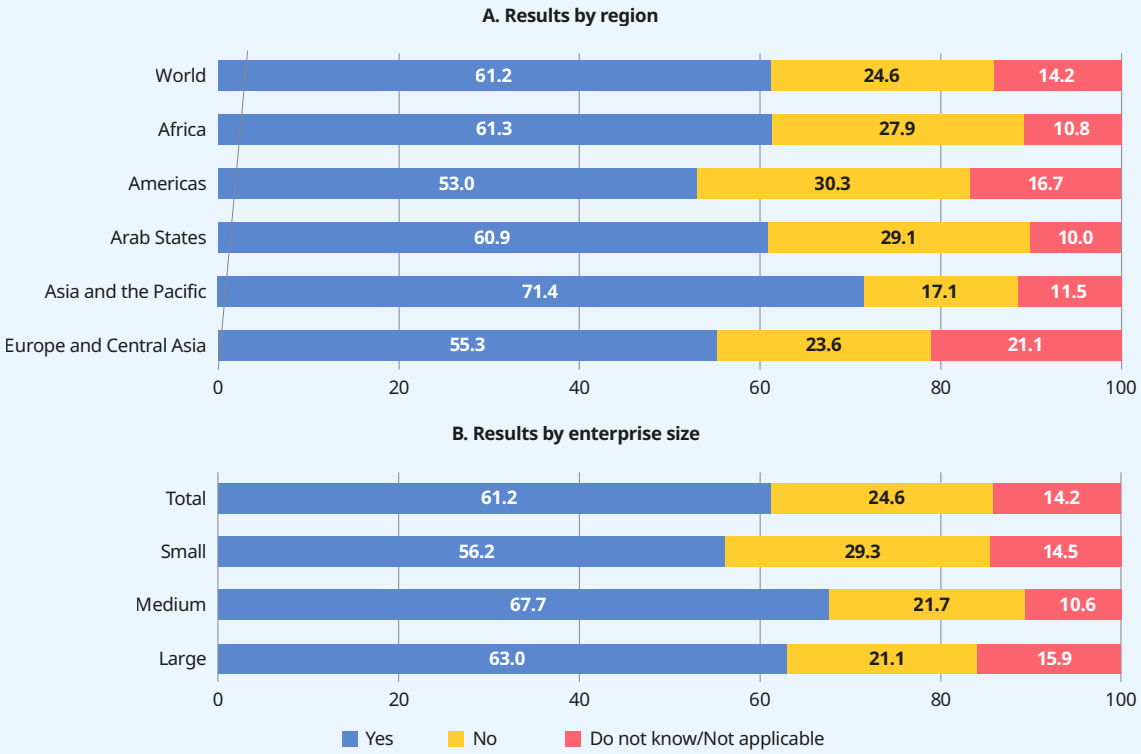
Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Transparency in ESG reporting is increasing in the private sector. In 2025, 61.2 per cent of enterprises surveyed reported that they formally disclose their ESG performance. Of these, a large majority (78.9 per cent) already included gender equality and diversity metrics in their reporting and 10.7 per cent planned on doing so in future (figure 37). These figures suggest that gender-related disclosures are becoming an integral component of ESG reporting and are likely to expand further.

Levels of ESG disclosure were relatively high across all regions, although there was some variation. Around seven out of ten enterprises in Asia and the Pacific reported publicly disclosing ESG information, compared to around six in ten enterprises in Africa and the Arab States, and just over half of enterprises in Europe and Central Asia and the Americas.

Differences by enterprise size were modest but consistent with earlier patterns. Medium-sized enterprises were most likely to disclose ESG information (67.7 per cent), followed by large enterprises (63.0 per cent) and small enterprises (56.2 per cent). This reinforces the broader finding that medium-sized enterprises not only lead on gender equality and diversity, but on ESG/RBC more widely.

▶ **Figure 37. Enterprises publicly disclosing ESG and/or responsible business conduct (RBC) performance, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "Does your company publicly disclose information or report on ESG and/or responsible business conduct performance?". This question was asked of enterprises that implemented processes or systems through a formal ESG policy, or processes or systems for ESG.

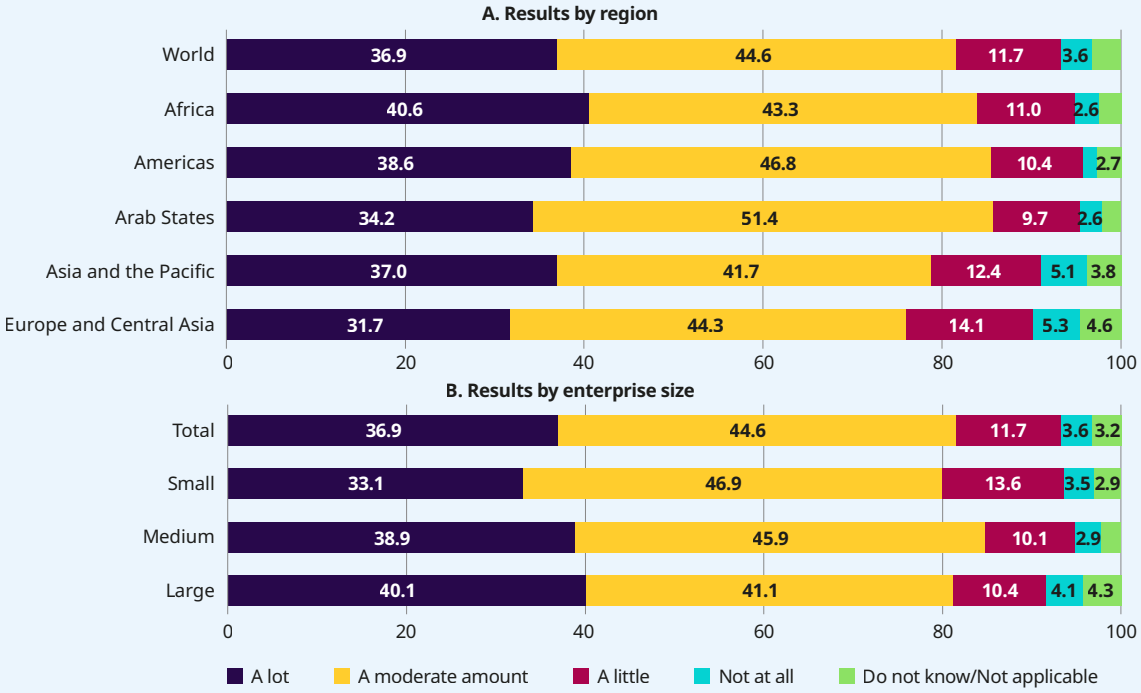
Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Importantly, ESG and gender equality and diversity are increasingly interconnected, with 81.5 per cent of enterprises incorporating gender considerations into their ESG strategies to a great or moderate extent (figure 38). This indicates that gender equality and diversity are no longer treated as stand-alone issues but are being embedded within broader sustainability and governance frameworks.

This integration is also associated with stronger business performance. The 2025 ILO enterprise survey shows that those enterprises that incorporate gender dimensions into their ESG strategies to a moderate or great extent are 25.7 per cent more likely to achieve better business outcomes, including a 15.7 per cent higher likelihood of increased profits.

Variation across regions and enterprise sizes in the integration of gender into ESG strategies is relatively limited. The Arab States (85.6 per cent), the Americas (85.5 per cent), and Africa (83.9 per cent) reported the highest shares of enterprises incorporating gender considerations, followed by Asia and the Pacific (78.6 per cent), and Europe and Central Asia (76.0 per cent). Similarly, medium-sized enterprises (84.8 per cent) were slightly more likely than large (81.2 per cent) and small (80.0 per cent) enterprises to include gender considerations in their ESG approaches.

▶ **Figure 38. Enterprises incorporating gender considerations into their ESG and/or responsible business conduct approaches, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: Respondents answered the question: "To what extent are gender dimensions taken into account in your company's approach to ESG and/or responsible business conduct?". This question was asked of enterprises that implemented processes or systems through a formal ESG policy or processes/systems for ESG.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

Gender metrics and targets are associated with increased profits

As discussed earlier, gender equality and diversity policies improve business outcomes, but so does a monitoring framework that tracks their impact. The 2025 ILO enterprise survey showed that enterprises using gender metrics, such as indicators on the gender pay gap or women's representation in leadership, were more likely to report positive outcomes than those not doing so. In fact, enterprises using gender metrics were 17 per cent (or 2.3 times) more likely to experience better business outcomes, including an 8.3 per cent higher likelihood of increased profits.

Together, the evidence points to the importance of measurement and accountability. While policies set the direction, the use of metrics enables enterprises to track progress, identify gaps and adjust actions, thereby reinforcing overall impact.

Voluntary targets also make a difference. In the 2025 ILO enterprise survey, enterprises with a specific gender equality and diversity strategy that included voluntary targets at the senior management level were 15.3 per cent more likely to see improved business outcomes as a result of their efforts. This includes a 7.6 per cent higher likelihood of seeing increased profits. Nearly three out of five enterprises surveyed (57.2 per cent) did not have such targets in place and may have been missing out on the associated benefits.

To sum up, enterprises that combine explicit policies with voluntary targets and robust tracking frameworks are better positioned to achieve gender balance and capture the associated performance benefits.

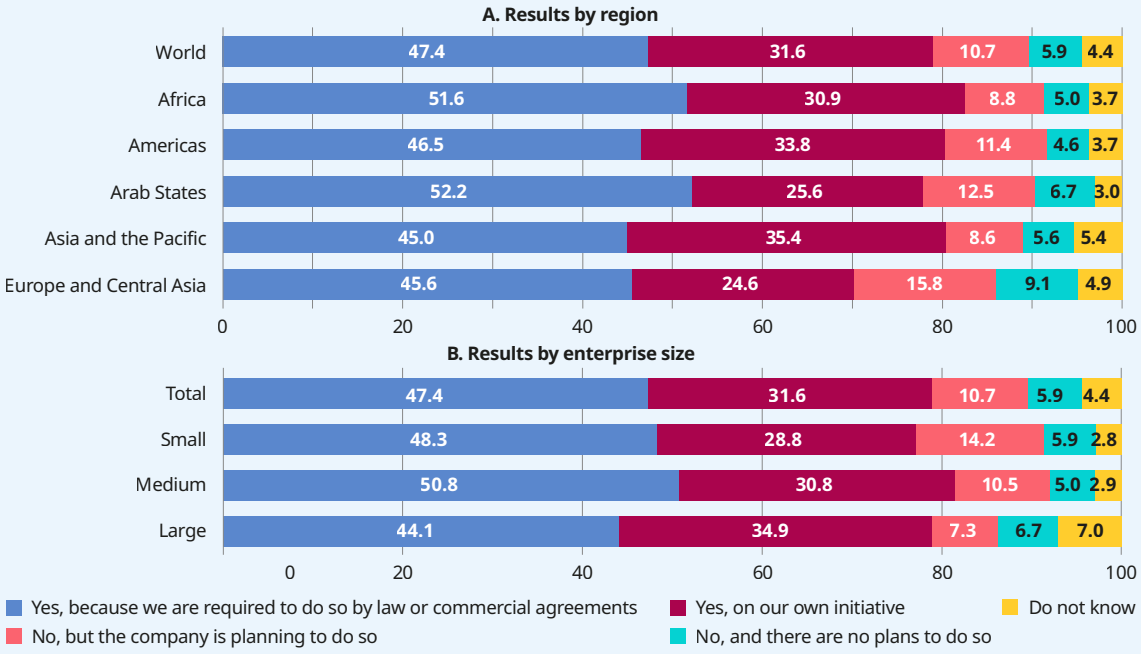
"Change doesn't happen organically. You need to keep at it, and you need targets. It took two years of hard work to really start seeing the positive impact of our gender equality and diversity initiatives." [18]

▶ Vandana Tilwani — Chief Human Resources Officer — Havas India

Given the importance of gender equality and diversity metrics for positive business outcomes, it is notable that most enterprises that disclose ESG performance also include such metrics. In 2025, 79.0 per cent of enterprises globally reported incorporating gender equality indicators into their ESG reporting, either due to legal or commercial requirements (47.4 per cent) or on their own initiative (31.6 per cent). At the same time, 21.0 per cent of enterprises did not use gender metrics, thereby missing out on the associated positive business outcomes (figure 39).

Across regions, the inclusion of gender metrics in ESG reporting was relatively widespread. Around four out of five enterprises across most regions reported using such metrics, except Europe and Central Asia, where the proportion was lower (seven in ten). In terms of enterprise size, medium-sized enterprises were somewhat more likely to have ESG gender metrics (81.6 per cent) than large (79.0 per cent) and small (77.1 per cent) enterprises.

▶ **Figure 39. Enterprises including gender equality metrics in their ESG reporting or disclosure, by region and enterprise size, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: The question "Does your company include gender equality metrics in its ESG reporting or disclosure?" was asked of enterprises that reported publicly disclosing information or reporting on ESG and/or RBC performance.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

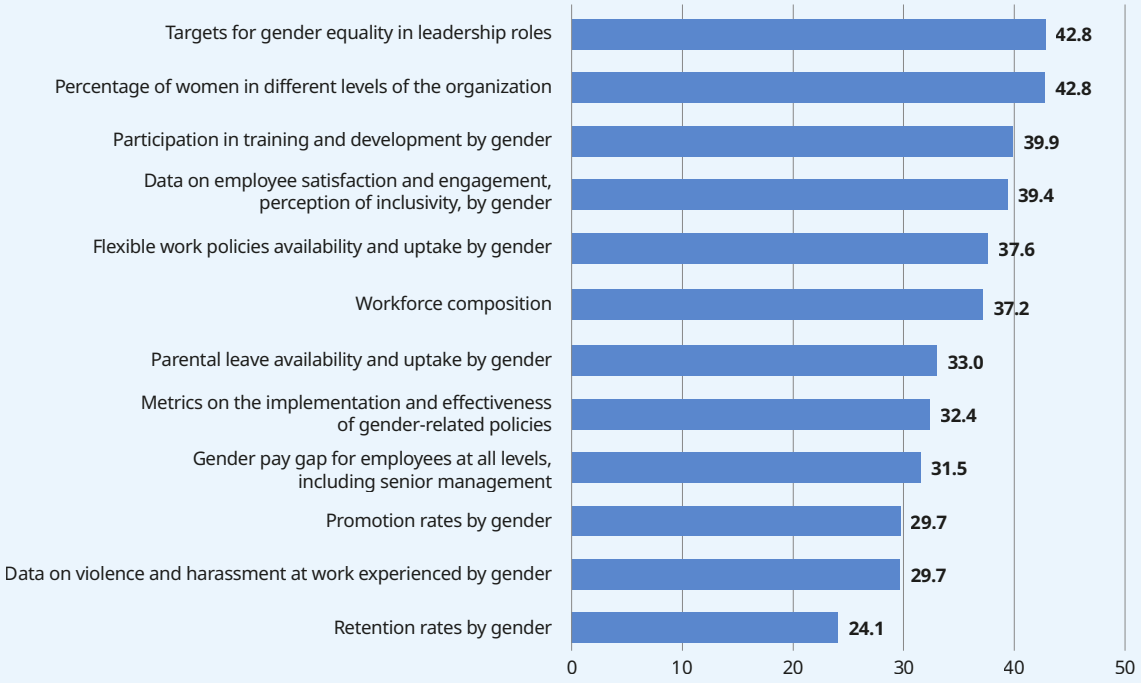
18 This quote is taken from the enterprise case study on the gender equality and diversity initiatives of Havas India, which can be found in Annex 3.

The most commonly used gender-related indicators and targets focus on workforce composition, leadership and workplace experience (figure 40):

- Targets for gender equality in leadership roles (42.8 per cent).
- Percentage of women at different levels of the organization (42.8 per cent).
- Participation in training and development, by gender (39.9 per cent).
- Employee satisfaction and engagement, and perception of inclusivity, by gender (39.4 per cent).
- Availability and uptake of flexible work policies, by gender (37.6 per cent).

Less frequently cited gender equality metrics included data on violence and harassment at work (29.7 per cent) and retention rates by gender (24.1 per cent).

▶ **Figure 40. Gender-related indicators and targets used by enterprises in ESG reporting or disclosure, 2025** (percentage of respondents)



Note: "Other metrics" are not shown in the figure.

Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

ESG and gender diversity: A mutually reinforcing relationship

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey data suggest a reinforcing relationship between ESG adoption and gender diversity. Enterprises with ESG and/or RBC practices were more likely to have women in management and leadership positions, while enterprises with more gender-diverse leadership were, in turn, more likely to adopt ESG strategies.

- Enterprises with ESG policies and/or practices were more likely to employ women across management, including middle (+9.8 per cent), senior (+12 per cent) and top management (+6.1 per cent).
- Enterprises with a female CEO were 6.8 per cent more likely to have ESG policies and/or practices, while enterprises with a woman chair of the board were 17.1 per cent more likely to do so.

Secondary research also indicates that enterprises led by women achieve higher ESG scores (EIB 2022) and that the presence of more women on boards and in senior-level management positions is connected with better company ESG performance (Di Miceli and Donaggio 2018).

The evidence suggests a mutually reinforcing dynamic. ESG adoption is associated with greater inclusion of women in leadership, while gender-diverse leadership is linked to stronger ESG engagement. This interaction indicates that progress in one area may support progress in the other, creating conditions that can accelerate both gender equality and enterprise performance.

What the evidence suggests

The evidence in this chapter highlights a gap between commitment and implementation. While most enterprises have gender equality and diversity policies in place, fewer are translating these into concrete initiatives. At the same time, the findings show that enterprises that adopt policies, implement targeted measures, and use monitoring frameworks are more likely to achieve improved business outcomes, including higher profitability.

Three key dynamics emerge.

- **First, policies alone are not sufficient – implementation drives results.** While gender equality and diversity policies are widely adopted, declining use of concrete initiatives suggests that many enterprises are not fully operationalizing these commitments. This implementation gap limits the potential business benefits associated with gender equality and diversity.
- **Second, specific measures and monitoring frameworks are strongly associated with improved outcomes.** Initiatives such as maternity leave, measures to prevent and address violence and harassment, and equal pay for work of equal value are consistently identified as effective. At the same time, enterprises that use gender metrics and targets are more likely to see improved business outcomes and higher profits, indicating the importance of tracking progress and ensuring accountability.
- **Third, ESG frameworks provide an important pathway for advancing gender equality and diversity.** ESG adoption is widespread and increasingly incorporates gender considerations. The evidence shows a reinforcing relationship: enterprises with ESG approaches are more likely to have women in management and leadership, while gender-diverse leadership is associated with stronger ESG engagement. This suggests that integrating gender equality and diversity into ESG strategies can support more systematic and sustained progress.

These findings point to the importance of moving from commitment to execution. Enterprises that combine clear policy frameworks with targeted initiatives, monitoring systems and integration into broader ESG strategies are better positioned to translate gender equality and diversity into measurable business outcomes.

The evidence also highlights the role of ecosystem actors. EBMOs, governments and investors can support enterprises by promoting effective practices, facilitating knowledge-sharing, and helping to scale approaches that have been shown to deliver results. The strong performance of medium-sized enterprises suggests potential for peer learning and replication across enterprises of different sizes.

Overall, the findings indicate that the challenge is less about identifying what works, and more about ensuring that effective measures are consistently implemented, monitored and scaled.

"Our national employers' organization, the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines has been so helpful to us. With their support, we implemented successful gender equality and diversity initiatives. As a result, 60 per cent of promotions in 2024 benefited women. We are now helping our clients put in place DEI strategies that work for them."[19]

▶ Rhoda Castro-Caliwara — Founder and CEO — Executive Genesis Services, Inc., the Philippines

19 This quote is taken from the enterprise case study on the gender equality and diversity initiatives of Executive Genesis Services, the Philippines, which can be found in Annex 3.

6

Where next?

This report highlights both meaningful progress and remaining challenges, as well as significant untapped potential. Women's participation in the labour market has increased, their educational attainment has risen, and more women are entering management and leadership positions, and becoming entrepreneurs. At the same time, evidence consistently shows that greater gender diversity is associated with improved business performance and enhanced reputation.

However, progress remains uneven. Women continue to be under-represented across the labour market and particularly at higher levels of seniority. "Leaky pipelines" and structural barriers limit progression, and the benefits of gender equality and diversity are not yet fully realized. These findings point not to a lack of evidence on what works, but to challenges in implementation, scaling and sustained commitment.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across multiple levels. Governments, in collaboration with key partners such as EBMOs, play a critical role in shaping enabling environments. This includes strengthening policies related to the provision of child care and elder care, promoting family-friendly working arrangements, and ensuring the effective design and implementation of gender equality legislation. Addressing gender stereotypes and social norms also remains an important component. Such measures can contribute to creating an enabling environment for enterprises to grow and support inclusive economic growth.

At the enterprise level, evidence suggests that the benefits associated with gender diversity have strengthened over time. While gender equality and diversity policies are widely in place, fewer enterprises are translating these into concrete initiatives. At the same time, the report shows that enterprises that combine policies with targeted measures, monitoring frameworks and leadership commitment are more likely to achieve improved business outcomes. Bottlenecks at junior and middle management levels, alongside uneven access to key functions, risk constraining future leadership pipelines and slowing progress at the top.

The findings also highlight the importance of strategic integration. ESG frameworks are increasingly used to embed gender equality and diversity into broader enterprise strategies, with evidence pointing to a mutually reinforcing relationship between ESG adoption and gender-diverse leadership. In addition, the use of gender metrics and targets is associated with stronger outcomes, underscoring the role of measurement and accountability in translating commitment into results.

Recent trends suggest that the pace of implementation may be slowing. Fewer enterprises report actively implementing gender equality and diversity initiatives, and in some contexts approaches may be shifting towards broader inclusion frameworks. While these approaches broaden the scope of equality and diversity efforts, measures targeted specifically at women remain important for addressing persistent structural gaps. Ensuring that such efforts are sustained and scaled will be critical to maintaining progress.

Looking ahead, broader structural transformations will shape both risks and opportunities. Demographic shifts are already affecting labour markets in many regions. Ageing populations in some economies are leading to shrinking workforces, while others continue to experience youth bulges and rapid labour market entry. In both contexts, making full use of available talent pools, including women, will be increasingly important for sustaining growth, productivity and social protection systems.

In parallel, the digital and green transitions are reshaping labour markets, with implications for skills demand and workforce composition. Women's under-representation in STEM fields, combined with their concentration in occupations more exposed to automation, may affect how they benefit from these changes. Expanding access to education, upskilling and reskilling, particularly in high-growth sectors, will be essential to ensuring more inclusive outcomes and addressing emerging labour shortages.

It is also important to emphasize that gender balance remains the overarching objective. The focus on women reflects the current distribution of gaps across labour markets and leadership structures, and where action is most likely to yield economic, social and organizational benefits. More broadly, gender equality implies addressing imbalances wherever they occur. In sectors or occupations where men are under-represented, targeted efforts can similarly contribute to stronger performance and more balanced labour markets.

The evidence presented in this report was gathered during a period of significant economic, technological and geopolitical change. It provides a robust foundation for decision-making, highlighting where progress has been achieved and where further efforts are needed. By building on these insights, EBMOs, enterprises, governments and other stakeholders can strengthen resilience, expand access to talent, and better position themselves to harness the opportunities associated with more inclusive and diverse workplaces.

Annex 1. The enterprise survey on women in business and management

The survey sample

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey included responses from 11,957 companies across 99 countries, making it the most extensive and inclusive dataset in the series to date. The 2018 survey received responses from 12,940 companies in 70 countries, while the 2013 survey gathered responses from 1,048 companies in 39 countries. Compared to the previous rounds, the 2025 edition exhibited a much more balanced distribution across regions, genders, company sizes and job roles. This improves the reliability of the insights the data provide and offers a clearer view of how companies worldwide are approaching gender equality and diversity today.

Data sources

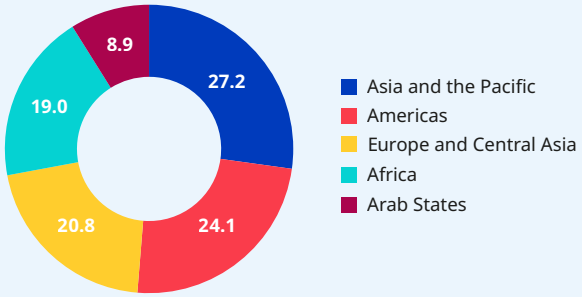
- Three large-scale, global ILO enterprise surveys carried out in 2013, 2018 and 2025.
- ILO global labour market data spanning 30 years.
- Five interviews with companies in five world regions.
- Secondary research on current trends.

Enterprise characteristics

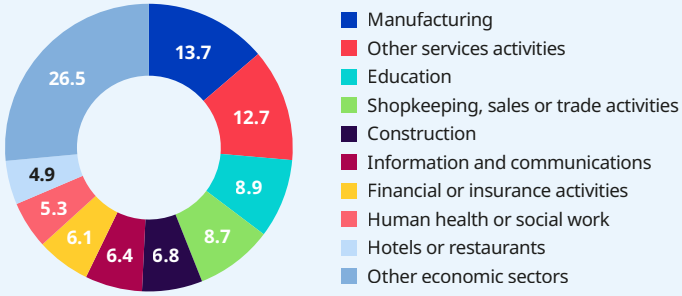
Enterprises across all major sectors participated in the 2025 survey. The sample also featured an evenly distributed mix of enterprise sizes and regions, except in the Arab States. Of those enterprises that answered the 2025 ILO enterprise survey:

- 76.2 per cent were national or local enterprises, while 23.8 per cent were multinational companies.
- 45.7 per cent were small enterprises (2–100 employees), 20.0 per cent were medium-sized enterprises (101–250 employees), and 34.3 per cent were large enterprises (250+ employees).
- 27.2 per cent were based in Asia and the Pacific, 24.1 per cent in the Americas, 20.8 per cent in Europe and Central Asia, 19.0 per cent in Africa, and 8.9 per cent in the Arab States.
- Most were manufacturing companies (13.7 per cent), provided various services (12.7 per cent) or were active in the education sector (8.9 per cent), shopkeeping, sales or trade (8.7 per cent), or in the construction sector (6.8 per cent).

▶ **Figure A1.1. Regions of surveyed enterprises, 2025** (percentage)



▶ **Figure A1.2. Economic sectors of surveyed enterprises, 2025** (percentage)



Source: 2025 ILO enterprise survey.

▶ **Table A1.1. Countries of surveyed enterprises, by region, 2025**

Country	Number of respondents	Share (%)
Africa		
Kenya	248	10.9
Nigeria	235	10.4
Egypt	169	7.5
Cameroon	168	7.4
Ghana	159	7.0
Senegal	151	6.7
Morocco	150	6.6
South Africa	150	6.6
Tunisia	150	6.6
Zambia	150	6.6
Mozambique	111	4.9
Angola	110	4.9
Côte d'Ivoire	102	4.5
Botswana	100	4.4
Other countries[1]	113	5.0
Total	**2 266**	**100.0**

▶ **Table A1.1.** *(Continued)*

Country	Number of respondents	Share (%)
Americas		
Colombia	251	8.7
Costa Rica	237	8.3
Mexico	236	8.2
Plurinational State of Bolivia	231	8.0
Ecuador	229	8.0
Argentina	226	7.9
Peru	222	7.7
Uruguay	221	7.7
Brazil	213	7.4
Honduras	202	7.0
Chile	200	7.0
Panama	187	6.5
Canada	100	3.5
Other countries[2]	115	4.0
Total	2 870	100.0
Arab States		
United Arab Emirates	218	20.5
Saudi Arabia	214	20.2
Lebanon	163	15.4
Kuwait	150	14.1
Jordan	102	9.6
Oman	100	9.4
Qatar	100	9.4
Other countries[3]	14	1.3
Total	1 061	100.0
Asia and the Pacific		
India	768	23.3
Malaysia	292	8.9
China	283	8.6
Viet Nam	230	7.0
Japan	228	6.9
Indonesia	226	6.9
Sri Lanka	222	6.7
Republic of Korea	220	6.7
Bangladesh	211	6.4
Philippines	201	6.1
Singapore	200	6.1
Thailand	200	6.1
Other countries[4]	9	0.3
Total	3 290	100.0
Europe and Central Asia		
Türkiye	281	11.4
Bulgaria	218	8.8

▶ **Table A1.1.** *(Continued)*

Country	Number of respondents	Share (%)
Romania	201	8.1
Slovenia	200	8.1
Georgia	180	7.3
Kazakhstan	168	6.8
Uzbekistan	167	6.8
Montenegro	160	6.5
Ukraine	160	6.5
France	151	6.1
Serbia	151	6.1
Croatia	150	6.1
Portugal	130	5.3
Other countries[5]	153	6.2
Total	2 470	100.0

1 "Other countries" include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali, Sierra Leone, Togo and Uganda.

2 "Other countries" include Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America and Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

3 "Other countries" include Iraq, State of Palestine and Syrian Arab Republic.

4 "Other countries" include Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Samoa and Vanuatu.

5 "Other countries" include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, North Macedonia, Russian Federation and Slovakia.

For more information on the sample characteristics of the 2013 and 2018 ILO enterprise surveys please see the corresponding reports (ILO 2015 and 2019b).

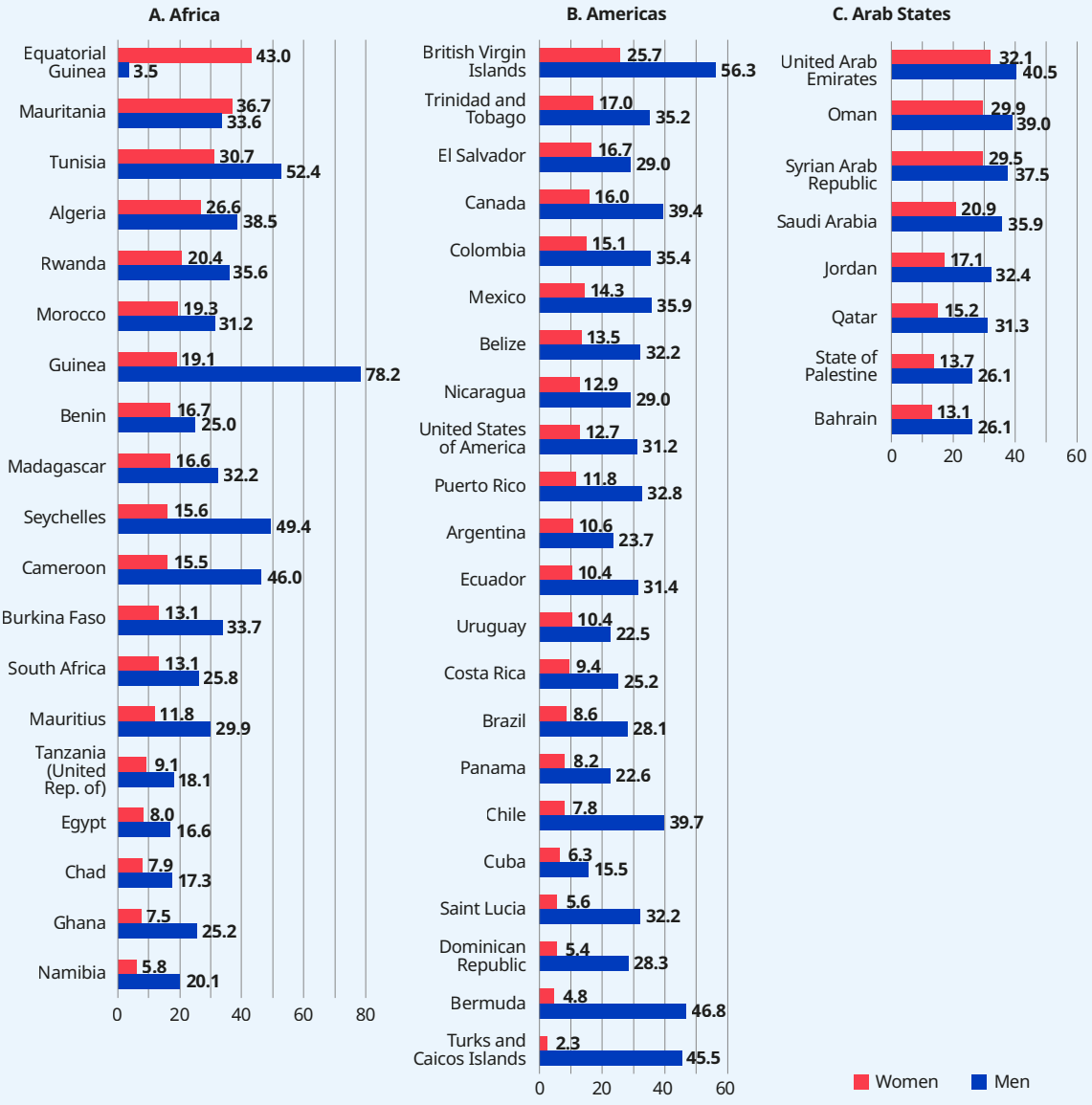
Respondent characteristics

The 2025 ILO enterprise survey was answered by enterprise employees. Looking at the characteristics of these individuals, the data show that the survey sample of respondents was gender balanced, with employees at different levels of seniority and with different work arrangements. Of the enterprise employees that responded to the survey:

- 51.4 per cent were women and 48.6 per cent were men.
- 38.2 per cent led a department or business unit, 32.8 per cent were employees without management responsibilities, and 29.0 per cent managed a team.
- Most (84.1 per cent) reported that they were in full-time employment, with 15.9 per cent working part-time.

▶ Annex 2. Supplementary figures

▶ Figure A2.1. Shares of female and male tertiary STEM graduates by region, latest years
(percentage)

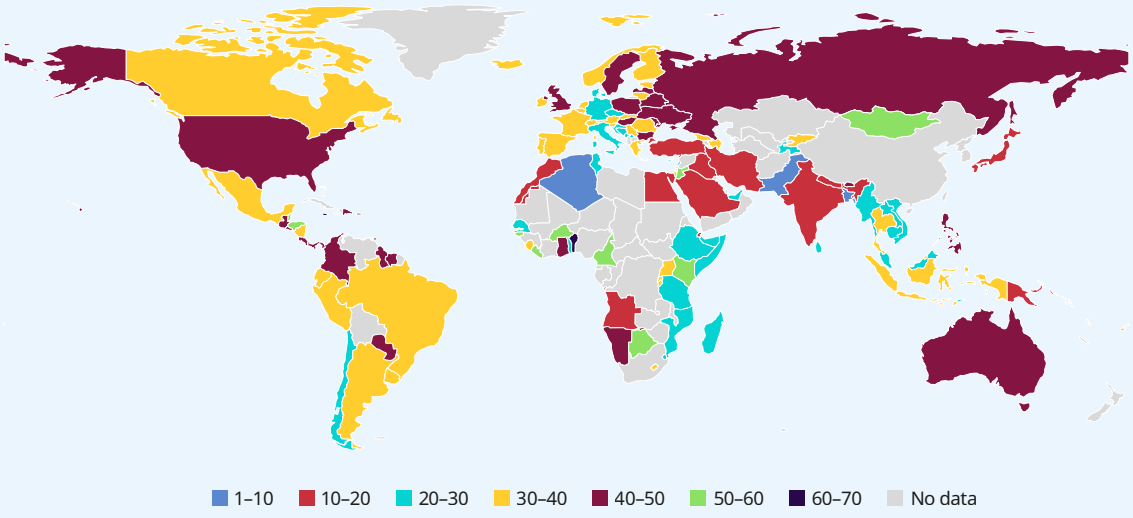


Source: UNESCO UIS 2025 data. [20]

20 UNESCO, *UNESCO UIS Data Browser*, indicator "Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education", accessed on 19 June 2025.


D. Asia and the Pacific
Brunei Darussalam 28.2 45.8
Malaysia 27.3 57.3
Iran (Islamic Republic of) 25.0 43.8
India 23.1 31.4
Singapore 22.3 50.7
Sri Lanka 16.6 41.0
Republic of Korea 16.1 45.9
New Zealand 15.7 35.6
Thailand 15.2 50.0
Philippines 14.5 35.0
Australia 10.7 30.8
Mongolia 9.4 32.9
Bangladesh 8.1 12.3
Samoa 7.9 4.6
Macao, China 6.4 18.5
Afghanistan 5.2 13.5
Marshall Islands 76.3 2.0
0 40 80
Women Men
E. Europe and Central Asia (i)
Liechtenstein 44.6 20.7
Serbia 25.5 46.4
France 23.0 40.3
Romania 20.3 40.4
Germany 19.6 52.8
North Macedonia 19.0 27.8
Türkiye 18.5 18.5
Croatia 18.2 45.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina 17.9 34.5
Greece 17.8 38.7
Uzbekistan 17.5 45.3
Portugal 17.5 42.2
Sweden 17.5 46.8
Estonia 17.5 44.9
Azerbaijan 17.1 37.4
Belarus 17.0 58.9
Ireland 16.4 38.1
Slovenia 16.1 49.1
Denmark 15.8 37.8
Italy 15.8 33.8
Austria 15.8 49.9
Finland 15.5 51.3
Albania 15.3 36.0
Israel 15.2 46.6
Georgia 15.1 27.4
Czechia 14.9 40.3
0 20 40 60
E. Europe and Central Asia (ii)
Kazakhstan 14.0 36.1
Luxembourg 13.6 33.1
United Kingdom 13.0 35.4
Switzerland 12.5 38.2
Poland 12.2 32.9
Bulgaria 12.2 33.4
Republic of Moldova 12.0 39.9
Lithuania 11.9 44.1
Hungary 11.8 41.4
San Marino 11.7 33.6
Netherlands (Kingdom of the) 11.7 31.2
Ukraine 11.7 37.8
Slovakia 11.6 37.0
Norway 11.4 35.8
Kyrgyzstan 10.7 26.5
Armenia 10.7 31.6
Spain 10.4 35.5
Iceland 10.1 31.2
Latvia 9.9 38.5
Belgium 8.7 33.9
Malta 8.1 24.6
Cyprus 5.0 20.5
0 20 40 60

▶ Figure A2.2. Proportion of women in junior, middle and senior management positions by country, latest available year (percentage)

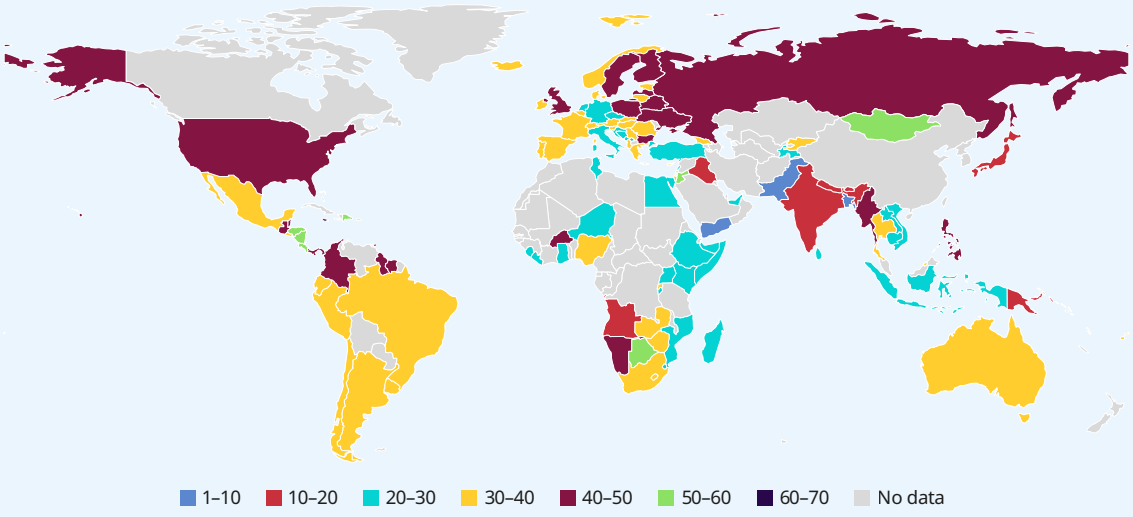


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Note: The data above refer to junior, middle and senior management.

Source: ILOSTAT, 2025. National labour force and household surveys.

▶ Figure A2.3. Proportion of women in senior and middle management positions by country, latest available year (percentage)



Disclaimer: Boundaries shown do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the ILO. See full ILO disclaimer: ilo.org/disclaimer.

Note: The data above refer to senior and middle management only, thus excluding junior management.

Source: ILOSTAT, 2025. National labour force and household surveys.

▶ **Figure A2.4. Proportion of women in senior and middle management and all management positions by region, country and territory, latest years** (percentage)



Panel A. Note: Data for women in all management positions are from the following years: Algeria and Morocco (2014); Djibouti and Liberia (2017); Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, and Sierra Leone (2018); Cabo Verde, Lesotho, Somalia, and Tunisia (2019); Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and United Republic of Tanzania (2020); Cameroon, Comoros, Ethiopia and Uganda (2021); Angola, Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal and Togo (2022); Botswana, Egypt, Eswatini, Gambia, Mauritius and Seychelles (2023); Burkina Faso and Rwanda (2024). Data for women in senior and middle management positions are from 2023, except for Ghana, Liberia and Niger (2017); Namibia and Sierra Leone (2018); Lesotho, Nigeria, Somalia and Tunisia (2019); Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and United Republic of Tanzania (2020); Ethiopia and Uganda (2021); Angola, Kenya, Madagascar and Mozambique (2022); Burkina Faso, Rwanda and South Africa (2024).

Panel B. Note: Data for women in all management positions are from 2024, except for Nicaragua (2014); Cayman Islands (2015); Suriname (2016); Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2017); Bahamas, Belize and Guyana (2019); Curaçao, Montserrat and Puerto Rico (2020); Canada (2021); Jamaica (2022); Argentina, Barbados, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala and Trinidad and Tobago (2023); Mexico (2025). Data for women in senior and middle management positions are from 2024, except for Jamaica and Nicaragua (2014); Belize and Suriname (2016); Bahamas and Guyana (2019); Montserrat (2020); Chile (2022); Argentina, Barbados, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala and Trinidad and Tobago (2023); Mexico (2025).

Panel C. Note: Data for women in all management positions are from the following years: Lebanon (2019); Iraq (2021); Jordan and United Arab Emirates (2023); Saudi Arabia and State of Palestine (2024). Data for women in senior and middle management positions are from the following years: Yemen (2014); Lebanon (2019); Iraq (2021); United Arab Emirates (2022); Jordan (2023); State of Palestine (2024).

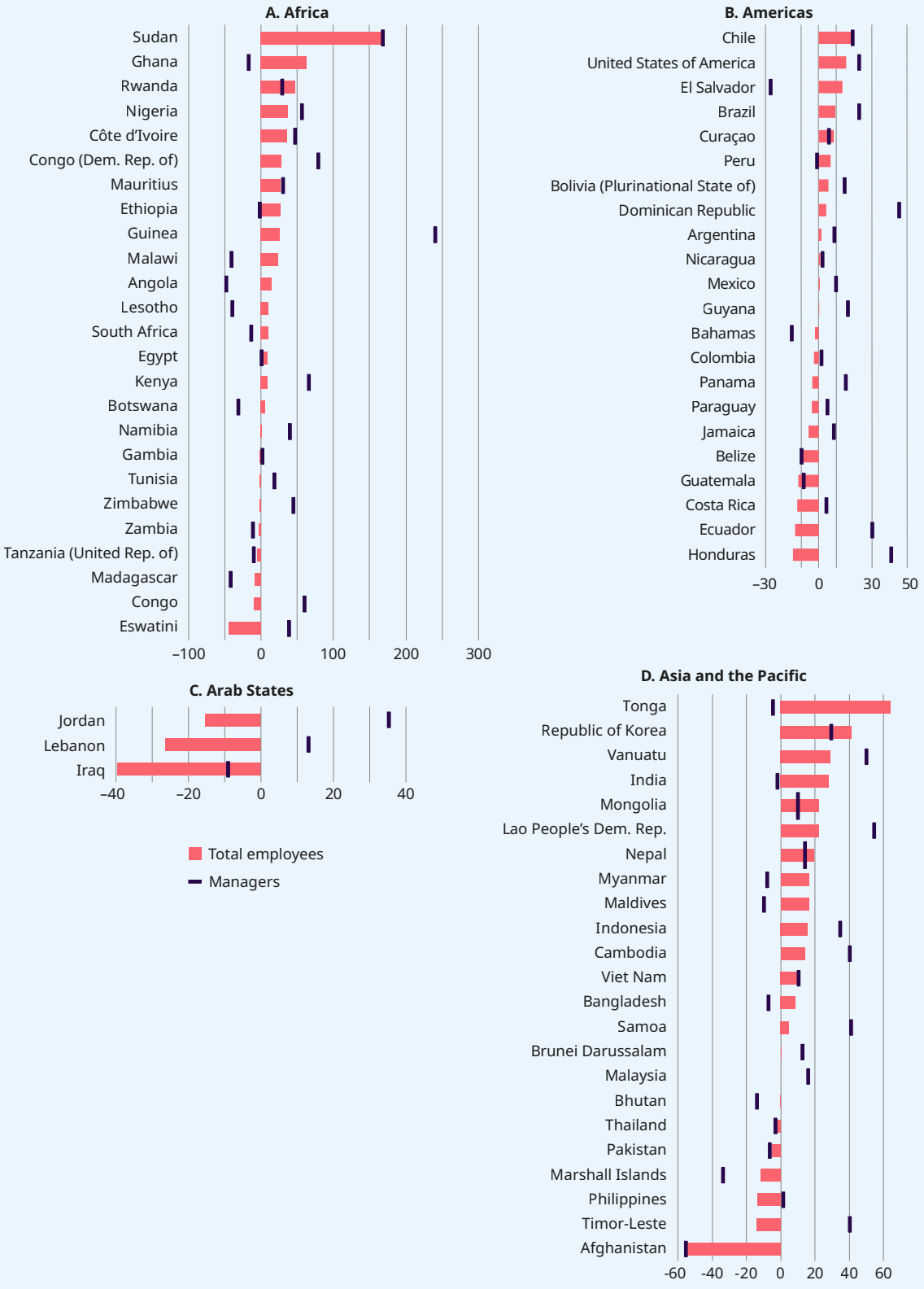


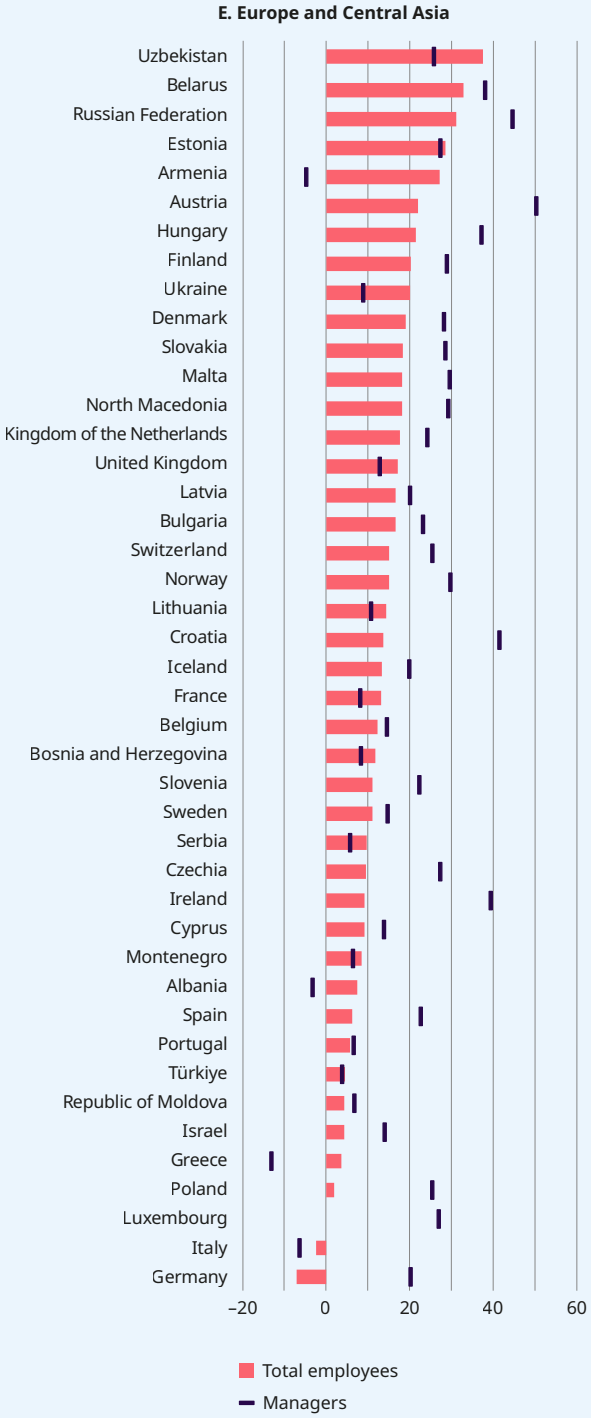
Panel D. Note: Data for women in all management positions are from 2023 except for Malaysia, and Federated States of Micronesia (2014); Nepal (2017), Cook Islands, Maldives, and Wallis and Futuna (2019); Kiribati, Myanmar, Palau, Taiwan (China) and Vanuatu (2020); Cambodia, Marshall Islands, Naoero and Pakistan (2021); Lao People's Democratic Republic, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tokelau and Tuvalu (2022); Australia, Hong Kong (China), India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand (2024). Data for women in senior and middle management positions are from 2023, except for Federated States of Micronesia (2014); Nepal (2017); Maldives (2019); Kiribati, Myanmar, Palau and Vanuatu (2020); Cambodia, Marshall Islands, Naoero and Pakistan (2021); Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Tonga and Viet Nam (2023); Australia, India, Singapore and Thailand (2024).

Panel E. Note: Data for women in all management positions are from 2024, except for Azerbaijan (2014); Fiji and Tajikistan (2016); Georgia (2020); Ukraine (2021); Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Kosovo (as defined in UN Security Council resolution 1244 of 1999), Montenegro and Russian Federation (2023). Data for women in senior and middle management positions are from 2023, except for Fiji and Tajikistan (2016); Georgia (2020); Montenegro and Ukraine (2021); Greece, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, Switzerland and United Kingdom (2024).

Source: ILOSTAT, 2025. National labour force and household surveys.

▶ **Figure A2.5. Hourly gender wage gap among total employees and managers, by region and country, latest years** (percentage)





Panel A. Note: Data are from 2023, except for Congo (2009); Democratic Republic of the Congo (2012); Malawi and Nigeria (2013); Madagascar (2015); Gambia and Namibia (2018); Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Tunisia (2019); United Republic of Tanzania (2020); Angola, Eswatini and Ethiopia (2021); Ghana and Sudan (2022). Sudan's gender gap remains one of the highest worldwide, caused by very low female labour force participation (14.4 per cent), restrictive social norms, limited educational opportunities, occupational segregation and conflict-related barriers to women's economic opportunities.

Panel B. Note: Data are from 2023, except for Nicaragua (2012), Jamaica (2014), Curaçao (2018), Bahamas and Guyana (2019), Belize (2021), Costa Rica and Ecuador (2022).

Panel C. Note: Data are from the following years: Lebanon (2019), Iraq (2021) and Jordan (2022).

Panel D. Note: Data are from 2023 except for Vanuatu (2010); Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam and Nepal (2017); Maldives and Marshall Islands (2019); Afghanistan, Malaysia and Myanmar (2020); Cambodia, Pakistan, Timor-Leste and Tonga (2021); Bhutan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Philippines, Republic of Korea and Samoa (2022).

Panel E. Note: Data are from 2018 except for Denmark and Montenegro (2014); Armenia (2017); Belarus (2019); France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Ukraine (2020); Austria, Czechia, Israel, Russian Federation and Spain (2021); Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Slovakia, Sweden and Uzbekistan (2022); Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Switzerland, Türkiye and United Kingdom (2023).

Source: ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

▶ Annex 3. Case studies

To inform this report and provide practical inspiration for other enterprises, five case studies were developed in different parts of the world and in various sectors. The case studies spotlight business initiatives that promote gender equality and diversity and demonstrate their positive effects on business performance. Interviews with enterprise representatives were conducted in 2025.

Case studies are presented in the same order as the corresponding quotes in the main report:

1. Centenary Bank, Uganda (banking).
2. HPS, Morocco (electronic payment systems).
3. Airspeed, the Philippines (logistics).
4. Havas India, India (media and advertising).
5. Executive Genesis Services, the Philippines (service contracting).

Case study 1: Centenary Bank, Uganda (banking)

Centenary Bank is a Ugandan commercial bank. Established in 1985 as a faith-based institution focused on microfinance, it has grown to serve 3 million customers and employ 3,500 staff, with women accounting for 48 per cent of the workforce in 2025.

Empowering women: a core value

In 2020, Centenary Bank developed and implemented targeted support programmes for female staff for the first time. The decision followed challenges in recruiting and promoting female talent, an issue directly relevant to the company's values. Founded as a faith-based enterprise, the bank places economic empowerment at the heart of its mission. Empowering women, including women leaders, therefore became an important strategic goal.

"Beyond company values and accessing talent, our gender inclusion efforts are about reputation. You want to be out there as a brand that cares about equality and equity."

▶ Nassejje Solomy Luyombo — General Manager, Human Resources — Centenary Bank

Learning and development are key

Since 2020, Centenary Bank has progressively aligned its policies and practices to promote gender equality and diversity. Key initiatives include the adoption of family-friendly measures such as hybrid working arrangements and ensuring equal pay for work of equal value. Against this backdrop, the bank's learning and development initiatives for women stand out. Centenary Bank invests heavily, both financially and in terms of staff time, in training female staff identified for succession. These initiatives have created a strong pipeline of female talent.

Centenary Bank gives women identified for succession the opportunity to participate in leadership training programmes offered by external providers. By November 2025, more than 50 female staff had participated in leadership programmes, of whom 36 were promoted internally and four left the company after finding more senior positions elsewhere. The leadership programmes also fostered company loyalty, enabling Centenary Bank to retain and benefit from the enhanced skills of its staff. Women have been promoted to positions including assistant manager, branch manager, regional manager, head office manager, chief manager and roles on the executive committee.

One of the training programmes available to female staff is a leadership programme run by Centenary Bank's EBMO, the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE). The bank has enrolled three female staff members every year since 2020 in the FUE Female Future Leadership Development programme. This nine-month programme focuses on personal development, management and communication skills, as well as networking. It also teaches women how to navigate male-dominated work environments and deal with gender bias in a respectful yet assertive manner.

To ensure that the benefits of external training programmes are shared across all levels of the bank, the enterprise has established a mentoring programme for women. Senior female staff members support and coach more junior female colleagues.

Impact and plans for the future

As a result of Centenary Bank's gender equality and diversity initiatives, the company has made progress in addressing challenges related to the recruitment and promotion of women, while also increasing the proportion of women at all levels. In 2025, 30 per cent of all leaders were women, up from 28 per cent in 2020. Over the same period, the proportion of women in the overall workforce increased from 47 per cent to 48 per cent. Moreover, in 2023, Centenary Bank was awarded the UNDP Gender Equality Gold Seal, recognizing its efforts to translate its commitment to gender equality into practice.

Centenary Bank has also fine-tuned its monitoring framework to better track progress against targets. Gender metrics include the ratio of female to male staff, the number of female staff members filling internal positions, and the number of women participating in training and development programmes. These metrics are reported monthly and annually to the executive board. They are also incorporated into the bank's ESG reporting and have helped improve its ESG scores.

While important progress has been made, Centenary Bank is not complacent. Several challenges remain, which it plans to tackle in the coming years. For example, in 2025 just 20 per cent of board members were women, and the bank aims to achieve gender balance within the next five years.

Occupational segregation is another challenge the bank has begun to address. For example, very few business banking managers are women. This is partly because the role involves extended travel, often by motorbike to areas that are difficult to access by car. The bank provides its business banking managers with protective riding gear, including helmets, jackets, trousers, gloves and boots, to protect riders from accidents, adverse weather and challenging road conditions. The company has also started training women to ride motorbikes and encourages male staff, who are more likely to be experienced riders, to support their female colleagues.

Case study 2: HPS, Morocco (electronic payment solutions)

HPS is a Moroccan multinational company specializing in the development of electronic payment solutions, which are used by over 500 clients in 95 countries. Founded in 1995, it now employs more than 1,400 staff, 34 per cent of whom are women. HPS has been listed on the Casablanca Stock Exchange since 2006 and has offices in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia and the Americas.

Drivers for action

HPS's approach to gender equality and diversity is predominantly driven by three factors.

- HPS leaders have demonstrated a strong, public commitment to human rights and sustainability since the company's start-up days, with DEI serving as a core pillar.
- HPS contends with a competitive job market and a limited pool of female university graduates. Retaining female talent is therefore a major focus for the company, particularly as many women leave after having children.
- Gender equality and diversity feature prominently in the business and human rights accreditations HPS already holds and those it aims to obtain.

Walking the talk

HPS formalized its company values on gender equality and diversity by incorporating them into enterprise policies. For example, the company charter sets out HPS's values, mission and commitments, including on gender equality and diversity. The company's DEI strategy, policies and practices are overseen at the highest level by the corporate social responsibility (CSR) Executive Committee and by the executive board's ESG Strategy Committee.

Gender equality and diversity strategies and policies are embedded in day-to-day work through a combination of regular mandatory and voluntary training for all staff. For example:

- The HPS policy on preventing and addressing discrimination and harassment at work, developed in 2022, is implemented through mandatory training for all staff, with additional training for managers and directors. According to CSR Director Mohamed Asri, the training has been particularly effective in tackling unconscious gender bias.
- In 2025, a new policy and corresponding training were introduced to support women in managing their careers and improving their promotion prospects. Data on the impact of this new initiative will be collected in 2026.
- As of 2025, when a woman and a man are deemed equally qualified for a position, the company offers the position to the woman in the first instance, with the aim of improving female representation at all levels.

Meeting international standards

In 2012, the company's CSR and sustainability strategy, policies and practices were accredited for the first time by the national EBMO, the Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc (CGEM). The CGEM grants accreditation to member companies that undergo audits assessing compliance with international ISO standards on CSR and sustainable development. Companies that meet these standards are awarded the CGEM's CSR label. HPS has successfully maintained this accreditation since then.

As the corporate sustainability and human rights landscape evolved, so did HPS's approach. Since 2022, gender equality and diversity have been a cornerstone of HPS's ESG strategy and have featured prominently in its ESG disclosure report. The company reports annually on metrics related to human rights, labour, the environment, anti-corruption and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

"HPS is a Moroccan success story, and we want to lead our business community by example. Our work on gender equality and diversity, and on inclusion more broadly, is important here. Inclusive companies have a better reputation, stronger brand loyalty, and improved access to talent."

▶ Mohamed Asri — CSR Director — HPS

Impact and targets

HPS is making steady progress in increasing the representation of women. In 2022, when women accounted for 28 per cent of the company's workforce, HPS set a target of 35 per cent for 2030 and a long-term goal of 50 per cent. In 2025, women accounted for 34 per cent of the total workforce, and the company expects to exceed its 2030 target.

Moreover, in 2025, 30 per cent of the company's directors were women. This represented an increase from 2022, when women accounted for 20 per cent of directors. All directors, regardless of gender, receive board readiness training, preparing them to progress to board-level positions.

In addition to voluntary company targets, the government of Morocco has mandated that all Moroccan companies listed on the Casablanca Stock Exchange have a minimum of 30 per cent women on their executive board. HPS reached this threshold in 2020, positioning the company to benefit from greater gender diversity in its leadership. The three women on the executive board in 2025 were recruited externally, but HPS aims to fill its next female executive board position through internal promotion.

Plans for the future

HPS's priorities, and biggest challenges, in advancing gender equality and diversity are retaining female talent and supporting women identified for succession to progress into more senior roles. In 2025, the company was developing new mentoring programmes to help both women and men progress into manager and director positions.

HPS is also looking to expand its accreditations and gain access to new markets by obtaining B Corp certification, which considers a company's entire social and environmental impact. Among other things, B Corp requires companies to dismantle barriers that disproportionately affect women and to implement policies and practices that promote gender diversity in hiring, promotions and leadership roles.

Case study 3: Airspeed, the Philippines (logistics)

Airspeed is a logistics company based in the Philippines. Set up in 1985, the business has experienced steady growth. In 2025, it directly employed 800 staff in addition to 331 agency workers. Airspeed has gained recognition for its efforts to advance sustainability and women's empowerment, including a Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award and an award for business sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A focus on talent

Unlike most enterprises, Airspeed experiences the opposite of a "leaky pipeline": the more senior the position, the more likely it is to be occupied by a woman. This makes the company stand out, especially given that the logistics sector in the Philippines is male dominated at all levels. At Airspeed, women represent 30 per cent of the overall workforce, but account for 70 per cent of managers and 85 per cent of executive staff.

Airspeed does not focus specifically on recruiting, retaining, and promoting women. Instead, the company focuses on talent, regardless of gender – an approach that has resulted in a high proportion of women in senior positions. Recruitment, promotion, training, and remuneration are fair, open to all, and based on clear performance criteria. The company has also ensured that career paths are accessible to both women and men. Airspeed promotes internally when talent is identified, otherwise the enterprise fills management and leadership positions through external recruitment.

This approach has helped attract female talent and minimize unintentional discrimination. For example, the company has avoided a gender pay gap by ensuring that pay is based on the requirements of the role and key performance indicators.

"A company with a nurturing culture, with fair recruitment, promotion, and remuneration, will get the best talent, both women and men. And when women know they have a future in the company, they shine."

▶ Rosemarie P. Rafael — Founder and Chairperson — Airspeed

Identifying what works

Airspeed has developed and implemented many gender equality and diversity initiatives over the years. The following have been especially effective.

- The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, have been crucial in helping the company develop its gender-related policies and monitoring systems. In 2025 the company started tracking the impact of its gender initiatives using key performance indicators and a gender scorecard. Key metrics include the percentage of women in leadership and management roles, gender balance across departments, and the representation of women in hiring and promotions. Integrating gender-sensitive metrics allows the company to measure how effectively equal opportunity principles are being applied and to identify areas for further improvement.
- Airspeed has explicitly linked its initiatives on gender equality and diversity to its broader efforts on sustainability. The gender metrics Airspeed tracks as a result of its adherence to the WEPs feed into its sustainability assessments. Progress on gender equality and diversity therefore contributes to improving the company's ESG scores, helping to attract investment and customers.
- Airspeed has had company policies and practices to prevent and address violence and harassment at work in place since the 1990s. This has helped to ensure that all staff, especially women, view Airspeed as a safe place to work, further supporting the recruitment and retention of female talent.

Plans for future initiatives include providing day care for employees' children and offering more hybrid work opportunities. These family-friendly work policies are intended to support staff, especially mothers who tend to shoulder a greater share of family responsibilities than fathers.

Changing wider culture

National and enterprise cultures are inextricably linked. To empower women beyond Airspeed's workforce, its female founder, chairperson and president, Rosemarie P. Rafael, has taken on an active and visible advocacy role. This includes serving as Chairperson of the Women's Business Council of the Philippines and as Commissioner on Labor at the government's Philippine Commission on Women. In these roles, she actively advocates for a national hub on women's leadership and excellence, among other initiatives, and is regularly cited in the press.

Airspeed's high-profile female leadership sends a clear message: women can excel in logistics and other industries. Women working at Airspeed are similarly highly visible outside the office, for example when making deliveries or transporting goods between warehouses; notably, all the company's warehouse managers are women. This visibility is helping to change cultural perceptions about the roles and occupations considered suitable for women and men.

Case study 4: Havas India (media and advertising)

Havas India is a media and advertising group encompassing several agencies and forming part of the global Havas network, which is headquartered in France. Since 2020, Havas India has grown from fewer than 300 to over 2,000 employees. During this period of rapid expansion, the company more than doubled the proportion of women in its workforce, from 19 to 43 per cent, with women accounting for half of all leaders in 2025. Far from slowing growth, this progress in gender equality and diversity has gone hand in hand with it, demonstrating that gender inclusion need not be a trade-off and can instead serve as a catalyst for success.

The case for change

The decision to design and implement an explicit gender inclusion strategy stemmed from several key drivers. In 2019, Havas India appointed a new CEO, Rana Barua, with a strong commitment to equality and diversity. The following year, the company appointed a Chief Human Resources Officer with deep expertise in diversity and inclusion. The new leadership team initiated a data-driven review of the workforce. This revealed a significant under-representation of women, particularly when benchmarked against industry peers globally.

Additionally, the company examined how its workforce profile compared with the audiences its agencies seek to reach. The findings showed a mismatch that could limit creative and commercial impact. For instance, women are the primary decision-makers in many consumer categories, yet advertising campaigns were largely conceptualized by men. Bridging this gap between the workforce and its target audiences therefore became both a business and a cultural imperative.

From vision to implementation

In 2020, Havas India set up Women Who Inspire, an internal committee of 12 leaders, including the CEO and ten women, to spearhead change across the organization. The committee focused on four key pillars:

- **Policies**

  All people-related policies, from recruitment to compensation, were reviewed to identify and correct gender bias.

- **Awareness**

  To build organizational awareness, data on gender representation were shared in team meetings, sparking open discussions about underlying causes and solutions. The company conducted regular training sessions on unconscious bias and inclusive leadership, facilitated by external experts, with additional sessions for senior management.

- **Inspiration**

  Committee members became visible champions of inclusion, communicating their commitment through team meetings, town halls, and internal digital platforms. Havas India also joined the Unstereotype Alliance, an industry initiative convened by UN Women that unites advertising leaders to eliminate harmful stereotypes. Tools from the alliance such as the Unstereotype 3Ps Marketing Communications Framework and the UN Women and UN Global Compact's Women's Empowerment Principles Gender Gap Analysis Tool have shaped Havas India's approach to creating more representative and inclusive content.

- **Impact**

  The company tracks relevant gender metrics to determine the impact of its initiatives. It also sets clear targets for the proportion of women at all levels and benchmarks its progress against similar companies around the world. Progress is communicated to all staff. For example, when the proportion of women in the workforce moves closer to a target, the progress is shared and celebrated in internal online discussion forums, with staff invited to comment.

"Change doesn't happen organically. You need to keep at it, and you need targets. It took two years of hard work to really start seeing the positive impact of our gender equality and diversity initiatives."

▶ Vandana Tilwani — Chief Human Resources Officer — Havas India

Successful initiatives

Among Havas India's gender equality and diversity initiatives, one has been particularly successful. Analysis of human resources data showed that the company was experiencing a "leaky pipeline", with many women leaving Havas India after having a baby. To retain female talent, the enterprise developed the *Maternity Bounce Back* programme. The programme supports mothers in gradually returning to work over a six-month period, with arrangements tailored to individual needs and options including part-time and hybrid work. The programme has improved the retention of new mothers; when it was first introduced, some women who had already tendered their resignations even chose to remain with the company. Between 2022 and 2025, 41 employees went on maternity leave. Of these, 71 per cent stayed with Havas India for at least a year after returning to work.

Another successful initiative aims to change broader social culture and promote women's empowerment. In 2025, Havas India officially became a supporter of Her Entrepreneurial Network (HEN) India, a network for women entrepreneurs. Over a period of six months, the Havas India leadership team mentored and coached 23 women entrepreneurs on business growth, networking, finance, branding and other areas. One mentee, an entrepreneur running a sugarcane drinks business, grew her venture so successfully that she later commissioned Havas India to develop an advertising campaign for her business, bringing the initiative full circle.

The company's progress has been recognized through several industry awards, including for Inclusive Workplace of the Year, Women Leading Change, and Excellence in Gender Transparency and Reporting. These awards have helped inspire employees and attract new talent.

Where next?

As it continues its growth trajectory, Havas India's plans include:

- Reaching its target of 50 per cent women in the overall workforce and tackling the occupational segregation masked by aggregate workforce data. For instance, women represent only around 25 per cent of staff at the events agency, where roles often involve evening and weekend work that can conflict with caregiving responsibilities.
- Expanding diversity efforts beyond gender to include people with disabilities, workers in different age groups and people in other vulnerable situations.
- Expanding the HEN India mentoring programme to include external investors and thereby facilitate access to finance for women entrepreneurs.

Case study 5: Executive Genesis, the Philippines (service contracting)

Executive Genesis Services, Inc. is a service contracting company based in the Philippines. Executive Genesis recruits, trains, develops and deploys skilled, semi-skilled and professional service personnel in the retail, manufacturing, janitorial and sanitation sectors. The company employs more than 100 staff to manage its day-to-day operations and has more than 6,000 agency workers on its books.

Employers' organizations make the difference

Executive Genesis is a long-term, active member of the national EBMO, the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP). ECOP has supported Executive Genesis in its DEI efforts since 2024. Executive Genesis used ECOP's online DEI self-assessment checklists to better understand gaps and opportunities and to develop plans for improvement.

New initiatives include an Executive DEI Committee, set up in 2025 with equal representation of women and men. The new committee oversees all DEI initiatives and monitors progress across departments. That same year, Executive Genesis also introduced regular, non-mandatory DEI training for all staff and agency workers, with dedicated sessions for leaders. These initiatives have contributed to tangible results, including an increase in the proportion of women in senior management positions from 60 per cent in 2024 to 70 per cent in 2025.

"Our national employers' organization, the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), has been so helpful to us. With their support, we implemented successful gender equality and diversity initiatives. As a result, 60 per cent of promotions in 2024 benefited women. We are now helping our clients put in place DEI strategies that work for them."

▶ Rhoda Castro-Caliwara — Founder and CEO — Executive Genesis Services, Inc.

The company's gender equality and diversity initiatives play a major role in its ESG efforts. Its sustainability strategy and reporting are built on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", and SDG 8, "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". The company's plans on gender equality and diversity include merging its DEI and ESG reports to create a single, integrated

framework for accountability and transparency. This will enable the company to measure progress more holistically, positioning DEI not as a separate initiative but as a core driver of overall ESG performance.

Supporting clients to make the most of DEI

In 2025, Executive Genesis set up the EXEGEN Training Academy, which provides training on DEI, leadership, the prevention of violence and harassment at work and other topics to all its workers, including those contracted out to other enterprises. By November 2025, the EXEGEN Training Academy had already provided training to over 1,200 workers, of whom 53 per cent were women.

Going one step further, Executive Genesis works closely with its client companies to advance their DEI efforts and ensure that they reap the corresponding business benefits. This is particularly important for clients in the retail and manufacturing sectors: traditional perceptions mean that women are more likely to be recruited for jobs in retail, whereas men are more likely to be recruited in manufacturing. This contributes to talent shortages in both sectors.

As a first step, Executive Genesis asks client companies to share basic gender metrics, such as the proportion of women at different seniority levels, and then works with them to develop DEI and talent acquisition plans. Client companies can also send their staff to the EXEGEN Training Academy.

This approach is paying dividends. In 2024, women represented 45 per cent of all deployed service personnel at client companies. By 2025, that proportion had increased to 70 per cent. Moreover, Executive Genesis is seeing positive business outcomes, with steady growth and an increasing number of clients.

Advice for other enterprises

Based on its own experience and its work with client companies, Executive Genesis has identified five top tips for ensuring that gender equality and diversity initiatives deliver results, both in recruiting, retaining and promoting women and in generating positive business outcomes.

- **Walk the talk**

  It is crucial that businesses "walk the talk". Gender equality and diversity initiatives need to move beyond paper commitments, such as policies and systems, into practice and become embedded in the everyday activities and culture of the business.

- **Lack of funding is not a barrier**

  A lack of resources is not necessarily an obstacle. Meaningful impact can be achieved with limited budgets, as demonstrated by Executive Genesis' Instagram posts giving visibility to women working at the company.

- **Promote on merit**

  Recruitment, retention and promotion must be fair, transparent and based on merit. If employees perceive bias, the company risks undermining its ability to attract and retain talent. This means addressing unconscious gender bias, especially at management level and above.

- **Listen to employees**

  Executive staff should actively gather, analyse and act on feedback from employees. This can be done through weekly meetings, anonymous surveys, team-building events and other channels.

- **Invest in learning and development**

  Training provides employees with the skills and confidence they need to make the most of the opportunities available to them. Given cultural perceptions of the roles of women and men, this confidence-building is especially important for talented women looking to progress in their careers, particularly in male-dominated sectors.

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Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency for the world of work. We bring together governments, employers and workers to drive a human-centred approach to the future of work through employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

Women have made considerable gains in education, skills and participation in the world of work. Yet their talent remains underutilized. Across the globe, women continue to face barriers to entering and remaining in employment, and to progressing professionally. They also remain under-represented in management and business leadership. For enterprises navigating skills shortages, demographic change, and rapid technological and environmental transformation, this represents untapped potential.

Women in business and management: Scaling success provides a global perspective on how gender equality and diversity in the world of work and in enterprises have evolved. The third ILO global report on women in business and management, it examines three decades of labour market trends alongside more than a decade of enterprise data, presenting new evidence on women's participation and leadership in enterprises, the business benefits associated with gender equality and diversity, and the policies and practices that can support further progress.

The findings reveal meaningful advances but also persistent gaps. The business case for gender equality and diversity has strengthened, and women's representation in senior leadership has improved. Yet progress remains uneven, gaps persist along the management pipeline, and enterprise commitments do not always translate into action.

The challenge now is to scale and sustain action. By making fuller use of women's talent at every level, enterprises can advance equality while strengthening their capacity to innovate, adapt and succeed.

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International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland