Promises over practice: How the world's most influential companies approach gender equality

Insights report

March 2026

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Foreword

In March 2019, I interviewed to lead the research for the Gender Benchmark. I was also pregnant with my second child and though I was aware of safeguards against pregnancy discrimination, I still harboured fears of hiring bias – a common concern shared by millions of women trying to enter and remain in the labour market.

WBA has been striving for nearly a decade to change this harsh reality to ensure companies offer women a livelihood where not only their basic needs are met but also one where their economic, social and psychological well-being can be achieved. This includes assessing companies on how they remove bias from their recruitment processes or whether they support suppliers to prevent discrimination against pregnant and/or married women workers.

Over the years, we have held consultations with company representatives, civil society organisations and supply chain workers to confirm we are measuring what matters most for women on issues where companies should be held accountable. We also conducted targeted interviews throughout 2020 and 2021 to strengthen the Gender Benchmark Methodology and its scoring guidelines. In collaboration with GIZ FABRIC, we interviewed trade union representatives from Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam. We also partnered with Good Business Lab who conducted interviews with women garment workers across 12 factories in India. During these interviews, we explored what factories can do to ensure women have a safe working environment as well as to support workers who are pregnant or with young children. We also inquired whether grievance mechanisms offer women workers an adequate path towards remedy, particularly when violence and harassment incidents occur.

It has been a rewarding experience to apply this extensive methodology to 2,000 of the most influential companies twice over, in addition to the initial apparel companies for three iterations. We have learned a great deal from analysing corporate disclosure and conversing with companies about their gender assessments. We have also witnessed where the needle has moved, with more companies prioritising gender-related human rights impacts as well as establishing gender-balanced boards and C-Suites. However, we have also seen unfortunate declines in crucial areas such as the number of companies offering professional development programmes for women employees or monitoring the return-to-work rate and retention rate of employees after maternity leave.

We tried to bring as many of our learnings to this report, but it would be impossible to cover it all in less than 30 pages. Luckily, the underlying data along with our scoring criteria are freely accessible through the WBA Data Explorer. Please feel free to use these materials to produce your own analysis or create snapshot assessments.

Moving forward, WBA will continue to assess companies' efforts to promote gender equality and how their transition plans consider women along with other vulnerable groups, because all people deserve to have their human rights respected and well-being realised. Here's to a future where the thought of hiding her pregnant belly for a job interview does not even cross my daughter's mind.

Melinda George Deleuze
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Executive summary

The gap between policy and practice

Gender equality is at a crossroads as progress towards parity remains too slow and uneven, while corporate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts face growing political backlash in some markets. This moment tests whether companies will retreat to minimal compliance or strengthen systems that protect and empower women in their own operations, supply chains and communities.

The 2026 Gender Insights Report draws on the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA)'s assessment of 2,000 of the world's most influential companies, which represent nearly half of global GDP and support the livelihoods of more than 500 million workers across operations and supply chains, to examine whether corporate commitments translate into measurable outcomes.

The findings show a consistent pattern: policies are expanding, while implementation remains weak. However, we also see that progress accelerates when investors and civil society engage companies in a coordinated way.

Key finding one: An implementation gap in violence and harassment remediation creates an 'illusion of safety'

Nearly 71% of companies publicly prohibit violence and harassment. However, only 3% provide survivor-centred support, leaving a staggering 68% implementation gap between policy and practice.

Companies engaged through coordinated investor and civil society action improved 2.5 times faster across indicators related to violence and harassment than their peers.

Key finding two: Fragmented care policies disadvantage women based on where they live and work

More than two-thirds of companies fail to clearly disclose their maternity leave duration. Even among the minority that do, fewer than 5% meet international standards for duration and pay or for global applicability. Not a single company requires its suppliers to offer paid parental leave to their workers.

Flexible working and childcare support are more common, though uneven across companies, and are being rolled back in some instances. Overall, corporate efforts to relieve employees' unpaid care burden remain weak.

Key finding three: Companies' just transition efforts are missing a gender lens

Only 7% of companies demonstrate meaningful worker engagement on just transition, and less than 1% explicitly recognise women as a distinct stakeholder group in dialogue around their climate transition.

Sex-disaggregated data on layoffs and transition impacts is scarce, and only two of 1,600 real-economy companies demonstrate gender-responsive action on reskilling or job creation.

Overall results: Incremental progress with persistent gaps

On average, companies score close to 19 out of 100 on gender equality, up from 15 points less than two years ago. Even so, more than one in ten companies score zero, and only eight score above the halfway mark.

Our analysis shows that global progress on gender equality remains marginal and efforts vary between companies depending on where it is headquartered, which sector it operates in and whether its focus is on direct operations or the supply chain. However, gender equality will not advance through corporate action alone – investors, policymakers and civil society also have a key role to play. Even amid systemic gaps, change is possible.

Introduction

Gender equality at a crossroads: Accountability in an era of progress and pushback

The latest World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report confirms that progress towards gender parity continues, but too slowly and unevenly. At the current pace, full economic parity remains decades away. At the same time, in several countries, corporate DEI initiatives are facing political backlash and retrenchment. In some markets, companies are scaling back language and visibility around gender commitments.

This moment presents a test of the integrity of corporate commitments to gender equality. When external pressure intensifies, do companies stand by their stated commitments and follow through on implementation, or do they step back and shift responsibility elsewhere?

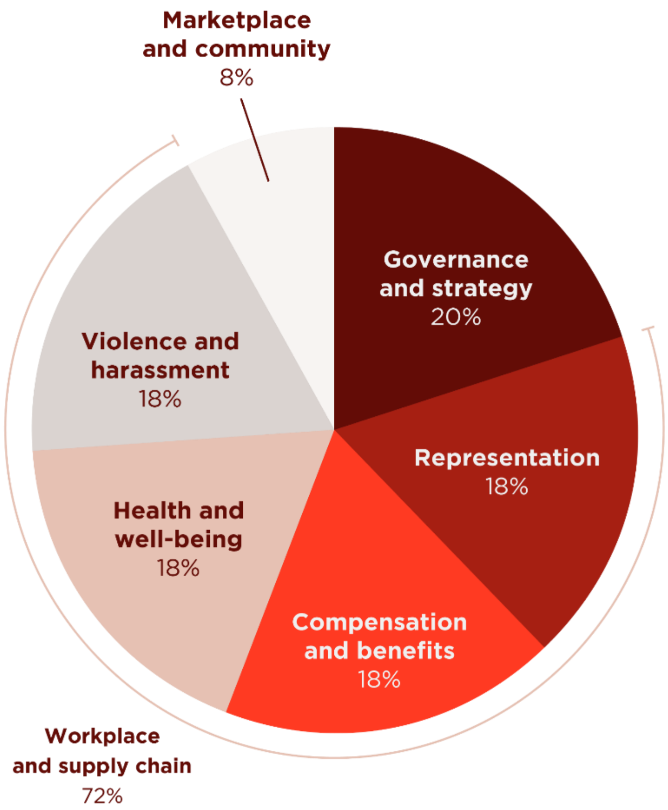
The 2026 Gender Insights Report starts to answer some of these questions by drawing on WBA's assessment of 2,000 of the world's most influential companies, representing close to half of global GDP and employing nearly 100 million people directly as well as supporting more than 500 million workers in their supply chains. How many of these workers are women varies by sector, but we can assume that women make up a significant share of this workforce.

This report examines whether corporate commitments to gender equality are translating into measurable outcomes. While women account for an estimated 38% of direct employees, companies rarely disclose sex-disaggregated data across their supply chains. As a result, we cannot determine how many of the value chain workers are women, despite strong evidence that women are disproportionately represented in lower-paid, informal and vulnerable roles in global supply chains. This data gap itself highlights a core accountability challenge.

To investigate corporate performance on gender equality at both scale and depth, WBA takes a dual approach. The Gender Assessment establishes a global baseline by evaluating 2,000 companies against a foundational set of 51 data points primarily focused on companies' own operations. Complementing this, the Gender Benchmark provides an in-depth analysis of 105 companies in the apparel and food and agriculture sectors due to the significant presence women have in these global supply chains. (*See Figure 1 and read the full methodology here*.)

This 2026 analysis builds on previous assessments that took place between 2023 and 2024, enabling us to track progress and regression over time. Of the 2,000 companies assessed for the 2026 iteration, there were 1,808 companies previously assessed against the Gender Benchmark Methodology with corporate sustainability disclosure in English, allowing for direct comparison of changes over time on policy adoption and implementation.

FIGURE 1. THE GENDER BENCHMARK'S SIX MEASUREMENT AREAS AND INDIVIDUAL WEIGHTINGS



Key findings and overall results

The key findings of our 2026 Gender Assessment and Gender Benchmark speak to three critical issues that companies should be held accountable for: violence and harassment prevention and remediation, employees' unpaid care burden, and a just transition that serves women too.

Violence and harassment incidents are pervasive across workplaces globally, undermining women's economic participation and leadership. Addressing this issue is fundamental to corporate gender performance, because safety is a precondition for decent work and equal opportunity. The International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Violence and Harassment Convention (C190) recognises that everyone has the right to a world of work free from such conduct and establishes a framework requiring employers to take preventive and remedial action. Companies, therefore, have a responsibility not only to prohibit violence and harassment through formal policies, but also to ensure effective prevention and survivor-centred remediation systems. Yet our assessment shows a significant gap between policy adoption and meaningful implementation: while nearly 71% of companies publicly prohibit violence and harassment, only 3% disclose survivor-centred remediation processes (*see Key finding one*).

Women globally continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of care responsibilities, performing an average of 2.5 times more unpaid care work than men[1]. This persistent imbalance is closely linked to the gender pay gap. As research by Nobel Laureate Claudia Goldin highlights, the bulk of the difference in earnings between women and men appears after the birth of the first child. Addressing this unequal care burden is essential for women to enter, remain and thrive in the workforce. Companies have a responsibility to help redistribute this care burden by providing equitable parental leave, flexible working arrangements, childcare and other family support. Yet our assessment reveals a fragmented landscape. Rather than offering universally applicable policies, employer-provided carer support is heavily dependent on uneven local legislation, leaving many workers – particularly those in supply chains where social protections are often weaker – without access to adequate carer support (*see Key finding two*).

Grounded in the preamble of the Paris Agreement which calls for "a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs" and in the broader narrative of "leaving no one behind," the term "just transition" has come to represent the social dimension of climate action. While much of the gender discussion has focused on existing inequalities, the climate transition offers an opportunity to reshape systems more equitably, including for women. The ILO has long advocated for gender equality within the just transition[2], and this has increasingly been reflected in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) context, including the Lima Work Programme on Gender, the Gender-Responsive Just Transitions & Climate Action Partnership and the Belém Gender Action Plan. Global disclosure frameworks have also begun to respond. The Global Reporting Initiative's Just Transition Standard (GRI 102-3), for example, requires companies to disclose sex-disaggregated data on recruitment, termination and redeployment, as well as on employees receiving reskilling and upskilling training. Integrating a gender lens into companies' just transition efforts is not only a matter of fairness, but it also strengthens the effectiveness and durability of the climate transition. However, we found that very few companies have structured engagement with women or tailored measures in place to mitigate negative impacts on them (*see Key finding three*).

Assessing companies on their just transition efforts

Since 2021, WBA has conducted just transition assessments, initially covering 180 companies across three high-emitting sectors and expanding to 1,600 real-economy companies across multiple sectors today. We assess areas where companies can most directly mitigate negative transition impacts, including through social dialogue and concrete planning around jobs and skills for their own workforce, as well as workers in the value chain and individuals in affected communities (*see the full methodology here*). This complements WBA's Gender Assessment by enabling us to analyse whether companies recognise and respond to women's needs in their just transition efforts.

WBA is currently updating our methodologies across benchmarks towards an Integrated Assessment Framework to examine companies' transition plans across climate, nature and social dimensions. Just transition will remain at the core, strengthening how we assess companies' impacts on jobs and livelihood in a rapidly changing world with multidimensional considerations, including gender, to drive clearer corporate accountability.

Beyond the specific challenges of violence and harassment, unpaid care and the climate transition, a comprehensive look at corporate gender performance reveals a broader narrative of uneven progress.

When evaluating the 2,000 companies in the 2026 Gender Assessment, regional performance varies considerably, painting a picture of shifting geographic priorities. Companies headquartered in Europe & Central Asia now lead the global baseline, overtaking North America, where companies have shown concerning signs of backsliding on key gender equality commitments. Conversely, emerging momentum is visible in Latin America & the Caribbean and in East Asia & the Pacific, where companies have displayed the biggest gains over time. Companies headquartered in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East & North Africa continue to lag significantly, though those in the Middle East & North Africa are beginning to show promising improvements across all measurement areas (*see the 2026 Gender Assessment results*).

Delving deeper into high-risk sectors, the Gender Benchmark reveals notable differences. Apparel companies consistently outperform food and agriculture companies and account for most of the benchmark's modest progress. While both sectors achieve similar scores for their direct workplace operations, their performance diverges when it comes to their gender equality efforts in the supply chain.

Apparel companies place greater emphasis on extending policies and protections to their factory networks, reflecting years of public scrutiny and engagement through multi-stakeholder initiatives. By contrast, food and agriculture companies – often operating through fragmented supply chains that rely on large numbers of smallholder producers – show poorer performance across the supply chain indicators.

Despite these differences, both sectors face a common challenge: ensuring that fundamental aspects of economic security, such as living wages and adequate carer support, are addressed across their value chains (*see the 2026 Gender Benchmark results*).

A hopeful but urgent agenda

Despite systemic gaps, the data shows that progress accelerates when expectations are clear and engagement by investors and civil society is sustained. The tools already exist to collect sex-disaggregated data, create accessible grievance mechanisms, establish globally applicable parental leave standards and ensure inclusive transition planning.

In a period of both progress and pushback, gender equality is not peripheral to business resilience. It is central to workforce health, climate adaptation, supply chain stability and long-term economic performance. Decisions made today about pay equity, care, workplace safety and transition planning will shape not only current workers' well-being, but also the opportunities and health outcomes of future generations.

The question is no longer whether companies should act, but how quickly they can move from commitments to systems that deliver measurable outcomes for women, workers and future generations that will inherit the consequences of today's choices.

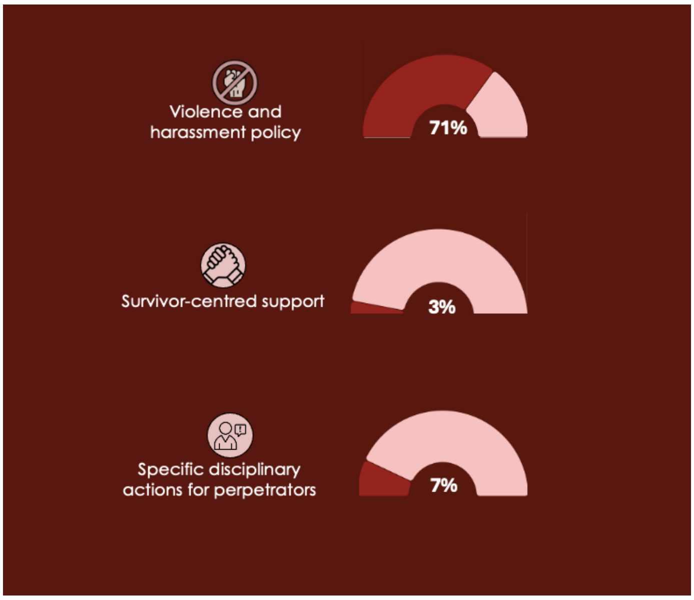
Key finding one: An implementation gap in violence and harassment remediation creates an 'illusion of safety'

Ensuring a workplace free from violence and harassment is a fundamental precondition for a safe and healthy work environment and establishing a formal violence and harassment policy is a critical first step to prevent incidents. However, effective remediation also requires clear consequences for perpetrators and survivor-centred processes. Policies alone without systems in place to remediate violence and harassment incidents give employees only the illusion of safety rather than correcting violations and providing reparation.

While there's progress, an implementation gap still leaves millions at risk

Most companies publicly prohibit violence and harassment across their operations, and establishing a zero-tolerance policy is rapidly becoming a minimum expectation across global markets. Comparing the 2026 Gender Assessment findings with the previous assessment, our data shows that violence and harassment policy adoption increased from 64% to 71% (1,290 companies). These commitments are typically articulated in company codes of conduct stating that violence, harassment, intimidation and threatening behaviour will not be tolerated, as well as affirming a commitment to maintain a workplace free from such conduct.

FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF COMPANIES WITH VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT POLICIES AND REMEDY



However, genuine survivor-centred support is lacking. Our findings show that only 3% (57 companies) provide dedicated provisions such as paid time off and psychological counselling following a violence and harassment incident. While this marks a slight increase from 1% in the previous assessment, the contrast between a 71% policy adoption rate and a mere 3% survivor support rate reveals a stark 68-percentage-point implementation gap in direct operations (*see Figure 2*).

What appears to drive this steep drop-off? One missing link is a formalised process for protecting survivors and remediating violence and harassment incidents. Our analysis reveals that while companies issue generic zero-tolerance statements, they rarely outline an actual remediation process. Among the 1,396 companies that disclose a sufficient violence and harassment policy, nearly all (1,336 companies) fail to provide additional information on formal remediation procedures or survivor support. Without this crucial element, survivors may be left unsupported and vulnerable to retaliation in the aftermath of an incident.

Conversely, companies that implement survivor-centred remediation prioritise immediate physical and psychological safety to dismantle reporting barriers. For instance, South Korean food production company CJ CheilJedang has integrated an encrypted, anonymous reporting system operated by a specialised third-party organisation. The company then pairs this secure channel with a guaranteed protocol that immediately provides survivors with paid leave, psychological counselling and physical workspace separation during investigations. Similarly, Italian telecommunications company Telecom Italia moves beyond standard internal human rights mechanisms by offering direct, confidential access to an external 'person of trust', independent legal counsel and psychological support, while also mandating the immediate relocation of the alleged perpetrator to a different office to prioritise the survivor's well-being.

The underlying lack of formal remediation procedures also helps explain why accountability mechanisms for perpetrators remain limited in practice. While the number of companies disclosing specific disciplinary actions increased from 2% to 7%, this still means that only 123 companies clearly outlined consequences for perpetrators. Without a predefined procedure, transparent consequences – such as suspension or dismissal – cannot be effectively enforced. Demonstrating what robust perpetrator accountability can look like in practice, Canadian pension fund La Caisse established a dedicated adjudicating committee with strict investigation protocols. Its consequence management goes beyond standard dismissals; it utilises interim suspensions during investigations and can mandate anger management therapy to assess whether a perpetrator can safely return to work.

Proving a holistic remedy culture is achievable

There are examples of leading practice, as shown above. However, comprehensively establishing an effective violence and harassment policy, detailing consequences for perpetrators and providing genuine survivor support remains rare. Our assessment identified that only 31 companies (2%) successfully meet all three criteria to provide more holistic remedy following a violence and harassment incident.

This reveals a systemic blind spot that cannot be ignored. Millions of workers are protected by a violence and harassment policy in theory. However, simply having a 'speak-up' policy does not ensure that survivors are protected, and setting up a grievance channel does not mean that an apt remediation process is in place. Leaving workers vulnerable when harm occurs is not a simple administrative oversight; it reflects the absence of procedural safeguards and victim recovery mechanisms. Nonetheless, the 31 frontrunners show that moving from theoretical commitments to a holistic remedy culture is achievable in practice.

Building a 'remedy culture': Foundational steps for companies

Efforts to remediate workplace violence and harassment require action beyond standalone violence and harassment policies and are often linked to a company's overarching approach to human rights and worker engagement. By examining broader corporate practices, we identified key 'building blocks' for companies currently lacking violence and harassment remediation systems.

Effective grievance channels

A company cannot remediate incidents that it does not know about. Among the companies that fail to provide survivor-centred support or disclose clear consequences for perpetrators, roughly 70% do not have an effective grievance mechanism to report violence and harassment incidents. Before survivor recovery programmes or disciplinary actions for perpetrators are established, companies should first put in place a grievance mechanism that allows for anonymous reporting, is available in relevant local languages and incorporates safeguards against retaliation. Once these reporting channels are in place, companies can connect incidents to an appropriate remediation process.

Transparent incident data

To effectively address violence and harassment incidents, a company must grasp how pervasive the issue is in its workplace. Collecting, analysing and monitoring grievance data builds internal awareness and strengthens companies' ability to effectively invest in actionable remediation and survivor support. Our findings show companies that track their grievance data are almost four times more likely to outline clear consequences for perpetrators. Even more strikingly, companies that track grievances are 20 times more likely to provide survivor-centred support. For companies currently failing to provide adequate violence and harassment remediation, monitoring grievance data can help identify hidden risks and drive meaningful systemic change.

Active worker engagement

When a company systematically asks questions and listens to its workers, violence and harassment policies are more likely to translate into protective realities. Our results show that companies engaging employees on topics related to gender equality tend to have stronger violence and harassment remediation systems in place. These companies are nearly six times more likely to outline clear consequences for perpetrators and nearly four times more likely to have a survivor-centred process in place to address workplace violence and harassment incidents. Engaging workers on everyday gender issues serves as another vital building block.

Ultimately, protecting survivors and holding perpetrators accountable does not happen in isolation. As the data demonstrates, the foundational 'plumbing' of addressing and remediating violence and harassment in the workplace must be built on trust in the reporting mechanisms, data on reported incidents and continuous dialogue with women employees about relevant issues. By putting these essential building blocks in place, companies can move beyond static violence and harassment policies to cultivate a strong remedy culture.

A deep dive into violence and harassment prevention and remediation in the supply chain

To understand how companies protect workers within their direct operations and supply chains, we evaluated 105 apparel and food and agriculture companies across nine indicators related to violence and harassment prevention and remediation. These include workplace- and supplier-level violence and harassment policies, support for violence and harassment prevention in the supply chain and monitoring suppliers' grievance remediation, as well as workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Across these indicators, companies scored an average of 3.9 out of 9 possible points.

In the supply chain, nearly all companies (88%, 92 companies) require their suppliers to establish a violence and harassment policy that covers their workers, and two-thirds (66%, 69 companies) require suppliers to prohibit retaliation against trade union members.

However, a profound gap emerges when considering how companies support suppliers to uphold these policies. The lowest-scoring indicator is violence and harassment prevention training, with only one in ten companies requiring their suppliers to provide this training to workers and managers. Furthermore, only 12% of companies (13) describe how they actively support suppliers in ensuring an enabling environment for freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Companies readily mandate rules for suppliers but fail to provide the active support needed to implement them. Requiring suppliers to prevent violence and harassment incidents or prohibit retaliation against trade union members without offering further support continues to leave supply chain workers vulnerable.

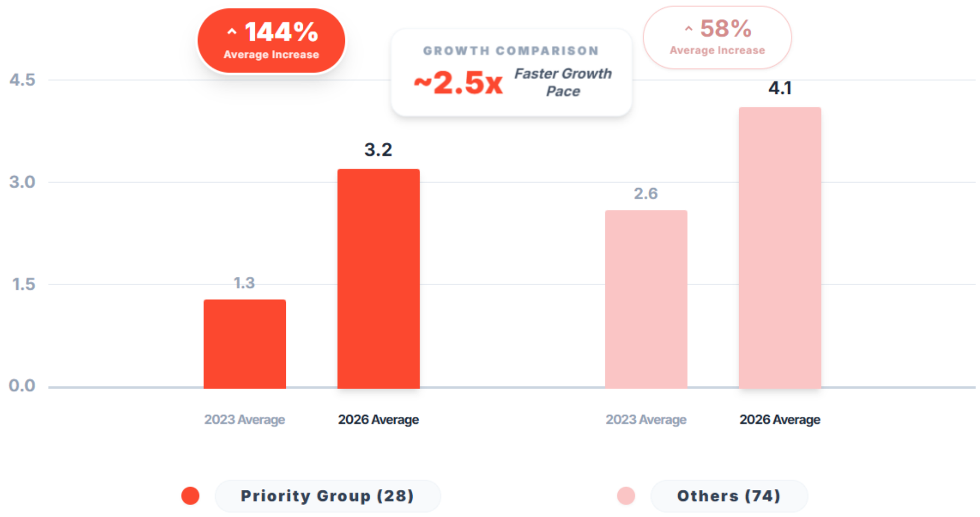
Coordinated engagement accelerates the implementation of remediation systems

While the violence and harassment indicators reveal a stark implementation gap, our data supports the premise that coordinated, multi-stakeholder engagement can rapidly accelerate progress. In response to persistent disparities, WBA convened a Collective Impact Coalition (CIC) bringing investors and civil society organisations together to support targeted corporate action on violence and harassment prevention and remediation.

To measure the impact of these efforts, we isolated a priority group of companies that were engaged with by the CIC and compared their performance to that of the non-engaged companies across nine indicators related to violence and harassment prevention and remediation. These priority companies were strategically selected based on policy gaps identified in the 2023 Gender Benchmark. While most of the companies – 27 out of the initial 30 companies selected – had internal violence and harassment policies in place, they all failed to require suppliers to have a corresponding policy covering their workers. With largely nonexistent supply chain commitments, this priority group was seen as needing urgent intervention.

Following this targeted CIC engagement, we found that the priority group experienced a significantly steeper upward trajectory. Despite starting from a significantly lower baseline, the engaged group improved their performance approximately two and a half times faster than the non-engaged group. While the 74 "other" companies saw their average scores on relevant supply chain indicators increase by 58% between the 2023 and 2026 Gender Benchmark, the 28 priority companies[i] achieved a remarkable 144% average growth rate (*see Figure 3*).

FIGURE 3. VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT TRENDS OF THE PRIORITY GROUP COMPARED TO OTHERS



Note: The maximum score a company can receive is 9 points across the nine indicators related to violence and harassment prevention and remediation.

The data points in a clear direction: coordinated multi-stakeholder engagement is closely associated with companies moving beyond initial violence and harassment policy commitments towards taking preventative actions and establishing survivor-centred remediation systems. Proactive converstaions with investors emphasised the operational urgency of the issue, while the unified call to action and on-the-ground expertise from civil society provided companies with the practical guidance needed for genuine remediation. Together, these efforts appear to have helped companies build the tangible, survivor-centred systems that vulnerable workers urgently need.

[i] *There was an initial target list of 30 companies, of which 28 were assessed in both the 2023 and 2026 Gender Benchmark.*

Key finding two: Fragmented care policies disadvantage women based on where they live and work

Corporate action on care directly shapes women's economic participation and long-term earnings. Without equitable parental leave, flexible working arrangements and childcare support, businesses risk higher turnover, reduced productivity and stalled leadership pipelines for women. WBA assesses 2,000 companies on the global applicability, adequacy and pay provisions of parental leave[ii] policies, alongside other care-related support efforts.

Our 2026 assessment highlights a clear disconnect between the scale of unpaid care responsibilities and the consistency of corporate responses. Too few companies have adequate, group-wide parental leave policies or comprehensive childcare support and flexible work arrangements. Moreover, more than 40% of companies (795) do not disclose any information about the carer support they offer employees.

Deep fragmentation in parental leave

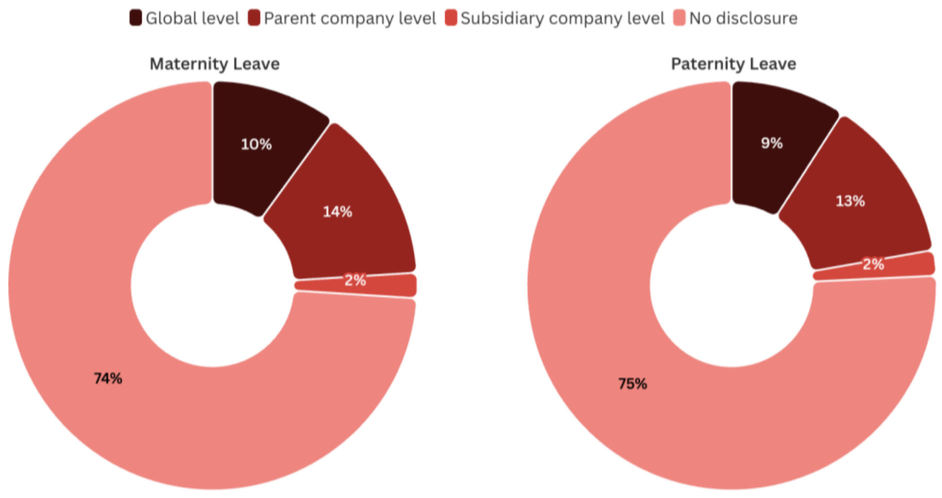
The transition to parenthood should be considered a universal experience regardless of where the parent lives, yet the level of support a worker receives from their employer is heavily dependent on location. This disparity is particularly stark within the supply chain. While global supply chains rely heavily on women workers who face economic vulnerabilities, not a single company (0%) requires its suppliers to offer paid parental leave to their workers.

Many companies are not transparent about benefits provided to workers within their own operations. Nearly two-thirds of companies (65%, 1,279 companies) either fail to disclose a maternity leave policy altogether or do not specify the number of weeks offered (*see Figure 4*). Companies also do not provide these policies globally within their own operations and largely default to national legislation. Only 10% of companies (197) ensure that their maternity leave benefits apply at the group level. When also considering the ILO mandate of at least 14 weeks of maternity leave at a minimum of two-thirds pay, the number is reduced to only 89 companies (5%). For paternity leave, the results are similar – 9% of companies (185) have a globally applicable policy of at least two weeks, and only half of those companies (96) provide at least two-thirds paid leave globally.

By deferring the responsibility of mandating and financing parental leave to local governments, companies are not offering equal benefits to all workers. Without globally applicable minimum standards, workers in jurisdictions with less generous legally mandated benefits – particularly women in the supply chain – face heightened financial instability and career disruption during pregnancy, early childhood care and beyond.

[ii] Note on terminology: In this report, 'maternity leave' refers to leave designated for the primary carer, and 'paternity leave' refers to leave for the secondary carer. The term 'parental leave' is used inclusively to encompass both primary and secondary carer leave.

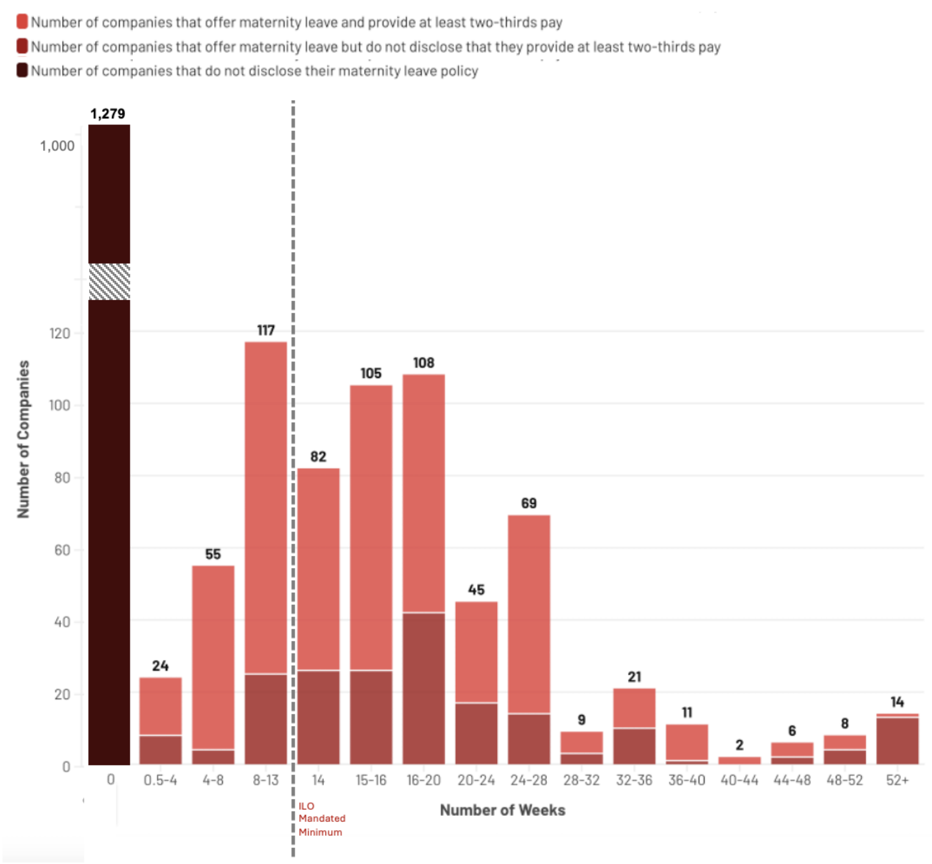
FIGURE 4. COVERAGE OF MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE POLICIES ACROSS 2,000 COMPANIES



Among the 35% of companies (676) that disclose the maternity leave benefits available to their employees, the amount of leave provided averages up to nearly 20 weeks which is greater than the ILO's 14-week mandated minimum. However, the number of weeks offered varies widely – from one to 148 weeks, and these disclosures are often prefaced with terms such as 'up to' meaning the guaranteed minimum number of weeks is unclear.

Moreover, of the 480 companies (25%) that offer at least 14 weeks maternity leave, one-third (33%, 158 companies) fail to explicitly guarantee at least two-thirds pay as mandated by the ILO (*see Figure 5*). This leaves only 322 companies (16%) offering maternity leave aligned with the ILO mandated minimum.

FIGURE 5. MATERNITY LEAVE OFFERED BY COMPANIES



Relying on local legislation can result in uneven carer benefits across global workforces

The ILO recommends financing maternity benefits through social insurance or taxes and discourages relying on employers alone. Despite this, in 49 countries, employers are required to bear full responsibility for maternity leave pay[3]. Given that at least 1,400 of the companies operate across multiple jurisdictions, ensuring equitable maternity leave coverage across their global workforce is not only shaped by national regulations, but also a matter of corporate responsibility. Conversely, 5% of companies (96) explicitly report relying solely on local legislation to determine and finance maternity leave. Companies have a role in ensuring that workers can access paid maternity leave, even if the specific approach varies across jurisdictions.

Country-level data reveals significant geographic and cultural divides

Relying on either patchwork local legislation or voluntary corporate policies creates significant divides in how parental leave is structured across the globe leaving workers vulnerable to receiving uneven benefits. While the global average for maternity leave is nearly 20 weeks, examining performance at the country level reveals stark disparities.

In North America, the impact of public policy is evident. Companies headquartered in Canada, supported by strong national mandates, average 22 weeks of maternity leave. Conversely, companies in the United States present a 'mixed bag.' Operating without a federal paid leave mandate, companies that disclose their maternity leave policies average 13 weeks – falling shy of the 20-week global average and the ILO's 14-week minimum threshold. However, more US companies report that they provide paid leave.

The danger of relying solely on local laws becomes even more apparent when looking at multinational operations. In regions like Latin America & the Caribbean and East Asia & the Pacific, certain countries stand out for their generous domestic policies driven by national legislation. For example, companies headquartered in Brazil average 30 weeks of maternity leave, in Taiwan average 23 weeks, and in Colombia and Australia average 22 weeks.

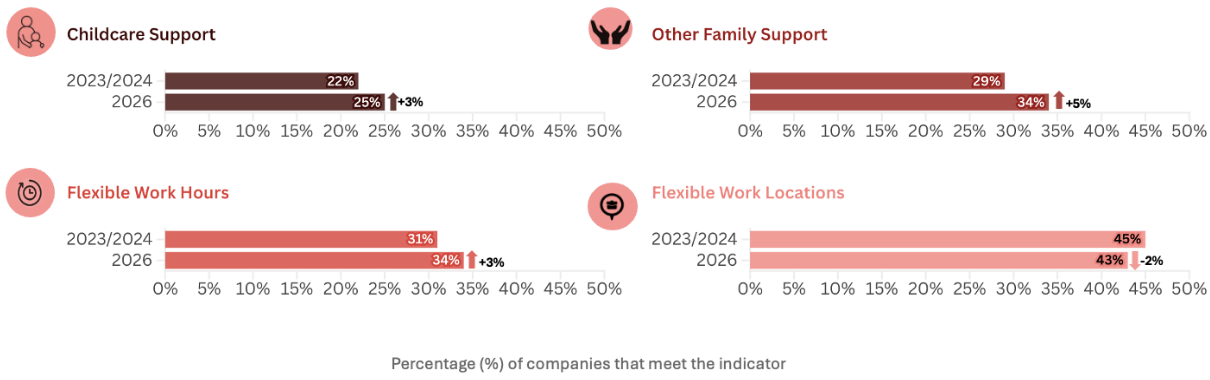
This localised compliance rarely translates into global standards. Strikingly, none of the 304 companies headquartered in Latin America & the Caribbean or Sub-Saharan Africa mandate a globally applicable policy of at least 14 weeks paid maternity leave. This shows that while companies readily comply with strong local laws for their employees at the headquarter location, they fail to provide equal baseline benefits to their global workforce.

Other arrangements aim to substitute parental leave

Beyond paid parental leave, companies are more likely to offer other forms of unpaid care support. However, international standards around childcare and other family support are mostly absent. The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2024 reports that only 62 countries have established standards around childcare[4]. In this vacuum, 25% of companies (492) provide childcare support, up from 22% in the previous assessment (*see Figure 6*). There has been an even greater increase in the number of companies providing other family support to their workers. Previously, 29% of companies offered benefits such as paid time off to attend healthcare appointments with children or other dependents, whereas today, 34% of companies (671) do.

Allowing for flexible working arrangements are another way that companies help reduce employees' unpaid care burden. Following the surge in flexible work benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic, 34% of companies (655) now permit employees to adjust their workdays. This is an increase of 55 companies in less than two years. While even more companies (42%, 825 companies) currently permit employees to work outside of the office, our findings show that these work-from-home trends have slightly reversed. We found that 46 companies have rolled back their flexible work location benefits since the previous assessment, most of which (36 companies) are headquartered in the United States.

FIGURE 6. COMPANY PERFORMANCE ON OTHER UNPAID CARE SUPPORT INDICATORS



Overall, companies' support for employees balancing unpaid care responsibilities remains uneven and can quickly shift depending on business priorities. While the progress around childcare and other family support measures as well as flexible work hours is encouraging, these benefits cannot substitute for adequate and equal parental leave. Meaningful redistribution of unpaid care responsibilities begins with equitable leave at the transition to parenthood, supported by extended carer support and sustained flexibility in working hours and location over the long term.

Key finding three: Companies' just transition efforts are missing a gender lens

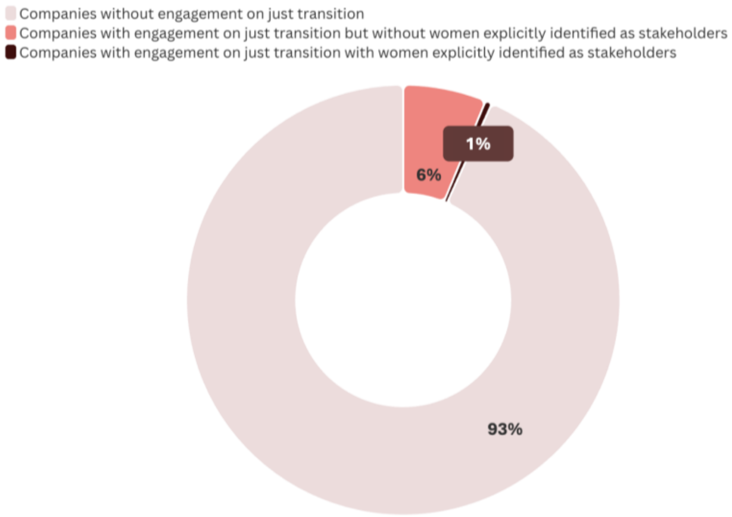
The climate transition is not automatically fair. Without deliberate safeguards, it can perpetuate – and in some cases exacerbate – existing inequalities. Women are often among the most vulnerable workers exposed to the compounding impacts of decarbonisation, climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. These vulnerabilities can be further intensified at the intersection of informal work, rural livelihoods and low-income contexts.

This is why a just transition matters. It is the vehicle to link climate action with tangible equity gains, rather than allowing existing inequalities to carry through. Done well, it can also improve transition delivery by reducing implementation frictions, widening workforce participation and building more durable support for change. Companies have an opportunity to apply a gender lens to their just transition efforts. However, our results show that very few companies are doing so.

Women are often not recognised as a stakeholder group

The most fundamental requirement for a just transition is meaningful engagement with those affected by the transition. In the real economy, this means starting with a company's own workforce. However, our results show that only 7% of the 1,563 companies assessed[iii] (107 companies) demonstrate stakeholder engagement on just transition that includes their own workforce (*see Figure 7*). Moreover, these companies often treat workers as one homogenous group, overlooking women workers' specific needs and the opportunities they could bring to the climate transition. Only 8 companies – BHP, Grupo Mexico, JSW Energy, Microsoft, Naturgy, Petrobras, TotalEnergies and Vattenfall – explicitly recognise women as a distinct stakeholder group in their just transition dialogues.

FIGURE 7: COMPANY ENGAGEMENT ON JUST TRANSITION



Note: A company must disclose engagement on just transition or on the broader social impacts of its climate transition plan. At a minimum, workers and/or their representatives must be included among the stakeholders engaged.

[iii] *For the 2026 just transition assessment, 1,600 real-economy companies were assessed. However, 37 companies did not publish key sustainability reports in English and were, therefore, not included in this analysis.*

In practice, engagement with women remains extremely limited. Only 1% of companies (16) reference gender equality and women's empowerment in their engagement mechanisms, for example gender-related employee surveys or external consultations with women's organisations, and only four companies – Naturgy, Petrobras, TotalEnergies and Vattenfall – engage directly with women on just transition issues. Among these, Swedish utilities company Vattenfall stands out for taking a multi-dimensional approach to vulnerability in its just transition efforts. It uses targeted interviews to gain insight into the conditions of particularly vulnerable groups of workers, including women, migrant workers and temporary agency workers.

Sex-disaggregated involuntary turnover data helps quantify transition impacts

Beyond dialogue, understanding the social impacts of a climate transition is fundamental, particularly when designing measures to mitigate impacts for different types of stakeholder groups. To capture social impacts of just transition on women, one of the most quantifiable ways is by collecting sex-disaggregated involuntary turnover data.

Overall, 23% of companies (365) disclose their annual involuntary turnover data. However, only 1% of companies (16) report this data by gender. This disparity is unlikely due to a lack of data availability. In fact, 36% of companies (563) currently report sex-disaggregated data on overall employee turnover.

Without the breakdown of involuntary turnover data by gender, companies cannot identify whether women are disproportionately affected by transition-related layoffs, making it difficult to design targeted strategies to mitigate potential negative impacts affecting women.

Gender-blind approaches limit access to meaningful transition opportunities

A just transition centres on safeguarding jobs and supporting skills development. However, to ensure equitable access to opportunities, efforts need to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of more vulnerable stakeholders, namely women. A good example of targeted just transition efforts to support women is India's self-help groups that have enabled women farmers to access finance and climate-smart technologies, build skills and diversify income through voluntary carbon markets, such as agroforestry and soil conservation[5]. By pairing targeted financing with skills support, these groups help the women who increasingly shoulder agricultural work to gain concrete benefits from the climate transition.

Our results reveal significant gaps in companies' efforts to safeguard women's jobs or support their skills development. While 26% of companies (405) have professional development programmes for women employees, only 10% (160) commit to reskilling or upskilling programmes explicitly linked to transition-related impacts. Among this narrow group, only two companies – Naturgy and Orange – actively promote gender equality in their programmes. This shows many programmes available to women are not explicitly connected to companies' transition plans and, therefore, do not offer the opportunities climate action may bring women workers.

Commitments to job creation and access to alternative employment are even less common than those related to reskilling and upskilling, with a similar pattern observed across both areas. Just 6% of companies (93) commit to job creation as part of their climate transition. Of these, only two companies – again, Naturgy and Orange – demonstrate a gender-responsive approach. These figures refer only to transition-related impacts, without factoring in additional structural shifts such as those driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI). This underscores the broader scale of corporate effort required, both to expand employment opportunities overall and ensure that women benefit from them.

Naturgy (utilities, Spain) provides one of the strongest examples of a gender-responsive just transition approach aligned with ILO guidance. The company recognises the energy transition as an opportunity for new job creation, collaborates with social partners to enhance trainings and employability, and promotes gender equality in the energy sector by strengthening the reskilling and requalification of women workers in the context of just transition. Moreover, the Naturgy Foundation supported one of the first studies in Spain using both quantitative and qualitative research to examine women's roles in a just climate transition.

Orange (telecommunications, France) positions sustainability and inclusion as part of its core strategy. Its decarbonisation efforts draw on technology and operational levers such as network energy efficiency, eco-design and "frugal AI." To support delivery, Orange pairs company-wide CSR training, including on climate, with digital upskilling across the business. Recognising that women remain underrepresented in AI- and data-related roles, it also runs targeted programmes to build women's skills and strengthen recruitment and retention in future-oriented roles both within and beyond the company. This illustrates how companies can respond to multiple transition drivers in parallel, although the implications for job impacts could be made more explicit.

Overall results: Incremental progress with persistent gaps

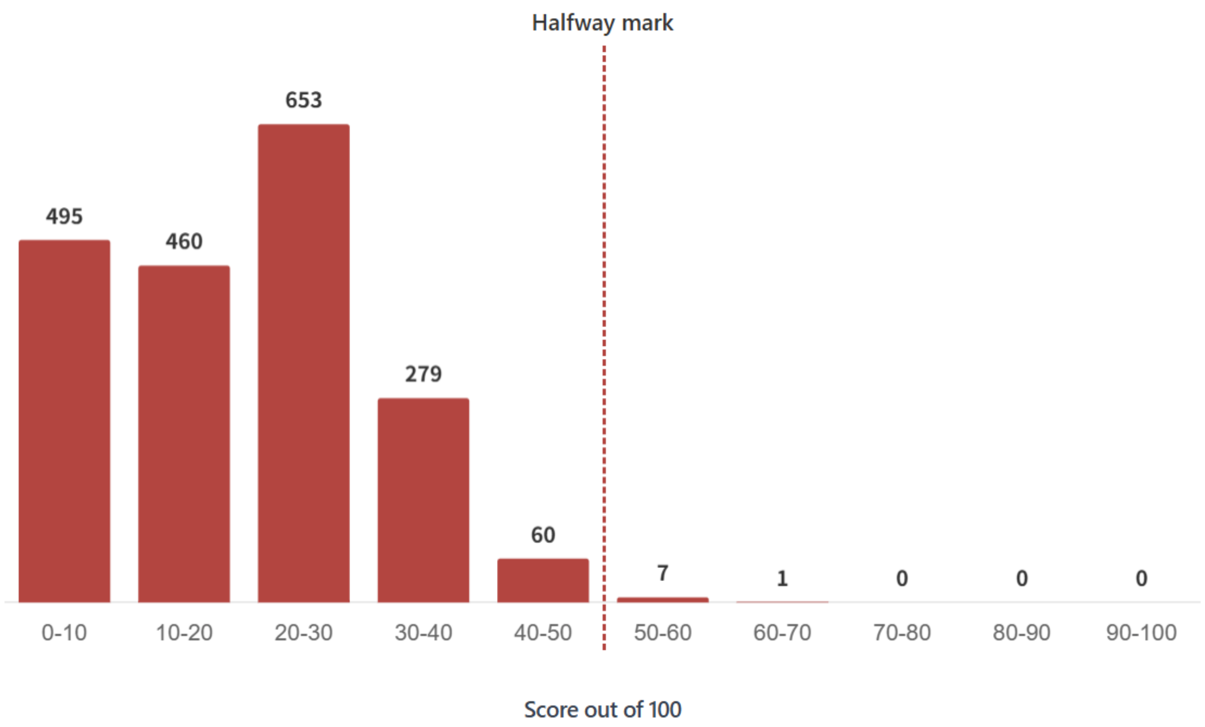
To capture a comprehensive picture of corporate gender performance, WBA adopted a dual approach that combines breadth and depth. In the Gender Assessment, we assessed 2,000 of the world's most influential companies using a subset of the Gender Benchmark Methodology focusing primarily on companies' own operations. In parallel, the Gender Benchmark provides an in-depth assessment of 105 companies in two sectors with significant impact on women in their supply chain – apparel (55 companies) and food and agriculture (50 companies) – allowing for a more extensive analysis on progress concerning gender equality and women's empowerment across the entire value chain.

The 2026 Gender Assessment results

The global footprint of the 2,000 companies assessed is immense. Headquartered in 83 economies and operating across more than 220 countries and areas, these companies generated collective revenues of USD 48 trillion in 2023, equivalent to 46% of global GDP. Together, they directly employ 99 million people and hundreds of millions more through their supply chains, with women accounting for an estimated 38% of the SDG2000 direct employees. On average, the companies assessed score 18.9 out of 100 points, up from 15.6 in the previous assessment.

Alongside this increase in the overall average, we observe several positive shifts in performance. Firstly, more companies are emerging as frontrunners. Eight companies score above 50 out of 100 points (*see Figure 8*) – Puma, Nestlé, Adidas, Schneider Electric, HP, Coles Group, SSE and Inditex – compared with only two companies in the previous assessment. Also, fewer companies score zero. Although more than one in ten companies (211) did not receive any points in the 2026 assessment, this is an improvement from the previous assessment when 320 companies (16%) scored zero.

FIGURE 8. NUMBER OF COMPANIES PER SCORE BAND ON THE 2026 GENDER ASSESSMENT



A striking trend is that the number of companies that disclose their salient human rights risks and impacts has more than doubled, from 13% (243 companies) in 2023 to 28% (501 companies) in 2026. Moreover, companies have increasingly identified gender-related risks as salient with the rate tripling since our last assessment, from 7% (123 companies) in 2023 to 21% (386 companies) in 2026. This means that issues such as discrimination and gender inequality, equal pay for equal work, and violence and harassment are increasingly recognised by companies as among the most severe potential or actual negative impacts in the workplace or supply chain.

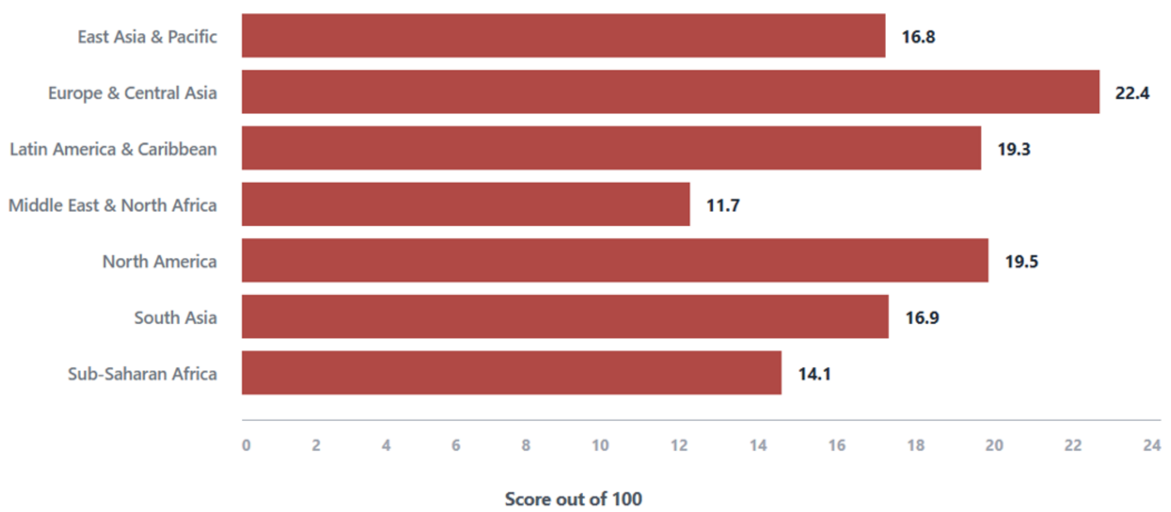
In the workplace, one-third of companies (33%, 653) – 50 more companies than in the previous assessment – set at least one time-bound gender target on issues such as increasing the number of women in leadership positions or closing the gender pay gap. However, only 2% of companies (36) disclose their gender pay gaps across all locations of operation, with 66 companies showing some regression in pay gap disclosure or its third-party verification.

Regarding health and well-being in the workplace, our findings show a stark increase in the number of companies that disclose how they cover the costs associated with employees' maternal health, sexual and reproductive health, or mental health. In 2023, we found that 24% of companies (480) covered at least one of these costs which has nearly doubled to 44% (856 companies) in our 2026 assessment.

In the supply chain, corporate efforts to promote gender equality look bleak. Only 21 companies (1%) set a gender equality target on issues such as offering women professional development programmes or increasing procurement from women-owned businesses, and more than half of these companies come from the apparel sector (*see the 2026 Gender Benchmark results below*). Despite these gender equality targets, only four companies – CEZ Group, HPE, H&M and Puma – collect data on the proportion of women in leadership positions in the supply chain. While 15% of companies (288) commit to purchasing from women-owned suppliers, only 3% (60 companies) show evidence of procuring from businesses that are at least 51% owned by women.

Furthermore, very few companies disclose how they support their suppliers to pay workers a living wage (3%, 49 companies) or help create an enabling environment for workers to exercise their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining (2%, 31 companies). While these actions are not gender-specific as such, women working in the supply chain greatly benefit from earning a living wage to cover their basic needs and those of dependents, contributing to closing the gender pay gap in the supply chain, as well as from joining trade unions to strengthen their voice and help secure better working conditions.

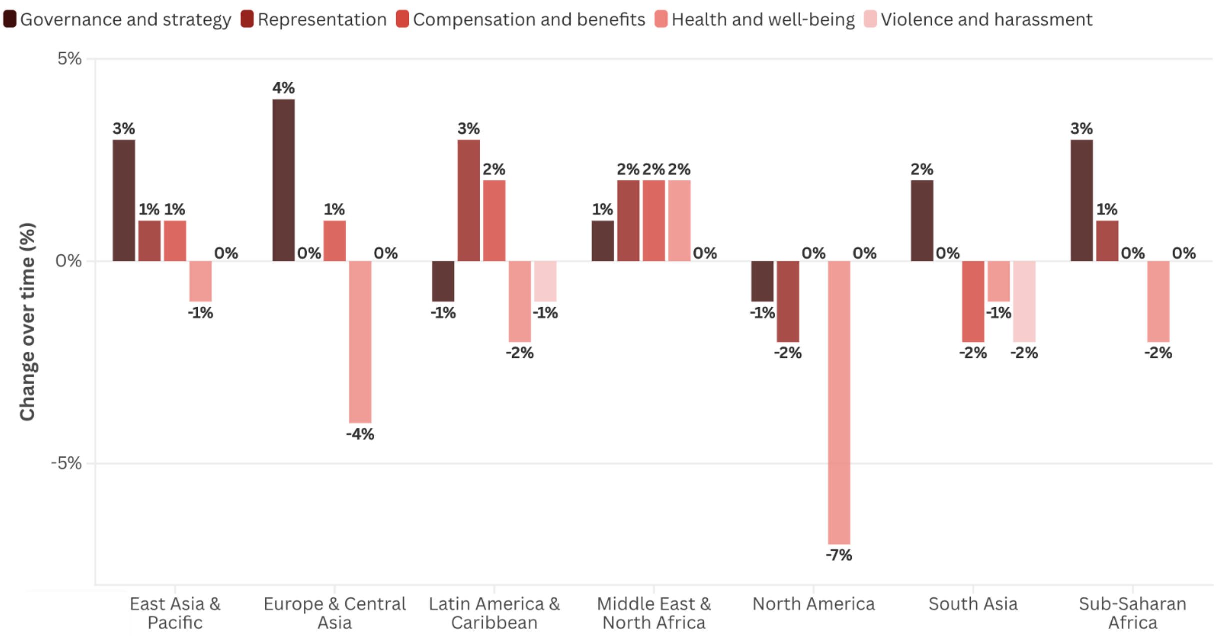
FIGURE 9. GENDER ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE BY REGION



At the regional level[iv], performance varies considerably (*see Figure 9*). Companies headquartered in Europe & Central Asia have the highest overall performance, averaging 22.4 points out of 100. This is a shift from the previous assessment where North American companies were in the lead. Today, companies in North America and Latin America & the Caribbean show similar performances with an average of 19.3 and 19.5 points respectively. South Asia and East Asia & the Pacific companies also have almost identical averages, at 16.9 and 16.8 points respectively.

The biggest gains come from companies in Latin America & the Caribbean and East Asia & the Pacific, suggesting momentum is strongest in these regions. Companies headquartered in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East & North Africa show poor performance, averaging 14.1 points and 11.7 points out of 100. However, companies in Middle East & North Africa are showing promising improvements across nearly all measurement areas since the last iteration, while companies in North America are backsliding on gender equality.

FIGURE 10. MEASUREMENT AREA PERCENT CHANGE OVER TIME BY REGION



In addition to the overall averages, discrepancies in performance trends among regions are evident at the measurement area level (*see Figure 10*). The change in performance is most apparent among Governance and strategy, Representation, and Health and well-being indicators. Performance on Violence and harassment and Compensation and benefits has stayed roughly the same over time at both the global and regional levels due to a combination progress and backsliding (*see Key finding one and Key finding two above*).

Governance frameworks, risk assessments and target-setting have been strengthened, but operational accountability mechanisms remain limited. Improvements in Governance and strategy are most evident in Europe & Central Asia, East Asia & the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa, where more companies are prioritising human rights risks as salient and setting gender equality targets. These upward trends are particularly striking in Japan, Germany, France and South Africa. Companies based in the Americas, however, are less likely to report targets linked to gender equality even if they had in the previous assessment. In the United States, for example, 58 companies that previously set such targets no longer have any in place.

Concerning Representation trends, many companies in Latin America & the Caribbean now have more gender-balanced leadership than they had in the past. One example of leading practice is Brazilian holding company Natura & Co, which previously did not have gender balance at any level of leadership and now maintains between 40-60%

[iv] *Regional classification is based on a company's headquarter location.*

women representation among senior executives as well as among senior and middle managers. Companies in the region are also reporting more sex-disaggregated data, such as Chilean banks Banco del Estado de Chile and Banco de Credito e Inversiones which now disclose the proportion of turnover among men and women. In the Middle East & North Africa, while companies do not yet exhibit high rates of gender-balanced leadership, several are offering women professional development opportunities and tracking the number of women participating, such as telecommunications companies Omantel, Ooredoo and VEON.

North America companies, however, have shown backsliding on Representation. Nearly 100 companies in the United States no longer maintain a gender balance in various levels of leadership, equating to 22% of companies assessed that are headquartered there. Similarly, 101 companies in the United States no longer offer professional development programmes to women even though they had done so only a few years prior. While United States headquartered companies still lead on procuring from women-owned businesses overall, accounting for half of all companies meeting this element, there are 96 companies headquartered there that have reneged on their prior commitments or no longer disclose evidence that they source from women-owned businesses.

The greatest regressions on gender equality performance have been on Health and well-being, where companies from nearly every region except the Middle East & North Africa have backslid on monitoring the health and safety performance of their suppliers. This means that many workers' health, safety and hygiene needs may go unmet in workplaces where women do not have access to adequate toilet facilities or may be exposed to hazardous chemicals and dyes that can affect their reproductive health. While 14 companies in the United States have improved their monitoring efforts, 77 companies no longer report this information. In Europe, we have seen 48 companies improve their efforts, though 78 companies have regressed, namely in Germany (17 companies), the United Kingdom (13 companies) and France (10 companies). On average, companies across East Asia & the Pacific have also shown signs of backsliding on monitoring supply chain workers' health and safety, though there have been some promising improvements among South Korean companies.

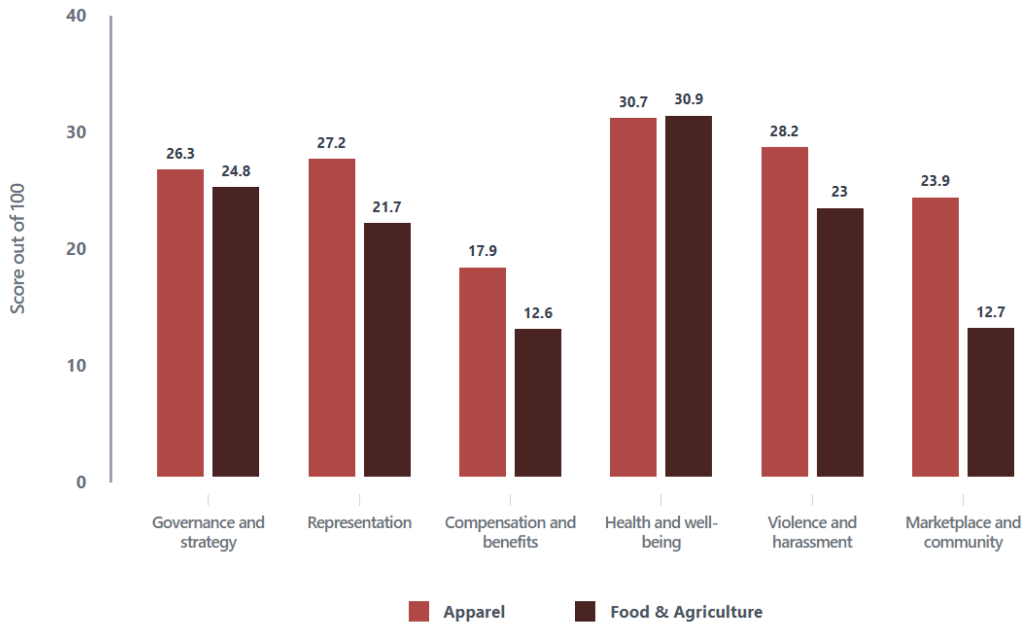
The 2026 Gender Benchmark results

Overall performance on the Gender Benchmark reveals that even the highest-scoring companies are only slightly more than halfway towards promoting gender equality through their own operations, supply chain, marketplaces and communities.

German apparel and footwear company Puma leads the benchmark with a total score of 66.2 points out of 100 followed by French luxury goods company Kering with 54.7 points. Swiss company Nestlé ranks highest in benchmark of the food and agriculture sector and third overall with 52.7 points. On the other end of the spectrum, five companies score zero across all indicators.

The average score on the benchmark across all 105 benchmarked companies is 24 points out of 100, representing a marginal increase of 1 point since the previous benchmark in 2023. This improvement was driven primarily by the apparel sector, which improved its average by 2 points – from 23.9 points in 2023 to 25.9 in 2026. In contrast, the food and agriculture sector's performance was relatively stagnant, shifting by only 0.2 points – from 21.7 points in 2023 to 21.9 in 2026.

FIGURE 11. MEASUREMENT AREA AVERAGE SCORES BY SECTOR



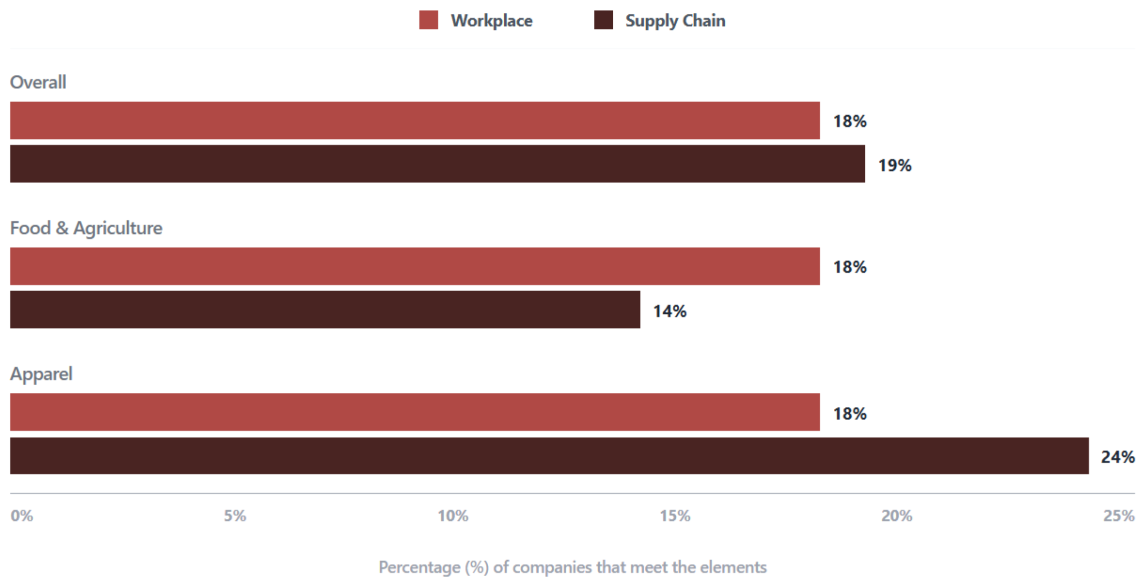
Apparel companies consistently outperform food and agriculture companies in five of the six measurement areas (*see Figure 11*). The most notable performance gaps between the two sectors are found in Representation, where apparel companies score 27.2 points out of 100 and food and agriculture companies average only 21.7 points, and Marketplace and community, where apparel companies score 23.9 points compared to food and agriculture companies that average a mere 12.7 points.

Much of apparel's lead stems from the differences in how these companies monitor their supply chains and support suppliers (*see Figure 12*). After decades of public scrutiny, the apparel sector has institutionalised factory audits and supplier codes of conduct, establishing formal governance and safety protocols on the factory floor. In contrast, cascading similar activities down to the farm level remains a significant challenge for food and agriculture companies. Insights from WBA's 2023 Food and Agriculture Benchmark show that the sector's reliance on a highly fragmented network of smallholder farmers and seasonal workers makes supply chain oversight inherently complex.[6] Consequently, corporate efforts to establish formal supplier codes of conduct, monitor compliance and implement corrective actions to address non-compliance and mitigate occupational health and safety risks at the base of the agricultural supply chain remain limited.

Interestingly, Health and well-being is the highest-scoring measurement area for both sectors and is the only area where food and agriculture companies slightly lead apparel companies, averaging 30.9 compared to 30.7 points. In contrast, Compensation and benefits is the lowest-scoring area for both sectors, with apparel companies scoring 16.5 points and food and agriculture companies scoring only 14.2 points. This indicates a shared, systemic gap in ensuring living wages and adequate carer support for supply chain workers.

The contrast between these highest- and lowest-scoring areas underscores a harsh reality: while companies may readily audit suppliers for basic workplace safety, they continue to fall short in supporting the changes needed to ensure the economic security of the vulnerable women making their clothes and growing their food. Companies must go beyond their direct operations and take actions to help ensure their suppliers transition workers to formal contracts, demonstrate progress towards paying living wages, and provide comprehensive care infrastructure – including paid parental leave, childcare and other family support.

FIGURE 12. PERCENTAGE OF COMPANIES MEETING ELEMENTS BY SECTOR AND VALUE CHAIN SEGMENT



When looking at performance by value chain segment, it becomes clearer where companies from each sector are directing their gender equality efforts, whether towards women in their own operations, women in their supply chains, or both.

The percentage of companies that meet the required elements for workplace and supply chain segments appears relatively similar, at 18% for food and agriculture companies and 19% for apparel companies. However, examining performance through a value chain lens uncovers a stark difference. While both sectors achieve identical results for their direct operations at 18%, the main discrepancy lies in how they address gender equality in their supply chains.

Apparel companies place a stronger focus on extending protections outward, meeting 24% of the supply chain elements on average – 6 percentage points greater than their workplace performance. This externally facing focus reflects over a decade of intense public scrutiny following disasters like the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse. Such tragedies catalysed the widespread adoption of robust multi-stakeholder initiatives and binding agreements, namely the Ethical Trading Initiative, the Fair Labor Association, the International Accord and the joint ILO-IFC Better Work programme. These institutional frameworks have compelled apparel brands to standardise gender-responsive protections and heavily monitor their localized factory networks where many women work.

Conversely, food and agriculture companies display a notable gap between gender equality efforts in their workplace and supply chains. For these companies, their workplace performance is 4 percentage points greater than their supply chain performance, meeting only 14% of the benchmark's supply chain elements. Since agricultural workers often fall outside standard employment relationships and are dispersed across vast, decentralized rural networks, extending and auditing corporate policies at the base of the supply chain is inherently complex. Consequently, food and agriculture companies tend to focus on improving conditions within their direct corporate control, leaving the most vulnerable women in the supply chain unprotected.

This divide highlights the fact that while corporate gender equality efforts may cover direct employees to some extent, companies consistently struggle to monitor their suppliers or support workers in the supply chains in the same way. It also emphasises the need to adapt robust supply chain accountability mechanisms to protect women throughout the global value chain, from factory floors to farms.

Conclusion and next steps

The findings from the 2026 Gender Benchmark and Gender Assessment show that progress on gender equality depends not only on companies making formal commitments and establishing policies, but also on translating these into measurable actions. This includes how companies handle violence and harassment incidents, provide equitable carer support and manage impacts of their climate transition.

However, gender equality will not advance through corporate action alone, especially given the headwinds that sustainability – and particularly diversity, equity and inclusion – are facing today. The evidence shows that progress happens when companies' responsibilities are clear and corporate accountability mechanisms are in place. Investors, policymakers and civil society have a key role to play. As demonstrated by the accelerated progress of companies engaged in our CIC, stewardship works. When stakeholders actively use their leverage to demand accountability, corporate performance visibly improves.

The task ahead is to scale good practice consistently across regions and global value chains. This means moving beyond isolated leadership cases and ensuring that effective practices such as survivor-centred remediation systems, globally applicable carer policies and gender-responsive transition planning become standard expectations across industries. Achieving this will require coordinated action so that companies, including those operating in high-risk sectors with complex supply chains, adopt and implement these practices systematically rather than sporadically.

For companies, this means moving from solely making commitments on gender equality, or requiring suppliers to do so, towards implementing programmes that benefit women more consistently. Violence and harassment policies must be backed by adequate remediation processes in the unfortunate instance that an incident occurs. Carer support must move towards globally applicable minimum standards rather than depend on insufficient local mandates. Climate transition strategies must incorporate meaningful engagement with women workers, sex-disaggregated involuntary turnover data and gender-responsive reskilling pathways.

For investors, there is a clear role in catalysing and sustaining corporate momentum to advance gender equality. Our data shows that coordinated investor engagement can help drive changes in corporate behaviour. This is particularly important in a context where companies are navigating multiple transitions and competing priorities, including those linked to climate action, biodiversity loss, AI and broader economic shifts. As companies face trade-offs in managing these pressures, investors play a critical role in ensuring that gender equality remains an integral part of corporate strategy and practice. If gender equality is deprioritised, companies face greater workforce, operational and reputational risks, while investors risk reinforcing inequalities that undermine long-term resilience.

Investors have powerful tools at their disposal to demand progress and broader systemic change. They can set time-bound targets for companies to close gender implementation gaps, such as requiring survivor-centred remediation systems within 12 months or globally applicable standards for carers by 2027. They can use their voting power to oppose director remuneration or board re-elections where gender commitments lack measurable outcomes and escalate engagement through shareholder resolutions on gender-responsive transition plans.

For policymakers, this means shaping an enabling environment that raises the floor for all companies, not just voluntary leaders. This is particularly important in areas such as unpaid care, social protections and labour standards where corporate action alone often remains fragmented. By strengthening regulation, improving enforcement and aligning gender objectives into national climate and industrial strategies, policymakers can elevate the baseline for corporate practice and ensure that new economic opportunities become more inclusive rather than reinforce existing inequalities.

For civil society organisations (CSOs), this means continuing to strengthen corporate accountability and ensuring workers are heard. To drive meaningful change, CSOs must continue to engage with affected stakeholders and advocate for their rights, guide companies on survivor-centred remediation processes and demand a just transition for women.

Next steps towards an integrated approach

Gender equality is central to workforce health, climate ambition and long-term economic resilience. The decisions made today will shape protection, participation and opportunity for future generations. The next phase requires collective action to ensure that commitments translate into durable systems that deliver measurable outcomes.

As WBA advances towards an integrated assessment framework linking social, climate and nature performance, we are committed to embedding a strong and practical gender lens across the framework. We invite ideas and partnerships on how to ensure that inclusive engagement processes, sex-disaggregated metrics, climate health considerations and equitable access to transition-related jobs are systematically integrated into the next phase of benchmarking.

All the data used in this report is publicly available to enable shared accountability and informed action. We invite stakeholders to explore the datasets via our WBA Data Explorer, conduct deeper sectoral or regional analyses, and apply the Gender Benchmark Methodology to develop national or thematic snapshots. We welcome collaboration to deepen our analysis, particularly on supply chains and informal workers, where sex-disaggregated disclosure remains limited.

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World Benchmarking Alliance

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