

# Gender Diversity and Inclusion for a Fair Business Environment



AN ASEAN NARRATIVE



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# GLOSSARY

This section provides a definition of key concepts in the context of this report:

**Business Integrity:** a set of principles, rules, practices, and policies to run companies based on transparency, accountability, strong ethical guidelines, and anti-corruption compliance.

**Corporate Governance:** according to OECD, it “involves a set of relationships between a company’s management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders. It provides the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined.”

**Gender Equality:** the equal rights, autonomy, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, and that the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female. The power dynamics between women and men based on equality.

**Gender Diversity:** having a fair representation/proportion of all genders in an environment.

**Gender Inclusion:** all individuals, regardless of whether they are born male or female, have a sense of belonging and empowerment, equal access to opportunities and equal participation in activities, including in the decision-making of an institution or community.

**Gender Equality at Workplace:** workplace culture and practices that value female and male workers equally with no gender-based discrimination, and that ensure safe and enabling environment for all individuals to perform their functions with equal pay and equal opportunities.

**Gender-Responsiveness:** strategic intent and outcome that influence and eliminate both symptoms and underlying causes of gender inequality, taking into consideration the existing unequal gender relations and power dynamics.

**Gender Social Norms:** socially embedded informal rules and beliefs that assign different values to individuals based on their sex, and define how women and men should behave, what women and men should be capable of, and what women and men should be entitled to, etc. in a given group or society.

**Gender Equal Leadership:** quality of leaders which regards and promotes the value of gender equality as fundamental to an organization or society they lead. Having gender parity in the leadership positions of an organization or society, or having an environment in which women as well as men can excel as leaders without being succumbed to gender bias, is integral to this concept.

# FOREWORD

Good corporate governance is the foundation of responsible and sustainable business, and a key feature of it is inclusion. A fair business environment will only be achieved when we succeed in removing the barriers that women and other marginalized groups face to access and thrive in the workplace, to progress in their careers and to reach decision-making levels in their organizations. Business cannot thrive until boards represent the diversity of society in which they work. A recent McKinsey study shows that companies which score higher on gender diversity in executive teams are 25 percent more likely to reach above-average profitability, in an upward trend from 2014 until today<sup>1</sup>.

The business sector is a key actor for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Companies are called to shift from a voluntary corporate social responsibility approach to a model where business integrity is at the core of their value system, in order to help them mitigate risks associated with corruption, discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Business integrity goes well beyond anti-corruption compliance, and touches upon diversity, inclusion and gender equality. Phenomena like discrimination, gender pay gap, exclusion from business opportunities, bullying, and sexual and other types of harassment are all examples of integrity flaws that not only hamper the internal environment of a company, but also impact the lives of their employees and the communities in which they live. Recognizing and addressing these problems is key for companies that want to lead in both diversity and inclusion and business integrity, ultimately contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNDP and the UK Prosperity Fund attach great importance to our collaboration through the project “Promoting a Fair Business Environment in ASEAN (FairBiz)” which is working to advance this agenda. We hope this advocacy report will trigger further action in ASEAN, building a regional narrative that offers an overview of the catalytic factors fostering gender equality, diversity and inclusion in business: social norms, the enabling environment and organizational policies.

The company insights and good practices presented in this advocacy report cover a wide range of measures to foster gender equality. We hope that they can spur a plethora of ideas for others to emulate, ultimately changing the world into a better place.



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<sup>1</sup> McKinsey, [Diversity wins: How inclusion matters](#), (2020)

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# 01 |

## INTRODUCTION



## BACKGROUND

Fostering gender equal leadership is one way to create a more efficient, equitable workplace. It contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In order to achieve equality in leadership roles, it is important to consider and influence social norms to create enabling and inclusive environment for women leaders, and to develop workplace practices that are inclusive for all genders, and promote diversity. This can be achieved both horizontally across departments and functions, and vertically as seniority of roles increase.<sup>2</sup>

The business case for gender diversity in the private sector has gained momentum in many parts of the world, and more recently in the Asia-Pacific region. There is compelling research demonstrating the linkages between gender diversity in senior leadership roles and board level with tangible benefits for companies. These range from gaining diversity in ideas, solutions and perspectives, to achieving higher financial performance and profits.

There is also growing evidence to establish the connection between gender-balanced representation in managerial roles and boards with stronger corporate governance and transparency in business operations. This narrative, however, still stems from large multinationals and often lacks evidence, stories or case studies, that can mirror a similar narrative for home-grown companies in Asia.

Gender inclusive policies bring more than just a positive economic impact to the community. A recent study shows gender diversity is the right choice for companies aiming for sustainability and business success. Firms scoring high on gender diversity in executive teams are 25 percent more likely to achieve above-average profitability than companies that do not prioritize this agenda.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, businesses which decide to pause their efforts to promote diversity and inclusion (D&I) during the current COVID-19 crisis may also be sacrificing their own resilience, limiting access to talent, diverse skills, leadership styles and perspectives.

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2 Gender diversity is the equitable or fair representation of people of different genders. This report will focus primarily on practices impacting women's representation and empowerment in the workplace.

3 McKinsey, [Diversity wins: How inclusion matters](#), (2020)

This advocacy report is part of an ongoing knowledge series<sup>4</sup> exploring the intersection of gender equality and fair business environment to

- enable equality of opportunity for women and men through fair and transparent processes;
- strengthen accountability for the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) agenda;
- promote diversity, especially gender diversity, in leadership as a feature of good corporate governance.

In the current context of “building back better” following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to put women’s and girls’ inclusion at the centre of each effort, as declared by the UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner at the UN General Assembly in September 2020.<sup>5</sup>

This report falls under the framework of the UNDP regional initiative ‘[Promoting a fair business environment in ASEAN \(2018-2021\)](#)’ (FairBiz), supported by the UK Government Prosperity Fund, ASEAN Economic Reform Programme. The project aims to nurture a culture of integrity and good governance for sustainable development, both in the public and the private sectors.

## WHAT DOES THE REPORT INCLUDE?

The report provides a snapshot of catalytic factors to foster gender equal leadership across three domains. Firstly, it explores how social norms shape gender roles and stereotypes that can limit women’s leadership prospects. Secondly, it identifies catalysts for an enabling environment, including laws and regulatory measures, and the role of coalitions and advocates. Finally, it highlights the role of companies and their organizational policies and practices in promoting gender equal leadership.

The report is the outcome of a research conducted across five of the ASEAN countries participating in the project: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The research was carried out in response to demands from stakeholders at the launch of the FairBiz Integrity Hub Diversity & Inclusion Platform, convened for the first time in Bangkok in August 2019, with the Regional Dialogue “[The future of leadership is gender equal](#)”.

The examples of measures illustrated build the case for a comprehensive set of practices to create and sustain results for achieving gender equal leadership in the workplace. The purpose is simple: to recognize the complex nature of addressing gender equality in leadership, and to

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4 The previous study conducted within the framework of FairBiz, [Good Corporate Governance and Gender Diversity in ASEAN](#) (UNDP, 2019) provided a baseline on the status of women representation in leadership positions in ASEAN companies.

5 UNDP, Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator message as part of the UNGA’s Global Week to Act4SDGs, video, 18 September 2020.

inspire companies and leaders by highlighting the options that can be taken to move closer towards this goal.

## HOW WAS THE REPORT DEVELOPED?

The study is based on synthesis and analysis of research and secondary data collected by national researchers on gender equality and the national context in the five ASEAN countries. It also documents some existing enabling public policies, programmes and positive measures from the business sector to foster gender equality in the workplace.

The report is further enhanced by interviews with more than twenty selected businesses which have shared their journeys on promoting gender-equal leadership.

Some of the questions addressed include: “How can companies in the region take active steps to show this leadership? How can they build their own resilience and sustainability by championing gender equality, diversity and inclusion? How can other actors from government and civil society nudge and support the companies’ journey?”

## WHO SHOULD READ THIS REPORT?

The study targets business leaders in ASEAN, especially from medium and large Asian/home-grown companies, as well as government representatives and civil society stakeholders who believe in creating a level playing field for women and men. It underscores the importance of leveraging businesses not only to achieve economic growth, but also to achieve the SDGs in the communities and countries where they operate.

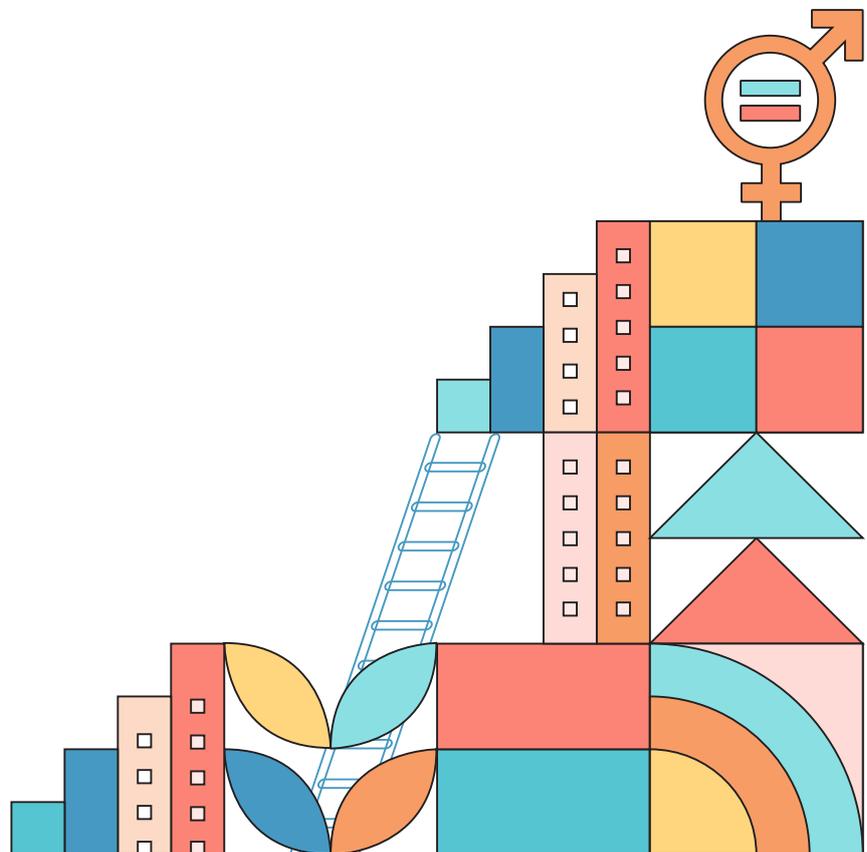
The report seeks to inform multi-stakeholder dialogues on how advancing D&I practices contributes to building strong corporate governance systems, and how business integrity should include fair and equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace.

This is an evolving discussion and we welcome your opinions, stories and examples.

Find out more on our [website](#) or send us an [email](#) to share your company’s insights.

# 02 |

## BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES - THREE DOMAINS OF EXPLORATION

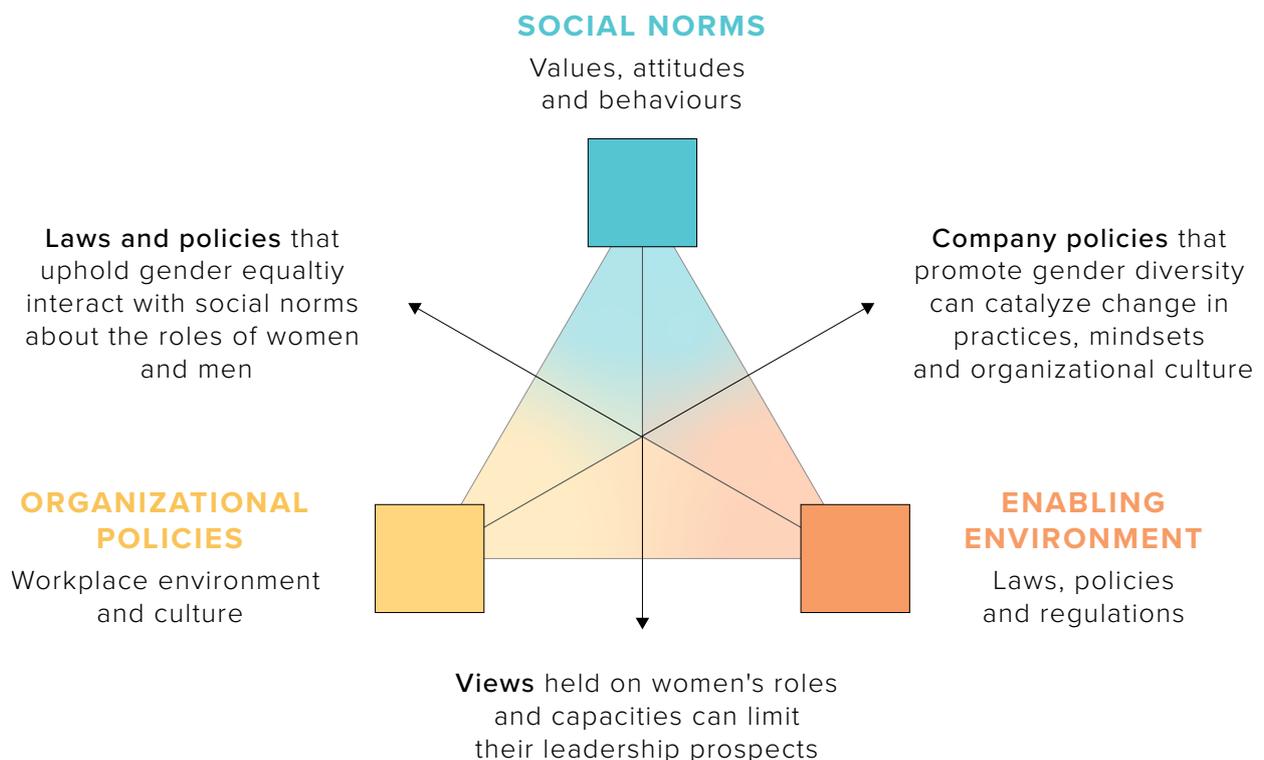


Our country level data and the collection of practices across private sector organizations reveal that the complete picture of the challenges and opportunities for increasing diversity, enhancing inclusion and creating greater gender equal leadership in companies requires a comprehensive approach.

To this end, the report approaches this issue through a **three-domain framework**, examining some of the barriers limiting women from attaining leadership roles in the business sector, and exploring where opportunities can be leveraged for advancing this agenda.

The **first domain looks at social norms**, which often dictate gender roles and can limit women’s opportunities, access and prospects. The **second domain is the enabling environment**, which consists of laws and policies providing the normative basis for gender equality, as well as societal movements and thought leadership, to create the necessary ecosystem for women to access leadership roles. And the **third domain consists of organizational practices** (including company policies and measures) and **workplace culture** where women assume leadership roles. These organizational practices need to create an environment that is safe and inclusive, providing equal access and opportunities for women and men. All three domains are independently critical but also interdependent on each other, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: The Three-Domain Framework**



## 2.1 SOCIAL NORMS

Gender disparities are a persistent form of inequality across social, economic and political life, and they manifest themselves in the labour market. Beyond what is visible, measurable and tangible, women and girls face invisible discrimination and unaccounted for burdens due to their gender. Thus, analyzing social norms is central to understanding gender dynamics, and to identifying and tackling the negative attitudes and associated behaviours hindering women's leadership potential.

### 2.1.1 Social norms and gender roles: intersections between home and work

Research by the McKinsey Global Institute, presented in the report *The Power of Parity*, demonstrates that cultural attitudes towards women in society also affect their equality at work, and underlines their unpaid roles as homemakers and carers. Norms influence the expectations of acceptable masculine and feminine behaviours. They also affect choices, freedoms and capabilities of individuals. This has an impact on the roles and functions, and the types of occupations and departments where women may be found, as well as their opportunities to take on leadership roles.

Broad societal perceptions about gender stereotypes are mirrored within organizations, where a traditional, male-centric leadership often continues to dominate the corporate world. Global surveys reveal that:

- Close to 40 percent of women felt their communication and leadership styles were incompatible with the prevailing approaches in their companies' top management.<sup>6</sup>
- While most women and men agree that women can lead as effectively as men, the men had reservations when asked if they were "strongly convinced" of women being equally effective leaders.<sup>7</sup>
- More than 40 percent of the women and men interviewed believe men make better business executives than women.<sup>8</sup>
- Globally, close to 50 percent of men believe they have the right to a job over women.<sup>9</sup>

The five ASEAN countries featured in this report also demonstrate similar trends. Cultural and traditional perspectives continue to segregate gender roles and reinforce notions of the man being the family breadwinner and the woman as the family caretaker.

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6 McKinsey, *Women Matter 2013. Gender diversity in management: Moving corporate culture, moving boundaries* (2013).

7 Ibid.

8 UNDP, *Tackling social norms. A game changer for gender inequalities. 2020 Human Development Perspectives* (2020).

9 Ibid.

**Vietnamese** women are expected to ‘work like men’ while taking care of their household duties, thereby increasing the opportunity gap between women and men.<sup>10</sup> Women face the challenge of balancing work and home responsibilities as well as multiple stereotypes about their business capabilities.<sup>11</sup> Views about women having limited appetite for risk, lower levels of financial astuteness and their primary responsibility being to care for the household, reinforce norms and attitudes that can limit their prospects to take on leadership roles in Viet Nam.<sup>12</sup>

Watch videos from the [#HowAbnormal](#) campaign by UNDP and UNFPA, which challenges negative gender stereotypes, brings in different perspectives, and promotes equality in the workplace, home and public spaces.

Cultural norms are a key influence shaping gender representation in **Thailand**. These norms or stereotypes of women and men are consistently reproduced through public media such as TV soap operas, news, films and advertising,<sup>13</sup> playing a role in influencing and perpetuating similar stereotypes at the workplace.<sup>14</sup>

For **the Philippines**, despite ranking high in gender equality indicators such as economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment and educational attainment, the cultural and traditional perspectives continue to segregate and reinforce gender roles.<sup>15</sup> Women are traditionally dubbed as the *Ilaw ng Tahanan* (Light of the Home) and are expected to stay in and take care of the house, while men are dubbed as *Haligi ng Tahanan* (Pillar of the Home) and are expected to work to financially provide for the family.<sup>16</sup> These gender stereotypes are structured in both school and the home, leading children to grow up with preconceived ideas about their roles and choices.

Such segregation also plays out in professional decisions and is evidenced by the higher hiring rate for women in manufacturing and service industries, as opposed to more cognitive and competitive careers.<sup>17</sup> A woman’s decision to leave work during her childbearing years cuts across educational attainment. This is supported by data indicating that majority of the labour force (60.9 percent) is occupied by men, even though the educational attainment is higher for women in postgraduate studies (58 percent).<sup>18</sup>

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10 Le Thi Quy, 2013. Gender equality in Viet Nam , Journal of Viet Nam Social Sciences, Vol. 2

11 VCCI, Business in Viet Nam: Reflections from women-owned enterprises (2019).

12 IFC, *Women-owned enterprises in Viet Nam : Perspectives and Potential* (2017).

13 Martin, F., Jackson, P., McLelland, M., & Yue, A. (Eds.) *Asia Pacific Queer: Rethinking genders and sexualities*. (University of Illinois Press, 2010).

14 Pranee Liamputtong, *Contemporary Socio-Cultural and Political Perspectives in Thailand*. (Springer, 2014).

15 Prieler, M. and Centeno, D., “*Gender Representation in Philippine Television Advertisements*”, *Sex Roles*, 69 (July 2013).

16 Inquirer Pop!, “[#inFAIRness: Calling for equality where there is none](#)”, 27 March 2019.

17 The Philippines, National Economic Development Authority, “[New NEDA Study identifies reasons behind Filipino Women’s Low Labor Participation Rate](#)” 2 October 2019.

18 Ibid.

In **Malaysia**, childcare remains a significant challenge, often preventing parents, particularly mothers, from participating in the labour force. In 2018, among the population outside of the work force, 2.9 million or 60.2 percent of women cited housework family responsibilities as the main reason for not seeking work, compared with only 81,000 or 3.6 percent of men.<sup>19</sup>

With high levels of tertiary education, women join the workforce but leave to fulfil the expected role of being mothers, caregivers and homemakers, often finding it difficult to return to the job market.

**Indonesian** women are still caught in a battle against the traditional gendered assumptions about the role of women and men in the public and private spheres. They are constantly confronted with unfair scrutiny, contradictory expectations, and restrictions, which their male counterparts are rarely subjected to.

Despite the growing awareness of the importance of women's roles in many sectors, there are ongoing points of contention, in particular Article 31 of Law No 1/1974 on Marriage, which defines the husband as the head of the family and the wife as the mother of the household. This legal definition has led to unfair practices in the workplace, whereby men act as legal breadwinners for the family, receiving more benefits (for instance health insurance or education subsidies for children) compared to their female counterparts.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.1.2 External factors affecting progress on gender equality

Social norms are a long-term play. It requires concerted efforts, advocacy and positive changes in laws, policies and practices to shift mindsets about the roles and capabilities of women and men. While all five countries are making progress, ongoing external forces can threaten these gains. For instance, there has been a growth in radical factions in some countries, which use religious foundations to limit women's participation in the public sphere.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020, an externality experienced by all countries, has brought additional burdens and intensified women's unpaid domestic and care duties, further limiting their participation in the workforce. While COVID-19 has affected everyone, recent assessments and research confirm that women and girls face disproportionate economic, health and social risks owing to deeply entrenched inequalities, social norms and unequal power relations.

As women take a bigger share of the responsibility in caring for the family, they typically earn less, save less and have less secure jobs. A recent global report indicated that women's employment is 19 percent more at risk than that of men.<sup>21</sup> Understanding the gender-differentiated impacts of the COVID-19

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19 Malaysia, Department of Statistics Malaysia, "[Labour Force Survey Report, Malaysia, 2018](#)", 30 April 2019.

20 Michele Ford, [Indonesia Country Context Paper](#) (Investing in Women, 2018).

21 UNDP, "[COVID-19 will widen poverty gap between women and men, new UN Women and UNDP data shows](#)", 2 September 2020.

crisis is critical to reducing vulnerabilities, inequalities and to ensuring a sustainable and fair recovery process.<sup>22</sup>

An assessment of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in **Viet Nam** showed a significant gender-differentiated impact exacerbated the vulnerability of female-headed households of informal workers and ethnic minorities. This was reflected in their slow rates of recovery and signals a risk of being left behind.<sup>23</sup> In addition, highly feminized sectors like retail, services, hospitality and textile manufacturing continue to face a decline in global demand.

**Across all five countries**, women have been economically impacted by the immediate loss of employment, reduction in working hours or pay cuts.<sup>24</sup> The pandemic has also created financial uncertainties for companies, with many of them opting to place the agenda of women's leadership and D&I on the periphery, creating longer-term negative consequences.

### 2.1.3 Patterns of female representation in leadership

According to the *Human Development Perspectives Report 2020*, women are catching up in basic areas of development, almost reaching parity in average primary enrolment, reducing the global maternal mortality ratio by 45 percent since 1990. Legal barriers to gender equality have been removed in many countries – women can vote and be elected, and they can increasingly participate in the economy without formal restrictions.

However, progress has been uneven as women move beyond basic emancipation to more enhanced empowerment, including leadership and greater responsibilities. For example, while gender disparity in education is reducing, women continue to find their access to positions of power blocked unfairly. This dynamic tends to perpetuate the unequal distribution of power.<sup>25</sup>

A similar empowerment gradient appears in companies, as demonstrated through the gender leadership gap in S&P 500 companies. It shows the overall number of women employees is steadily increasing, but only 5.8 percent of CEOs are female.<sup>26</sup> Hence, while women's overall employment in the business sector is increasing, even reaching parity in some sectors, they continue to remain underrepresented in more senior positions. This is often referred to as the glass ceiling.

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22 UNDP, *Gender Inequality and the COVID-19 Crisis: A Human Development Perspective* (13 July 2020).

23 UNICEF, *UN analysis on social impacts of COVID-19 and strategic policy recommendations for Viet Nam* (August 2020).

24 Marian Baird, *COVID-19 and Women's Economic Participation* (Investing in Women, May 2020).

25 UNDP, *Tackling social norms. A game changer for gender inequalities. 2020 Human Development Perspectives* (2020).

26 Catalyst, *Pyramid: Women in S&P 500 Companies* (15 January 2020).

A related pattern is demonstrated in the transition from the education system to the world of paid work, which is marked by factors associated with women’s reproductive functions and the perceptions around gendered roles of parenting and domestic work. While women have reached parity in primary education enrolment, this is not reflective of all sectors in tertiary education, as the share of female graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) continues to be lower than 15 percent for most countries.<sup>27</sup>

A recent International Finance Corporation (IFC) report identifies cultural expectations and unconscious bias as prominent region-specific inhibitors preventing female advancement at work in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in the selection of higher level positions and board roles.<sup>28</sup> The sourcing for board positions is still reliant on personal networks, often excluding qualified women from being identified, and unconscious bias adds another barrier for many women who may not be perceived as “board-ready”. Such bias also finds its roots within the talent pipeline, which runs from enrolment in tertiary education, to entry-level recruitment in companies, moving up the ladder to middle management and eventually to senior positions and the boardroom.

Table 1 illustrates how these issues manifest themselves in a diminishing gradient, wherein the number of women decreases along this pipeline.

**Table 1: Women’s representation patterns**

Country	Female tertiary students (% of total tertiary students)	Female workers age 30-39 (% of workers, age 30-39)	% of senior management positions held by women	% of board seats occupied by women	% of companies with only one woman on the board	% of companies with an equal number of women and men on the board
Indonesia	51.9	38.2	18.4	14.9	28	3
Malaysia	52.3	39.0	26.2	13.5	40	0.3
The Philippines	55.5	36.0	32.8	13.2	32	2
Thailand	57.7	46.9	29.7	20.4	29	1.5
Viet Nam	54.2	49.1	16.8	15.4	31	2
Average	54.32	40.64	24.78	15.48	32	1.76

Source: IFC, [Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN](#) (2019), based on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s analysis of 2017 data.

Based on different national statistics, it can be observed that all - regardless of their specific country patterns and varying female labour force participation rates – have markedly fewer women in senior management, and even fewer make it to the board level.

27 UNDP, “[Dashboard 2 Life-course gender gap](#)” (2020).

28 IFC, [Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN](#) (2019).

In **Viet Nam**, there is a relatively small gap between women's labour force participation (72.6 percent) and that of men (82.2 percent).<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, only 23.1 percent of enterprises have a female CEO and 16.3 percent have a female chairperson on the board.<sup>30</sup>

It is noteworthy that more women work in foreign-owned companies than men, while the opposite is true for national companies, whether state-owned or private local firms.<sup>31</sup>

A similar observation holds for **Thailand**, where the female labour force participation rate is 59.2 percent compared to 76.17 percent for men in 2019<sup>32</sup>; and while almost 30 percent of senior management positions are held by women, that figure drops to 20.4 percent when they reach the board level (see Table 1).

For **Indonesia**, the gender gap in labour force participation is also widening in addition to women already having relatively lower shares of senior positions compared to Thailand and Viet Nam. In 2019, the Central Statistics Agency reported that although there was a 0.12% growth in the workforce, the increase was higher for men (0.17%) than for women (0.06%). Thus, the female participation rate stood at 55.50 percent versus 83.18 percent for that of men in 2019.<sup>33</sup>

Although there is no data to show how the levels of unpaid care and domestic work are distributed between women and men, research reveals that Indonesian women spend more than twice as much time on childcare than men. Consequently, they have a higher chance of dropping out of the labour force after bearing children, compared to other countries in the region.<sup>34</sup>

In **Malaysia**, the female labour force participation rate was 56 percent at the end of 2019, compared to about 80 percent for men.<sup>35</sup> Although Table 1 shows that women make up 52.3 percent of total tertiary students, due to their domestic roles and responsibilities, this high participation rate is not reflected in the labour force, where men are still leading across all levels of educational attainment.<sup>36</sup>

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29 World Bank, "Labor force participation rate, male (% of male population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) – Vietnam", September 2020.

30 ILO, *Women in Business and Management: The business case for change* (2019).

31 Viet Nam, General Statistics Office, Statistical Yearbook of Viet Nam 2018.

32 Thailand, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, "Labour Force Participation Rate by Sex: 2010 – 2019" (National Statistical Office, n.d.).

33 Indonesia, Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, "[BPS: Working Population Rises by 2.29 million](#)", (Central Statistics Agency, 2019).

34 Michele Ford, *Indonesia Country Context Paper* (Investing in Women, 2018).

35 Malaysia, Department of Statistics Malaysia, "[Principal Statistics of Labour Force, Malaysia, Third Quarter \(Q3\) 2019](#)", 11 November 2019.

36 Malaysia, Department of Statistics Malaysia, "[Labour Force Survey Report, Malaysia, 2019](#)", 29 April 2020.

Finally, the **Philippines** is an interesting case where despite a lower female labour force participation rate at 48.5 percent in 2020 (versus 75.3 percent for men), the country still tops the region with respect to women in business leadership roles (32.8 percent) as shown in Table 1.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the same pattern of having fewer women at the top level appears when considering the figure of percentage of board seats held by women - it stands at only 13.2 percent – a clear indication of a glass ceiling.

## 2.1.4 Women’s leadership potential - a victim of unconscious bias

The data in Table 1 reveals that it is easier for gender equality to be achieved at some levels but becomes more difficult as the stakes rise. Unconscious gender bias, which is a manifestation of unintentional mental associations based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values and/or experience, can often be the invisible roadblock.

The unintentional associations can also feed into decision-making, leading to a quick assessment of an individual according to their gender and preconceived perceptions.<sup>38</sup> Unconscious gender bias can be a major factor affecting women’s prospects in the workplace, across many sectors and levels.

Stereotypical ideas about leadership qualities often lean towards traits traditionally perceived as masculine, making it difficult for women to climb up to senior positions and rise to C-suite/executive level or board level roles.

As per the *UNDP HDR Gender Social Norms Index*, 91 percent of men and 86 percent of women demonstrate at least one clear bias against gender equality. This holds true in all areas including politics, finance, education, intimate partner violence and women’s reproductive rights.<sup>39</sup> The index also noted that:

“Globally more than 40 percent (men and women) feel that men make better business executives—a social judgement, just for being a woman, an invisible barrier and an affront to fairness and real meritocracy.”<sup>40</sup>

Bias in the workplace has a direct impact on promoting gender diversity. The problem can start from the recruitment stage, with unconscious discrimination often playing a part in women not being perceived as suitable for certain types of roles causing occupational segregation. Similar bias may also appear during promotions as well as in selection for learning and growth opportunities, often limiting their ability to achieve professional gains at the same pace as their male counterparts.<sup>41</sup>

37 The Philippines, Philippine Statistics Authority, “[Employment Situation in July 2020](#)”, 3 September 2020.

38 ILO, *[Breaking barriers: Unconscious gender bias in the workplace](#)* (31 August 2017).

39 UNDP, *[Tackling social norms. A game changer for gender inequalities. 2020 Human Development Perspectives](#)* (2020).

40 Ibid.

41 ILO, *[A quantum leap for gender equality: for a better future of work for all](#)* (7 March 2019).

Studies focused on Asia have found that women in the workforce are often perceived to be empathetic and possessing maternal qualities, which are deemed less suitable for top executive positions than the aggressive, confident leadership styles more often associated with men.<sup>42</sup>

While unconscious bias is shaped by and manifests across several facets and aspects of our society, from education and the family to the media, it is important to recognize how it can play out in the workplace.

By recognizing social norms as a catalyst for diversity and inclusion, and understanding how the prevailing norms and perceptions influence women's career prospects and inclusion, we can then tackle them. The following sections will also explore how they can be addressed through laws and policies, as well as inclusive organizational practices, to create an enabling environment for women.

## 2.2 ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Government measures, regulations and policies, as well as social movements and the advocacy of non-governmental groups to reshape social norms and promote women's leadership in the private sector and beyond, all constitute towards an enabling environment where gender equality in the workplace can be achieved. Evidence clearly points to a positive link between economic growth and a rise in GDP for countries and societies that invest in increasing opportunities for women in the labour market.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.2.1 Gender equality laws and policies: a strong foundation for the Diversity & Inclusion agenda

Across all five countries, legal frameworks and government policies promoting gender equality in general are a prerequisite for workplace equality, and for promoting women in private sector leadership positions. Government policies promoting gender diversity in business leadership also improve the social conditions required for gender equality, and vice versa.

Addressing government policies which condition women's full and equal participation (directly or indirectly) in education, work and other aspects of society, could be a catalyst for improving gender diversity in the workforce and in private sector leadership roles, even more so than setting quotas.<sup>44</sup>

While all five countries have some policies and laws in place providing the normative framework for equality between women and men, their implementation and compliance remains a challenge. The Asia-Pacific Beijing+25 review outcome recognized this implementation gap as a continuing barrier to gender equality.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Willis Towers Watson, *Women leadership in Asia Pacific* (19 September 2016).

43 ILO, *Women in Business and Management: The business case for change* (22 May 2019).

44 Meijun Qian, *Women's Leadership and Corporate Performance* (ADB, January 2016).

45 Report of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review, Bangkok 27-29 November 2019 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2898).

The following is an overview of government policies and initiatives directly connected with achieving gender equality and diversity in the workplace.

In **Viet Nam**, equality of rights between men and women are guaranteed by the Constitution under Articles 26 and 36, and Article 12 of the Law on Gender Equality which regulates gender equality in economic areas, implying that men and women should be equal in establishing enterprises, doing business, accessing capital and information, and in opportunities in the labour market and labour resources. In fact, enterprises that employ more women are incentivized through tax breaks.<sup>46</sup> Female participation has increased in the professional workforce and we find that in the manufacturing sector, which is by far the largest industry employing 48.81 percent of the total population; 63.40 percent are women.<sup>47</sup>

In **Indonesia**, as per the Law No 13/2003 on Manpower, Article 82 regulates the mechanism for maternity leave, and also includes leave entitlement for female workers who have miscarriages. Additionally, Article 83 permits female workers to breastfeed children during their working hours. Further, a new Omnibus Law on job creation was passed in 2020. Going forward, the implementation of safeguards for gender equality and inclusion in the workplace will be ever more critical.

**Malaysia** stands out with respect to the various policies and initiatives it has put in place to promote women's economic participation and engagement in the private sector. The ones most relevant with respect to the workplace are enshrined in the Employment (Amendment) Act 2012. It introduced several provisions related to sexual harassment and provides protection by making it an offence to terminate women's contracts during maternity leave.

The government has established deliberate measures to promote gender equality practices, as well as to increase gender diversity targets in the private sector.

- To encourage women to return to the job market, TalentCorp, an agency under the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), has been hosting Career Comeback Programme workshops with companies since 2015.<sup>48</sup> The government also initiated a Career Comeback Tax Exemption 2019, to encourage women to return to work by providing an individual income tax exemption for a year.<sup>49</sup>
- The Human Resources Development Fund, under the MOHR, has a Housewives Enhancement And Reactivate Talent Scheme (HEARTS) to train educated homemakers in specialized fields

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46 Viet Nam, Ministry of Finance, Circular 78/2014/TT-BTC dated 18 June 2016 on guiding implementation Decree No. 218/2013/ND-CP of Ministry of Finance dated on 26 December 2013 on regulating and specifying Law on Profit Tax.

47 Viet Nam, General Statistics Office, Statistical Yearbook of Viet Nam 2018.

48 TalentCorp, "[Career Comeback Programme](#)" (n.d.).

49 TalentCorp, "[Career Comeback Tax Exemption](#)" (n.d.).

enabling them to transition from the latent workforce with options to work from home or under flexible working arrangements.<sup>50</sup>

- The Empowering Women in Cyber Risk Management programme is another a cross-ministerial initiative to bring women back to fill mid-tier positions and promote workforce diversity in the cybersecurity sector, tapping into diverse ideas and innovative thinking.<sup>51</sup>

**The Philippines** government through the Republic Act No. 9710, laid the foundation for the Magna Carta for Women, approved in August 2009. This includes provisions for businesses to promote gender equality in the workplace. Specific policies aiming to empower women workers include the 105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law, with an option to extend for an additional 30 days without pay, and granting an additional 15 days for single mothers. It also provides new mothers with the option to breastfeed during work hours, however it is not clear whether all companies provide childcare support and/or specific breastfeeding rooms to enable them to avail of this law.

Further, the Telecommuting Act institutionalizes telecommuting as an alternative arrangement for employees in the private sector. This has been useful for women as an option to engage in paid employment through flexible working arrangements. Another innovation called MyFirstJob, later renamed to JobStart Philippines, within the Department of Labour and Employment, assists young women in work placement, recognizing that women entering the job market can have specific and additional challenges in securing their first position<sup>52</sup>.

**Thailand's** Labour Rights Protection Act (No 7) 2019 aims to improve the rights of women, specifically through two articles promoting gender equality and preventing discrimination on the grounds of sex and gender. Section 41 states that a pregnant female employee is entitled to maternity leave of 98 days for each pregnancy. Article 53 requires an employer to fix equal wages, overtime pay, holiday pay and holiday overtime pay for an employee, notwithstanding their gender.

Thailand also developed its First National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (2019–2022),<sup>53</sup> encouraging the business sector to also take action on gender equality in the workforce. This includes ending discrimination and gender bias in employment practices, ensuring mechanisms to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence, and guaranteeing that gender dimensions of any resettlement issues are considered.

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50 Malaysia, Ministry of Human Resources, "[Housewives Enhancement And Reactivate Talent Scheme \(HEARTS\)](#)", presentation, 2019.

51 Digital News Asia, "[Career Comeback Programme for Women in Cyber Risk Management](#)", Digital News Asia, 21 June 2019.

52 ADB, [Social Protection Brief. Reducing Youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training through JobStart Philippines](#), ADB Briefs No. 87, (ADB, January 2018).

53 UNDP, [Thailand's 1st National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNDP, 22 January 2020)

## 2.2.2 Parental leave policies shaping a new narrative of shared domestic responsibility

Stark differences between maternity and paternity leave policies are particularly problematic across ASEAN, with most countries not yet embracing paternity or shared parental leave concepts. Existing legislation across the five countries confirms that men have limited access to paternity leave, with Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam offering fewer than three weeks of government-mandated paid paternity leave in the private sector. At the same time, all of the countries offer female workers at least 60 days of paid maternity leave.

**Table 2: Maternity and paternity leave policies for the business sector**

Country	Maternity leave	Paternity leave
Indonesia	3 months	Less than 3 weeks
Malaysia	60 days	No paid leave
Philippines	6 weeks	Less than 3 weeks
Thailand	90 days	No paid leave
Viet Nam	2-6 months	Less than 3 weeks

Source: UN Gender Stats 2018<sup>54</sup> and World Policy Centre (2016)<sup>55 56</sup>.

**Viet Nam** offers paid maternity leave of up to six months (with a minimum of two months) along with other protections for women during pregnancy. Laws also allow mothers to take leave to care for sick children at reduced pay rates. Provisions for health, unemployment, and pension are funded through mandatory social security contributions.<sup>57</sup>

According to a research across nine provinces, women spent 314 minutes and men spent 190 minutes each day on unpaid care and domestic work, and there was no major difference in time used among different groups of women with varying levels of education and marital status. This demonstrates again that the burden of household work, especially unpaid care work, continues to be shouldered by women.<sup>58</sup>

Several studies conducted in **Malaysia** also suggest childcare issues are a major contributor for women opting out of the labour force. This is in line with findings from the 2014 Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS-5), that 32.4 percent of married women between the ages of 15 and 59 cited childcare as the main reason for leaving the workforce.<sup>59</sup>

54 United Nations, Statistics Division, "[Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#)", 2018.

55 World Policy Centre, "[Is paid leave available for mothers of infants?](#)", 2016.

56 World Policy Centre, "[Is paid leave available for fathers of infants?](#)", 2016.

57 ADB, [Boosting Gender Equality Through ADB Trade Finance Partnerships](#), May 2018.

58 ActionAid, [Policy Brief – Unpaid Care Work: Make a House becomes a Home](#), 1 September 2016.

59 Malaysia, National Population and Family Development Board, [Report on Key Findings: Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey \[MPFS-5\] 2014](#), 2016.

Currently, Malaysian fathers employed in the public sector are entitled to seven days of paid paternity leave, but the same has not been reflected in the private sector. While Malaysia is still debating the introduction of several paternity leave days for all sectors (between two to seven days), it was announced during the tabling of Budget 2020 that the government intends to review the Employment Act 1955, which would increase maternity leave from 60 days to 90 days, effective from 2021.<sup>60</sup>

While countries may have a regulation that stipulates female workers' right to maternity leave and/or male workers' right to paternity leave, challenges remain for its implementation. To ensure all employers comply with the regulation, the role of various government agencies responsible for realizing women's equal rights is ever more critical.

The absence of strong paternity and shared parental leave policies highlights an opportunity for governments in the region to establish legislation providing parental leave for both women and men. This would signal that responsibility for childcare is shared between parents, rather than being an exclusively female responsibility.

### 2.2.3 Corporate governance standards and gender diversity at the board level

As discussed in chapter 2.1.3, the trend of women at the board level remains low across the five countries, with Thailand the country with highest representation of women at board level (20 percent), followed by Viet Nam and Indonesia at around the 15 percent mark. There are several reasons for this trend, ranging from cultural biases and social norms stereotyping women's leadership capacities, to the fact that the 'business case' for more women on boards is still a relatively nascent discourse in Asia.

According to a study in **Malaysia**, women's participation in top management has a positive impact on the organization's performance in terms of leadership styles, financial management, and various other aspects.<sup>61</sup> Another study found that companies with a higher proportion of female board directors had a positive impact on the organization's performance, suggesting a strong business case for increasing the number of women board directors.<sup>62</sup> A positive association between gender diversity and return on assets has also been demonstrated across Malaysian publicly listed companies.<sup>63</sup>

These studies align with the *Malaysian Corporate Governance Blueprint 2011* which calls to have 30% women in boards by 2016. This aspirational goal was

60 Nazihah Muhamad Noor, "[Maternity Leave in Malaysia: The March to 90 Days](#)" (Kuala Lumpur, Khazanah Research Institute, 2019).

61 Khadri, M., & Subramaniam, G., "[Women's intention to enter top management in Malaysia: A closer look at the "glass ceiling" phenomenon](#)", Proceedings of the 4th International Seminar on Entrepreneurship and Business (ISEB 2015), Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 2015.

62 Nurwati A. Ahmad-Zaluki, "[The pre-and post-IPOs gender composition of board of directors in Malaysia](#)", Gender in Management: An International Journal, Vol. 27, No. 7 (September 2012), pp. 449–462.

63 Julizaerma, M. K., & Sori, Z. M. "[Gender diversity in the boardroom and firm performance of Malaysian public listed companies](#)" *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 65 (December 2012), pp. 1077–1085.

not met by 2016, however a slight increase was observed among the top 100 listed companies, from 17% women in board seats in 2015 to 19.2% in 2017.<sup>64</sup>

The Corporate Governance Strategic Priorities 2017-2020, announced by the Securities Commission Malaysia, still include the target of having 30% women on boards of listed companies, together with having no all-male boards in the top 100 listed companies and increasing the percentage of women in senior management positions as they form a vital pipeline to the board.<sup>65</sup>

**The Philippines** Securities and Exchange Commission in its revised code of corporate governance, which came into effect in January 2017, recommends that listed firms should establish policies on board diversity, as well as increase the number of female directors, including female independent directors.<sup>66</sup> The code promotes the case that gender diverse boards contribute to less groupthink and more efficient and diverse decision-making skills. While the Philippines code has not set a target (compared to Malaysia), the existence of this code is likely to create greater awareness among companies to work towards achieving gender diversity in their board structures.

In March 2020, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by the **Thai** government, private sector and academic officials on “promoting equality and eliminating unfair gender discrimination.”<sup>67</sup> The agreement, signed by 24 organizations, includes removing gender bias from recruitment and job application processes, as well as ensuring gender diversity in the selection of committees. It also guarantees prevention and grievance mechanisms in response to sexual harassment in the workplace.

Clearly, there are several measures countries can take to promote gender diversity as part of the corporate governance agenda, from making corporate governance recommendations (the Philippines and Thailand); supporting official targets for board diversity (Malaysia); to mandating equal remuneration for females and males for work of equal value (Viet Nam and the Philippines).<sup>68</sup>

As corporate governance standards evolve in ASEAN, there is an opportunity for countries to share and learn from each other’s experiences, and to take positive actions on gender-responsive policies towards board nominations and make specific recommendations on board diversity. Further investments should also be made in generating regional and country-specific data to continue building the business case for gender diversity in senior roles and at the board level, as driving forces for sustainable practices and integrity.

[Find out more about the FairBiz Diversity & Inclusion Platform for companies and governments that are willing to support gender inclusion to promote business integrity, build resilience and sustainability.](#)

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64 Securities Commission Malaysia, *Corporate Governance Strategic Priorities 2017-2020*, September 2018.

65 Ibid.

66 IFC, *Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN* (2019).

67 “จรินทร์ หน้า 24 องค์กร ‘ไม่เลือกปฏิบัติทางเพศ’ ปตท.-ซีพี-ตลาดหลักทรัพย์ร่วมด้วย”, Matichon Online (Bangkok), 2 March 2020.

68 IFC, *Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN* (2019).

## 2.2.4 Business coalitions and gender equality advocates are powerful agents of change

Women's civil society movements and groups have always been a critical part of advancing gender equality agenda. The same advocacy is also critical and lends itself to advancing gender diversity in boards and at senior leadership levels in the private sector across the five countries. Some of the leading initiatives and organizations advancing this agenda are mentioned in the following section.

### Malaysia

- **LeadWomen** provides a platform for women to grow and develop as leaders and role models. It was established in 2011, the same year that the Malaysian government announced its 30 percent target for women on boards. LeadWomen runs a signature Women Directors Programme which equips women with the technical and soft skills needed to join and succeed on a board. It brings together potential female candidates and corporations, facilitating the placement of women in senior roles and board positions.
- **The 30% Club**, which started in the United Kingdom, has set up a chapter in Malaysia to advocate for companies to set a voluntary target of 30 percent board gender diversity. The Malaysian branch connects senior women decision-makers who play an important role in promoting board diversity, provides networking opportunities and advocates in favour of equal opportunities.
- **Lean In Malaysia** focuses on career comeback programmes for women through a nine-week programme designed to equip women with the tools, support systems and confidence to pursue their career aspirations and return to the workforce.
- **Women's Aid Organization (WAO)** is a non-governmental organisation working to promote women's participation in the workplace. Its most recent campaign was a call to action for at least seven days of paternity leave in the private sector.<sup>69</sup>

### Viet Nam

- The **Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)** plays an active role in promoting women in the business sector, through training, advocacy and generating research and evidence.
- **Vietnam Business Coalition for Women's Empowerment (VBCWE)** advocates for businesses to commit to gender equality within the workplace, with initiatives to reduce the gender pay gap and promote women's leadership roles in senior management and board functions.

<sup>69</sup> ["WAO: introduce 7 days of paternity leave"](#), The Star (Petaling Jaya), 16 June 2019.

## Indonesia

- **The Indonesian Business Coalition for Women’s Empowerment (IBCWE)** is a business coalition consisting of major private companies promoting gender equality in the workplace to commit and contribute to women’s economic empowerment. The coalition members also work towards [Economic Dividends for Gender Equality](#) (EDGE) Certification, the global institutional equality in the workplace.
- **Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia (APINDO)** or the Indonesian Employers Association, is known for voicing business interests, and recently its members have highlighted issues of gender diversity and increasing female participation in the business sector. They also worked with ILO in 2012 to release the Employer’s Guidelines Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace, in an attempt to create a safe work environment.<sup>70</sup>
- The **Alliance for Integrity**, a global business-driven, multi-stakeholder initiative to support businesses collectively fight corruption, promotes transparency and integrity in the economic system and offers solutions to strengthen the compliance capacities of companies and their supply chains. It launched the working group - **“Women in Integrity” (WIN)** in Indonesia<sup>71</sup>. WIN promotes women as pioneers and actors of integrity, and its capacity building initiatives focus on providing female entrepreneurs with the tools to excel in anti-corruption compliance and business integrity.<sup>72</sup>

## The Philippines

Most foreign chambers have their own gender committees conducting programmes to promote gender-sensitivity among their member companies. They also collaborate with one another to host meetings tackling issues related to gender equality in the workplace and promote gender inclusivity.

- The **Makati Business Club** is a business association promoting a number of these initiatives, from research to networking dialogues.
- The **Women’s Business Council** is an NGO that gathers various for-women business councils to promote networking and mentoring opportunities.

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70 ILO, “[International Women’s Day: ILO-APINDO to launch the Employers’ Guideline on Sexual Harassment at the Workplace](#)”, press release, 8 March 2012.

71 Alliance for Integrity, “[Women in integrity: Women as important actors in the fight against corruption](#)”, 30 September 2020.

72 Alliance for Integrity, “[Women in integrity: Resilience of women-owned SMEs in times of crisis](#)”, 2 June 2020.

## Thailand

- The **Federation of Business and Professional Women's Associations of Thailand** Under The Royal Patronage of H.M. The Queen, is a member of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International), providing a networking platform for professional and businesswomen.
- The **Women Workers Unity Group** is one of the oldest women's rights groups in Thailand, operating since 1993, to ensure female workers' rights are prioritized. The Group has been advocating with the Thai government to accept its recommended measures, including ensuring women's participation in any official labour committees and amending the Labour Protection Act by expanding maternity leave to 120 days, while allowing their spouses to take co-parenting leave for at least 15 days, with full salary payments.<sup>73</sup>

The range of organizations mentioned above, by no means an exhaustive list, plays an important role in providing networking and capacity support for women leaders in the private sector. In addition, they continue their advocacy role in ensuring positive measures and regulations are put in place to advance gender equality in the sector. This momentum is critical for creating an enabling environment and ecosystem that support women's leadership.

## 2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES: COMPANY POLICIES AND MEASURES

Several companies are taking multiple measures to create and nurture greater diversity, inclusion and gender equality in the workplace, helping to shape an ASEAN narrative of D&I. This report looks at seven dimensions as building blocks critical to promoting this agenda, and to creating a company culture that embraces women in leadership roles. Each of these dimensions is independently critical, while also being intrinsically linked and co-dependent.

The seven dimensions are women in leadership; gender-based pay gaps; gender-balance across roles and functions; work-life balance; inclusive and non-sexist language; zero tolerance of sexual harassment; and gender-responsive contingency planning (e.g. for unforeseen crises like COVID-19).

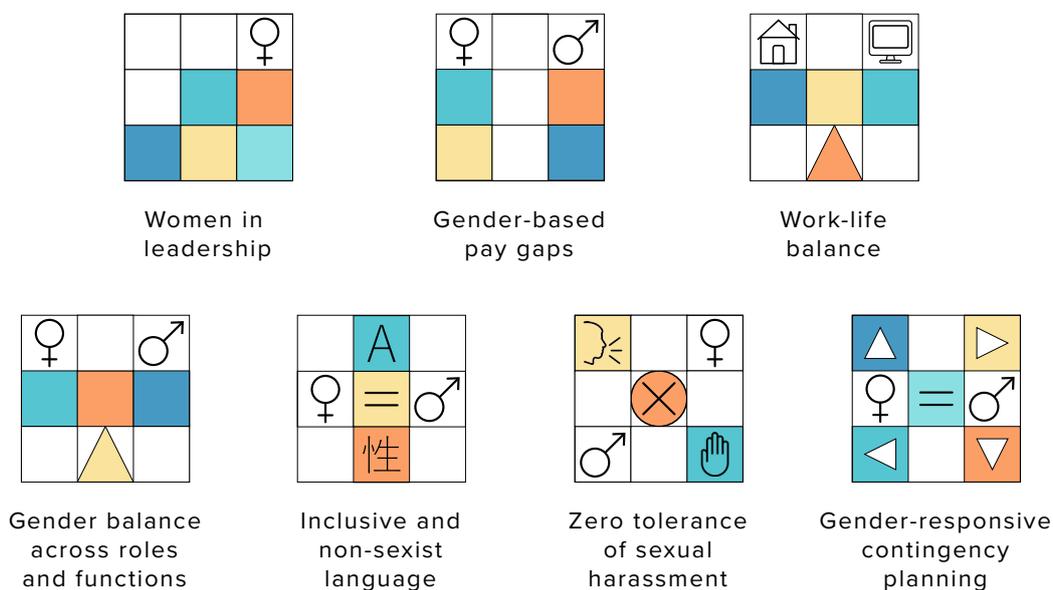
In order to create true gender parity and increase the number of women in leadership positions, there is a need to introduce initiatives at different levels; from developing a talent pipeline, to introducing fair measures to accommodate women's caregiving roles and professional ambitions, and creating a company culture that embraces and values diversity.

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73 Arom Foundation, “[วันสตรีสากล กลุ่มผู้หญิงยื่น ขอแก้รัฐธรรมนูญ พร้อมรับรองอนุสัญญาILO](#)”, 11 March 2020.

To inspire companies to take action - from simple, quick gains to comprehensive long-term initiatives - the report has selected a range of measures that companies across the five countries are undertaking,<sup>74</sup> and some simple tips on getting started on the gender equality agenda.

**Figure 2: Seven building blocks for promoting the D&I agenda**



### 2.3.1 Women in decision-making, senior management functions and at the board level

The latest IFC report on *Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN* establishes a clear connection between firms with more women on their boards and better financial performance. Analysis of data from 1,000 companies demonstrates that firms with over 30 percent of women on their board membership report an average Return on Assets (ROA) of 3.8 percent, compared to an ROA of 2.4 percent for companies with no female board members.<sup>75</sup>

Despite evidence to support a business case that rests on data from ASEAN, the percentage of women on boards continues to remain low in the region. This is in part due to existing gender bias, stereotypes and the lack of enabling policies discussed earlier in this report.

However, the good news is that individual companies can take the following actions to demonstrate leadership in order to overcome the barriers women face in taking up leadership roles.

- A first step is simply having an intent and being open to hire female board members.

<sup>74</sup> The list of measures of companies across the five countries is based on secondary research and interviews carried out by national consultants. The information about these measures was found on company websites and/or open source research carried out at the national level by think tanks.

<sup>75</sup> IFC, *Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN* (2019).

- Introduce a more formal and transparent selection process and widen the talent pool for top candidates, to move away from a company's dependence on the 'old boy networks'.
- Invest in creating a sustainable talent pipeline of women ready to assume senior leadership roles through training, mentorship, and sponsorship opportunities, as building a steady supply of quality talent in the region requires multiple positive actions early on.

For example, Unilever has worked on implementing its commitment on gender diversity in **Indonesia**, where 44.1 percent of its board of directors are women and 40.7 percent of the manager ranks are also occupied by women (2019). Its approach to achieving diversity focuses on creating inclusion through specific measures, including by increasing the representation of women in management roles, creating opportunities in the country and community for people with disabilities to access and join the workforce, and identifying and addressing issues of negative stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

In **Viet Nam**, the global consulting firm, Deloitte, has translated its commitment to D&I into nearly 60 percent of employees being female, with almost 40 percent holding senior leadership positions. Maritime Bank has set out an innovative plan to systematically measure and assess gender balance in recruitment, with the support of a new human resources information system. This will create greater transparency and accountability for processes in support of the D&I agenda, as gender will be an important indicator in recruitment, and the data will continue to inform the development of specific policies and actions.

**The Philippines** also boasts several model companies working to increase women's role in decision-making. For instance, Accenture, with the goal of having a gender-balanced workforce by 2025, has women in more than 50 percent of its leadership posts. Women comprise 48 percent of SGV & Co.'s leadership positions, and half of the leadership positions in Convergys are occupied by women. All three are [EDGE Certification](#) holders<sup>76</sup>, and offer measures such as a safe space for high-potential women in the company to openly discuss different issues and concerns to help them to learn, grow, and thrive. They also provide support through leadership courses and the creation of customized career plans for women.

Creating internal networks for women as a means to receive support and mentoring, and dialogue with peers and role models can go a long way in creating a sustainable talent pipeline of women who are capable of assuming senior leadership roles.

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<sup>76</sup> EDGE is a business certification for gender equality. Its methodology assesses representation, pay equity, effectiveness of policies and practices for ensuring equitable career growth, and the workplace culture's inclusiveness.

Across all five countries, several organizations are investing in women's networking opportunities. In **Indonesia**, all Coca Cola Amatil's female employees have been conferred with a special title, "female warriors". They are connected via an online platform to share experiences, motivate and seek peer and professional guidance. In 2019, to increase the number of women in the workforce and in leadership roles, the company initiated a comprehensive capacity development programme. The female employees/warriors are led by a champion, with several other champions working across divisions and operational units. While Citibank Indonesia has established the Indonesian Citi Women Council (IWC), founded by female employees to support personal and professional growth, including a mentoring programme with Citibank executives from Indonesia, Asia Pacific and the global office.

In **the Philippines**, Telus International Philippines has set up programmes called 'Spectrum' and 'Connection Women's Network', as resource groups providing members with support and connecting them with company leaders to learn how to promote D&I in the workplace.

Similar networks are operating in **Malaysian** companies, like Gamuda Berhad who started the Gamuda Women Empowerment Network (GWEN) and Shell Malaysia which runs the Shell Women's Action Network (SWAN). Both focus on career development and women's leadership, engagement and well-being. Malaysian branches of global companies like IBM and Intel have similar internal networks emphasizing the development of female talent in the technology space. Dell, with a similar approach stands out for establishing the Dell Malaysia Council, comprising of its senior leaders and has committed to a target of 30 percent or more female talent at key decision-making roles through support measures such as employee resource groups and mentoring. It has also put in place measures to address unconscious bias and issues related to privilege through awareness and training sessions.

Almost all companies include a policy of non-discrimination in hiring and promotions, and many also specify the same intent in their policies related to board diversity.

In **the Philippines**, for instance, Manila Water reported a detailed nomination procedure and election processes to ensure non-discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and age, etc. SM Investments Corporation also uses a Board Matrix as a file to track the composition of the board. The Board Diversity Policy of DMCI, a construction and real estate conglomerate in the Philippines, has set the participation of women on the board as one of its criteria for guiding the search, screening, and selection of directors.

Bursa Malaysia, an exchange holding company, joined the 2020 Bloomberg Gender Equality Index (GEI)<sup>77</sup>, and reported 50-50 representation on its board in line with the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (MCCG) and the national agenda.

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<sup>77</sup> It distinguishes companies committed to transparency in gender reporting and advancing women's equality. The reference index measures gender equality across five pillars: female leadership and talent pipeline, equal pay and gender pay parity, inclusive culture, sexual harassment policies, and pro-women brand.

Another Malaysian publicly listed company, Digi Telecommunications, has been promoting gender equality for several years. It maintains gender-balanced representation across the company, with women making up 43 percent of the board, and up to 45 percent in management positions.

In sum, the promotion of women in decision-making, senior management functions and at board level, requires a combination of interventions. These start at the recruitment stage and span across a range of human resource policies, to address different levels and functions within the structure of a company. Several simple measures can help firms take the first step towards incremental results in promoting women in more decision-making roles.



### Tips on how companies can support women in leadership

- **Recruitment:** Introduce written and documented processes for recruitment, formalize the process by eliminating informal hiring practices, provide gender training for management and human resource teams, use inclusive and gender-sensitive language in job descriptions, and ensure gender-balanced recruitment panels.
- **Retention:** Introduce a retention policy focusing on fair and accessible opportunities for male and female staff, conduct exit interviews to understand reasons for staff leaving, create feedback loops to report findings to management and inform on new measures and actions to improve retention.
- **Professional Development:** Promotion policies and professional development efforts can complement each other. Ensure companies have a fair, open and transparent process for promotions, possibly even outlined in a policy. Require managers to have regular discussions on performance and provide relevant feedback for growth and improvement. Ensure that managers and human resources have career development planning sessions with high potential female staff on a regular basis.
- **Internal networks:** Create internal women's networks for dialogue, peer-to-peer support and mentoring.
- **Organizational policy:** Consider setting targets (against a baseline) and timelines for increasing women in training, promotions, management positions. This will demonstrate a company's commitment to D&I while maintaining accountability and transparency.
- **Board members selection:** Introduce a formal process for the nomination and selection of board members. Look beyond the normal networks and connect with some of the advocacy groups in each respective country, as mentioned in Chapter 2.2.4. They can help gain access to a broader talent pool and connect with board-ready women.

### Driving the D&I agenda from the top down and the bottom up | Maybank, Malaysia

In 2009, Maybank undertook a process of introspection of its business strategy and infrastructure to grow its business in a competitive market. During this process, the bank recognized the need to re-evaluate and transform its people strategy, beginning with building a more diverse workforce. A decade later, the company is seeing positive impacts on its bottom line as well as its D&I agenda. With multiple policies in place, Maybank measures gender diversity across departments and levels of seniority at the management, top management and board of director level. It has been investing in creating a succession plan for women leaders, while providing training, learning and mentoring opportunities.

The D&I Agenda at Maybank is a collective effort, driven by the Human Resources department, and formalized and held accountable by the Board of Directors. Its performance on the D&I agenda is recorded

and monitored through a Group scorecard (with 10 percent of the scorecard specifically focused on D&I initiatives) including indicators on diversity, succession planning and identification of new opportunities through internal vacancies and placements. An annual review is conducted in the Human Resources department to monitor and update D&I indicators, if needed. This exercise is carried out as part of the bank's overall strategy, and involves executives as well as the strategy team.

Maybank has achieved 33 percent representation of women at the board level, and is also the first publicly-listed company in Malaysia to have a female chair. In addition, the bank has witnessed positive results from its well-designed succession planning. Women now make up 42 percent of mission-critical roles (roles identified as key to the operations of the bank), compared to 10 percent from 2008-2009.

### Women are a critical stakeholder - as customers, employees and as business leaders | SM Investments Corporation, the Philippines

SM Investments Corporation (SM) is a leading Philippine company invested in retail, banking, and property. The company was recently included in the 2020 Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index. In its 2018 sustainability report, SM reported that 66 percent of its workforce are women, occupying 59 percent of senior leadership positions in 2019, with two women on the Board of Directors. SM uses a matrix to ensure diversity on the Board, as this contributes to better decision-making, having more viewpoints and better ways of tackling challenges. The company celebrates high-achieving employees, and has set up the SM Women 60 where the firm highlighted women's contribution to its success as part of its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, showcasing women

who live out SM's values of sustainability, accountability, and innovation.

SM also considers women as important stakeholders for business, recognizing that they often spend on behalf of the household. The company invests in marketing and research to listen and respond to its female customer base. SM has focused efforts on gender equality through its corporate social responsibility, by supporting women scholars and entrepreneurs, and runs campaigns on breast cancer awareness, breastfeeding programmes and the installation of breastfeeding rooms in communities. The firm has partnered with the Philippines' Department of Health to build children's and birthing clinics.

## 2.3.2 Gender-based pay gaps

All countries reviewed in this report demonstrate gender-based pay gaps that disadvantage women.

Several factors can influence the existence of gender-based pay gaps, including occupational segregation, interruption due to childbirth, lack of salary transparency, etc.

For example, the marriage law in **Indonesia** places men as the breadwinner and women as homemakers, resulting in lower tax costs for male employees. Even companies that practice merit-based remuneration can find it difficult to narrow the pay gap between male and female workers who share the same rank and job responsibilities.

Given that the causes for the pay gap are complex, and often due to multiple reasons, companies can take an important initial step by recognizing the gap. Positive moves include measures to promote transparency and change the social norms, such as by disclosing salary gaps within the company. Introducing advanced family-friendly policies enabling women to balance personal and professional ambitions, and promoting men's share of home and care responsibilities can also help.

For instance, some companies have introduced specific measures, beyond a commitment to equal pay in their policies. Indo Phil Textile Mills, GT Capital Holdings, Inc. and TeaM Energy in the Philippines have policies in place that articulate their commitment to ensure male and female employees with the same job title are paid equally. XL Axiata in Indonesia applies the "3P" principle, by using position, person and performance, to provide equal remuneration for both male and female employees.<sup>78</sup> It also conducts remuneration surveys in similar industries to maintain competitiveness and fairness.



### Tips on how companies can avoid gender-based pay gap

- **Function-based remuneration:** Establish transparent and fair salary structures, according to the tasks and responsibilities of the functions and roles. A documented methodology classifying work positions and assigning a scale of remunerations would support this.
- **Market rate reference:** Introduce a policy of basing salaries on the market rate for a job rather than on an applicant's previous salary. This could reduce the chances of women being paid less than men for taking up the same job if they had taken a career break.
- **Transparency:** Disclose salary gap within the company, whether based on gender or varying functions at the same level of seniority.

<sup>78</sup> XL Axiata, [Driving Growth Delivering Excellence. 2019 Sustainability Report](#), 11 May 2020.

- **Benefits package:** Recognize the potential bias in legal provisions and design ways to ensure male and female employees receive equal benefits and compensation for equal work.
- **Other internal policies:** Shape the organizational culture and social norms that govern expectations around career performance (and hence pay), such as by implementing family-friendly policies to help balance personal and professional ambitions, as well as promoting men's involvement in care work at home.

## COMPANY INSIGHTS

### Women are leaders - helping to change perceptions | Magsaysay, the Philippines

Magsaysay Group of Companies (Magsaysay) in the Philippines operates across multiple industries, with its initial footprint in ship management and logistics. It now also covers workforce deployment and human resources, hospitality and tourism, education and training, oil and gas, healthcare, and specialized engineering and trade. Magsaysay is led by a female CEO, but there is broad acknowledgment that several of their business sectors are male-dominated and there is a need for better gender balance in some areas and functions.

More recently, the company has experienced positive shifts, with women entering traditionally male domains. It now has a woman leading the legal team and shipping operations. In the Magsaysay Maritime Academy, female cadets are encouraged and supported to rise to the rank of captain, a role traditionally occupied by men. The Academy has also introduced a clause in its procurement policy, earmarking a minimum percentage of procurement for women-owned businesses and green companies.

### 2.3.3 Gender balance across roles and functions

As discussed earlier, social norms and gendered roles play a big part in creating occupational segregation, mostly placing women in jobs that pay less and have fewer chances of management experience. According to an ILO review of recruitment practices in **Viet Nam**, one in five job postings included a gendered filter, of which 70 percent targeted men who were often more skilled in jobs related to engineering or information technology.<sup>79</sup>

Such practices in recruitment can create clusters for women and men in certain occupational spaces, with women often being predominant in office and support functions. This segregation can also prevent women from acquiring relevant management experience for leadership roles in companies. Increasing their presence in occupational areas that are traditionally male-dominated requires proactive and deliberate effort, as showcased by several companies.

<sup>79</sup> ILO, [Gender Equality in Recruitment and Promotion Practices in Viet Nam](#), Country Brief, 5 March 2015.

In **Indonesia**, the telecommunications company Telkomtelstra initiated a campaign called “Pledge for Parity” in 2016, with two simple but practical measures. Firstly, by ensuring that female candidates are always included when reviewing talent to fill open positions (both for internal and external recruitment processes); and secondly, by increasing women’s talent in areas where they remain underrepresented.

Acknowledging that lower numbers of women are engaged in the technology and telecommunications sector, Telkomtelstra has been hosting roadshows in universities, to recruit more young women into the workforce. The company has also been progressive in providing two-week paternity leave for new fathers.

Several other companies are also taking positive measures, like Johnson & Johnson Indonesia, where women are leading teams across departments and functions, as directors, business unit heads and in company unit functions. It also makes a targeted effort to increase women in the supply chain, through its supplier diversity programme.<sup>80</sup> Another demonstration of the company’s commitment is the introduction of multiple partnerships to increase the number of women in STEM, and the WiSTEM<sup>2</sup>D Scholarship Program (Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, Manufacturing and Design) which provides funding and guidance for women in STEM<sup>2</sup>D.

Another company targeting more women and girls in this area is General Electric which started a “Balance the Equation” drive to target 20,000 women in STEM roles throughout the company by 2020. To further this in Indonesia, General Electric provided a platform of recognition to five prominent Indonesian women in STEM fields to serve as role models and inspire younger women.

Other companies, such as the on-demand transport company Gojek supports an initiative called Generation Girl; Unilever Indonesia has a Women in Engineering Leadership Fellowship (WULF), and L’Oreal Indonesia is working with UNESCO to promote women in science.<sup>81</sup> All three companies aim to support more women to enrol STEM fields.

In traditionally male-dominated sectors, recognizing specific needs or concerns of women can be a good starting point to create an enabling workplace environment.

Chevron Indonesia recognizes that the oil and gas industry has a low track record for attracting female talent. With 12 percent of women in its workforce, the company has introduced several measures such as lactation rooms for new mothers and providing a ‘safety hijab’ which is fireproof and a gender-sensitive safety measure for female staff who wear a hijab.

As an integrated textile and garment company, PT Dan Liris in Indonesia has two major divisions: the textile division with a larger number of male

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80 Johnson & Johnson, “[Supplier Diversity](#)”, (n.d.).

81 UNESCO, “[L’Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Programme](#)”, (n.d.).

employees, and the garment division which is more female dominated. The likely genesis of this distribution is that girls graduate in vocational subjects, while more boys graduate in machine engineering and similar subjects, leading them to join the textile side of the business. In order to ensure opportunities for diversification across the divisions, the company has set up development programmes for all employees providing an opportunity to pursue different skills/knowledge that could be applicable in other divisions.

In **Malaysia**, Shell revised its Graduate Programme to become more gender-sensitive with the aim of attracting more female graduates and building the female talent pipeline in the oil and gas sector. Measures include appointing women leaders from the company as campus ambassadors, carrying out special initiatives to target female graduates, and running female-centric recruitment campaigns.

A Malaysian conglomerate, Sunway, has been able to keep D&I as a priority in the company because the agenda is driven by the top leadership, a strong advocate and a co-founding chair to the 30% Club Malaysian chapter. As a result, the Group has focused on achieving 30 percent female representation at the board level, as well as maintaining 50 percent of its female employees. Additionally, Sunway runs personal and leadership development programmes for employees across the Group, providing equal opportunities for empowerment and growth.

The innovation ecosystem is another space with gender differences, particularly in tech start-ups. The Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Centre (MaGIC) runs the Pre-Accelerator Bootcamp: Female Founders Edition, which aims to help women entrepreneurs validate their business ideas, develop a working prototype, and create a focused market strategy. The participants also receive mentorship and access to key industry players.<sup>82</sup>

While this report has shown some good examples of women in traditionally male-dominated areas of work, there is a need to ensure this trend continues to gain momentum. The business sector's role in achieving this is immense, from companies taking internal decisions to address gender-based occupational segregation, to industry-wide collaborations tackling sector-specific gender gaps.



### Tips on how companies can ensure balanced female representation across sectors/in traditionally male-dominated sectors

- **Recruitment outreach:** Target potential talent at career fairs and in universities by showcasing strong women leaders' testimonies, thus addressing unconscious bias and providing inspiration to a younger generation.

<sup>82</sup> Qishin Tariq, "[MaGIC launches bootcamp for women startup founders](#)", *The Star* (Petaling Jaya), 3 May 2018.

- **Gender champions:** Senior male managers who are gender champions and advocates should be given visible roles to promote women's engagement and leadership in traditionally male-dominated sectors and functions of work.
- **Sector narrative:** Create new narratives around women leadership, such as by showcasing women as leaders in sectors typically seen as male-dominated, and attracting young women into the talent pipeline through gender-sensitive and women-friendly campaigns and narratives of the industry.
- **Training:** Collaborate with other industry partners to create a strong talent pipeline of women who can join the workforce in male-dominated fields, such as by providing support for enrolment in STEM.
- **Gender-sensitive and safe space:** Provide a space for women employees to share their specific needs and priorities and create tailored measures to help more women transition into traditionally male-dominated areas, as well as creating physical spaces for women as needed, such as lactation room.

## COMPANY INSIGHTS

### Investing in a culture of inclusion | SGV & Co., the Philippines

SGV & Co. is the largest professional services firm in the Philippines providing assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. The company is a strong advocate of the D&I agenda evident in gender balance across the talent pipeline with women comprising 50 percent of SGV's leadership and 60 percent of the total workforce. The company believes it is fundamental to have women leaders in critical decision-making positions as they provide diverse, insightful and sustainable ideas. To this end, SGV has 65 male and 62 female partners, with eight women serving in key executive positions including Vice Chair and Deputy Managing Partner, General Counsel and Chief Financial Officer; and leading various service lines such as Talent, Learning and Development, Risk Management, Consulting and Financial Services.

The company's membership in national and international business coalitions has been helpful in driving its diversity agenda. The firm is a founding member of the Philippine Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (PBCWE), and achieved EDGE Certification in 2018. It is also part of an initiative called Male Champions for Change. SGV & Co believes that driving a culture of inclusion is important, and to foster a safe and inclusive working environment it has introduced a mandatory web-based learning course on non-discrimination. To deal with turnover of staff and ensure new employees are part of this broad vision of an inclusive workplace, company leaders always make it a point to talk about diversity at the management level and with their staff, and the company's D&I programme is well-communicated at every level of operations.

### 2.3.4 Policies to improve work-life balance

Many companies have begun to ‘walk the talk’ on the work-life balance. However, it is important to recognize that measures put in place to provide this equilibrium can often perpetuate gender stereotypes. Women are not the only ones who need to strike a work-life balance, because this can perpetuate the myth that they are less ambitious or that they should be solely responsible to manage the household and domestic responsibilities. Motherhood/maternity should not be a source of discrimination in employment, whether in accessing employment or in returning to the same or equivalent job after maternity leave. Many companies have adopted return to work programmes and other flexible arrangements aimed at working parents, especially women. Work-life balance policies should also attempt to encourage shared domestic and childcare roles between women and men.

While ASEAN countries still lag in their policies to provide paternity leave to alleviate parenting and household responsibilities from being solely women’s role, some companies, especially multi-nationals with local offices, are introducing measures to encourage shared parental and paternity leave.

In **Indonesia**, Unilever provides day-care support, lactation rooms and four months maternity leave, and three weeks of paternity leave. Johnson & Johnson offer a global parental leave benefit in 60 of its operating locations (including Malaysia and Indonesia) in order to improve its maternity, paternity and adoption provision. Johnson & Johnson Indonesia also provides three and a half months’ maternity and three months paternity leave. While in **Malaysia**, the company’s policy provides a maximum of eight weeks paid parental leave for fathers within one year from the child’s birth, going much beyond the government policy and measures in both countries. PwC Malaysia has introduced a comprehensive set of flexible work arrangement policies for parents and other staff including shorter work weeks and flexibility to work from home when the need arises.

Other measures include those at Celcom Axiata Berhad in Malaysia which implements various family-friendly initiatives to support employees, such as 75 days paid maternity leave, with an option extending to unpaid leave for up to 150 days (six months). It has allocated designated car parks for women ensuring easy access and safety for female employees and has an initiative called “Little Blue Planet” providing childcare support through a facility established close to the office. Sarawak Energy reported a similar initiative through an on-site childcare ‘Little Power Genius’ for staff who are working parents at Menara Sarawak Energy, with plans to extend similar facilities to all of its locations across Sarawak.

CIMB provides six months of paid maternity leave for first-time mothers, with the option of extending to twelve months under the staff rejuvenation programme. A work-from-home policy called Flex4Moms allows female staff with children aged five years old and under to work from home for one day per week. It is one of the few national companies providing paid paternity leave of 30 consecutive calendar days for first-time fathers.

Several interesting examples can be highlighted in **the Philippines**. Accenture Philippines is recognized as a ‘Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace’ by the Philippine Pediatric Society. It has breastfeeding clinics called Diana Rooms and conducts education classes as well as monthly meetups and support for mothers who are breastfeeding. The company also provides maternity leave benefits for up to 120 calendar days. First Philippine Holdings, meanwhile, encourages its male employees to take their paternity leave as well as more active roles in raising their children. Indo Phil Textile Mills also offers parental leaves to all employees regardless of gender, and women are encouraged to continue their career in the organization post-delivery. In addition, Ayalaland has established the ALI Wellness programme, which promotes mental and physical health, and the nutritional intake of parent-employees. This programme has resulted in improved return-to-work rates in 2019, at 92 percent and 100 percent for women and men employees respectively.

In Thailand, the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) arranges a breastfeeding room and supports the right to avail of maternity leave as provided by law. In 2019, 100 percent of SET’s employees who took maternity leave returned to work. Male employees are also able to take paternity leave. Additionally, Krungsri provides a maternity room and Child Care centre<sup>83</sup>, while CP All has expanded the maternity leave from 90 days (by law) to 120 days.<sup>84</sup>

Often the lack of a work-life balance is cited as a reason for women leaving the workforce, and this may coincide with the years they could be gaining access to more senior roles. Companies can take several measures to ensure they create a more shared narrative of domestic and household responsibilities among their male and female employees. Guidelines and tailored measures for employees can help ensure productivity, satisfaction and a balance between their professional and personal lives.



### Tips on how companies can provide better work-life balance measures for employees

- **Understanding employee needs:** Conduct employee engagement surveys, and integrate questions related to work-life balance and flexible work arrangements to gauge staff preference and needs
- **Parental leave:** Introduce shared parental plans and paternity leave; encourage male employees to share domestic and childcare functions.
- **Workplace facilities:** Create accessible and safe spaces for child-care support, lactation rooms, and dialogue space for new parents to share experiences.
- **Flexible working:** Provide flexible work and time arrangements for parents, as well as others; encourage the use of these arrangements and address any associated stigma.

83 Krungsri, [Sustainability Report 2019](#), 18 March 2020.

84 CP All, [“Labor Practices”](#), April 2020.

### Translating global D&I commitments to the national level | Danone, Indonesia

Danone is a global food company, applying the principles of diversity at three levels: the individual, team and organizational. In Indonesia, Danone has several initiatives to promote gender diversity, including mentorship, training and targeted promotion opportunities for women. In order to ensure accountability, it has set diversity targets at the leadership and managerial levels, and regularly checks against these goals. The company also reports back to the board on the key initiatives being rolled out to develop the female talent pipeline. Danone Indonesia has made significant progress in achieving its targets, with 40 percent of women in positions at director level by the end of 2019. Its recognition of diversity's value to the company is mirrored by the belief that a more diverse workforce enhances decision-making for major business transactions.

While the company holds true to its global commitments, it also recognizes the need to review these commitments and drive a narrative shaped within the country context. In Indonesia, the company provides six months maternity leave and 10 days of paternity leave, compared to the national trend and government policy of three months maternity leave and two days for the father. It has also initiated campaigns to further the narrative on paternal leave, for instance by featuring employees who are new fathers to share their experience of going on leave. Both mothers and fathers, are also encouraged to bring their children to work on certain days. Such dialogues and initiatives have been an important part of promoting values of shared responsibility. Internal surveys carried out by the company revealed that Danone Indonesia scored 95 percent in employee engagement.

### Tackling stereotypes | Gamuda, Malaysia

Gamuda operates in the engineering, transport and infrastructure sector, and boasts women in 43 percent of its board level seats. Gamuda falls under the traditionally male-dominated engineering industry, but it is committed to nurturing a qualified and diverse workforce with a strong foundation in STEM subjects. The company runs a scholarship initiative targeting more women in these subjects. In 2018, it launched the Gamuda Women Empowerment Network (GWEN) with the objective of advancing women's careers by providing an internal support network, offering mentoring opportunities with internal and external leaders across different sectors. The network is also effectively working to address cultural impediments surrounding women

in leadership and management positions through open dialogue. The company has launched leadership initiatives with the consulting and training institute LeadWomen and a Women in Rail drive to increase the number of women in the railway sector.

Gamuda recognizes that young working mothers face additional challenges and domestic responsibilities, and has created a women-centric benefits package. This includes a 90-day maternity leave, childcare leave, childcare subsidy, day-care centre services and nursing room facilities as well as pre- and post-natal expenses support. Flexible work from home arrangements are also provided to help all staff balance work and family commitments.

Open and two-way communication has been a key aspect of Gamuda's journey to building an inclusive workplace environment. Company values are relayed to all employees, right from their onboarding and orientation with

the company. While this is led by the Human Resources department, engagement is rolled out across all business units to ensure that D&I and other core values of the company are owned by all.

### 2.3.5 Inclusive and non-sexist communication inside and outside the company

The projection of fair (non-sexist) and diverse images and narratives is an important part of breaking harmful gender stereotypes and for establishing an inclusive culture as the social norm in companies. This is also the case for the use of inclusive and non-sexist language, both internally and externally.

Therefore, engaging employees in open conversations on diversity, using inclusive language and visual representation, is a major step towards creating a culture of inclusion, acceptance and celebration of diversity at the workplace.

- **PwC in Malaysia** organizes Gender Bender events to address gender stereotypes and provide opportunities for discussion and reflection for both women and men. The main objective is to create a safe environment to help people realize the existence of unconscious bias and find ways to tackle it.
- **Intel in Malaysia** has created a reverse coaching programme allowing managers and directors to listen and learn from Gen-Y employees on issues of inclusion. Several accessible communication platforms and channels have been set up to enable this exchange within the company. This has helped to create an organic and inclusive culture, owned and shaped by young people in the firm.
- **Deloitte in Viet Nam** follows its global and regional commitments on gender equality and has created interesting initiatives in the local context to embrace the concept of creating a narrative of shared responsibility among its colleagues, such as recognizing men who share household responsibilities equally, and a support programme for women returning from maternity leave. The human resource policy is designed to create conditions supporting an inclusive work environment in major pillars such as hiring, promotion and succession; experience; exposure; and inclusive leadership.

Most companies tend to state their commitment to equality and non-discrimination in their code of conduct, and simple measures can be taken through written, visual and verbal communication to further translate this commitment into real action.



## Tips on how companies can promote gender sensitive communication

- **Language in communications:** Ensure the use of inclusive language in internal and external communications. Simple words like chairman (instead of chairperson) can contribute to a culture of exclusion.
- **Language use training:** Promote training for staff on the use of gender-sensitive language, keeping in line with cultural sensitivities and language.
- **Images in communications:** Showcase positive images of women and more balanced gender roles. For example, when conducting recruitment campaigns in universities, especially in areas dominated by men (such as engineering), introduce images that show both women and men as potential candidates.
- **Inclusive dialogues:** Create safe spaces and mentoring networks for open and constructive dialogue on issues related to bias, inclusion and diversity.

### COMPANY INSIGHTS

#### Fixing the system, not the women | P&G, Thailand

P&G as a global conglomerate has set a progressive agenda on D&I across the board. This is especially true of its Thailand office, where 50-50 parity across all levels is sought, and top management positions, including Managing Director, Plant Manager and Sales Manager are all held by women.

Setting up targets, performance indicators and monitoring, has helped promote accountability on the D&I agenda. Gender pay equity is also monitored, through the establishment of the Compensation & Leadership Development Committee. P&G Thailand believes diversity in the workforce and in leadership for decision-making needs to be reflective of the diverse customer needs, and hence adds value to the company profile and the bottom line.

In addition to promoting internal work practices, the company also leverages its advertising and media reach to create campaigns and awareness initiatives promoting social issues, from addressing violence against women to encouraging shared responsibilities between

women and men. While the leadership in the company supports and leads the D&I agenda, this is implemented and communicated effectively by HR, thus ensuring company buy-in.

P&G Thailand has adopted innovative approaches to advance this agenda. For instance, the programme called “fix the system” challenges the notion of “fixing women” (in terms of their lack of capacity or ambition) to accelerate their careers. It helps to shape a new narrative focusing on perceptions, workplace culture and policies. This approach has also enabled men to be a part of the discussion and to become advocates and leaders in promoting the D&I agenda, rather than bystanders.

Translating the D&I agenda into company policies and culture has also given P&G a winning reputation, especially with millennials, as the next generation of talent values companies that promote D&I.

## A culture of inclusion is critical to promoting diversity | Thai Union, Thailand

Thai Union is a leading seafood-based food company that promotes a 50-50 gender parity policy at the management level. The firm has demonstrated steady progress with the ratio of women in management increasing from 37.8 percent in 2016 to 46.06 percent in 2019. Thai Union supports diversity in all aspects, including and not limited to gender, race, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, and marital status, with a written policy published on its website.

The company believes diversity is important for business, and its internal workforce and leadership must mirror the customer base in order to be able to meet their needs. It has been awarded for its efforts and recognized by the Dow Jones Sustainability Index for two consecutive years. The D&I agenda of

the company is driven by its top leadership and is also promoted throughout the supply chain with suppliers, vendors, and other stakeholders.

To cultivate a culture of inclusion and for the value of D&I to be embraced by all its employees, Thai Union regularly organizes seminars to sensitize employees and creates dialogues and avenues for greater engagement. The company has a Worker's Voice channel, providing opportunities for employees to share any grievances and/or difficulties they may be facing. To tackle potential issues related to unconscious bias, diversity in recruitment is promoted, and questions on a candidate's age or gender have been removed from the job application form.

### 2.3.6 Zero tolerance towards sexual harassment in the workplace

Sexual harassment not only affects individuals, but also hinders efforts to create an inclusive workplace environment wherein employees, especially women can grow and maintain organizational commitment. Hence, most companies have policies in place articulating their intent to create a safe space free from sexual harassment for all employees. Several provide training and sensitization on issues related to sexual harassment in order to create awareness within the workforce.

**Miles Films in Indonesia** introduced a clause on sexual harassment in all its contracts with actors and production crews in 2017, which includes serious sanctions. These measures range from immediate removal from the production to forwarding complaints to the police. The clause has been shared subsequently to other production houses as part of the Indonesian Film Producers Association's drive to curb sexual harassment across the industry.

**Kawasaki in Thailand** conducts trainings and awareness sessions, and has established an email consultation point within the Head Office of Human Resources Division. This facilitates communication with employees at any time regarding issues related to harassment in the workplace, including sexual harassment, abuse of authority, and maternity-related harassment.

A key aspect of implementing sexual harassment policies is ensuring protection for whistleblowers and employees who report improper conduct. **Traphaco in Viet Nam** has adopted an interesting approach through staff involvement in denouncing violation and protecting employees/individuals from retaliation for revealing harassment or improper behaviour. The company intends to integrate these initiatives when developing its Internal Audit Regulation in 2020. The method engages the entire company in developing and owning a culture dealing with how harassment should be addressed.

TNG Investment and Trading Joint Stock Company have also conducted training on prevention of sexual harassment. In addition to their policy, they have a complaints process for employees to report improper or unethical conduct, which is part of the error warning system. It specifies the department/person responsible for receiving warning reports and resolving cases. The policy includes a commitment to protect employees from being threatened, fired or discriminated against for reporting any form of harassment. Another example is from **Celcom Axiata in Malaysia** which established Speak Up as its official channel for whistleblowing, providing a means to draw attention to any wrongdoing within the organization.

Ensuring zero tolerance towards sexual harassment is an important part of creating a safe and inclusive culture for all employees, and is critical for any business. While a policy against sexual harassment can be a first step to recognizing the issue and articulating commitment, companies must also put in place measures to prevent and respond to incidents.



### Tips on how companies can address sexual harassment

- **Training:** Conduct regular awareness and sensitization sessions for all staff on gender and harassment, including training for all employees and suppliers on gendered forms of corruption and unconscious bias training. Studies show awareness of internal biases can help reverse them, and addressing unconscious bias in a systematic way can help tackle the underlying causes which may trigger sexual harassment.
- **Contract terms:** Include clauses on repercussions or possible sanctions in case the party is found guilty of sexual harassment
- **Report and response mechanisms:** Introduce gender-sensitive, safe, and accessible grievance mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment, including sextortion.<sup>85</sup> It should ensure that whistleblowers, especially women, feel comfortable and remain safe from retaliation.

<sup>85</sup> "Sextortion", in this context, is a term used to describe a form of corruption and abuse of authority in which sex is the currency of the bribe. Sextortion is a gendered form of corruption that happens when those entrusted with power use it to sexually exploit those dependent on that power ([Feigenblatt, 2020](#)).

## COMPANY INSIGHTS

### **A safe workplace is key to an inclusive workplace | SAITEX International, Viet Nam**

SAITEX International (Viet Nam) is the largest denim manufacturer in the world to place emphasis on making its workplace inclusive, with a focus on people with disabilities, ensuring that there is access for everyone in its factories and operating spaces. It participates in programmes such as Better Work from ILO and PACE from Gap Inc. in support of improving workplace and sustainability practices. For SAITEX, D&I is an important part of their business strategy as many international brands seek credible partners in the garment industry who ensure high standards in their supply chain.

SAITEX also believes its company culture has helped with employee engagement and retention. Women make up 58 percent of the total workforce of SAITEX, and hold 42 percent of management positions. SAITEX treats harassment and abuse very seriously, and has put in place specific policies to prevent and respond to any occurrence of sexual harassment, with guidance and grievance mechanisms.

### **A diverse workforce for a diverse customer base | Blue Bird Group, Indonesia**

The Blue Bird Group, one of the largest land transportation service providers in Indonesia, is no stranger to promoting gender equality. The company is close to reaching its target of having women in 30 percent of senior leadership roles, and also has close to 30 percent women employees in its operations (excluding drivers). It is noteworthy that the positions of CEO, as well as Vice President who oversees the mechanical division, a traditionally male-dominated arena, are held by women. Blue Bird's gender equality policy is embedded in the application of flexible policies for employees, and ensuring that women receive opportunities to develop their careers. The leadership of the company has led the gender equality agenda, creating an action plan endorsed by the Board of Directors. Employees can convey and voice

any concerns or clarify their priorities through regular (anonymous) employee engagement surveys.

Blue Bird believes that greater gender diversity in its workforce and leadership roles reflects its customer base which largely comprises of women, and helps the company to make better decisions. For instance, harassment issues are taken very seriously. Training and guidance are in place for employees within the company, and to ensure customers' safety. Recognizing the male-dominated nature of the transportation industry and existing cultural expectations which may limit women from taking up jobs as drivers, Blue Bird has initiated a programme to encourage more women to join the company's cohort of drivers by incentivizing existing employees to recommend women to enrol.

## How to adopt gender sensitive whistle-blowing reporting mechanisms?

One way to create gender-sensitive legal whistleblowing mechanisms is to reflect gender-related preferences in the incentives to motivate people to report. Women are more incentivised than men to report wrongdoing and abuses if there are anti-retaliation protections and legal duties, while men are more incentivized to report if there is a monetary reward.

Based on a recent research conducted by Transparency International, these are important features of a gender-sensitive whistleblowing reporting mechanism:

- Establish a duty to report (this is a way to incentivize reporting)
- Ensure anonymity
- Ensure anti-retaliation policies
- Raise awareness on both internal (e.g. company hotline, manager or designated staff) and external reporting platforms (media, government, police). External reporting mechanism are especially important if there is fear of retaliation internally

*Source: Content abridged and adapted from “Gender sensitivity in corruption reporting and whistleblowing”, Transparency International, 2020*

### 2.3.7 The COVID-19 crisis as a test-bed for future shocks

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a standstill, creating unprecedented health, social and economic crises, forcing companies, organizations and countries to shutdown public spaces and move into the private domain. This has led work from home (WFH) to become a ‘new normal’ mode of work. Gender and social inequalities that underpin societies have been further exacerbated during the pandemic, creating additional challenges for women by increasing care work demand on them and perpetuating their traditional caregiving role, as well as leading to a sharp increase in cases of domestic violence and abuse. While the impact and consequences of COVID-19 are still emerging, some companies have demonstrated leadership by maintaining their D&I commitments and reflecting on lessons learned to prepare for future shocks.

**L’Oreal in Indonesia** has provided its female employees with children under one year old the option to keep working from home and also provided flexibility for women who needed to stay with their children for home-schooling during the COVID-19 lockdown. In order to support employees’ well-being during the pandemic, L’Oreal has also created a staff assistance programme to provide free, confidential advice and counselling. In addition, the company is undertaking regular surveys on employee wellness to curate specific measures to meet their needs.

**Insular Life (InLife) in the Philippines** provided an early release of mid-year bonuses to its employees, including those on maternity leave. The firm shows that its commitment to continuing advocacy and awareness on gender equality issues is an important part of its company culture. In celebration of International Women's Day during the pandemic and the work from home requirements, it created a virtual space to feature stories of influential women leaders from various walks of life.

A number of interesting initiatives have been implemented in **Viet Nam. Dai Dung Mechanics, Construction, and Commercial JSC** provided grant aid for married employees' accommodation fees and for baby care. **Hoa Binh Construction JSC** gave support through an additional US\$45 (approx. 1 million VND) per female employee with young children to support childcare, and **No. 7 Printing JSC** provided support for childcare, reduced working hours and provided flexi-time for parents, especially female employees.

While these are all positive measures, the WFH situation also provides an opportunity to shape a new narrative around sharing household and care work between women and men.

To find out more about the challenges and opportunities on "We Worked from Home", check out this [report from UNDP Malaysia](#).

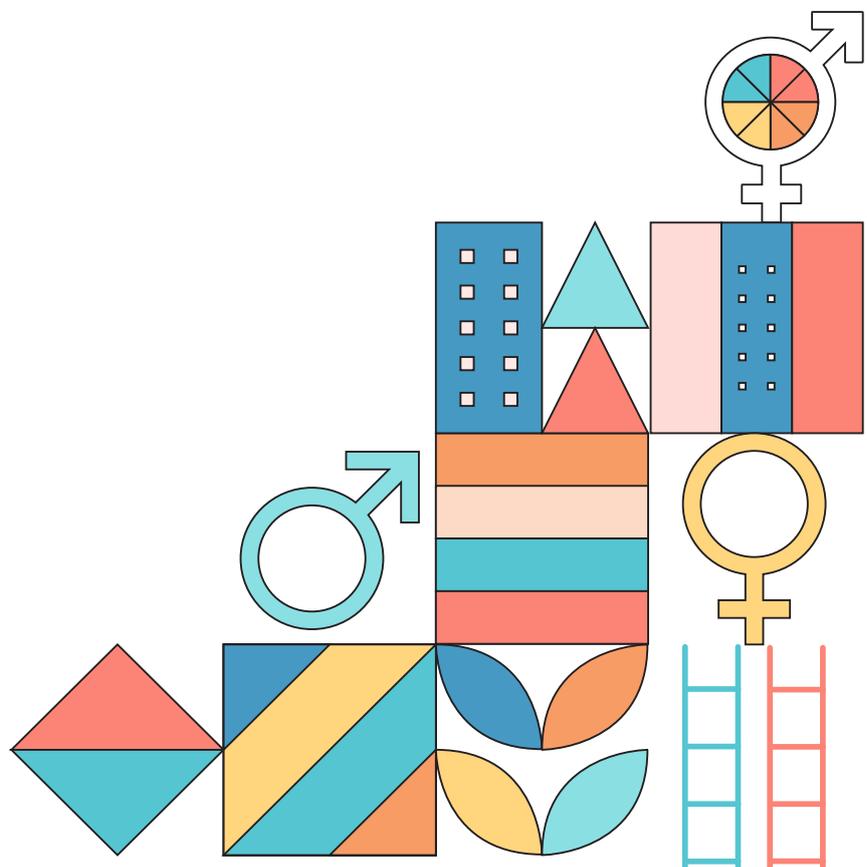


### Tips on how companies can deal with the new normal after covid-19 and future shocks

- **Affirming commitments:** Communicate the company's continued commitment to D&I through an internal memo to all staff.
- **Internal support:** Conduct wellbeing surveys and encourage employee resource groups to provide support for staff during possible lockdown scenarios.
- **External support:** Consolidate information about local shelters, hotlines and other channels for addressing domestic violence and harassment, as well as counselling for mental health, and ensure that all staff have access to these resources.
- **Protection mechanism:** Ensure there is no breakdown in grievance mechanisms, set up alternative channels for any complaints or concerns from employees, and communicate any new arrangements to all staff.
- **Flexible working:** Ensure greater flexibility in work hours can be given and work-life balance measures can be adapted towards the new WFH arrangements.
- **Equipment support:** Ensure employees have access to digital equipment and online technical support, keeping in mind potential digital divide and gaps from a gender perspective.

# 03 |

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS



The challenges for promoting gender equal leadership are complex, but the opportunities are promising. The measures and tips outlined here are designed to inspire companies that want to try new ideas and solutions. In conclusion, the final section is a reiteration of some of the key messages that are important for maintaining the momentum for the D&I agenda and for promoting women's leadership.

## **LEADERSHIP AND AMBITION ARE NOT A MALE PREROGATIVE**

Women's access to leadership roles in companies is often constrained by myths about their lack of ambition, leadership capacities, or giving priority to family life over professional career development. In reality, women's experiences and interactions within the workplace can have a big impact on their levels of ambition.<sup>86</sup>

Hence, there is a need to demystify and challenge how the construct of leadership is defined, while creating new narratives to foster more inclusive social norms and environment conducive to women's leadership. Further, while societal pressures do play a role, companies can bridge some of the challenges by promoting a better workplace environment and access to opportunities for career growth.

Companies can undertake initiatives towards this end, for instance by starting with showcasing an 'employee of the month' to identify women and men leaders who can narrate their stories and showcase their distinct styles of leadership. Such role models can also be found beyond the business sector, as social norms can influence across different sectors. Informal networking opportunities for women can help foster a peer group support structure for women to share, learn, and gain experience and confidence. Managers can also play a proactive role in identifying women who are ready to take on greater leadership positions.

Further, mentoring initiatives to pair young women with more successful leaders can also exemplify strong role models within the company and society-at-large, and demonstrate support for gender diversity.

## **ADDRESS THE GLASS CEILING AND THE WALLS**

The focus of D&I measures and initiatives often centre on the number of women in leadership and management roles. And perhaps rightly so. But an important element to tackle, beyond addressing the barriers to the glass ceiling that women face, is also recognizing the 'glass walls',<sup>87</sup> the sectoral and functional segregation by gender and making sure companies can work towards breaking down these barriers as well.

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<sup>86</sup> BCG, *Dispelling the Myths of the Gender "Ambition Gap"*, 5 April 2017.

<sup>87</sup> UNDP, *Country Case Studies - Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA)*, 2014

Companies can make efforts to diversify their talent pool in male-dominated areas and ensure all functions are more gender-balanced. Companies in male-dominated sectors such as construction, and those in female-dominated sectors such as education, can also apply an out-of-the-box approach to gradually shift the concentration from one gender. Thus, a comprehensive set of measures allowing for a diverse workforce is needed both horizontally and vertically.

## **EMPHASIZE THE “I” IN D&I**

In order to achieve D&I goals, it is imperative for companies to build an organizational culture based on inclusive practices, which is critical for harnessing the benefits of a diverse workforce and leadership. An inclusive workplace culture fosters a better environment for all, as measures to ensure zero tolerance towards sexual harassment make everyone feel safe, and access to opportunities for all nurture employees’ organizational commitment.

To this end, companies need to start recruiting differently and ensure they tackle any unconscious bias in the workplace, while providing women with the capacity building opportunities, mentorship and the support network to help them gain the confidence needed to lead. They should continue to promote equal parental leave, flexible work hours, and job-shares; and to ensure people who leverage these opportunities are celebrated rather than stigmatized. This can help to positively integrate these practices into the culture of a company.

Such efforts need to be inclusive for all, and not just focusing on women, as a narrow focus on women could potentially alienate men, or make the diversity agenda seem peripheral and only a concern for female employees. Thus, male participation in family-friendly benefits must be encouraged. These practices would also help to create a new narrative of shared responsibility for women and men.

Finally, it is crucial to remember that how the measures are communicated is also important. Companies and government alike will do well to use gender-sensitive and inclusive representation and languages to speak to diverse audience and portray desirable social norms.

## **FUTURE PROOF YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

The COVID-19 crisis has perhaps also provided a watershed moment wherein major disruptions require enhanced and varied problem-solving skills for management and leadership, to design new thinking around challenges impacting revenue, business strategy and employees. Further, while remote working brings its own set of difficulties, it also has the potential to diversify talent, namely by allowing companies to source a broader range of skills from women who may prefer to work with greater flexibility.

Given the unique perspectives and experiences that women and men bring, a gender-diverse leadership and board could promote a more balanced decision-making process.<sup>88</sup> This would particularly hold value for companies in dealing with unknown crisis situations, like COVID-19 and other future shocks.

Diversity in representation has increasingly become part of a business's license to operate, and those who fall short of their commitment during a crisis also stand to lose their broader reputation and brand. Instead, they could build on demonstrating a more diverse and representative company.

Thus, D&I needs to be part of the long-term strategy, and not one that is placed at the periphery when faced with shocks or crisis. Keeping D&I as a priority and ensuring diversity in people and leadership during a crisis can offer opportunities to strengthen recovery, innovate and pivot on business ideas.

## **TRANSPARENCY AND DIVERSITY: COMPLEMENTARY GOALS**

Transparency is a key aspect of corporate governance and should be mirrored in D&I practices. For instance, in order to translate D&I commitments into real action and impact, companies should establish targets, monitor progress and communicate results. This helps provide a platform to celebrate gains and keep track of remaining gaps.

Communicating the rationale behind measures promoting gender equality and diversity in the workplace is essential to ensure the involvement of the whole organization. Several companies have also taken steps to build ownership of this agenda by building it into key performance indicators (KPI) for managers and the entire office, encouraging them to value diverse leadership styles and behaviour.

Further, broader processes and systems within companies need to follow principles of fairness and transparency, such as performance evaluations, promotions and pay processes. Standard measurement matrices should be communicated openly and used consistently, complemented by open and constructive feedback and dialogue.

Although D&I initiatives can be organic and driven by a human resources team and employee resource groups, the accountability for the overall results should rest with the highest level of leadership. Doing so can help companies to move beyond individuals towards systemic change, where a more inclusive and enabling environment can break down barriers to women's advancement into leadership roles.

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<sup>88</sup> Cristina Banahan and Gabriel Hasson, "[Across the Board Improvements: Gender Diversity and ESG Performance](#)", Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, 6 September 2018.

At the same time, having greater diversity and more women in leadership roles, especially at the board level, also contributes to higher standards of transparency and better Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) outcomes.<sup>89</sup> A literature review by IFC found similar positive correlations for board diversity and a company's commitment towards sustainability.<sup>90</sup> Further, such firms were seen to have better corporate governance practices, such as internal controls, ethics and anti-corruption compliance. They also demonstrate greater commitment to social impact, community engagement and corporate responsibility, as well as better internal measures promoting inclusion and work-life balance.

While such benefits may not result directly from individual women or the mere presence of women, it is likely that an organizational culture that embraces gender diversity and gender equal leadership is also likely to enable the improvements in ESG standards.

## A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

The examples showcased in this report illustrate a growing recognition of the importance of gender diversity for businesses within the ASEAN context, and that achieving gender equal leadership requires collaboration and concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

**Governments** must continue to develop laws, regulations and policies promoting and guaranteeing gender diversity in business leadership. **Companies** must continue to adopt measures that promote organizational cultures and workplace practices essential for women to take on leadership roles. **Coalitions and organizations** must continue to advocate and provide networking and training opportunities in this area; while individuals must try to overcome biases and challenge social norms which limit the leadership potential of women in the household, organizations, and society-at-large.

UNDP's recent engagement with B20, the G20's business advocacy group, have led to the creation of new materials to empower women entrepreneurs and leaders to be catalysts of business integrity, in their companies, their supply chains, and through grassroots women's networks.<sup>91</sup> UNDP is ready to involve mentors from the B20 and other companies in ASEAN to create a women's movement to promote a sustainable and fair business environment.

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89 McElhaney, K. A. and Mobasseri S., *Women create a sustainable future*, UC Berkeley Haas School of Business, October 2012.

90 Alexandre Di Miceli and Angela Donaggio, *Women in business leadership boost ESG performance: Existing body of evidence makes compelling case*, (IFC, 2018).

91 The partnership UNDP-B20 in the context of covid-19 was highlighted by the [Joint Statement on "Accountability and anti-corruption in the age of a global pandemic"](#), a call on the G20 leaders "to commit more explicitly to accountability and anti-corruption efforts to ensure the impact and effectiveness of response and recovery efforts to COVID-19."

UNDP remains committed to promoting the diversity and inclusion agenda, together with gender equality in leadership roles, as a key element of business integrity.

Learn more about:

- [The FairBiz Diversity & Inclusion Platform](#) trainings and mentoring initiatives to strengthen women's role for a sustainable and fair business environment.
- [UNDP Sustainable Development Services \(SDS\)](#) tool helping companies to affirm their D&I commitments.

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