



Gender Benchmark 2021 Insights Report

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The COVID-19 crisis has exposed and exacerbated systemic weaknesses, inequalities and unacceptable practices throughout global value chains. With less than ten years to go to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is clearer than ever that urgent change is needed if we are to realise the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

Companies have a key role to play in achieving this shared agenda. As such, the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) is developing free and publicly available benchmarks to measure and incentivise company contributions towards the SDGs. To do so, we identified [seven systems transformations](#) that are needed to put our society and economy on a more sustainable path. The [social transformation](#), which focuses on human rights, decent work and ethical conduct, sits at the heart of WBA's model, underpinning and enabling the food, energy, circular, digital, urban and financial systems transformations. Our model puts people at the centre of all transformations, recognising that the SDGs can only be achieved if no one is left behind.

Gender equality is fundamental to the social transformation, as moving the needle in this area has the potential to drive catalytic change in support of the SDGs. The Gender Benchmark, a spotlight benchmark in support of the social transformation, takes a deep dive into how companies drive and promote gender equality and women's empowerment across their entire value chain to accelerate corporate progress in closing the gender gap. The apparel sector

FIGURE 1: WBA'S SEVEN SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATIONS



was chosen as the focus for the first Gender Benchmark because of the high number of women workers involved in the operations and supply chain as well as the number of consumers the sector reaches. Learnings from this benchmark will be used to help scope an approach to scaling up our work on gender equality to drive impact across many more sectors and companies.

Introduction

In 2020, WBA published a Gender Baseline Report assessing the gender impacts of the most influential apparel companies globally. Building on this, the first iteration of the Gender Benchmark assesses 35 key apparel companies on their efforts to drive gender equality and women's empowerment across their value chain, based on publicly available information and confidential information submitted by companies dated between January 2018 and February 2021. The [2020 Gender Benchmark Methodology](#) was developed by WBA together with key stakeholders, including investors, policymakers and civil society, and is based on the SDGs, notably SDG 5 (gender equality). This report sets out the key findings of our assessment along with the actions specific stakeholder groups and apparel companies can - and should - take to drive change. It also features leading practices we identified and insights from women garment workers in India that were gathered through a worker engagement study undertaken with WBA Ally, [Good Business Lab](#).

Our results show that while apparel companies may be fast on fashion, they are slow on gender equality and, as such, they are not on track to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of SDG 5. Although some demonstrate leading practices, most have yet to embrace the importance of taking transformative action to drive gender equality and women's empowerment.























Women's voices from the supply chain: A qualitative study with Good Business Lab





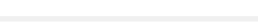











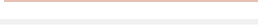
Benchmarks can provide tangible insights into corporate commitments, processes and performance, painting a picture at both an industry and company level. However, there are still aspects not addressed in this assessment approach - a key one being the experiences and stories of people, especially those working in a company's supply chain. Recognising this, WBA partnered with our Ally, [Good Business Lab](#) (GBL), to bring women workers to the forefront of our analysis and give a voice to those who are largely voiceless in corporate supply chains.

The objective of the study was to understand first-hand the needs of women workers in the apparel industry. GBL conducted interviews with 26 workers from 12 factories in the Indian provinces of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka in early 2021. The topics of conversation were aligned with the measurement areas assessed in our Gender Benchmark and covered grievance mechanisms, violence and harassment, discrimination, financial and job security, opportunities for job growth, family-friendly benefits, a safe and healthy working environment, and access to health information and services.

This report contains initial insights from these interviews, shining a light on how corporate gender policies and processes are experienced in practice. In the coming months, we will release additional lessons learned from the study.

Ranking

Ranking	Company	Score out of 100	Engaged*
1	Gap	 53.9	✓
1	VF Corporation	 53.9	✓
3	Adidas	 50.1	✓
4	Levi Strauss & Co.	 47.3	✓
4	Target Corporation	 47.3	✓
6	Industria de Diseño Textil (Inditex)	 46.4	✓
7	PVH	 45.6	✓
8	Nike	 45.2	✓
9	Kering	 44.6	✓
10	Aditya Birla Group	 43.7	✓
11	Under Armour	 43.3	✓
12	Ralph Lauren Corporation	 41.8	
13	Marks & Spencer	 41.2	✓
14	Abercrombie & Fitch	 40.1	✓
14	Fast Retailing	 40.1	✓
16	Associated British Foods (Primark)	 36.1	✓
17	Hennes & Mauritz (H&M)	 31.5	✓
18	Amazon	 31.2	✓

Ranking	Company	Score out of 100	Engaged*
19	LVMH Moët Hennessy - Louis Vuitton	 30.4	✓
20	Hanesbrands	 28.1	✓
21	Walmart	 24.1	✓
22	Lojas Renner	 20.0	
23	Costco	 19.4	
24	Decathlon	 19.3	✓
25	American Eagle Outfitters	 18.4	✓
26	Carter's	 18.0	
27	L Brands	 17.0	
28	The Foschini Group (TFG)	 10.8	
29	Fung Group	 10.5	✓
30	ANTA International Group Holdings	 8.4	✓
31	Urban Outfitters	 6.3	
32	Tailored Brands	 6.1	
33	Heilan Group	 0.0	
33	Souyute Group	 0.0	
33	Zhejiang Semir Garment	 0.0	

*Engaged with benchmarking process

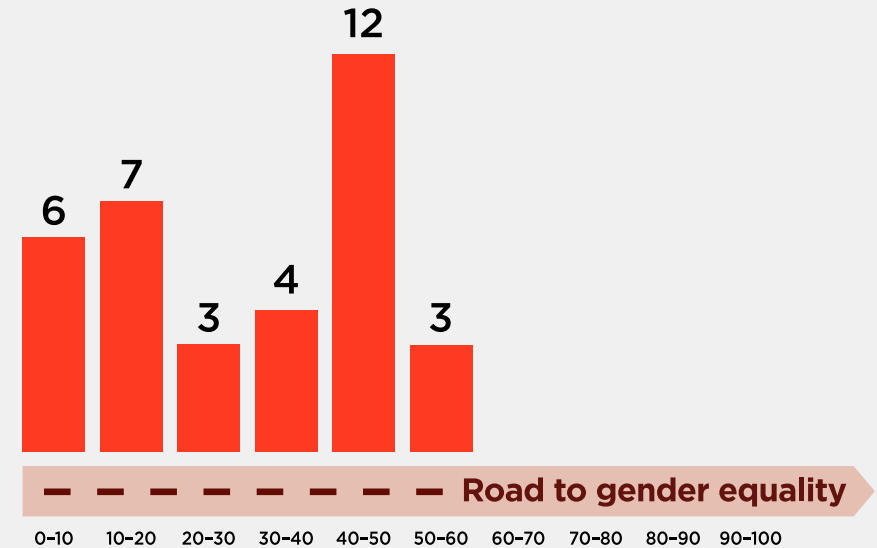
1. Companies lack ambition to drive transformative change

Business as usual will not get us to where we need to be to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. Transformative change from and by the private sector is required. Moreover, while gender equality is a standalone SDG, it is inextricably linked to the realisation of all 17 SDGs. Therefore, corporate action to drive gender equality and women's empowerment is critical to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

This year's Gender Benchmark evaluates how 35 apparel companies are addressing gender inequalities and empowering women. Overall, we found that performance in these areas is poor, with companies averaging 29.1 points out of 100. Only Adidas, Gap and VF Corporation score above 50 points.

Companies seem to be only at the beginning of their journey, though much more is needed across all measurement areas to drive transformative change.

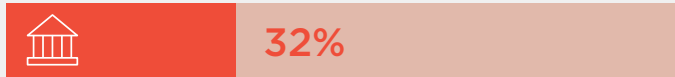
FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF COMPANIES PER SCORE BAND



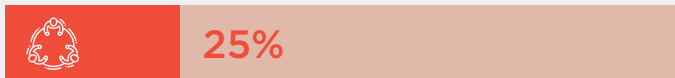
Key findings and further insights

FIGURE 3: AVERAGE SCORES PER MEASUREMENT AREA

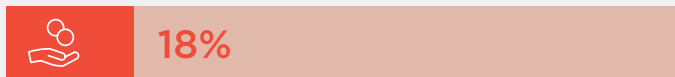
Governance and strategy



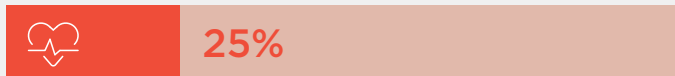
Representation



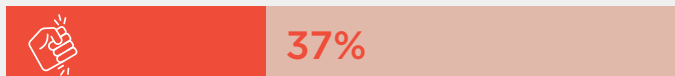
Compensation and benefits



Health and well-being



Violence and harassment



While performance by measurement area varies, it remains low across all themes. Companies average the highest on violence and harassment at 37%, followed by governance and strategy at 32%. On representation and health and well-being, companies average the same at 25%. The lowest measurement area average across companies is compensation and benefits at 18%.

Strategic action

A company committed to gender equality recognises both the company’s wider responsibility and the business case for respecting gender equality and upholding women’s rights and takes appropriate strategic action. Though making a public commitment to gender equality is a strong first step – six of the ten best performing companies are signatories to the [UN Women’s Empowerment Principles](#) – more can be done to prioritise gender equality and women’s empowerment, notably disclosing and tracking specific targets.

While 11 companies (31%) make a high-level, public commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment, and 14 companies (40%) appear to have integrated gender into their business strategy across their value chain, only seven companies (20%) have disclosed at least two targets on gender equality and women’s empowerment, and only four (11%) ensure the company’s board of directors has at least annual oversight of progress against these targets.

Key findings and further insights

Gender equality in leadership

Women's active participation in leadership positions at all levels of an organisation results in improved business performance and lower volatility.¹ Nearly all the companies assessed (97%) disclose the percentage of women on their board of directors and at the senior executive level, a requirement of most regulatory commissions for publicly listed companies. Decathlon, one of four privately held companies assessed, is the only company that does not disclose this information. However, far fewer companies (60%) disclose the percentage of women at the senior management level, and only half (54%) do so at the middle management level.

In terms of gender equality across these levels, only five companies (14%) maintain a gender balance – between 40-60% women – at the board level, seven companies (20%) at the senior executive level, 11 companies (31%) at the senior management level and seven companies (20%) at the middle management level.

Gender pay gap and living wage

Companies should collect gender pay data and take steps to address any gaps identified to reduce pay inequalities. While 17 companies (49%) report their gender pay gaps in France or the United Kingdom, where mandated by law, only Adidas and Inditex collect data on the difference in earnings between women and men employees globally. Furthermore, Adidas, Fast Retailing and Inditex are the only companies that show they are actively addressing gender pay gaps in their workplace.

To contribute to poverty alleviation and help close the gender pay gap in the supply chain, companies should also require their suppliers to pay workers a living wage that is sufficient to cover the basic needs of the worker and his or her dependents as well as provide some discretionary income.² Most companies (83%), however, default to requiring suppliers to pay only the legal minimum wage. Inditex is the only company that requires its suppliers to pay workers a living wage, as defined above. Moreover, only five companies (14%) are taking steps to help ensure suppliers pay their workers a living wage by conducting wage assessments in factories and promoting industry collaborations, such as the Platform Living Wage Financials and the ACT accountability and monitoring framework.

Key findings and further insights

Paid carer leave

Companies should respect employees' reproductive rights and their right to family life as well as women's maternal health needs to recover physically from childbirth. This means offering paid primary carer leave of at least 14 weeks (as set out in ILO Convention No. 183) and at least two weeks of paid secondary carer leave, even where it is not mandated by law. While seven companies (20%) provide carer leave when mandated by law, Kering, L Brands and Nike are the only companies that provide at least 14 weeks of paid primary carer leave and only six companies (17%) offer at least two weeks of paid secondary carer leave to all employees globally.

Beyond their own operations, companies should also require their suppliers to provide family-friendly benefits to their workers, which leads to increased worker and talent retention and has advantages for the wider community. While 12 companies (34%) require suppliers to provide carer leave when mandated by law, none of the companies assessed require their suppliers to offer at least 14 weeks of paid primary carer leave or at least two weeks of paid secondary carer leave to their workers.

Safe and healthy work environment

Women workers in garment factories face occupational health risks and have specific needs relating to their reproductive health and rights. While 18 companies (51%) require suppliers to provide workers with drinking water, only seven companies (20%) address the specific needs of women workers, such as requiring breastfeeding rooms (Gap), prohibiting exposure to chemicals that could impact reproductive health (VF Corporation) or providing access to reasonable transport to and from work facilities (Amazon).

Violence and harassment prevention

Companies should take an active role in preventing and addressing violence and harassment in all of its forms, acknowledging their broad effects on workers' lives, and explore the underlying causes and risk factors. While many companies (80%) have a publicly available policy in place regarding violence and harassment in the workplace, only 11 companies (31%) provide violence and harassment training to their employees. An even greater difference can be seen in the supply chain, where 29 companies (83%) require their suppliers to have a violence and harassment policy, but only six companies (17%) require them to provide violence and harassment training.

Key findings and further insights

Women in leadership roles are good for gender equality - in more ways than one

Gender parity in managerial roles is not just a target in itself; it is a catalyst for gender equality. The experiences of those interviewed by GBL underline the various benefits of having women supervisors.

Women supervisors serve as **role models**, providing inspiration to other women and giving them a vision of career growth. They can provide **mentorship and feedback** as well as support other women to climb the ladder.

“When I look at her, I feel that if she can do it, even I can do it, and I should learn from her.”

Women supervisors are generally perceived as **more approachable and empathetic** than their male counterparts, making it easier for women workers to raise issues and requests:

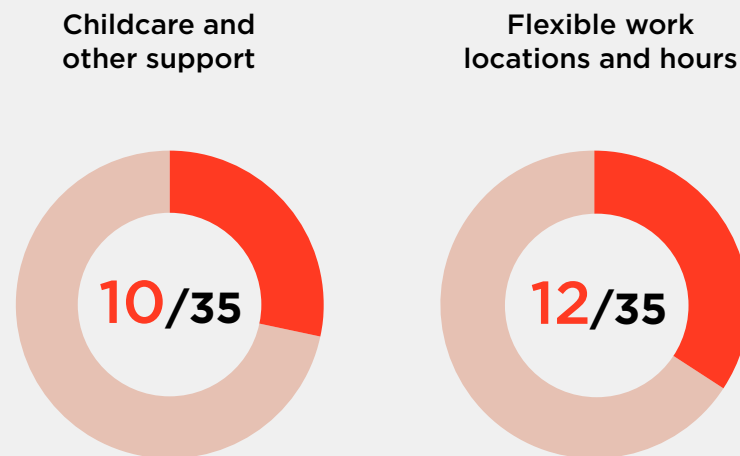
“Ladies understand the problems. Gents don’t understand easily, and it is hard to tell them about the problems. With lady supervisors we don’t hesitate to open up about our problems (...) with ladies we feel less scared to talk.”

Similarly, women supervisors are generally perceived as **more concerned about growth, well-being and long-term productivity**, as opposed to their male counterparts who tend to prioritise short-term production targets and have a more fear-based style of management. Interestingly, however, most of the interviewees value both the empathy and the target-oriented mindset of the different management styles, with one stating “both are equally important”.

Key findings and further insights

2. Companies are not ensuring women are prepared for another pandemic

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF COMPANIES WHO PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING TO THEIR EMPLOYEES



The past 18 months have made it abundantly clear that the world is unpredictable, and companies need their workforce to withstand unexpected shocks in order to survive. Women, in particular, have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and left the labour force at higher rates than men as a result of the sudden collapse of childcare, increased caregiving responsibilities of elder relatives and the inability to work remotely, to name a few.³

Companies can introduce policies and practices that enable women employees and supply chain workers to thrive in normal times and endure the turbulent ones. But many of the companies assessed have not done so. Those that seize the moment will not only be better placed to support their women employees and supply chain workers but also to drive sustainable business performance.

Childcare and other family support

Childcare and other family support such as paid time off to attend healthcare appointments with children or dependents have become increasingly important for employees juggling multiple responsibilities while trying to maintain a work-life balance. However, only half of the companies assessed (51%) offer childcare support to their employees. Even fewer (37%) offer other family support, with only 10 companies (29%) offering both.

Women workers in the supply chain usually bear the burden of caring for dependents, including children and elderly relatives. However, Aditya Birla is the only company that requires its suppliers to provide childcare support to their workers. Moreover, none of the companies require suppliers to provide other family support for workers to care for their dependents.

Flexible work

Work-life balance was already challenging for workers with families and other demands on their time. Achieving this balance only became harder with the outbreak of COVID-19.

Key findings and further insights

Flexible work arrangements, such as being able to alter the start and end time of the work day and working from home, can help ease the burden for employees. Companies that already offered these options were able to adapt more easily when social distancing regulations and lockdowns came into effect. However, less than half of the companies assessed (49%) offer flexible working hours, and only 13 companies (37%) offer flexible work locations. Lojas Renner is the only company that tracks employees' uptake of its flexible working options.

Health information and services

Health and well-being have emerged as significant challenges for all workers during the pandemic. Globally, the impact on women, who are more likely to struggle with mental health issues and worry about the health and safety of on-site workplaces, has been particularly striking.⁴ Companies should invest in women's health and well-being by offering employees and supply chain workers health information and services, especially regarding mental health. However, less than half of the companies assessed (40%) cover even part of the mental health costs for their employees in some countries, and only six companies (17%) cover some of these costs for all employees globally. In the supply chain, Associated British Foods (Primark) is the only company that supports its suppliers in raising awareness around mental health issues and aims to establish basic counselling services in select factories.

Furthermore, many women workers in garment factories still lack access to general health information and services. Despite this, only four companies (11%) require their suppliers to have an on-site clinic with credentialed health providers, with an additional two companies supporting their suppliers in providing their workers with access to external healthcare providers.

Violence and harassment

Gender-based violence also increased during the pandemic, both in the workplace and at home, with an estimated 31 million additional cases during the first six months of COVID-19 lockdowns alone.⁵ These trends are particularly concerning in the apparel industry where violence and harassment prevention and remediation are weak in the workplace and supply chain. While most companies (83%) have a grievance mechanism for employees and workers to report incidents, only 18 companies (51%) are taking steps to prevent further violence and harassment from occurring either in the workplace or supply chain. Few companies (31%) provide violence and harassment training to their employees, and even fewer (17%) require violence and harassment training for workers or managers in their supply chain.

Key findings and further insights

As for remediating violence and harassment claims in the workplace, 21 companies (60%) mention disciplinary action for the perpetrator. Aditya Birla is the only company that mentions providing support to the aggrieved by offering the option to request a transfer. No company, however, mentions not requiring private arbitration of violence and harassment claims, prohibiting a silencing agreement in violence and harassment settlement agreements unless requested by the victim, or offering support to the aggrieved such as leave from work or counselling.

In the supply chain, 16 companies (46%) require their suppliers to have a remediation process for addressing workers' violence and harassment grievances, though most only referring to grievance addressal in a timely manner. No company requires its suppliers to provide additional support for the victim.



Key findings and further insights

Good in a crisis: Gender-sensitive mechanisms help companies weather pandemic

Twenty-four of the companies assessed in our Gender Benchmark were also assessed in our [Corporate Human Rights Benchmark \(CHRB\) COVID-19 and Human Rights Study](#), published earlier in 2021. The CHRB study looked at how 229 companies in five sectors (including apparel) responded to the increased human rights risks and impacts associated with the COVID-19 crisis. It assessed companies in four dimensions: governance and policy commitment, human rights due diligence, purchasing decisions and grievance mechanisms.

When comparing these 24 apparel companies, we found there is a relative correlation (0.76) between both studies: companies that scored higher in the Gender Benchmark also had better results in the CHRB study, meaning that having mechanisms to protect and empower women prior to the crisis is associated with a better response to it. This holds true specifically regarding flexible work locations in the workplace and health and safety precautions in the factory, with companies that already addressed the needs of women employees and supply chain workers being better able to adapt quickly and support these women during a crisis.



Key findings and further insights

In their own words: Workers' experiences in the time of COVID-19

When the right policies and benefits are in place, women workers flourish. Women workers interviewed by GBL highly valued measures such as health check-ups, social security, formal contracts, childcare and maternal support policies. Those who had access to these benefits acknowledged them as quite rare, even among other garment factories:

"Ma'am, it's not wise to leave the job as we have a lot of benefits here which we don't get in any other company."

Conversely, the lack or cancellation of these benefits had negative impacts on women's resilience and their job permanence. Out of 26 women interviewed, 21 (81%) were migrant workers who had moved away from their place of origin, either between or within states, to be closer to the factory. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many of them had little to no support from relatives, particularly on issues pertaining to childcare, and had to quit their jobs during the first wave when creche facilities closed:

"Since COVID, creche is cancelled, so a lot of people have left jobs and stayed at home."

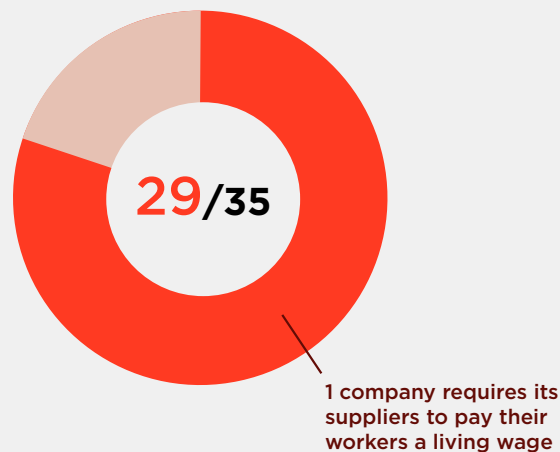
Additionally, access to healthcare has been severely impacted by the spread of COVID-19. While a few of the workers interviewed said they had been informed about social distancing and hygiene measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, they did not mention receiving any information regarding common COVID-19 symptoms or the additional risks faced by workers with comorbidities:

"Yes, there was an arrangement done for [access to healthcare] in the past. I don't know what happened, now it's not there. Since corona, the doctor is not available. Earlier we used to get medicines for fever etc. But now it's not available."

Key findings and further insights

3. Companies must do more to support women workers in their supply chain

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF COMPANIES THAT SCREEN FOR GENDER-RELATED ISSUES AMONG SUPPLIERS AS PART OF THEIR AUDIT PROCESS



Most companies have mechanisms in place to identify and assess actual or potential adverse gender-related impacts in their supply chain, with several issues being prioritised as salient. However, incidents are still occurring that companies should be preventing, mitigating and/or remediating, though these are not always detected through audits or grievance reporting.

Nearly all companies (83%) screen for gender-related issues among suppliers as part of their audit process. These include sexual harassment, discrimination based on marital or pregnancy status, and intimidation, harassment, retaliation or violence against trade union members and representatives. Furthermore, 20 companies (57%) identify gender-related issues as requiring corrective action to be taken by the supplier within a set period of time, with seven companies (20%) classifying at least one of these issues as zero-tolerance, resulting in an immediate evaluation of the business relationship and termination if not remediated.

However, only five companies (14%) disclose that corrective action plans linked to gender-related issues were established with suppliers over the last two years, with one company ultimately terminating relationships with some of its suppliers after identifying gender-related issues. According to the [Business and Human Rights Resource Centre](#), in the past two years, an additional three companies assessed in the Gender Benchmark faced allegations regarding gender-based violence in their supply chain, two companies faced sexual harassment allegations and two companies faced allegations of discrimination against pregnant workers.

Key findings and further insights

Improve existing systems

Companies should improve their existing systems to better detect gender-related issues in their supply chain. Many of the companies assessed require their suppliers to establish non-discrimination policies to protect pregnant or married women (80%) as well as prohibit intimidation, harassment, retaliation and violence against trade union members and representatives (66%). While these issues are indeed important, they can be more difficult to identify during an audit process and run the risk of being overlooked.

Far fewer companies include issues in their supplier codes of conduct that are easier to monitor and detect during audits, such as requiring suppliers to employ workers through formal written contracts (29%), have an on-site clinic with credentialed health providers (11%) or pay workers a living wage (3%).

In addition to conducting audits on issues outlined in supplier codes of conduct, other mechanisms could help identify gender-related issues in the supply chain, namely human rights due diligence processes and grievance mechanisms. However, these mechanisms also need to be improved.

Currently, 13 companies (37%) screen for at least two gender-related human rights impacts as part of their human rights due diligence process, with nine companies (26%) prioritising at least one gender-related issue as salient. However, only seven companies (20%) consult with relevant parties, such as women's organisations, gender experts or potentially affected women, as part of their risk identification and assessment process.

When it comes to grievance mechanisms, many of the companies (63%) require suppliers to have a grievance mechanism in place for workers to raise complaints. However, only nine companies (26%) require suppliers to ensure that workers are aware of this grievance mechanism, limiting its effectiveness. Similarly, of the 17 companies (49%) that allow supply chain workers access to the company's own grievance mechanism to raise complaints, only 11 companies (31%) ensure that workers are aware of this grievance mechanism. None of the companies assessed collect, analyse or monitor sex-disaggregated grievance data relating to the number of grievances reported or the number of grievances remediated in their supply chain. This is despite the fact that such data would help companies identify gender-related issues that need to be addressed and inform their human rights due diligence process.

Key findings and further insights

What grievance mechanisms look like in practice

All the women interviewed by GBL were aware of the grievance mechanisms available to them. The four main channels identified were:

1. Letterboxes on site.
2. Phone line to log grievances anonymously.
3. Directly speaking to supervisor or Human Resources (HR).
4. Communicating grievances to factory committee members.

Letterboxes and the phone line offered one clear advantage over the other two mechanisms: anonymity. These channels were preferred for issues that are difficult to bring up in person, such as abuse and sexual harassment, as well as for infrastructure grievances that could appear 'petty' or 'ungrateful' if brought up directly. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms remained unclear, as in many cases they had no visible follow-up procedures:

"There is a complaint box, so people can write their complaint on paper anonymously and put it in that box (...) That box is handled by whom and how, I don't know."

On the other hand, in-person channels were perceived as more effective. Several women referred to bringing up complaints to floor supervisors or HR as the first step when reporting a grievance:

"I inform the supervisor; they usually sort it out. If not, we go to HR - they ask us about the concern, they inform us that they will resolve the issue within a time, they come back and inform us once it is resolved, they ask if we are convinced."

However, not everyone felt comfortable using those channels. The comfort level varied greatly depending on how long the women had been working in that factory, and the trust and existing relationships with their supervisors and people within the HR department. One important barrier mentioned by some interviewees was the fear of repercussions and the risk of ruining the relationship with their supervisor. In that sense, some felt that HR personnel could address grievances with less bias, as they are farther from the production process and are not under direct pressure to meet targets. However, in many cases the distance - both social and physical - between factory workers and HR made it difficult for workers to have access to HR and submit a grievance:

"If we face any problem on the floor, we tell them [floor supervisors] and they resolve it. Usually, we don't go to HR. HR people, that ma'am is available on the top floor."

Key findings and further insights

Provide appropriate training and support

Once companies better understand what issues exist in their supply chain and the severity of the issues, they can focus on more targeted actions such as training and support initiatives. These are currently scarce.

Companies' efforts to prevent gender discrimination in the supply chain need to improve. While 28 companies (80%) require suppliers to have a non-discrimination policy that explicitly protects married or pregnant women workers, only Nike and Target require their suppliers to provide training to hiring managers to eliminate bias in the recruitment and promotion of women workers. Eight companies (23%) provide additional support to prevent discrimination against these women workers.

More support should also be provided when it comes to the health and well-being of women workers in the supply chain. While 21 companies (60%) require suppliers to address at least one specific health, safety and hygiene need of their women workers, such as access to drinking water, and 15 companies (43%) require health and safety training, only ten companies (29%) provide additional support to ensure a gender-responsive, safe and healthy work environment for their workers.

Violence and harassment is another area where nearly all companies (83%) require their suppliers to have a policy or statement in place, though less than half of these companies require that it be made available in local languages. Furthermore, only six companies (17%) require suppliers to provide training on violence and harassment, and only 12 companies (34%) offer their suppliers support by providing targeted training in select factories or by working with external organisations, such as BSR's HERrespect programme or the ILO's Better Work programme.

Key findings and further insights

Conflicting priorities

A common thread throughout many of the interviews is the clear tension between productivity targets and the effective implementation of benefits and safeguarding measures. This means that in some instances, even if there are policies encouraging the use of grievance mechanisms, toilet breaks and skills training, these compete with the very high garment production targets – and in most cases, worker well-being is sacrificed to meet targets.

Putting productivity first: A trend reported by the interviewees was that workers opt to drink less water or forget to drink enough water during the day. This is because they feel drinking water will lead to more toilet breaks, which in turn will slow down their productivity and break the workflow. It is not that supervisors do not allow toilet breaks; it is a practice that workers have internalised themselves. A frustrated woman supervisor expressed it as follows:

“Even the doctor suggested that many of the issues we go to the infirmary for are because of not drinking water. However, I keep telling my batch that they should drink water and go to the toilet. If I realise that somebody wants to go to the toilet, then I find a replacement for them and ask them to go.”

Not enough time to raise grievances: Related to the challenges associated with the physical and social distance between workers and HR personnel, some interviewees flagged that the short length of breaks means they feel there is not enough time to approach HR and bring up their concerns and grievances.

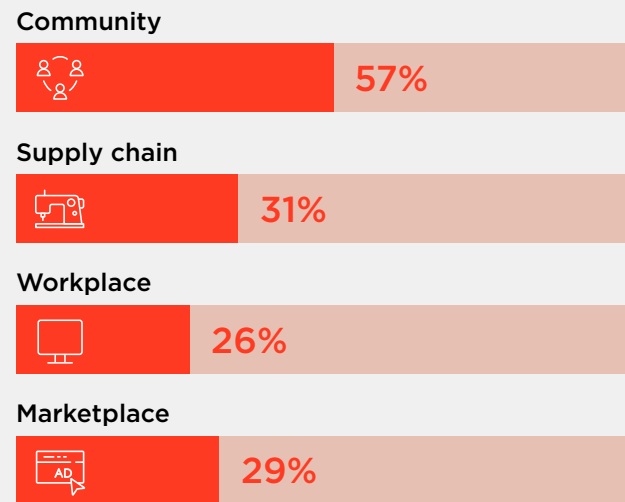
Training as an additional task: Skills development is seen as an ‘extra’ task that workers have to do in their free time and on top of their existing workload, using their lunch break or staying after hours to take part in training. This poses a challenge to many women workers, especially those with children:

“They conduct such training programmes, but one needs to give extra time for it. I don’t have this much time to give for such training programmes, I have kids at home.”

Key findings and further insights

4. Companies are ignoring their employees' needs

FIGURE 6: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORE PER VALUE CHAIN ELEMENT



Companies' efforts to drive gender equality and women's empowerment vary across the value chain. The difference between the workplace and community elements is more than double, as shown in the graph. This suggests that companies are more focused on their gender efforts towards external stakeholders than their own employees.

The community element has the highest average score at 57%. Most companies (83%) support initiatives to drive gender equality and women's empowerment in the community, with 18 companies participating in programmes across multiple regions and tracking the number of women and girls who benefit.

In the marketplace element, the average score is 29%, with half of the companies assessed (51%) taking specific actions to avoid discriminatory marketing practices, such as promoting positive images of women and girls, highlighting the importance of female leadership and breaking stereotypes that women face in sports.

The average company commitment to drive gender equality and women's empowerment in the supply chain is 31%, slightly better than in the marketplace element.

Key findings and further insights

What is most surprising is that the average score in the workplace is, at 26%, the lowest across all value chain elements. Better performance in the supply chain than in the workplace could be the result of supply chain requirements being more clearly communicated, such as in the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh that was introduced following the Rana Plaza incident, or that apparel companies' supply chain practices have been under greater scrutiny over the past years.

There are some stark differences in the ways that companies interact with external stakeholders and their supply chain workers, in comparison to their own employees. One example is stakeholder engagement. Companies need to show a stronger commitment to understanding the diversity of employees' needs and interests and addressing adverse gender-differentiated impacts. While 21 companies (60%) engage with external stakeholders to inform their gender efforts, only eight of these companies engage their own employees specifically on gender equality and women's empowerment issues through surveys or other engagement mechanisms. Furthermore, while eight companies (23%) provide evidence of integrating external stakeholders' feedback into company policies and practices, only Aditya Birla displays evidence of also integrating its own employees' feedback.

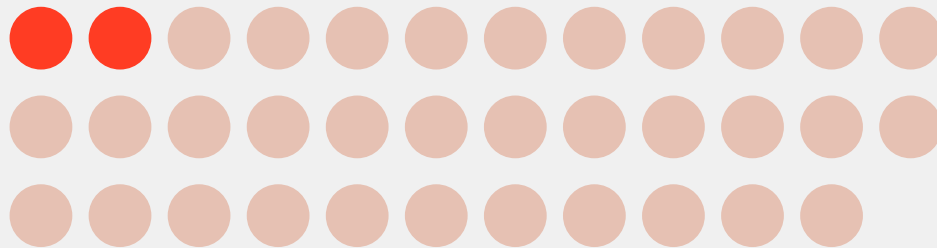
In terms of professional development, companies should empower women to grow in their roles and increase their pipeline of women leaders. In the supply chain, 15 companies (43%) support women workers to develop their supervisory or managerial skills and occupy similar leadership roles as men. However, only eight of these companies also offer professional development opportunities to their own employees. Moreover, 11 companies (31%) track the number of women workers who benefit from their supply chain professional development programmes, though Associated British Foods (Primark) and Levi Strauss are the only companies that also track the number of women employees benefitting from their programmes in the workplace.

Finally, companies should take a more active role in preventing and addressing violence and harassment across the value chain. Twelve companies (34%) support their suppliers in preventing violence and harassment in the supply chain through awareness campaigns and capacity building training, though Aditya Birla, Inditex and Under Armour are the only companies that also take additional action to help prevent violence and harassment in their own operations.

Key findings and further insights

5. Gender data is still invisible

FIGURE 7: TWO COMPANIES COLLECT GENDER PAY GAP DATA ACROSS THEIR OPERATIONS GLOBALLY



The apparel industry is dominated by women in terms of the workforce, operations and supply chain as well as the target customer base. Even so, companies are not being transparent enough about their gender impacts. Basic information regarding the actions apparel companies are taking to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment is not being collected, and if it is, it is not being disclosed.

In 2020, our Gender Baseline Report looked at publicly available information and found that very little was disclosed with regard to what stakeholders expect to see around gender equality and women’s empowerment. Nearly a year later, and even after inviting companies to submit additional information, there are still massive data gaps.

In the workplace, seven companies (20%) collect gender data on the gender balance of its workforce by at least three occupational functions. Only six companies (17%) collect gender data on percentage of employees promoted. Regarding the annual turnover of employees, merely five companies (14%) collect data disaggregated by gender, and only Inditex tracks this data annually. However, no company collects gender data on the absenteeism levels of employees. In terms of the gender pay gap, only Adidas and Inditex disclose the difference between women and men’s earnings across their operations globally.

In the supply chain, Walmart is the only company that collects data on the total procurement spend that is directed to women-owned businesses, while Adidas is also the only company that collects gender data on the injury rates of supply chain workers.

No companies collect gender data on the remediation of violence and harassment grievances in the workplace or require their suppliers to collect gender data on the remediation of violence and harassment grievances reported by their workers.

If we are to adequately address the needs of 50% of the population, companies need to be much more explicit about how women are impacted by their actions and what they are doing to address those impacts. Apparel companies need to be held to account, and that starts with robust gender data.

In the workplace

Strategic Action | PVH

In 2016, PVH's Chairman and former CEO Emanuel Chirico signed the UN's Women's Empowerment Principles. The company has also conducted a self-assessment using the Women's Empowerment Principles Gap Analysis Tool (WEPs-GAT) to help identify strengths, gaps and opportunities to improve its performance on gender equality. Its Forward Fashion strategy demonstrates a clear focus on women's empowerment, setting targets to make professional and life skills development programmes and services available to 500,000 women across the supply chain by 2030, expand unconscious bias training to all employees globally by 2023 and achieve gender parity in leadership positions by 2030.

Professional development and promotion | Nike

Nike offers its women employees professional development opportunities and reviews the percentage of women employees promoted annually. Its Xcelerate course provides senior director level employees with tangible business experience, coaching and mentoring. Its E-VOLVE leadership programme for director level employees focuses on developing self-awareness, strategic thinking, leadership skills and the ability to navigate change. Both programmes maintain at least 50% representation of women participants. Furthermore, the company's Amplify programme focusing on leadership, strategy and career development is for women employees, as well as those from underrepresented groups, at the manager and director level.

Gender pay gap | Inditex

Inditex calculates its global gender pay gap using the median salary across its four markets – Spain, rest of Europe, America, Asia and the rest of the world – weighted on the aggregate number of employees in each market. It also uses a third-party to verify its analysis. Furthermore, the company joined ClostinGap along with 10 other companies that aim to quantify the economic impact of the gender pay gap on society, detect areas for improvement, and initiate public policies and corporate practices.

Paid primary and secondary carer leave | Kering

Kering's Baby Leave Policy offers 14 weeks of fully paid maternity, paternity, adoption or partner leave to all employees, including those working part-time. To facilitate the return to work after leave, Kering Corporate France allows new parents to opt for 80% of standard working hours without any loss of pay during the month following their return. Bottega Veneta enables women employees at its Italian headquarters to maintain a link with the workplace during their maternity leave, if they so choose, through a dedicated digital platform. The company also showcases employees' experiences following their paternity leave on an internal portal and gathers feedback from employees on its parental policy through internal surveys. Moreover, Kering tracks the number of employees that return to work after leave as well as their retention a year later.

Childcare and other family support | Levi Strauss & Co.

Levi Strauss offers its US-based employees 100 hours a year of subsidized back-up childcare and adult care for all employees. This benefit increases to 200 hours for new parents during their first year back to work to use for extra childcare, help transition back to work or trial a childcare centre prior to enrolment. The company also offers its employees waitlist priority at childcare centres and additional support to find childcare or elder care.

Violence and harassment prevention | Aditya Birla Group

Aditya Birla demonstrates and enforces zero tolerance of violence and harassment in the workplace through its Policy on Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH). It also ensures all employees are made aware of this policy, verified by requiring their signature, and provides online trainings to build awareness and educate each employee on sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, the company regularly communicates safety measures for women employees, such as recommendations on which hotel rooms to book and when to avoid road travel, as well as offers them the ability to rent private cars during business travel.

In the supply chain

Enabling environment for freedom of association | Adidas

Adidas requires its suppliers to respect their workers' right to organise and prohibit discrimination against trade union members or representatives. It also recommends that suppliers provide training programmes for supervisors on establishing and maintaining proper communication with workers as well as instructing workers on the Workplace Standards regarding freedom of association (FOA) and collective bargaining. Furthermore, the company has provided FOA trainings to its suppliers FOA. Its FOA Protocol Training in Indonesia, first introduced in 2011, has served as part of the company's Orientation Training materials for onboarding new suppliers. In countries with barriers to the formation of trade unions, Adidas identifies parallel means for worker representation through direct worker-led elections.

Gender-responsive procurement | Walmart

As part of its Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Initiative, Walmart established a target to source US\$20 billion from women-owned businesses for its US-based operations over five years as well as increase its sourcing from women-owned businesses globally. It also has a Supplier Inclusion Program focused on working more with companies owned by underrepresented groups, including women, and is a member of Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). Furthermore, Walmart publicly discloses the total procurement spend that is directed to women-owned businesses.

Leading practices

Safe and healthy work environment | VF Corporation

VF Corporation requires its suppliers to address the specific health, safety and hygiene needs of their women workers and monitors adherence. This includes determining if exits are properly illuminated with emergency lights and that they are functioning throughout the facility, including stairwells, aisles, and hallways as well as prohibiting workers from being exposed to hazards which may endanger their reproductive health. VF Corporation also requires its suppliers to provide health and safety training to workers. The company further supports several suppliers in India through its Menstrual Hygiene Management modules, developed in partnership with BSR's HERproject.

Health information and services | Gap

Though Gap does not require its suppliers to have an on-site clinic with credentialed health providers, such as VF Corporation, Nike, Under Armour and Hanesbrands, the company offers its suppliers extensive support in providing their workers with access to health information and services. Gap's health modules, adapted from the ILO's Better Work programme, BSR's HERproject and its own P.A.C.E. programme, provide workers with knowledge and resources on healthy eating, hygiene, menstruation, family planning, maternal health, reproductive cancers, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, and mental and emotional health.



Companies

Learn from your peers

The Gender Benchmark and its methodology provide a roadmap for companies to follow to drive gender equality and women's empowerment. The examples of leading practices set out in this report demonstrate that such actions are possible. Benchmarked companies should use the benchmark scorecards and analysis to understand where there are gaps in policies, practices and/or disclosures and take steps to address those gaps. Lower ranking companies should aim to learn from and emulate the approach of higher ranking companies and companies that demonstrate leading practices in driving transformative change, using this benchmark to guide their efforts to meet global expectations related to gender equality.

Take a strategic approach

Companies need to take an integrated and holistic strategic approach across their entire value chain that considers the many interconnected dimensions affecting gender equality and women's empowerment (such as compensation and benefits, health and well-being, representation, and violence and harassment) and is supported by top management. Only then can companies truly drive transformative and sustainable change.

Collect and disclose sex-disaggregated data

Companies need to prioritise and invest in data that is disaggregated by gender to understand how their actions are impacting women across their value chain. Only then can they make informed decisions to address the underlying issues and barriers to gender equality that are present in their organisational context and incorporate a gender lens that accounts for women's unique needs and rights so that no one is left behind.

While numbers alone will not solve gender inequalities, data is necessary to shine a light on problems so that solutions can be identified. It will enable companies to revisit and revise old strategies and make better decisions that lead to better outcomes.

Drive transformative change

Transformative change is vital to the achievement of SDG 5 and beyond. Companies need to stay ahead of the regulatory curve and shift their approach from preventing harm to women and disclosing what is necessary to meet legislative requirements, to taking action that has positive impacts on women. Companies need to make ambitious commitments and set bold targets and match those with timely and meaningful actions and dedicated resources in order to drive change.

Investors

Invest with a gender lens

Gender-lens investing is gaining traction rapidly across the global field of investment and finance because it is linked to value creation.

Investors need to take into consideration gender based factors across the investment process to advance gender equality and better inform decisions by investing in, among others, businesses that work to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across their value chain. The Gender Benchmark results show that less than half of the benchmarked companies (46%) are taking action to promote gender equality across their entire value chain, and even fewer (40%) across all the interconnected dimensions impacting gender equality. As such, investors need to look beyond gender actions at the corporate and workplace levels to actions at the supply chain, marketplace and community levels, and ensure companies are taking a holistic approach to addressing gender inequalities. Without this, gender-lens investing will not resolve the challenges raised in this report. Investors should also have a clear escalation strategy in place wherever they identify that progress is not being made in closing gender gaps.

Take individual and collective action

Investors should speak up when companies do not disclose sufficient information on their efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across their value chain. This may be achieved through regular engagement with individual companies as well as through collective engagement, such as the Collective Impact Coalitions established by WBA, in order to maximise leverage. Engagement may also be targeted at other stakeholders, such as governments, to drive systemic changes and create an environment that not only incentivises the collection and disclosure of gender data but also the need for companies to act on that data.

Governments

Raise the bar

Governments can play a decisive role in accelerating progress towards gender equality through regulation. Currently, a patchwork of regulatory measures exists to promote gender equality in the organisational context. For example, India has laws to address domestic violence and sexual harassment, and the United Kingdom requires all large companies to publish gender pay gap data. However, more regulation is needed that aligns with international standards and requires companies to report gender data and impacts.

The Gender Benchmark results suggest that where regulation exists, companies take action to comply with legislative requirements, and, therefore, that government regulation is required to incentivise companies to drive gender equality and women's empowerment. Without such regulation, progress will remain too slow, impacting the achievement of SDG 5 and the broader 2030 Agenda. We encourage governments to introduce more and tougher mandatory measures and bring consistency to expectations across jurisdictions.

Civil society and other stakeholders

Use our data and findings to hold companies accountable

The Gender Benchmark provides a wealth of information to civil society, workers and society at large, enabling these groups to make informed decisions. We rely on these stakeholders to use the benchmark's publicly available data to support their own agendas. Civil society has accumulated a large amount of experience working on different initiatives to put pressure on companies to take action to close the gender gap. We invite civil society to use Gender Benchmark data to hold companies to account and keep gender equality at the forefront of public debate.

Our results also offer an opportunity for media and civil society to consider where high- and low-scoring companies (and their associated brands) may provide compelling narratives to drive change in consumer behaviour, thereby spotlighting companies that are underperforming and rewarding those that are clearly demonstrating their respect for gender equality

Explore opportunities for evidence-based collaboration

We encourage civil society and interested stakeholder groups to get in touch to better understand the nature of the data provided and where specific issues, such as violence and harassment, gender pay gap or gender equality in leadership, may be identified to support advocacy campaigns.

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