

International Executive Search
and Advisory Partners



The Journey to Gender Parity:

**International
Women's Day 2025**

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In the 2024 edition of our International Women's Day report, we shared that it will take 131 years for the world to achieve full gender parity.

12 months later, how has the world changed?

In this report we share progress, highlights and challenges in closing the global gender gap, looking both broadly at the hiring landscape and focusing on the three core markets Proco Group operates in: commodities, industrials and consumer.

Understanding the Global Gender Gap

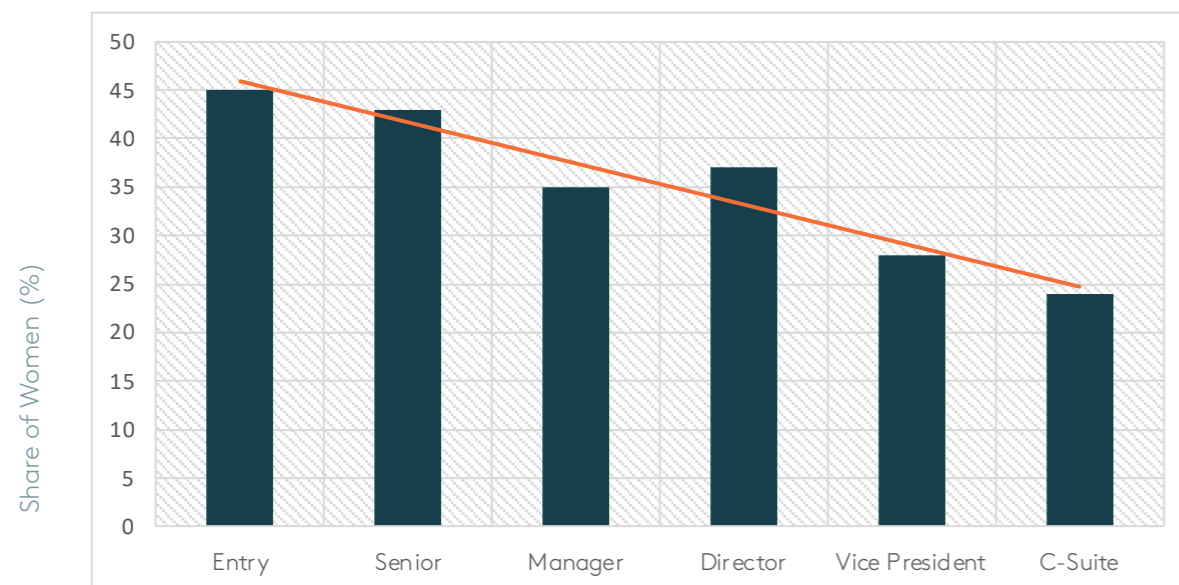
Despite progress towards gender equality in the workplace, the global gender gap remains a persistent challenge.

Based on current trends, it is estimated that it will take 134 years to achieve full parity between men and women in organisations. The combination of successive economic shocks, inadequate social and care infrastructure, and enduring inequities has significantly slowed progress in recent years.

Women currently make up **42%** of the global workforce but only **31.7%** of senior leaders, highlighting the substantial barriers to advancement that persist across nearly every industry and economy.

While women hold **50%** of entry-level positions, they remain underrepresented at the highest levels of leadership, with just **25%** of top executive roles occupied by women. This disparity is often referred to as the “drop to the top,” reflecting the 21.5 percentage point difference between women’s representation at entry-level and C-suite positions.

Global workforce representation of women, by seniority, as of April 2024



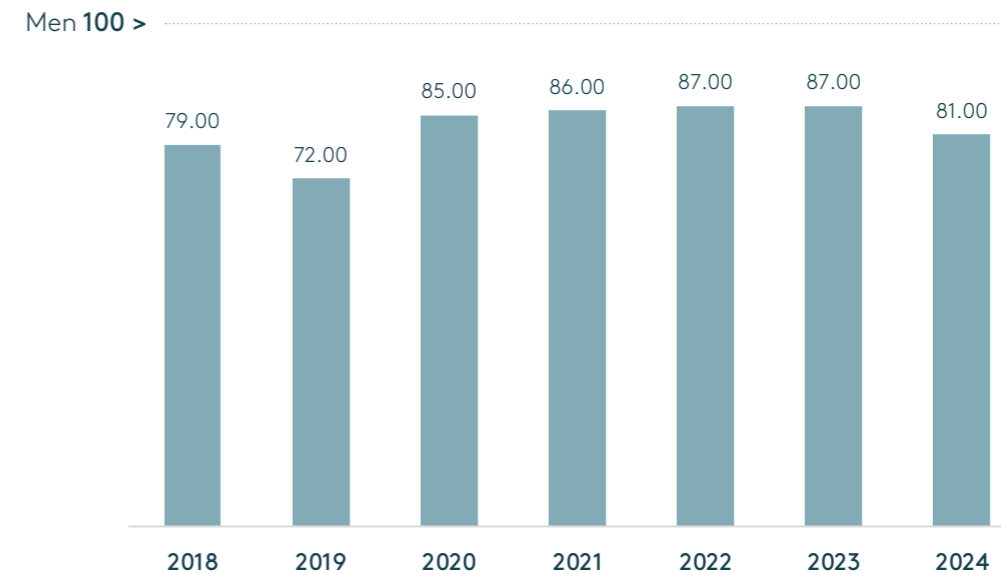
Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Note: Values for 160 economies with at least 100,000 LinkedIn members

A closer analysis of labour-market data at the industry level further reveals that women’s representation remains below men’s in nearly every sector worldwide. According to LinkedIn data, women’s overall representation in the workforce has slightly declined over the past two years, regressing to 2018 levels. While women’s representation in senior leadership has seen some growth in recent years, recent data also suggests that women’s hiring into leadership roles is facing a downturn. In 2023, the proportion of women being hired into leadership roles fell from 37.5% to 36.9%, and early 2024 data indicates a further decline to 36.4%, falling below 2021 levels.

LinkedIn research points to macroeconomic conditions as a key factor in this decline, with economic instability reducing opportunities for women’s advancement into senior roles. However, organisations with higher levels of female representation in the workforce tend to be more resilient to economic downturns, suggesting that gender diversity strengthens organisational stability and adaptability.

Another key barrier to gender parity is the disparity in promotions to management roles. According to McKinsey, for every 100 men promoted, only 81 women receive the same opportunity. This bottleneck at the managerial level hinders long-term progress towards gender equality in leadership, further entrenching disparities at the highest levels of organisations.



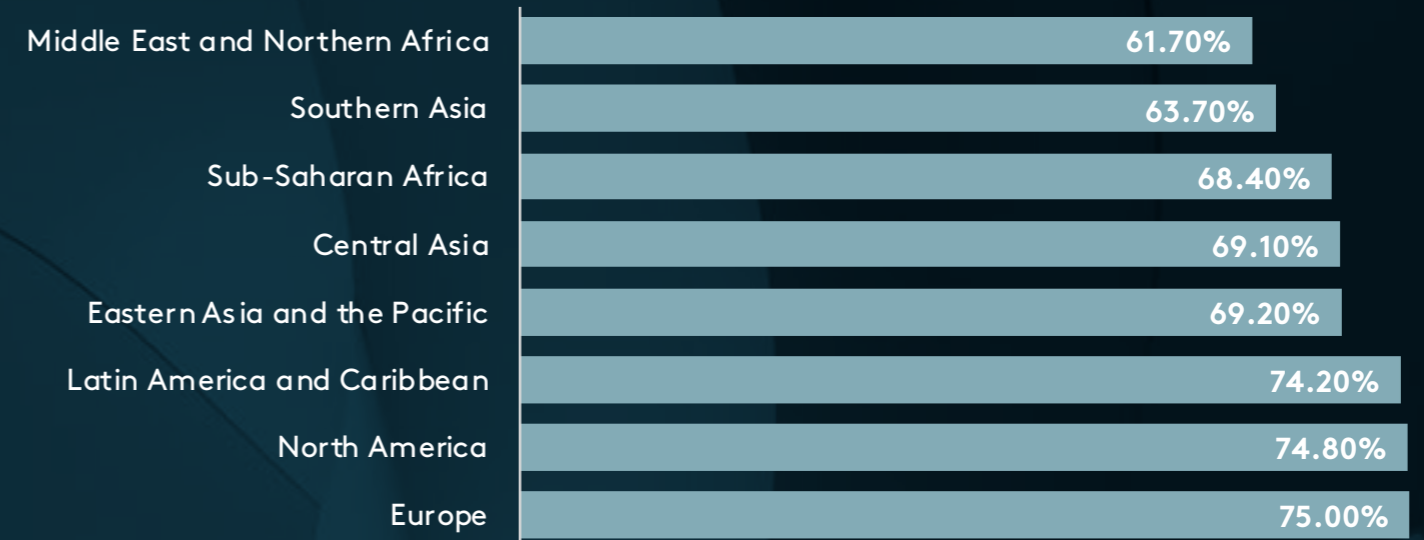
Source: Women in the Workplace 2024, McKinsey & Company and LinkedIn.Org

Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies and initiatives aimed at improving access to leadership opportunities for women. By implementing inclusive hiring and promotion practices, investing in mentorship and sponsorship programmes, and addressing the systemic barriers that hinder women’s advancement, organisations can take meaningful steps toward closing the gender gap and fostering a more equitable workplace.

A Regional Perspective

Progress on gender parity varies from region to region, driven by cultural differences, government policies and different DEI initiatives.

While no country has achieved full gender equality, the 2024 Global Gender Gap Index highlighted that **97%** of the economies included have closed more than 60% of their gender gap, a notable improvement from **85%** in 2006.



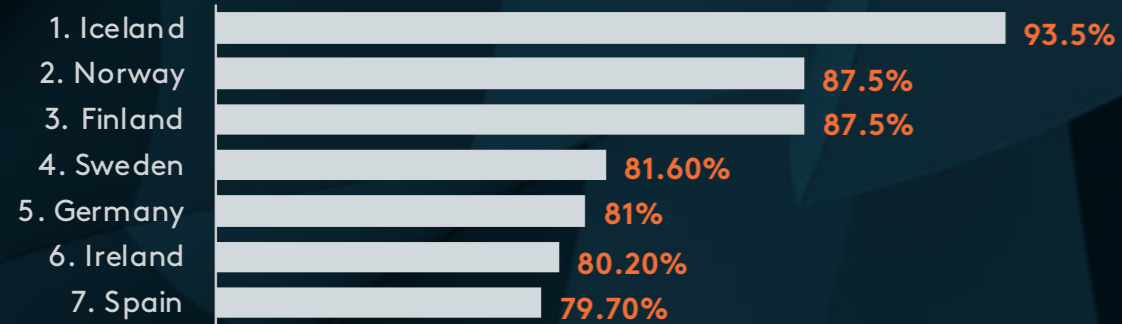


EMEA

Europe led the regional gender gap rankings in 2024, having closed 75% of its gap with an overall improvement of +6.2 percentage points since 2006. The top five European economies were:



European economies also occupied seven spots out of the global top 10:



However, while 21 out of the 40 economies in the region have closed over **75%** of their gender gap, disparities within the region remain stark. Whilst Iceland has maintained its leading position for over 15 years and is the only country to have closed over 90% of its gender gap, Türkiye ranks at the bottom, trailing Iceland by 29 percentage points.

NORAM

Ranked second among global regions, North America has achieved **74.8%** gender parity and has achieved a **4.3** percentage point improvement since 2006.

However, despite leading in the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex, North America's overall economic parity score has slightly declined to 76.3%, reflecting ongoing disparities in earned income and women's representation in senior leadership positions.

With the Trump administration's decision to roll back support of DEI initiatives, there is substantial uncertainty surrounding DEI progress across North America over the next 12 months, and beyond.

LATAM

Latin America ranked third, with a gender parity score of **74.2%**. The region has demonstrated the most significant improvement since 2006, reducing its overall gap by **8.3** percentage points.

Importantly, economic parity has reached a record high of 65.7%, increasing by 0.5 percentage points from 2023. This was largely driven by two key factors:

1. Improved labour-force participation
2. Professional role representation for women

APAC

Asia and the Pacific ranked fourth in global gender parity, with an overall score of **69.2%**.

While the region has improved by 3.1 percentage points since 2006, gender disparities remain substantial. Only two countries, New Zealand and the Philippines, have consistently ranked in the global top 10 over the years.

These regional disparities underscore the need for tailored policy interventions to accelerate gender parity. While some economies have made substantial progress, others continue to face systemic challenges that limit opportunities for women in the workforce.

The region's Economic Participation and Opportunity score has reached **71.7%**, reflecting progress since 2023. However, significant variations exist between countries, particularly in labour-force participation and workforce representation.

Addressing these inequalities requires a combination of policy reforms, corporate initiatives, and societal shifts to ensure sustained progress towards gender equality worldwide.

Spotlight: Driving Diversity

Key Takeaways from the OWIT Geneva Gala Dinner

On 20 June 2024, Lisa Finney, a Senior Partner in Proco Group's Consumer practice, joined a panel of experts at the OWIT Geneva Gala Dinner to discuss practical strategies for enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace.



The event featured a keynote speech by Doug Manuel, a former BBC documentary producer, and a panel discussion with industry leaders, including Jane Hoskisson (IATA), Karin Rupp Baertschiger (Skyguide), David Vaury (PwC), and Tanguy Dulac (PeopleCentriX).

The panel explored the complexities of implementing effective DEI strategies. Key insights included:

1. Enhancing Workplace Diversity

The panel underscored that diversity is integral to "people sustainability" and recommended that organisations:

- > Cultivate an inclusive culture: Prioritise cultural transformation as the foundation of DEI efforts.
- > Establish clear KPIs: Set measurable objectives to track DEI progress.
- > Invest in upskilling: Provide continuous learning opportunities to foster inclusivity.
- > Hold leaders accountable: Ensure leadership actively promotes DEI principles.

Research from our 2024 International Women's Day report revealed that women prioritise:

- > Company culture: A supportive and inclusive work environment
- > Representation at board level: Visible female leadership
- > Career progression opportunities: Clear pathways for advancement

2. Addressing DEI Barriers

Findings from PeopleCentriX showed that women in Switzerland face lower promotion rates and a 20% higher failure rate in leadership roles. The panel suggested:

- > Structural support: Implement frameworks to ensure women in leadership receive adequate backing
- > Purposeful DEI Objectives: Move beyond quotas to establish intentional and sustainable DEI goals

IATA's 25by2025 initiative is a strong example, aiming to improve gender balance in aviation. Since its inception, the number of female CEOs in the sector has increased from 3 to 28.

3. Breaking Leadership Barriers for Women

Despite women entering consumer markets at high rates, leadership remains male-dominated. Challenges include:

- > Retention and career growth: Ensuring women have clear opportunities to advance
- > Cultural barriers: Transforming workplace norms that hinder female progression

In the aviation industry, long tenures and low turnover have resulted in stagnant leadership demographics. The panel highlighted the need for:

- > Continuous upskilling: Recognising that skills have a five-year relevance span, necessitating ongoing training
- > Leadership renewal: Encouraging fresh perspectives to drive innovation and inclusivity

4. Effective DEI Implementation Strategies

The panel recommended:

- > Active listening: Engaging with employees to understand their experiences
- > Tailored approaches: Designing DEI initiatives that reflect the workforce's specific needs
- > Visible leadership commitment: Ensuring senior leaders champion and participate in DEI efforts

The OWIT Geneva Gala Dinner highlighted the multifaceted nature of DEI and offered actionable insights for organisations striving to foster inclusivity.

By prioritising cultural transformation, structural support, and continuous development, businesses can make significant progress towards meaningful diversity and inclusion.

AI and its Impact on Gender Parity

In the fast-paced world of AI, new tools are regularly developed to streamline business processes, including hiring and embedding diversity.

While AI has the potential to drive positive change in recruitment, concerns remain about its ability to ensure truly unbiased hiring. AI can inadvertently perpetuate biases present in its developers. As AI adoption grows, it is crucial to assess its role in promoting diversity in hiring.

Perceptions of AI in Diversity Hiring

A study of 3,000 workers and 1,000 HR professionals across the UK and USA found 64% of candidates believe AI is as fair or fairer than humans in hiring, and 67% of HR leaders trust AI to help find qualified candidates. However, perspectives on AI's role vary:

HR professionals:



trust AI for candidate recommendations



have a more positive view of AI than a year ago



implemented AI tools without business approval

Workers:



% think AI could reduce hiring bias



believe AI will help more than harm



disagree with AI making final hiring decisions

The Benefits of AI in Hiring Diversity

AI can improve hiring processes and DEI efforts by:

- > Automating CV screening: AI swiftly filters CVs for relevant experience.
- > Keyword matching: Identifies essential skills in applications.
- > Pre-screening interviews: Chatbots conduct standardised initial interviews.
- > Personalised communication: Keeps candidates engaged.
- > Blind hiring: Anonymises applications to reduce bias.
- > Standardised assessments: Ensures all candidates are evaluated fairly.

While AI enhances efficiency and fairness in early recruitment stages, it is not a flawless solution.

AI in Diversity Hiring: Helpful, but Not Reliable

AI can anonymise candidates initially, but unconscious bias may still influence hiring decisions. For example, in male-dominated industries, career experience and education may indicate gender.

AI also cannot address broader DEI issues. If hiring managers remain inflexible about role requirements—such as travel or experience—certain minorities may still be excluded.

For AI to truly support diversity, companies must reform internal processes. Flexibility in role requirements, including remote work and varied experience levels, is essential.

In Conversation with Anca Gosling, OWIT Lake Geneva President and EHL WIL Member



OWIT International is a non-profit professional organisation that supports the advancement of women in international trade and business by providing a network and educational opportunities.

As the president of OWIT Lake Geneva, and a member of the EHL Women in Leadership initiative, Anca Gosling is leading the narrative on improving DEI and creating more opportunities for women to progress in their career.

Following on from the OWIT Lake Geneva conference that took place in 2024, we sat down with Anca Gosling to hear her latest insights on the gender gap across international trade.

Reflections on DEI Progress

Anca reflected on the past 20+ years, acknowledging that significant progress has been made in DEI conversations, policies, and best practices. However, although progress has been made, it is not now a time to pause or refocus. Rather than discarding these advancements, it's critical that we now use them as a strong foundation to consolidate and strengthen our position moving forward.

This is especially critical as we navigate a more volatile DEI landscape over the course of the next few years. With world dynamics surrounding DEI shifting, and organisations rolling back their initiatives, it is vital that we maintain the progress that has been made and keep the commitment to the DEI targets that have been set.

Women in Tech

Anca also discussed recent research, which shows that women continue to fall behind in future and tech-related skills, particularly in AI. Although women are now accounting for more roles within the tech space, they still tend to be predominately within the non-tech functions including Marketing, HR and Finance. So, whilst the broad gender gap has closed across the tech industry, there is still significant work to be done to enable women to work within the tech functions. With this in mind, having a targeted approach to building awareness and upskilling in AI needs to be a top priority for the next 2 to 5 years.

The Importance of Soft Skills

Another key takeaway Anca shared is the increasing focus on soft skills. Experts emphasise that while technical skills can be taught, attitude cannot - and it is attitude that truly makes a difference. Being authentic, staying true to one's values, and maintaining curiosity and resilience are critical differentiators in today's workplace.

Address Unconscious Bias

Reflecting on the last 12 months, Anca highlighted that unconscious bias and prejudices remain ongoing challenges for companies. While efforts to address them have evolved, a perfect solution has yet to be found. A number of industries are actively discussing how to adapt to the changing workforce, especially with the rise of Gen Z. Business models may need to be revisited to stay relevant, incorporating more flexibility, job-sharing, and other initiatives that support both men and women.

Finally, Anca reflected on the benefits of diversity, saying:

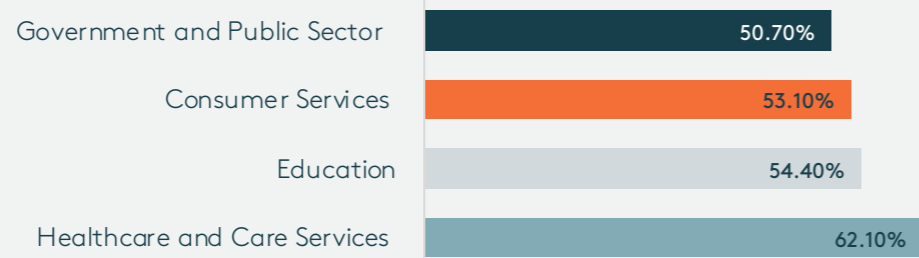
"Diversity matters! Not only does it bring proven social, economic, and political benefits, but it also helps create a better world for everyone. We should celebrate the progress made over the last 20 years while staying vigilant and committed to building on this foundation for the next 20."

We'd like to thank Anca for sharing her invaluable insights with us for this report.

Gender Parity Across Different Industries

In 2024, gender representation across different industries continued to show significant disparities, with women being the majority in some sectors while remaining underrepresented in others.

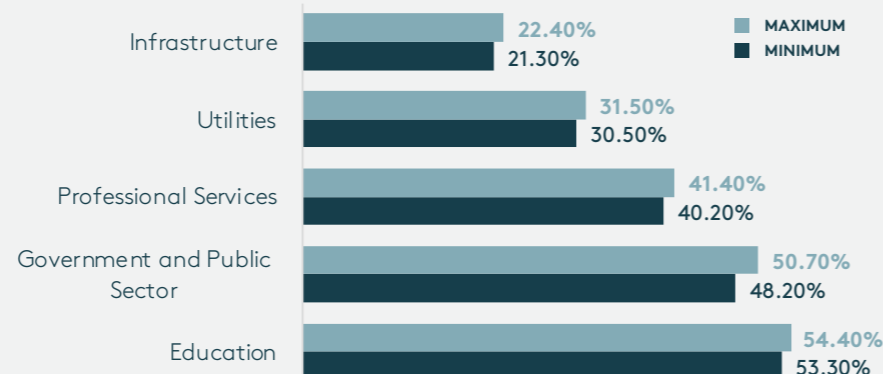
Data from LinkedIn found that women constituted the majority of the workforce in:



These industries have historically maintained a strong female presence, reflecting ongoing trends in employment distribution.

Conversely, women were least represented in male-dominated sectors such as Utilities (31.5%), Supply Chain and Transportation (31.6%), Oil, Gas, and Mining (24.1%), and Infrastructure (22.4%). Despite gradual progress in some of these industries, the overall gender imbalance remained pronounced.

Examining long-term trends, there has been a positive evolution in women's representation since 2016. Incremental increases in female workforce participation were observed in several industries, including:

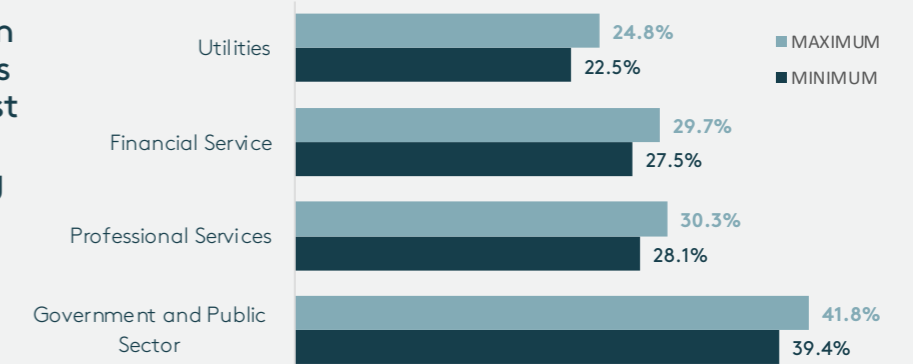


These improvements highlight the ongoing efforts to enhance gender inclusivity in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

However, despite the progress observed over the years, the overall proportion of women in the workforce showed a slight decline between 2023 and 2024.

The most notable decreases were recorded in Accommodation and Food (from 44.2% to 43.5%), Consumer Services (53.7% to 53.1%), Wholesale (33.3% to 32.7%), Real Estate (42.2% to 41.7%), and Retail (49% to 48.5%). These shifts indicate potential challenges in sustaining gender parity gains, particularly in industries affected by economic and structural changes.

Women's representation in senior leadership positions also demonstrated modest improvements since 2016, with every industry seeing an increase in female leadership by 2024. The most significant gains were observed in:



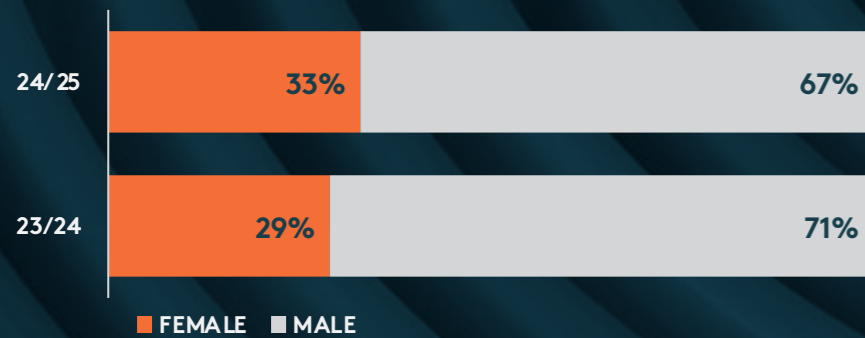
Despite these advancements, the period between 2023 and 2024 saw slight declines in female leadership across all industries, with Consumer Services (dropping from 42.1% to 41.6%), Retail (35.3% to 35%), Technology (26.7% to 26.4%), and Wholesale (23.1% to 22.8%) experiencing the most notable reductions.

Proco Group's Three Core Markets

Proco Group's global team delivers executive search and business advisory services across three core markets:

COMMODITIES | INDUSTRIALS | CONSUMER

Looking at our data over the last two years, the gap between hiring men and women across our three core markets has closed slightly, with the percentage of successfully placed female candidates increasing by **4%**.



Gender Parity in Commodities

Gender diversity at leadership level across the global commodities landscape has seen some progress in recent years, however, significant disparities remain and, as of 2024, women still hold a minority of senior roles across this industry.

Industry Advice on Closing the Gap

At a recent event co-hosted by Trafigura, three of their inspiring women leaders shared their professional journeys and insights on how to thrive in the world of commodity trading. The key traits they emphasised included:

- > Being curious
- > Being adaptable
- > Having a strong interest in geopolitical affairs and global markets

Yasmina Rauber, Secretary General of the Zug Commodity Association and former President of WISTA Switzerland, also recently shared insights in how she excelled in the commodities industry. When asked how women can break into leadership positions, she gave the following advice:

"Women make up a fair share of mid-management, but at VP level and beyond, it drops to one in ten. My big piece of advice for women to break the glass ceiling into leadership positions is to network.

Find what works for you. A quick coffee, a lunch, whatever feels natural—but make the time. Build those relationships because that is what will help you move up. Don't expect people because you are doing well at your job to support you, you need to be visible.

And then, when you're networking, talk about what you've achieved. Say, I'm really happy because this week I did this, this, and this. If you don't say it, no one will see it. And don't wait for your yearly review—it's too late by then and you'll have forgotten a lot. Keep track. Speak up. Because unless you do, everyone will forget."

Gender Parity in Industrials

The gender gap across the industrial markets remained a significant issue last year, affecting women's representation across the industry on a worldwide scale.

In North America, despite making up nearly half of the total labour force, women accounted for only **29.4%** percent of manufacturing positions in 2024. This underrepresentation extended to top management, with women holding just **26%** of industry leadership roles.

A recent report we created that shed light on site management talent across the North American medical device industry reflects the lack of women at leadership level, with only **6%** of the roles we mapped being occupied by women.

You can access the full Medical Device Manufacturing report here:

[ACCESS REPORT](#)

Similarly to North America, European countries also demonstrated low female representation. For example, in Germany only **20%** of manufacturing jobs were held by women, which some may find surprising considering that the region is known for its emphasis on inclusivity, prompting efforts to bridge the gap. Studies have suggested that industrial organisations could close the gap by as much as **50%** by increasing overall female workforce participation by just **10%**.

Manufacturing in India and other APAC countries also saw a considerable gender imbalance. According to the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), of the 8 million workers employed in India's formal manufacturing industries in 2019-20, only **19.7%** were women.

These statistics reinforce the pressing need for targeted initiatives to promote gender diversity in industrial markets. Increasing women's participation in manufacturing not only fosters workplace equity but also enhances economic performance and innovation within the sector.

Gender Parity in Consumer Markets

The diversity divide across the global consumer markets widened in 2024. While some organisations made strides in closing the gender gap, others saw setbacks, reversing previous progress.

In the food and beverage industry, Diageo continued to lead in promoting gender parity. The London-listed company had **44%** of its leadership roles occupied by women, and it remained committed to increasing this figure to **50%** by 2030. The company's boardroom also reflected strong diversity, with seven of ten directors being women, as well as four self-identifying as belonging to minority ethnic groups.

Diageo's Chief Human Resources Officer, Louise Prashad, also believes that goals are a great way of driving change within a business. In a recent interview she said:

"Any progress on diversity should also be complementary to our wider business performance. We don't think of it as an 'either or'. We believe that being a more inclusive, more representative business makes us better at reflecting and serving our global base of consumers, as well as ensuring we can access the broadest talent pipelines."

However, in North America, DEI initiatives faced growing challenges. Since the return of the Trump Administration, corporate focus on DEI has diminished, with some organisations scaling back their commitments.

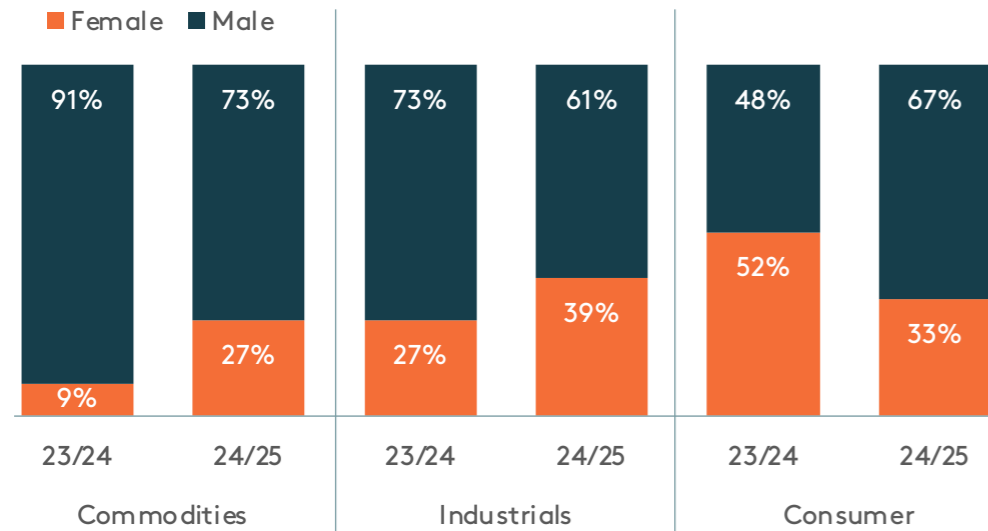
McDonald's, for instance, revised its DEI policies, though the company insisted it remained committed to inclusion and, in an open letter, McDonald's leadership highlighted that **30%** of its US leaders came from underrepresented groups, an increase from **29%** in 2021.

In the fashion industry, progress in gender representation remained slow. Despite frequent turnover among creative directors, inclusivity at the highest levels of design leadership remained limited.

A report from Vogue Business found that out of **35** leading fashion brands, only **10** had female creative directors, underscoring the ongoing struggle to achieve gender balance in key creative roles.

Overall, while some global consumer market leaders advanced gender diversity, others stalled or reversed prior commitments. The need for continued accountability and structured policies to ensure long-term, sustainable progress remains critical.

The insights shared mirror hiring data from Proco Group's global network. Whilst progress can be seen across commodities and industrials, the gender gap widened across the global consumer markets last year.



We are Proco Group

We are an executive search and advisory partner for organisations and senior professionals, who are navigating the complexities of operating in the commodity, industrial and consumer markets.

The quality of our intelligence enables our clients to make insight-driven strategic decisions, create new possibilities and secure hard to find individuals.

Combining a cross-industry, international reach with a dedicated regional presence, we are perfectly placed to serve our clients' needs wherever they are. We are a purpose-led organisation, building better businesses and stronger markets, by turning our network and knowledge into people possibility. Get in touch for a conversation about your talent strategy and challenges.

Conclusion

With three years added to the timeline to have achieving gender parity, it might feel as though the world has not progressed over the course of the last 12 months. However, despite the slowdown, progress has still been made.

It's important to consider that to achieve gender parity systemic change is required, not just incremental progress – and there isn't a short-time fix for this.

What is clear is that organisations that are actively rethinking hiring, leadership development, and workplace culture have a greater chance of creating a truly inclusive

8

Global Locations

50+

Search Professionals

16

Years in operation

At Proco we turn our network and
knowledge into people possibility