
**WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT
PRINCIPLES**

WEPS

Women's Empowerment Principles

A snapshot
of 350 companies
in G7 countries



7 PRINCIPLES

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

Established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact Office

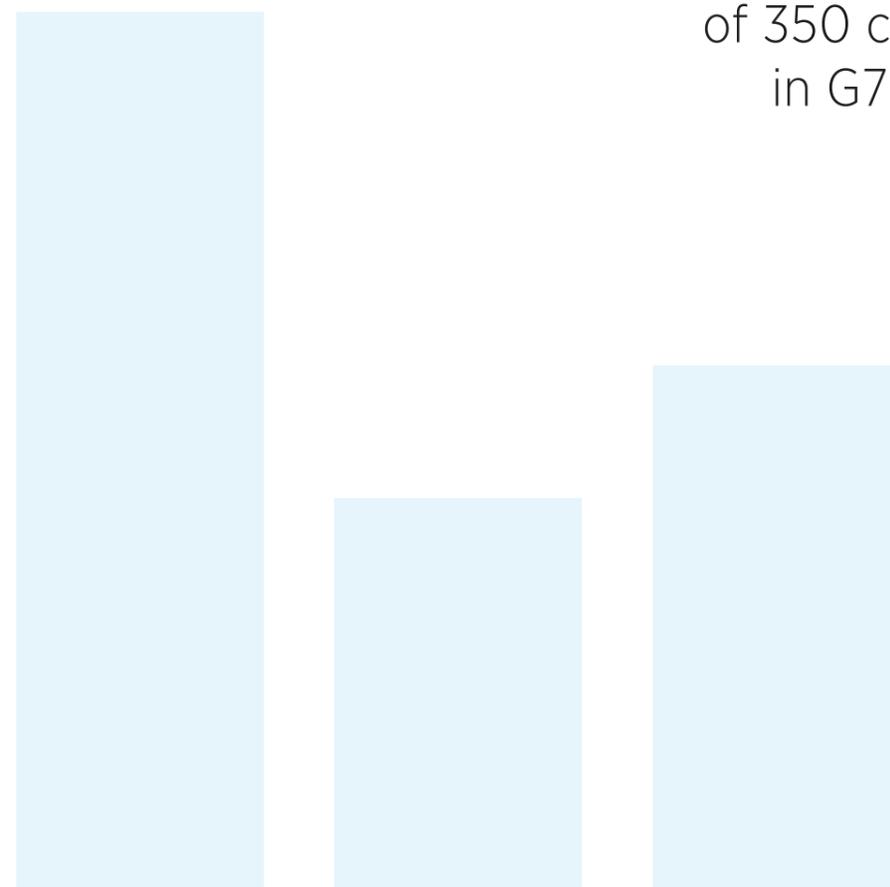


- Principle 1**  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2**  Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
- Principle 3**  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4**  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5**  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6**  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7**  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

WEPs

Women's Empowerment Principles

A snapshot of 350 companies in G7 countries



WEPs - Women Empowerment Principles | A snapshot of 350 companies in G7 countries

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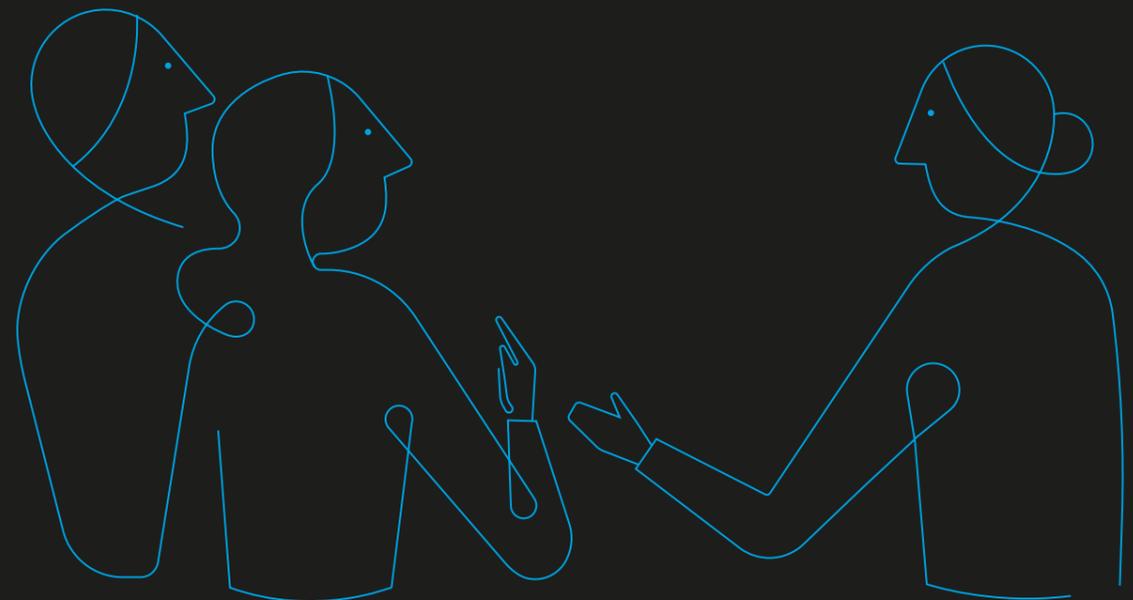
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Foreword UN Women



The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened hard won gains on gender equality. Pre-existing inequalities in social, economic and political systems have been exposed and further deepened.

Now more than ever we need multi-stakeholder partnership to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community. This demands strong government action for gender-responsive laws and policies, a committed and forceful private sector operationalizing them and a vibrant civil society.

This is the vision from which the WE EMPOWER-G7 programme was established over three years ago. In 2018, UN Women joined forces with the European Union and the ILO to promote sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth in G7 countries. Our multi-stakeholder approach has actively engaged the private sector, contributed to the G7 gender equality agenda and built collaboration with civil society organizations.

This study of the largest 350 companies in G7 countries offers insights on how the public and private sector interact to advance gender equality. Laws and policies in each G7 country impact the lives of women, from the extent that women's voices are heard, to their employment in decent work, their holding of leadership roles and their decision making in the marketplace including as entrepreneurs.

The study is founded in the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) framework. Informed by international labour and human rights standards, the WEPs are grounded in the recognition that businesses have a stake in, and a responsibility for, gender equality and women's empowerment. Leveraging the WEPs, WE EMPOWER-G7 developed guidance and engaged the private sector on key issues such as gender parity in the workplace and on boards, parental leave and child care, gender pay gap, violence and sexual harassment, paid parental leave and gender-responsive procurement.

To reverse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and also meet the ambitions we collectively share, we need bolder, bigger and faster steps. At its heart, this study makes a call on governments and the private sector to continue to advance gender equality and women's rights. This demands every effort to ensure that women in the workplace, marketplace and community thrive. UN Women, and our partners present and future, stand ready to support these efforts.

Anita Bhatia

Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of Resource Management,
UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships
UN Women

Foreword European Commission



Gender equality and women's economic empowerment are key objectives the European Union is committed to. Through partnerships all over the world, and jointly with the United Nations, we show that together, we can make a difference.

In the wake of COVID-19, we must stand up, speak out and act to protect our hard-won gains towards achieving gender equality from getting pushed back. The pandemic has presented challenges, highlighting pre-existing inequalities that are exacerbated amid a global health and economic crisis. We must accelerate our actions to achieve our goals and strive to always do better.

Our EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025 (GAP III) sets out concrete actions to contribute to building a gender equal world. It complements the EU's Directives on work-life balance and pay transparency. More recently, the European Commission has put forward a proposed directive on corporate sustainability reporting. Its aim is to increase transparency around organizations' and companies' contribution to sustainable development, including gender equality and women's empowerment.

The WE EMPOWER-G7 initiative is in full alignment with these directives and action plan, ensuring that women and girls progress in the world of work. The WE EMPOWER-G7 initiative has demonstrated what can be achieved if governments, private sector and civil society all work together. Each sector has a specific role to play in creating an enabling environment in which women and girls can thrive. Gender equality can only be achieved if we act and work together.

This study has highlighted the steps that have been taken by governments and private sector alike to ensure women's rights are recognized in the workplace, marketplace and community. It also illustrates the power of the Women's Empowerment Principles as a framework to bring about this change. It guides companies through concrete steps to advance gender equality for women in the world of work.

As of end August 2021, nearly 5,500 companies have committed to the WEPs. We are confident that this will inspire others to follow and will continue to see progress on gender inclusive initiatives.

From the EU side we remain strongly committed to empowering women and to continue working with partners to achieve a gender equal world.

Hilde Hardeman

Head of Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
European Commission

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Executive summary

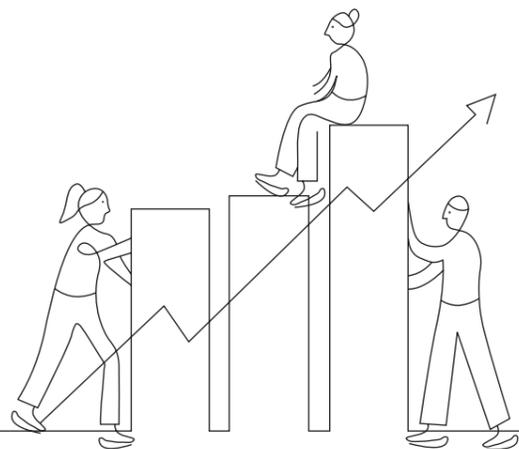
Gender inequality is one of the greatest economic and social costs to society – so much so that if full gender equality were achieved now it would increase growth in the global economy by US\$12 trillion by 2025.¹ However, at the current rate of progress the gender gap in economic participation will take 267.7 years to close.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a serious threat to women's employment and livelihoods as it has deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed cracks in social, political and economic systems. From access to health services, social protection and digital technologies to a significant rise of domestic violence and unpaid care work, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for many women around the world. Women with care responsibilities, informal workers, low-income families and youth are among the hardest hit.³

COVID-19 has also revealed that many workers lack paid family and medical leave which – in a pandemic – has meant that working women without paid leave, who are more likely to stay home with a sick child or other family member, might have to choose between going to work and staying at home. This fact alone is a driver of pay inequity and limited career opportunities.⁴

We need bolder, bigger and faster steps towards our collective goals on gender equality.

There is already an overwhelming acceptance of women's right to financial independence and while G7 leaders can influence policies, implement reforms and invite the global community to follow suit the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS) offer the private sector a clear framework to address gender gaps in the workplace, marketplace and community.



This study:

- Analyses the 50 largest companies in each of the G7 countries. One fifth of these 350 companies are WEPS signatories. There is a clear correlation between those that have adopted the WEPS and the generally higher percentages of women in those companies on boards, in executive positions, senior management and indeed the number of women employees.
- Examines some of the relevant laws and frameworks that G7 countries have implemented to promote gender equality. Gender-responsive laws, regulatory frameworks and policies shape and influence companies' behaviour, which in turn benefits working women.
- Shows areas where companies have made significant progress in improving their policies and practices and others which require more work.
 - ▶ Some results are dictated by existing frameworks within the country, while others are based on companies' own initiative to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.
 - ▶ Most of the 350 companies have implemented policies that promote gender equality alongside corporate strategies on human rights, safety at work and training and career development and recruitment that do not discriminate against any demographic group.
 - ▶ WEPS signatories in general do better on the indicators analyzed. They have shown both commitment and action to have acted to improve gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace.

Call to action

We invite the remaining 80 per cent of the 350 companies in the G7 to start their WEPS Journey by signing the CEO Statement of Support and becoming WEPS signatories.

UN Women provides WEPS signatories with guidance, advice, peer-to-peer learning activities and national and regional awards. Being part of the WEPS community and network also allows companies to exchange information and good practices.

Improvements are required in the following areas:

- **Corporate leadership** – Companies should embed gender equality and women's empowerment into their business model, values and overall organizational culture, establishing company-wide goals and targets and measuring progress through clear performance indicators. A dedicated gender action plan is a clear path to making progress and achieving results. Corporate leaders should signal the importance of gender equality for the company by initiating and leading this action plan. Actions speak for themselves and leading by example in areas such as taking time off for family needs could set the tone and direction for a gender-sensitive corporate culture.
- **Women's leadership and decision-making** – The proportion of women in decision-making positions remain limited – women CEOs range from zero to five per cent. However, research shows that companies with gender diversity in leadership and decision-making roles tend to outperform those with fewer women in executive positions. Some G7 governments have recognized this by expanding gender quotas to executive teams and leadership pipelines. Companies need to step up their efforts to recruit and promote women into leadership and decision-making roles; thereby signaling that they value women's perspectives and talents.

to pay a living wage (although the United Kingdom has a certifying body which offers accreditation to employers who voluntarily offer living wages to their staff and employees).⁷ Providing living wages has an impact on narrowing the gender and racial pay gap.⁸

- **The gender pay gap** – Closing the gender pay gap is dependent on greater pay transparency, as it gives employees confidence that their pay is fair and non-discriminatory. Pay transparency also helps employers obtain the necessary information to assess gender discrimination and rectify pay gaps, and reduce any risk of unequal pay claims against them. Gender-disaggregated pay information needs to be published by more companies in order to ensure fair remuneration.
- **Gender-based violence at work** – COVID-19 saw a spike in the incidence of domestic violence and abuse. Employers have a role not just in cultivating a safe and respectful corporate culture to prevent violence and harassment and in supporting survivors of violence, they also benefit from doing so. For example, domestic violence negatively affects the company's bottom line from costs associated with higher rates of absenteeism, staff turnover, reduced productivity and the potential for reputational damage.⁹
- **Supplier diversity** – Some 44 out of 50 companies (88 per cent) in the United States have a supplier diversity programme, followed by Canada (30 per cent). Overall, 21 per cent of WEPS signatories and 20 per cent of non-WEPS signatories have such a programme. However this issue, including support for women-owned businesses in the supply chain, needs more effort.
- **Greater transparency and reporting** – All companies should report their performance to achieve the substantive gender equality goals set out by the WEPS. The WEPS reporting platform allows companies to assess their progress on gender equality. Globally, 124 companies have publicly reported on this platform since March 2021.¹⁰

UN Women will continue to expand its guidance and support to all stakeholders in collaboration with partners to foster an enabling environment for gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community. This includes supporting organizations to embed values of gender equality in their business model and overall organizational culture and guiding them through the WEPS Journey – from designing action plans to measuring performance.

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