

BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

EBOOK VERSION 2025

GROWTH THROUGH DIVERSITY
www.30percentclub.org
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*“**Gender Mainstreaming**” means the process of identifying gender gaps and making women’s, men’s, girls’ and boys’ concerns and experiences integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, legislation and programmes in all sectors of life to ensure that they benefit equally.”*



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FOREWORD



When Business Engage published the initial Best Practices in Gender Mainstreaming back in 2013 we noted at the time “There exists a global understanding that there is a solid business case for the private sector to embrace Gender Mainstreaming within the fabric of the organisation. This document provides the best practices for Gender Mainstreaming in the South African private sector. It is the result of over two years research by Business Engage into international trends. Over two hundred global academic papers, commercial reports, blogs and general articles have been perused and combined with local knowledge. The private sector is encouraged to consider these best practices and to implement the chosen best practices in their Gender Mainstreaming endeavours. They are further welcome to adapt and experiment with these best practices to suit their own environment. A “one size fits all” approach is not advocated.

In 2025, as South Africa advances its transformation agenda, gender mainstreaming is a critical driver of an equitable and inclusive society. The Department’s strategic plan aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing:

- Strategic leadership and governance for women’s socio-economic empowerment and gender equality.
- Gender mainstreaming in socio-economic and governance programs to foster a just society.
- Public participation through outreach and advocacy.
- Knowledge generation and policy analysis for women’s empowerment.
- Robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms.

With South Africa chairing the G20 in 2025 and with the G20 embracing the UN SDG’s it is an opportune time to revisit the Best Practices. This updated edition of Best Practices in Gender Mainstreaming provides an extensive guide for organizations to address gender disparities, fostering inclusive workplaces and contributing to a prosperous South Africa.

ABOUT BUSINESS ENGAGE



Business Engage is a non-profit company at the forefront of driving gender mainstreaming within the private sector across Africa. Established in 2005, it has built a solid reputation as a trusted partner for businesses committed to embedding gender mainstreaming into their corporate strategies, governance, and operational frameworks.

Through high-impact initiatives such as the Gender Mainstreaming Awards, Business Engage has created a powerful platform to recognise individuals and organisations leading the way in inclusive leadership. These awards have become a benchmark of excellence, inspiring companies to go beyond box-ticking and embrace gender mainstreaming as a catalyst for innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

What sets Business Engage apart is its unique ability to convene meaningful dialogue between business leaders, policy influencers, and change-makers - turning conversations into actionable commitments. With a presence in East, West, and Southern Africa, the organisation plays a key role in shaping regional best practices and fostering cross-border learning.

As Business Engage continues to expand its footprint and deepen its impact, it remains committed to equipping the private sector with the tools, frameworks, and recognition it needs to lead the charge in gender mainstreaming.

ABOUT THE 30% CLUB



THE VISION

The 30% Club believes that gender balance on boards not only encourages better leadership and governance, but diversity further contributes to better all-round board performance, and ultimately increased corporate performance for both companies and their shareholders.

THE MISSION

The 30% Club aims to develop a diverse pool of talent for all businesses through the efforts of its Chair and CEO members who are committed to better gender balance at all levels of their organizations. Business leadership is key to our mission, taking the issue beyond a specialist diversity effort and into mainstream talent management.

THE VALUES

The 30% Club approach—collaborative, concerted business-led efforts—can help accelerate progress towards better gender balance at all levels of organizations. The 30% Club does not believe mandatory quotas are the right approach. Instead, we support a voluntary approach in order to realize meaningful, sustainable change. 30% Club efforts are complementary to individual company efforts and existing networking groups, adding to these through collaboration and the visible and voluntary commitment of senior business leaders.

The 30% Club launched in the UK in 2010 with a goal of achieving 30% women on FTSE-100 boards by end 2015. As of 2025, the initiative has expanded globally, with significant progress in Southern Africa, where the focus remains on building a pipeline of women leaders from “schoolroom to boardroom.” For a full list of international members, visit www.30percentclub.org.

BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR 2025 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, Gender Mainstreaming has evolved from a compliance-driven initiative to a strategic imperative for private-sector organizations in South Africa and globally. Integrating gender equality into all aspects of organizational strategy, operations, and culture is no longer optional—it is a driver of competitive advantage, innovation, and sustainable growth. The business case for gender diversity is robust, with compelling evidence linking diverse leadership to enhanced financial performance, better governance, and increased market responsiveness. In South Africa, frameworks such as the King IV Code on Corporate Governance and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's (JSE) Board Gender Policy listing requirements underscore the urgency of intentional, systemic action. Globally, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 highlights progress in closing gender gaps but reveals persistent challenges, particularly in economic participation and leadership representation in the private sector.

This document provides a comprehensive guide to Gender Mainstreaming Best Practices for the private sector in 2025 and beyond. It builds on the foundational principles established in the 2019 edition while incorporating new recommendations informed by global and local trends. These include digital transformation, hybrid work environments, intersectionality, mental health considerations, and heightened stakeholder expectations for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Drawing from academic research, industry reports, stakeholder consultations, and regulatory frameworks, this guide offers actionable strategies to foster inclusive workplaces, address systemic barriers, and align with global gender standards. The recommendations are designed to be adaptable, enabling organizations to tailor approaches to their unique contexts while driving systemic, sustainable change.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The rationale for Gender Mainstreaming is multifaceted, encompassing financial, operational, and societal benefits. Key drivers include:

- **Financial Impact:** Research consistently demonstrates a correlation between gender diversity and financial performance. McKinsey's Diversity Matters report (2023) found that companies with greater gender diversity in leadership are 25% more likely to outperform financially. Similarly, a 2022 study by Credit Suisse showed that firms with higher female representation on boards achieved higher returns on equity.
- **Talent Optimization:** In a skills-driven global economy, accessing the full talent pool is critical for competitiveness. Women represent half of the workforce, and organizations that prioritize gender equality attract and retain top talent, reducing turnover costs and enhancing productivity.
- **Market Responsiveness:** Women's growing economic influence as consumers and decision-makers demands diverse perspectives to design products and services that meet market needs. Companies with gender-diverse teams are better positioned to understand and respond to these dynamics.
- **Governance Excellence:** Gender-diverse boards and leadership teams enhance decision-making by bringing varied perspectives, improving risk management, and strengthening stakeholder trust. The King IV Code emphasizes diversity as a cornerstone of effective governance.
- **Reputation and Stakeholder Expectations:** Investors, customers, and employees increasingly prioritize gender. Aligning with global standards, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enhances organizational reputation and mitigates reputational risks.

Persistent Challenges

Despite progress, significant barriers to gender equality persist in the private sector. These include:

- **Unconscious Bias:** Subtle biases in hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations continue to limit women's advancement.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Women disproportionately bear caregiving responsibilities, exacerbated by hybrid work models, which can hinder career progression.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

- **Systemic Inequalities:** Structural issues, such as wage gaps and underrepresentation in STEM fields, remain entrenched.
- **Intersectionality:** Women from marginalized groups—based on race, disability, or socioeconomic status—face compounded barriers, requiring tailored interventions.
- **Leadership Representation:** Women remain underrepresented in C-suite roles and boardrooms, with South Africa's private sector lagging behind global benchmarks (although progress is being made).

The *Global Gender Gap Report 2024* highlights South Africa's strengths in political empowerment (ranked 10th) and health and survival (ranked 1st) but reveals a concerning 85th ranking in economic participation and opportunity (this ranking has hardly moved over the years). These gaps underscore the need for targeted private-sector interventions to close disparities in leadership representation, wage equality, and workforce participation.

SOUTH AFRICA'S GENDER EQUALITY LANDSCAPE

South Africa's regulatory and societal context provides both opportunities and obligations for gender mainstreaming. Key frameworks include:

- **King IV Code on Corporate Governance:** Principle 7 emphasizes diversity, including gender, as essential for effective governance and decision-making. Boards are encouraged to set voluntary targets for gender representation.
- **JSE Listing Requirements:** The JSE mandates listed companies to adopt and report on gender diversity policies, with a focus on board composition.
- **Companies Act No. 71 of 2008 (Regulation 43):** Listed public companies and certain other entities must establish Social & Ethics Committees to monitor activities related to social and economic development, including employment equity and gender equality. These committees ensure compliance with legislation and promote ethical practices.
- **Employment Equity Act:** This legislation requires designated employers to eliminate unfair discrimination and implement affirmative action to advance gender and racial equity.
- **Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE):** Gender equality is a key component of B-BBEE scorecards, incentivizing organizations to prioritize women's empowerment in ownership, management, and skills development.

South Africa's rankings in the Global Gender Gap Report (2018–2024) reflect steady progress in overall gender equality (16th in 2024) but highlight persistent challenges in economic participation. The data serves as a call to action for private-sector leadership to address these gaps through intentional, measurable strategies.

SOUTH AFRICA'S GENDER EQUALITY LANDSCAPE

South Africa's Global Gender Gap Rankings (2018–2024)

Year	Overall	Economic Participation	Political Empowerment ⁺	Health and Survival	Educational Attainment
2024	16	85	10	1	15
2023	18	87	12	1	16
2022	20	90	14	1	18
2021	18	88	13	1	17
2020	17	86	12	1	16
2019	19	91	10	1	17
2018	19	91	72	1	17

BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING 2025

The following recommendations build on the 2019 best practices while addressing emerging trends and challenges. They are grouped into five key areas: leadership and governance, inclusive culture, talent management, technology and innovation, and stakeholder collaboration.

1. Leadership and Governance

- **Set Measurable Targets:** Establish clear, time-bound gender diversity targets for leadership and board positions, aligned with King IV and JSE requirements. Regularly report progress to stakeholders.
- **Champion Accountability:** Assign senior leaders as champions to drive gender mainstreaming initiatives. Social & Ethics Committees should oversee implementation and compliance.
- **Integrate Intersectionality:** Ensure policies address the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized groups, where appropriate.
- **Enhance Board Diversity:** Actively recruit women with diverse expertise for board roles, leveraging networks like the 30% Club South Africa.

2. Inclusive Culture

- **Address Unconscious Bias:** Implement mandatory bias training for all employees, with a focus on recruitment, promotions, and performance evaluations.
- **Foster Psychological Safety:** Create environments where women feel empowered to voice concerns and contribute ideas. Conduct regular employee engagement surveys to assess inclusivity.
- **Support Mental Health:** Offer flexible work arrangements and mental health resources to address the disproportionate caregiving burden on women, particularly in hybrid work settings.
- **Celebrate Diversity:** Recognize and promote women's contributions through internal communications and awards programs.

BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING 2025

3. Talent Management

- Close the Pay Gap: Conduct regular pay equity audits and address disparities transparently. Align with global standards, such as the Equal Pay International Coalition.
- Develop Leadership Pipelines: Implement mentorship and sponsorship programs to prepare women for senior roles. Focus on high-potential women from underrepresented groups.
- Promote Work-Life Balance: Offer parental leave, childcare support, and flexible schedules to support women's career continuity.
- Upskill for the Future: Provide training in digital skills and emerging technologies to ensure women remain competitive in a rapidly evolving economy.

4. Technology and Innovation

- Leverage Digital Tools: Use AI-driven analytics to identify and address gender biases in hiring and promotions. Ensure algorithms are audited for fairness.
- Bridge the Digital Divide: Invest in STEM education and training for women to increase representation in tech-driven roles.
- Adapt to Hybrid Work: Develop policies that ensure equitable access to opportunities in hybrid environments, addressing risks of "proximity bias" that may disadvantage remote workers.
- Innovate for Inclusion: Design products and services with women's needs in mind, informed by diverse teams.

5. Stakeholder Collaboration

- Engage Stakeholders: Partner with industry bodies, NGOs, and government agencies to share best practices and scale impact. Collaborate with initiatives like the UN Women's Empowerment Principles.
- Align with Global Standards: Benchmark against international frameworks, such as the SDGs and the GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards, to enhance credibility.
- Measure and Report: Use data-driven metrics to track gender mainstreaming progress. Publish annual DEI reports to demonstrate transparency and accountability.
- Support Community Initiatives: Invest in programs that empower women economically, such as skills development and entrepreneurship initiatives, to strengthen the broader ecosystem.

BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING 2025

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

To operationalize these best practices, organizations should:

1. Conduct a Gender Audit: Assess current policies, representation, and culture to identify gaps and opportunities.
2. Develop a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy: Create a roadmap with clear objectives, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.
3. Engage Employees: Foster buy-in through communication campaigns and training to embed gender equality in organizational values.
4. Monitor and Evaluate: Use key performance indicators (KPIs), such as gender pay ratios and leadership representation, to track progress. Adjust strategies based on outcomes.
5. Experiment and Iterate: Pilot innovative approaches, such as reverse mentoring or flexible career paths, and scale successful initiatives.

CALL TO ACTION

Gender Mainstreaming in 2025 and beyond is a strategic necessity for private-sector organizations seeking to thrive in a complex, competitive, and values-driven global economy. By embedding gender equality into leadership, culture, talent management, technology, and stakeholder engagement, companies can unlock financial, operational, and societal benefits. South Africa's unique regulatory and social context, combined with global DEI trends, provides a compelling opportunity to lead in gender mainstreaming. Organizations that act decisively, measure progress, and collaborate with stakeholders will not only overcome persistent barriers but also set new benchmarks for inclusive, sustainable growth.

This guide serves as a call to action for private-sector leaders to embrace gender mainstreaming as a catalyst for transformation. By adopting these best practices, organizations can build workplaces that reflect the diversity of their markets, empower their talent, and contribute to a more equitable future.

"Our strategy is to stay ahead of the curve on talent, by building a culture that is truly inclusive. I tell people that we shouldn't rest until we reach census levels–50/50. When I see hesitation or resistance, I know I'm onto something. I find it energising!"
Andrew Stevens, IBM Australia"

BEST PRACTICES

1. INTRODUCTION

General

- BP001** Recognize the low base with regards to Gender Mainstreaming from which South African organizations in general, as is the case in most countries, are starting from. Do not let that deter you.
- BP002** Recognize that whilst legislation seeks to overcome the concerns of gender inequality and discrimination, it may be too narrow a policy tool to address the underrepresentation of women in the middle and senior structures.
- BP003** Gender Mainstreaming is not a “one size fits all” solution for your organization. Work out what works best for you. This may also mean different aspirations and strategies for different divisions.
- BP004** Ensure that your organization fully understands the global business case for Gender Mainstreaming. If you are going to implement Gender Mainstreaming purely based on the requirements to satisfy legislation and/or regulations, it is probably going to be detrimental to your business.
- BP005** Celebrate victories along the way, no matter how small. Likewise, accept the difficulties that will be faced as you go on your journey.
- BP006** Gender Mainstreaming is evolutionary in nature, not revolutionary. Do not try and make wholesale changes in a short period of time.
- BP007** View the successful implementation of Gender Mainstreaming as a source of competitive advantage.
- BP008** Recognize the importance of keeping records and analyzing data in order to get the best results out of your Gender Mainstreaming strategies.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP009** Acknowledge that the deliberation around the topic of Gender Mainstreaming has shifted from a question of equality and “the right thing to do,” to a matter of using all the available talent in an effort to achieve greater performance.
- BP010** Be aware of the internationally accepted barriers to success and factor in these barriers to your plans and measures.
- BP011** All plans and measures have to be intellectually defensible. Organizations should apply their minds diligently.
- BP012** Some of the Best Practices may be best dealt with at sector level rather than, or in addition to, corporate level. Organizations are encouraged to discuss these matters with their sectorial organizations.
- BP013** Leverage data analytics and AI-driven tools to identify gender gaps in recruitment, promotion, and retention, ensuring data-driven decision-making in gender mainstreaming strategies.
- BP014** Integrate gender mainstreaming into Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, aligning with investor expectations for sustainable and inclusive business practices.
- BP015** Foster cross-sector collaboration to share best practices and resources, amplifying the impact of gender mainstreaming initiatives across industries.
- BP016** Consider conducting regular benchmarking against global gender equality indices, such as the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index, to identify gaps and set ambitious targets.
- BP017** Develop a gender mainstreaming communication strategy to educate employees and stakeholders about its benefits, fostering buy-in and cultural change.

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- BPO18** Create a feedback loop with employees to refine gender mainstreaming strategies, using anonymous surveys and focus groups to capture diverse perspectives.
- BPO19** Promote gender mainstreaming as a core component of corporate social responsibility (CSR), integrating it into community engagement and philanthropy efforts.

2. THE BOARD

Gender Mainstreaming on Boards

- BPO20** The Board should first and foremost establish Gender Mainstreaming strategies that are fitting for the particular type of organization and the environment that the organization is working in. These strategies should be applicable throughout the organization (with variations if applicable) and should be compatible with the various other strategies of the organization.
- BPO21** Gender Mainstreaming should be driven by the Chairperson of the Board taking into account the skills set required to meet the needs of the organization at different divisions and different levels.

Board Committees

- BPO22** Should the organization have a Risk Committee, that committee should assess the risk to the organization of the short and long-term effect of Gender Mainstreaming. It should assess both the legal, ethical, and social risks of not embracing Gender Mainstreaming, and the risks to the organization of any real or perceived lowering of standards, expertise, and skill sets in the short to medium term.

BEST PRACTICES

BPO23 Where an organization is required to have a Social & Ethics Committee in terms of the Companies Act 2008, such committee should ensure that all of its members are well versed in Gender Mainstreaming both in terms of legislation, regulations, and the international business case. Due to the responsibilities that the Companies Act places on the Social & Ethics Committee, organizations may consider it prudent to invest in suitable training in Gender Mainstreaming for such committee members.

Directors

BPO24 Periodically advertise non-executive board positions to encourage greater diversity in applications.

BPO25 Where organizations are rotating non-executive board positions in terms of King IV, or for any other reason, the organization should take the opportunity to examine its criteria and terms of reference for such position with due regard for the benefits of gender diversity on the board.

BPO26 Where shareholders have a say in the appointment of directors, the Board should advise such shareholders of the strategies, plans, and measures of the organization in relation to Gender Mainstreaming, with specific reference to the appointment of directors.

BPO27 Consider the suitability of women from outside the corporate mainstream for non-executive positions. These could include professionals, successful entrepreneurs, non-profit executives, and academics.

BPO28 Organizations should be encouraged to grow and reward their own talent and alumni. Resist the temptation to engage “Golden Skirts” (women who sit on multiple boards and are highly sought after, usually for business or political attributes). Organizations should carefully consider the value and commitment to the Board of women who are over-extended.

BEST PRACTICES

- BPO29** Chairmen and boards have a responsibility to ensure that first-time directors are given proper support in learning their role on the Board in order that they may positively contribute to the Board as quickly as possible. This applies equally to new women directors.

Alternate Directors

- BPO30** In order that women may undertake a more significant role in the boardroom, it is recommended that organizations look to appoint women as alternate directors whenever the opportunity arises.

- BPO31** Adopt policies and procedures wherein women appointed as alternate directors may be allowed to attend Board and other high-level meetings with the director to whom they are alternate to. The alternate director may or may not be allowed to voice opinion on matters raised at such meetings. The alternate director may be requested by the chairperson to leave such meetings at any point in time.

General

- BPO32** Engage with proxy advisors and institutional investors to align board gender diversity strategies with their voting guidelines and expectations.

- BPO33** Provide board members with training on intersectionality to address overlapping forms of discrimination (e.g., gender, race, disability) in decision-making processes.

- BPO34** Establish a board mentorship program pairing experienced directors with women aspiring to board roles, facilitating skill development and networking.

BEST PRACTICES

- BPO35** Conduct annual board evaluations that include gender diversity metrics, assessing the impact of diverse perspectives on decision-making.
- BPO36** Encourage boards to engage with external gender diversity experts to review and refine their gender mainstreaming strategies.
- BPO37** Promote women's representation on nomination committees to ensure gender considerations are embedded in director selection processes.
- BPO38** Develop succession plans that prioritize gender diversity, identifying women as potential candidates for future board vacancies.

3. INTEGRATED REPORTING

- BPO39** Advise on the position regarding Gender Mainstreaming in the Integrated Reports. Organizations should take a progressive approach, detailing as a first step their aspirations. In subsequent years they should look at advising on strategies to achieve such aspirations, targets set using criteria they deem suitable for their environment, and finally noting targets met with explanations for targets not being met. The Integrated Report should provide a clear rationale for any comments made.
- BPO40** A reasonable timeline from the recording of aspirations in the Integrated Report to the noting of targets met or not met is suggested at five years. Organizations should however feel free to set their own timeline based on their environment and particular set of circumstances.
- BPO41** Reference in the Integrated Report to an organization's website noting further detailed information is considered acceptable so long as it references the chairperson's acknowledgement of the information held therein.

BEST PRACTICES

BPO42 Specific difficulties experienced in particular sectors should be observed and progress in overcoming those difficulties noted.

BPO43 Where organizations do not complete Integrated Reports, it is recommended that the same information be posted on the website of the organization.

BPO44 The investment community should be persuaded to take an active interest in the Gender Mainstreaming strategies of the organizations that it invests in.

General

BPO45 Include quantitative metrics in Integrated Reports, such as gender pay gap ratios and pipeline progression rates, to enhance stakeholder trust and accountability.

BPO46 Align gender mainstreaming disclosures with global reporting standards, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), to meet investor expectations.

BPO47 Use digital platforms to share interactive gender diversity reports, making data accessible to a broader audience, including employees and customers.

BPO48 Report on intersectional diversity metrics, such as representation of women from marginalized groups, to reflect a holistic approach to inclusion.

BPO49 Include case studies in Integrated Reports showcasing successful gender mainstreaming initiatives, highlighting measurable outcomes.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP050** Engage assurance providers to verify gender diversity data in Integrated Reports, enhancing credibility with stakeholders.
- BP051** Disclose strategies for addressing gender-based violence in the workplace, demonstrating commitment to employee safety and well-being.
- BP052** Provide forward-looking statements in Integrated Reports, outlining future gender diversity goals and anticipated challenges.

4. INTERNAL RELATIONS

Sponsorship

- BP053** Actively encourage, and have a policy for, the use of sponsorship to raise women to higher levels within the organization. This should be considered at various levels right up to board positions.
- BP054** Women should be encouraged and sponsored to apply for core positions rather than support positions.
- BP055** Both the organization and the women may require coaching in sponsorship if this area is a new concept to them.
- BP056** The sponsor and “sponsee” should be compatible with each other.
- BP057** Sponsors should be accountable for the development of the women under their sponsorship.

Mentorship

- BP058** Run mentorship programs for women which are suitable for the environment in which they work and the aspirations of the women. These mentorship programs should run simultaneously with any sponsorship programs.

BEST PRACTICES

Women's Ambitions and Career Path

- BP059** Understand the types of experiences the organization requires for senior and important roles and seek to broaden the criteria to be considered for such roles. Organizations should ensure that women get critical experiences in core positions.
- BP060** Recognize that men and women are equally ambitious. Women however tend to show the same level of ambition later on in life. This ambition lifts exponentially by the time they reach the higher levels.
- BP061** Consistently reassess career options for women, particularly when male colleagues are more overt about their aspirations over a longer period of time.
- BP062** The rhythm of a women's career appears to be different to their male counterparts. Women make more lateral moves than men over the same time span with a midlife career surge. Organizations should take note of these differences.
- BP063** To steer away from direct, linear, and unbroken work skills and experience and to look for other criteria which will broaden narrow definitions of career paths.

Management

- BP064** In acknowledging that male and female employees have different work-skill timeframes and career paths, organizations should investigate the benefit of either raising or abolishing any age limits for identifying high potential individuals.
- BP065** Encourage management to build up a track record of sourcing, developing, and advancing women within the organization.

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Flexible Working

- BP066** Develop a plan to share the strategy, plans, and measures to achieve Gender Mainstreaming with employees at all levels.
- BP067** Address the stigma that flexibility signals low career ambition and commitment. Organizations should make women aware of the negative connotations with working within an established flexibility program.
- BP068** Investigate the benefits of working flexibly once all cultural stigmas have been removed.

General

- BP069** Explore the increased focus on team-based approaches in many workplace situations and the contribution that women can add to this dynamic.
- BP070** Analyse any gender pay gaps that may exist and take steps to eradicate such gaps.
- BP071** Prohibit all forms of gender-based violence in the workplace including verbal, physical, and sexual harassment.
- BP072** Provide employees with the requisite tools and resources to increase awareness of women's leader's skills and create and implement work practices that target the eradication of stereotype biases.
- BP073** Provide unconscious bias training to staff and external consultants who recruit or internally promote employees.
- BP073** Assist in the systematic knowledge transfer between those who are close to retiring and female employees. These may be incorporated into a mentorship program.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP075** Provide time and resources for female employees to participate in sectorial or professional associations and institutes.
- BP076** Implement hybrid work policies that prioritize flexibility without penalizing career progression, ensuring women can balance professional and personal responsibilities.
- BP077** Establish employee resource groups (ERGs) focused on gender equity, providing platforms for women to share experiences and influence organizational policies.
- BP078** Use AI-driven career pathing tools to identify and support women's advancement, tailoring development plans to individual aspirations and organizational needs.
- BP079** Provide mental health support programs tailored for women, addressing stressors related to workplace bias, caregiving, and career progression.
- BP080** Develop leadership competency frameworks that value emotional intelligence and collaborative skills, often associated with women, to redefine leadership criteria.
- BP081** Create internal campaigns to highlight women's contributions, fostering a culture of recognition and reducing stereotype-driven biases.
- BP082** Offer upskilling programs in digital and technological competencies for women, ensuring they are equipped for roles in high-growth sectors.
- BP083** Establish peer mentoring networks for women at all levels, promoting knowledge sharing and community building.
- BP084** Provide childcare support or subsidies to employees, reducing barriers for women balancing family and career responsibilities.

5. RECRUIT & RETAIN

Job Descriptions and Criteria

- BPO85** Acknowledge that generally men are more risk-takers and women are more cautious than men when considering career changes. Women generally prefer to apply for roles where they feel they meet the job description almost in its entirety. Organizations are urged to encourage women to apply for roles which they may normally not apply for but for which others see potential in them.
- BPO86** Evaluate what mechanisms are in place that safeguard against gender bias in performance evaluations and reviews.
- BPO87** Be mindful that all employees accessing talent management systems should be trained to understand that both women and men hold leadership competencies stereotypically ascribed to women and men; and that solely pro-male criteria can have adverse effects on performance appraisals and advancement opportunities for employees whose competencies are not appropriately valued or evaluated.
- BPO88** The middle phase of a women's career has been identified as an area where potential and experience is often lost, especially where women combine family commitments and work. Organizations should allow for this in their talent planning.
- BPO89** When looking to fill positions, widen the net to encompass more than the traditional male-focused criteria. Ask "why not" as opposed to "why".

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Family Commitments

- BP090** It is recommended that organizations initiate policies and procedures that allow women on protracted leave to remain conversant with developments in the workplace. This would include business and socially related issues.
- BP091** Communicate the organization's plans for the women when they return to work from maternity leave which will support and advance their career.
- BP092** Introduce effective return-to-work procedures, including pre-return appraisals. Support should be given for women to re-enter the workplace with a view to moving to more mainstream roles.
- BP093** Encourage women who are on protracted leave to undertake development studies in preparation for coming back to work.
- BP094** Organizations may be advised to investigate the opportunities that "job sharing" offers in retaining female talent that wish to continue with their careers once they are able to decrease their family commitments.

Pre-employment

- BP095** Broaden girls' aspirations and career choices by creating partnerships between schools, tertiary education institutions, career development professionals, business, and parents. This may be more successful if undertaken on a sector level.
- BP096** Acknowledge the benefit of having women in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) environment being involved in promoting STEM-based careers to school and tertiary education students.

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BP097 Acknowledge that there is often a lack of family role models for certain career paths and the stereotyping and bias starts at school level.

General

BP098 Establish accountability, targets, and Key Performance Indicators and link gender diversity, with a particular focus on increasing women in non-traditional roles, to the performance and remuneration outcomes of leaders.

BP099 Monitor turnover by gender and undertake exit interviews to understand the reasons for resignations.

BP100 Implement policies to change workplace culture to be more gender-inclusive. Embed the gender diversity strategy within all key processes.

BP101 Ensure that all employment advertisements are geared to attract women to apply. Provide information on the full range of career opportunities available to women.

BP102 Develop a system to obtain feedback from women applicants at each stage of the process and integrate the feedback into the recruitment process.

BP103 Create a system that acts to challenge decision-making during discussions about talent that uncovers bias and stereotyping.

BP104 Monitor advancement and fall-offs of women's representation in the management development process and take action when required to ensure meritocracy.

BP105 Use inclusive language and AI-driven recruitment tools to eliminate bias in job descriptions and attract diverse candidates.

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- BP106** Develop targeted retention programs for women in high-demand roles, offering incentives such as professional development and leadership training.
- BP107** Partner with universities and vocational institutions to create internship programs that prioritize women in underrepresented fields, building a diverse talent pipeline.
- BP108** Implement blind recruitment processes to reduce bias in candidate selection, focusing on skills and qualifications.
- BP109** Offer signing bonuses or relocation support for women hired into senior or technical roles, addressing financial barriers to career mobility.
- BP110** Create talent pools specifically for women returning to the workforce after career breaks, providing tailored onboarding and development.
- BP111** Develop partnerships with recruitment agencies specializing in diverse talent to ensure a steady flow of qualified women candidates.
- BP112** Provide transparent career progression pathways in job postings, showing women clear routes to leadership roles.
- BP113** Conduct regular audits of recruitment processes to identify and address systemic barriers to women's hiring and retention.
- BP114** Offer flexible onboarding programs for new hires, accommodating women with family or caregiving responsibilities.

6. GENDER FORUMS

- BP115** It is strongly recommended that any forum that is set up to address Gender Mainstreaming be styled as a “Gender Forum” and not as a “Women’s Forum” to ensure the inclusion of men.
- BP116** The participants of forums should be both female and male. Women-only events should be reserved for specific social events only.
- BP117** The forum should be actively endorsed and supported by the CEO.
- BP118** The forum should report to the CEO or a senior executive nominated by the CEO; and the chairperson of the Social & Ethics Committee.
- BP119** The forum should play a major role in guiding the direction of the plans and measures with regards to Gender Mainstreaming. In this regard, both female and male role-players should be consulted. Organizations should remember that it is a business issue, not a women’s issue.
- BP120** The forum should be allocated sufficient budget in order to function efficiently.
- BP121** The forum should be allocated leaders whose job description should include the work undertaken for the forum and sufficient work time should be allocated in order to fulfil that role. The forum work should be part of the overall KPI of those individuals. Forum leadership should not be addressed as a part-time or “add-on” job.
- BP122** Integrate virtual and hybrid formats for Gender Forums to ensure accessibility for remote and geographically dispersed employees.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP123** Establish metrics to evaluate the impact of Gender Forums on organizational culture and gender equity outcomes, reporting progress annually.
- BP124** Use Gender Forums as platforms to pilot new gender mainstreaming initiatives, gathering feedback before organization-wide rollout.
- BP125** Ensure Gender Forums include representatives from all organizational levels, fostering diverse perspectives and grassroots engagement.
- BP126** Develop a digital repository of Gender Forum resources, such as case studies and toolkits, accessible to all employees.

7. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Auditors

- BP127** Consider the gender of the auditor when next rotating auditors. Where appropriate, the organization should consider a woman in the position if the majority of previous incumbents have been men.

Shareholders

- BP128** Over and above the information provided in the Integrated Report, organizations should provide periodic updates on their Gender Mainstreaming efforts to their major shareholders.

Regulators

- BP129** Organizations may wish to be pro-active and make their Gender Mainstreaming positions known to any regulators that they are required to interact with. This will foster the positioning of good citizenship.

BEST PRACTICES

Executive Search / Recruitment

BP130 Executive search and recruitment firms should be required by the organization to provide a required number of women candidates for each middle and senior level position; or provide detailed explanations as to why they are unable to do so.

Service Providers

BP131 Be aware of the extent to which women play a role in the organizations in which the organizations have dealings with.

BP132 Organizations should strive to develop policies to support women-led entrepreneurship.

BP133 Organizations may wish to identify high-potential female-led entrepreneurial enterprises with the aim of supporting the fast-tracking of their development.

BP134 Organizations should communicate to suppliers and service providers the organization's policies regarding Gender Mainstreaming.

BP135 Policies should be developed with regards to what is expected by your organization from service providers in terms of gender (whether these service providers are required to comply with specific gender legislation or not). These policies are encouraged to be more collaborative in nature than prescriptive.

Customers

BP136 Organizations should ensure that their Gender Mainstreaming plans and measures are communicated, as appropriate, to their customers.

BEST PRACTICES

Media

- BP137** Good news should be shared. Organizations should share with the media all the Gender Mainstreaming success stories. This includes both mainstream and social media.
- BP138** Make all websites and advertising gender-sensitive.
- BP139** Organizations are strongly encouraged to holistically promote female role models as an inspiration to future generations.

Corporate Social Investment

- BP140** Organizations should look afresh at their CSI projects with a view to assessing the impact of the projects on women.
- BP141** Where appropriate, organizations should consider the advisability of gender-balancing their future CSI spend.
- BP142** Organizations should over time record the gender balance of their CSI spend.

Tenders and Negotiations

- BP143** Organizations are reminded of the value in promoting their Gender Mainstreaming efforts when negotiating or tendering for work with clients.
- BP144** Engage with suppliers to develop gender diversity scorecards, incentivizing service providers to prioritize women's leadership and participation.
- BP145** Partner with media outlets to create campaigns that highlight women's contributions to the organization, amplifying positive narratives.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP146** Allocate a portion of CSI budgets to initiatives that empower women in STEM and digital skills, addressing future workforce needs.
- BP147** Develop partnerships with women-led SMEs to integrate them into the organization's supply chain, fostering economic empowerment.
- BP148** Engage with industry associations to advocate for gender diversity standards in procurement and tendering processes.
- BP149** Create customer-facing campaigns that highlight the organization's commitment to gender equity, building brand loyalty among diverse audiences.
- BP150** Collaborate with NGOs focused on gender equality to co-develop CSI projects that address systemic barriers for women.
- BP151** Ensure all external communications, including annual reports and marketing materials, use gender-inclusive language and imagery.
- BP152** Host public webinars or events to share gender mainstreaming successes, inviting stakeholders to learn and collaborate.
- BP153** Engage with international organizations, such as UN Women, to align external relations strategies with global gender equality goals.

8. GENERAL

- BP154** Set targets that stretch, but not unrealistically so.
- BP155** Recognize that women should not just be trying to fit into the economy, they should be shaping it. This should be encouraged.
- BP156** Consider the advantages of filling vacant roles on an interim basis to allow sufficient time to secure a permanent female candidate to meet future strategic and current operational needs.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP157** In order to tap into the full talent pool, work to create the conditions, cultures, and mindsets that enable both men and women to thrive.
- BP158** Take reporting to deeper levels, with consistent reporting standards, to create a more transparent and granular view of the pipeline and progress.
- BP159** Shift accountability for diversity, talent, flexibility, and leadership from HR to senior line roles.
- BP160** When leaders are requested to partake in speaking appointments where there are multiple speakers, motivate the organizers that the panel be gender-diverse.
- BP161** Where the organization is represented on business, sector, or industry-wide organizations, endeavor to establish gender diversity in the participants.
- BP162** Embed gender mainstreaming into corporate innovation strategies, encouraging women's participation in developing new products, services, and processes.
- BP163** Advocate for policy reforms at the national level to support gender mainstreaming, collaborating with government and industry bodies to create enabling environments.
- BP164** Develop a gender equity scorecard for the organization, integrating it into strategic planning and performance evaluations.
- BP165** Create a diversity innovation lab to test and scale new gender mainstreaming initiatives, fostering a culture of experimentation.
- BP166** Promote allyship training for male employees, encouraging them to actively support gender equity in the workplace.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP167** Establish partnerships with global corporations to exchange best practices in gender mainstreaming, enhancing organizational learning.
- BP168** Integrate gender mainstreaming into crisis management plans, ensuring women's perspectives are considered in decision-making during disruptions.
- BP169** Offer incentives, such as bonuses or recognition programs, for employees who champion gender equity initiatives.
- BP170** Develop a gender mainstreaming playbook for new employees, outlining the organization's commitment and expectations.
- BP171** Engage with youth organizations to promote gender equity awareness among future generations, building a long-term pipeline.
- BP172** Create a recognition program for teams that achieve significant gender diversity milestones, fostering a culture of accountability.
- BP173** Use predictive analytics to forecast gender diversity outcomes, enabling proactive adjustments to strategies.
- BP174** Establish a gender equity advisory council with external experts to provide strategic guidance and oversight.
- BP175** Promote women's participation in industry-wide hackathons or innovation challenges, showcasing their contributions to innovation.
- BP176** Develop policies to support women entrepreneurs within the organization's ecosystem, such as through incubators or funding programs.
- BP177** Ensure gender mainstreaming is a standing agenda item in all strategic planning meetings, embedding it into core operations.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP178** Create a digital dashboard for employees to track the organization's gender equity progress, enhancing transparency.
- BP179** Advocate for tax incentives or government grants for organizations that demonstrate exemplary gender mainstreaming practices.

9. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES (WEPS)

Harnessing a Global Framework for Gender Equality

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), developed by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, provide a strategic framework for companies committed to advancing gender equality across the workplace, marketplace, and community. By signing the WEPs, organizations make a public commitment to embedding gender equality into their core strategy and operations, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 5 and global ESG trends.

Best Practices for WEPs Implementation

- BP180** Publicly endorse and sign the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) to demonstrate senior-level commitment to gender equality and align with international standards.
- BP181** Assign executive-level responsibility for gender equality, ensuring WEPs implementation is tracked, reported, and championed at board and CEO level.
- BP182** Align company policies and procedures with the seven WEPs principles, including non-discrimination, equal pay, parental leave, anti-harassment, and flexible work.
- BP183** Expand occupational health and safety to include gender-specific needs such as menstruation, menopause, maternity, and mental health, creating a safer and more inclusive work environment.

BEST PRACTICES

- BP184** Deliver regular unconscious bias and inclusive leadership training, particularly for middle and senior managers involved in hiring, performance evaluation, and promotions.
- BP185** Promote women's career advancement through gender-sensitive mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership development programmes, with a focus on women from underrepresented groups.
- BP186** Establish targets for sourcing from women-owned businesses and integrate gender responsiveness into procurement criteria and supply chain audits.
- BP187** Include WEPs-aligned metrics in ESG, sustainability, and integrated reports. Benchmark performance using tools like the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).
- BP188** Partner with community organizations to co-create social impact initiatives that empower women, particularly in education, entrepreneurship, and digital skills.
- BP189** Use advertising and corporate communication channels to challenge gender stereotypes, promote diverse role models, and reinforce the organization's gender equality commitment.
- BP190** Engage employees across all levels in WEPs implementation through internal awareness campaigns, employee resource groups, and community initiatives.
- BP191** Participate in WEPs-related global learning platforms, peer networks, and events to share progress, learn from other signatories, and deepen impact.
- BP192** Participate in WEPs-related global learning platforms, peer networks, and events to share progress, learn from other signatories, and deepen impact.

BEST PRACTICES

BP193 Conduct periodic gender audits and WEPs gap assessments to evaluate effectiveness and adjust strategy. Use feedback loops to inform continuous improvement.

BP194 Link executive performance and incentives to WEPs-aligned gender equity goals to ensure accountability and sustainable progress.

10. BEST PRACTICES FOR CORPORATES: SUPPORTING MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE



Menopause is a natural life stage that affects a significant portion of the workforce, yet it remains one of the least acknowledged areas in corporate policy. Forward-thinking organisations are now recognising menopause support as a key component of gender mainstreaming — creating more inclusive, empathetic, and productive workplaces. Below are best practices corporates can adopt to lead the way.

BP195 *Normalise the Conversation*

- Break the silence and stigma by fostering open, informed, and inclusive conversations about menopause.
- Share real stories and experiences from employees.
- Include menopause in existing diversity and inclusion conversations.
- Encourage leaders to speak up and set the tone.

BP196 *Create Menopause Support Policies*

- Develop clear, inclusive, and practical policies to support employees navigating menopause.
- Integrate menopause into existing health, wellness, and diversity frameworks.
- Define flexible work arrangements and leave options in policy documents.
- Ensure policy language is compassionate and accessible.

BEST PRACTICES

BP197 *Educate the Workforce*

- Awareness and understanding are critical to reducing bias and creating empathy.
- Host training sessions for managers on recognising symptoms and offering support.
- Deliver company-wide workshops on the physical and emotional impact of menopause.
- Provide toolkits with facts, guidance, and resources.

BP198 *Implement Flexible Work Arrangements*

- Support fluctuating energy levels and symptoms through work flexibility.
- Offer adjustable hours, remote working, and part-time options.
- Allow flexible breaks and wellness intervals throughout the day.
- Enable virtual meeting participation when preferred.

BP199 *Support Mental and Emotional Well-being*

- Recognise the psychological toll and provide robust support systems.
- Ensure access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes.
- Include menopause-specific wellness programmes, such as nutrition and exercise support.
- Promote self-care and mindfulness resources.

BP200 *Design Inclusive Physical Workspaces*

- Make small but impactful changes in the physical environment.
- Regulate temperature to mitigate hot flashes.
- Allow flexible dress codes based on comfort needs.
- Ensure private, quiet spaces for rest or recovery.

BP201 *Appoint Menopause Champions*

- Identify internal advocates who can support both employees and leadership.
- Champions act as points of contact for information and support.
- They help raise awareness, guide policy implementation, and ensure continuity.
- Their presence signals organisational commitment.

BEST PRACTICES

BP202 *Launch a Visible Campaign*

- Create a workplace movement that celebrates menopause inclusion.
- Roll out MenoMove-style campaigns with clear objectives and employee engagement.
- Use digital channels, social media, and internal platforms to share content.
- Partner with healthcare professionals for expert-led events and health checks.

BP203 *Embed Continuous Learning*

- Ensure menopause support remains current and responsive.
- Review policies regularly based on employee feedback.
- Update training with new insights, tools, and research.
- Integrate menopause into broader gender equity strategies.

BP204 *Track and Share Impact*

- Measure progress to reinforce the value of support initiatives.
- Monitor employee satisfaction, retention, and absenteeism rates.
- Track participation in wellness and support programmes.
- Publicly commit to gender equity through menopause inclusion in ESG reporting.

Organisational Benefits

Implementing menopause support strategies has proven benefits:

- Improved employee retention and morale
- Reduced absenteeism and presenteeism
- Stronger organisational culture
- Reinforced commitment to equality and inclusion
- Increased productivity and profitability

Supporting employees through menopause isn't a "nice to have" — it's a leadership imperative for inclusive, future-fit businesses. It signals that no stage of life is invisible, and no employee is left behind.

To learn more or implement a full MenoMove campaign in your organisation, contact: colleen@businessengage.co.za

“Diversity for us is about getting the right balance of independence, skills, knowledge, outlooks and experience – and gender is an important part of that balance. It is obvious that women have a significant role to play at M&S, not least given the nature of our customer base and the profile of our staff. Female directors already account for 30% of the board and 32% of senior management. It is a significant area of development for our people across the business.”

*Robert Swannell
Chairman, Marks and Spencer Group UK*



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