

► **Women in business:  
How employer and business  
membership organizations  
drive gender equality**



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## ► Preface

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The last decades have seen the world press forward on gender equality issues supported by renewed commitments of businesses to accelerate change. There is large-scale agreement, backed by plentiful evidence, that gender equality in the workplace leads to positive business outcomes, including increased profits.

Employer and Business Membership Organizations (EBMOs) are very much part of the movement towards gender equality and diversity. EBMOs have unparalleled influence in the private sector and beyond. Together with governments, workers' organizations and others, EBMOs can spearhead the change that is needed and help the business community make the most of the benefits that gender equality has to offer. Where EBMOs "walk the talk" on gender equality and diversity by leading by example, promoting effective policies and genuine implementation, they bring about substantial positive change.

In this report, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) explore progress made by EBMOs on gender equality and diversity within their organizations and their engagement with members over a six-year timeframe. The report shows that many EBMOs are clearly aware of the business benefits of gender equality and are actively making it a reality both internally and among their members. At the same time, like many other policy areas, there is plenty of scope for further action.

The ILO and IOE stand ready to support EBMOs to generate the desired change. The ILO and IOE have common objectives of assisting EBMOs to create an enabling environment for enterprises so they can develop and embrace a workforce that represents the diversity of our societies. This includes securing talented women and men to seize new growth opportunities and business solutions.

Established in 2019, the IOE's [Policy Working Group on Gender Equality and Diversity](#) provides direct policy support to EBMOs to actively promote gender equality and diversity at the workplace. Furthermore, the IOE is the secretariat for the "[One Global Women Empowerment](#)" B20 initiative which promotes inclusive, resilient, and sustainable global economic growth by empowering women and ensuring gender equality remains at the top of political agendas. In addition, the IOE runs an annual EU mentorship programme for professional women, including those working at EBMOs, in partnership with management consultancy Deloitte.

Since 2015, the ILO, through its research on [Women in Business and Management](#), has worked with EBMOs worldwide to present the business case for gender equality and diversity through research and data on the changing status of women in management and on enterprise boards. Using the evidence collected, the ILO has been enhancing the institutional capacities of EBMOs to advocate for gender equality and diversity in policy-making and among their enterprise members.

We sincerely hope that this report will give EBMOs around the world the information and inspiration to continue on their path. We wish to sincerely thank all the EBMOs that participated in this report. The information they shared, and the time they gave, has led to valuable insights, and demonstrated their strong commitment to achieving gender equality.



**Deborah France-Massin**

Director  
ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities



**Roberto Suárez Santos**

Secretary General  
International Organisation of Employers

## ▶ Contents

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Preface	v
Acknowledgements	ix
Abbreviations and acronyms	xi
<b>▶ Executive summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>▶ Chapter 1. Background</b>	<b>5</b>
The inclusion of women at work has undeniable business, economic and societal benefits	5
A huge opportunity exists to better tap into female talent	5
COVID-19 gave fresh impetus to gender equality and diversity	6
EBMOs are in a powerful position to drive change	7
Research methodology	7
<b>▶ Chapter 2. The business case for gender equality and diversity</b>	<b>11</b>
Gender equality improves outcomes at enterprise, national, and global level	11
The business case for EBMOs is equally strong	12
Gender equality and diversity is moving up the EBMO agenda	13
<b>▶ Chapter 3. Gender equality and diversity inside EBMOs</b>	<b>17</b>
Women's representation inside EBMOs	17
More EBMOs are driving gender equality and diversity internally	23
<b>▶ Chapter 4. EBMO advocacy and member services that drive gender equality and diversity</b>	<b>29</b>
More EBMO enterprise members are led by women	30
More EBMO members represent women's interests	30
A growing minority of EBMOs train their members and recognize efforts	33
Equal pay for work of equal value is EBMOs top advocacy priority	33
<b>▶ Chapter 5. Conclusions: What next for EBMOs?</b>	<b>37</b>
Endnotes	42
<b>▶ Annexes</b>	<b>44</b>
Annex 1. Key gender equality and diversity terms	45
Annex 2. Survey demographics	46
Annex 3. Countries covered in the 2023 survey by region	48
Annex 4. Survey questionnaire	49
Annex 5. List of EBMOs interviewed	54

## ► List of figures

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Figure 1. Female share management, employment, and working-age population 2000-2020	6
Figure 2. EBMOs that experienced better business outcomes as a result of gender equality and diversity, 2023 results	13
Figure 3. Share of female staff members and managers, 2023 results	17
Figure 4. Plans or policies to recruit and promote women into managerial positions, 2023 results	18
Figure 5. Share of women board members, 2017 and 2023 results	20
Figure 6. Gender of the CEO, 2023 results	22
Figure 7. EBMO mechanisms or policies to internally support work-family balance and greater equality, 2017 and 2023 results	23
Figure 8. Means to promote gender equality in operations , 2023 results	25
Figure 9. Assessment of organizational culture in enterprises and EBMOs, 2019 and 2023 results	26
Figure 10. Share of EBMO enterprise members led by women, 2017 and 2023 results	30
Figure 11. Regular activities or initiatives targeting members to promote gender equality, 2017 and 2023 results	31
Figure 12. Services to members that promote gender equality and diversity, 2017 and 2023 results	33
Figure 13. Percentage of EBMO respondents to the 2023 survey, by region	46
Figure 14. Share of multinational and local enterprises represented by EBMOs, 2023 results	46
Figure 15. Size of EBMOs, all results	47

## ► List of boxes

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Box 1. Filipino EBMO uses business case for gender equality as first step to bring employers on board	12
Box 2. Malaysian EBMO embarks on gender equality journey by launching new national summit	14
Box 3. Cyprus EBMO advances gender equality on all fronts	18
Box 4. EBMOs work together across borders to tackle female leadership void	21
Box 5. Georgian EBMO helps its women managers reach the top	22
Box 6. Barbados EBMO supports work-life balance through flexible working and time off	24
Box 7. Greek EBMO drives sea change on gender equality	29
Box 8. Nigeria's Network of Entrepreneurial Women picks up the pace	31
Box 9. Implementing a comprehensive strategy for gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in Colombia	32
Box 10. Canadian EBMO helps members prepare for new pay equity legislation	34

## ► Acknowledgements

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Contributions from employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) were instrumental in developing this report. Deep appreciation is extended to all EBMOs who took their time to respond to the survey questionnaire, participate in the in-depth interviews, and share information on how their organizations are advancing gender equality and diversity.

Mariska van der Linden, a public policy expert, researcher, and writer, authored the report. She shaped the survey questionnaire, carried out interviews, analysed findings, and conducted the secondary research on gender equality and diversity. Linda Vega Orozco, an economist, contributed to the report's development, including designing the survey questionnaire and conducting interviews, data analysis and visualization, and extracting critical findings from the primary data collection.

This report is the result of extensive collaboration between the International Labour Organization's Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO-ACT/EMP) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). From the ILO-ACT/EMP, Jae-Hee Chang, Senior Relations and Technical Specialist, conceptualized and led the development of the report with the support of employers' specialists in all regions. From the IOE, deep appreciation is extended to Akustina Morni, Director for Employment, Skills and Diversity, for her strategic direction, guidance, and technical support as well as the outreach to IOE members.

### About ILO-ACT/EMP

The ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO-ACT/EMP) is a specialized unit within the International Labour Office that maintains direct and close relationships with EBMOs. EBMOs advance the collective interests of employers at country and regional levels. The ILO-ACT/EMP supports EBMOs to strengthen their governance, services, and advocacy capacities so they are better positioned to respond to their members' needs.

### About the IOE

The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) is the largest private sector network in the world with more than 150 EBMO members and represents the interests of more than 50 million companies. The IOE has been representing businesses in social and employment policy debates at the ILO for more than a hundred years. The organization also represents the private sector across the United Nations, G20, and other emerging forums. The IOE has been recognized for its unique expertise, advocacy, and influence and is a powerful and balanced voice for business at the international level.



## ► Abbreviations and acronyms

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<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CFO</b>	Chief Financial Officer
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>D&amp;I</b>	Diversity and Inclusion
<b>EBMO</b>	Employer and Business Membership Organization
<b>ESG</b>	Environmental, Social, and Governance
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOE</b>	International Organisation of Employers
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
<b>UN</b>	United Nations







# Executive summary

This report brings together new primary research with existing evidence to provide insights into progress made by employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) on gender equality and diversity in their organizations and their engagement with members. It is based on a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) with 95 EBMOs across 87 countries and in-depth interviews with over 20 EBMO representatives. The report examines the challenges faced and successes achieved by EBMOs to increase the organization-wide representation of women, including in decision-making positions, as well as the road ahead.

To evaluate progress over time, this report compares the current survey results with the findings of the ILO's 2017 survey report *Women leaders and managers in employers' organizations*<sup>1</sup>, the first ILO report that assessed the representation of women in governance, leadership, and management roles within EBMOs. The comparison over a six-year period provides insights into the extent of progress made by EBMOs to promote gender equality and diversity and where more opportunities lie for EBMOs to accelerate progress and "walk the talk".

- **Overall, EBMOs have made impressive progress in advancing gender equality and diversity but there is still untapped potential.** While some EBMOs have made significant strides in the past six years, others are just beginning their journey, and many have yet to scale up efforts to reap the tangible benefits that gender equality and diversity can offer to their organizations and members. Although a growing minority of EBMOs are taking action on gender equality and diversity, they still constitute a minority.

Furthermore, there is ample opportunity for more EBMOs to strategically integrate gender equality and diversity within their organization's core sphere of action. While running a small number of more separate, add-on initiatives can have some benefits, the positive impact will be more limited compared to organizations where gender equality and diversity are fully integrated into their mainstream activities.

- **Nearly half of EBMOs say gender equality and diversity positively impact their business outcomes, but only a few track this impact.** The business case for gender equality and diversity for enterprises is well-evidenced, including benefits such as increased profits and improved recruitment and retention. This report delves deeper into how EBMOs perceive the business case for gender equality and diversity when it comes to their own organizations.

A total of 46 per cent of EBMOs reported that their initiatives on gender equality and diversity have contributed to enhanced business outcomes. The top three business benefits are increased income, enhanced organizational reputation, and a heightened ability to attract and retain talent.

However, approximately half of EBMOs do not have a clear understanding of how their gender equality efforts are influencing the bottom line. This is likely to be because EBMOs typically do not track the impact of their gender equality and diversity initiatives. Establishing better tracking mechanisms would not only enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives, but also allow EBMOs to share valuable insights with their members about what constitutes a good initiative and why members should get on board.

- **"Glass ceilings", representing situations where women hold limited representation in decision-making positions, persist in EBMOs and are difficult to break. These barriers hinder the ability of EBMOs to lead by example and influence the conduct of the broader business community.** Importantly, glass ceilings extend beyond EBMOs and are pervasive within the labour market, presenting obstacles to achieving gender equality and diversity in various domains, including the political sphere.

EBMOs grapple with the internal goal of achieving gender balance, despite most having implemented relevant initiatives. Popular strategies include flexible working and teleworking arrangements. While women are well-represented among secretariat staff, they remain under-represented at the managerial and board levels.

Globally, women chair only 16 per cent of EBMO boards, highlighting a significant gender imbalance. A mere 9 per cent of EBMOs achieve gender balance on their boards, with representation ranging from 40 to 60 per cent for either gender.

However, some EBMOs are actively improving women's representation on their boards. In fact, 44 per cent of EBMOs surveyed have increased women's representation on their boards in the past two years. Moreover, there is a more positive trend at the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) level where 30 per cent of EBMOs have a female CEO.

- ▶ **EBMOs are taking steps to accelerate progress on gender equality and diversity by assigning staff to specific responsibilities.** This action conveys a strong commitment to achieving gender equality and diversity within the organization by holding individuals or teams accountable for developing programmes, implementing initiatives, tracking progress, and driving transformative change. According to the survey, many EBMOs have staff responsible for promoting gender equality and diversity either through a designated focal point (25 per cent) or an official team or department (21 per cent).

Significant progress has been made by EBMOs in this regard over the past six years. In 2017, 36 per cent of EBMOs reported that no one was responsible for gender equality and diversity. In 2023, this figure halved to 18 per cent.

- ▶ **The leadership of women is on the rise within EBMO enterprise members.** Gender equality and diversity progress is not limited to EBMOs alone; their members are also making advancements, although they began from a relatively low representation. About 40 per cent of EBMOs surveyed indicate that 11 to 30 per cent of their members are headed by women. This percentage has more than doubled since 2017 when it stood at 15 per cent.
- ▶ **EBMOs are expanding their gender equality-related services to members.** In 2017, one-third (31 per cent) of EBMOs surveyed said that they lacked regular activities or initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality among their members. Six years later, this figure has decreased by half to just 17 per cent. Gender equality-related services provided to members at least once a year include training on how to promote gender equality and diversity in the workplace (36 per cent of EBMOs), conducting research (36 per cent) and publicly recognizing EBMO members for good practices (32 per cent).
- ▶ **EBMOs could broaden advocacy efforts to effectively address obstacles to greater equality, diversity, and inclusion.** Some EBMOs and their members are facing obstacles to achieving gender equality and diversity, but are not advocating in line with these challenges. Many EBMOs mention the need for improved access to finance for women entrepreneurs, enhanced access to child and elderly care, and the development of talent pipelines through better access to quality education for girls and women. However, these issues are not advocacy priorities for EBMOs.

Most EBMOs (81 per cent) are involved in some form of advocacy related to gender equality and diversity. A top advocacy priority for EBMOs is promoting the principle of equal pay for work of equal value (37 per cent), followed by advancing women in leadership positions (over 20 per cent).

- ▶ **Progress in gender equality and diversity varies among EBMOs, with some significantly ahead while others are just beginning.** This disparity holds important implications for organizations that provide support to EBMOs as it necessitates tailored support to meet the specific needs of each EBMO. The aim of this support should be to progressively narrow the gap over time.

The contrast in progress among EBMOs also offers opportunities. Those EBMOs that have made substantial advancements can serve as inspirations and provide support to their counterparts, enabling the latter to benefit from their wealth of experience.



# Chapter 1



# Background

## The inclusion of women at work has undeniable business, economic and societal benefits

The narrative on women and work has changed over the last decades. There is now a global acceptance that fully including women in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity is essential to:

- ▶ Boost the competitiveness, innovation, and profitability of enterprises.
- ▶ Build strong economies.
- ▶ Establish more stable and just societies.
- ▶ Achieve internationally agreed goals for development sustainability and human rights.
- ▶ Improve the quality of life of women, men, families, and communities.

The body of evidence to support the benefits of gender equality and diversity is large and growing, and the issue has become high profile. Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), signed up to by all UN Member States in 2015, is devoted specifically to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. What is more, gender equality is also mainstreamed throughout the other sixteen goals.

## A huge opportunity exists to better tap into female talent

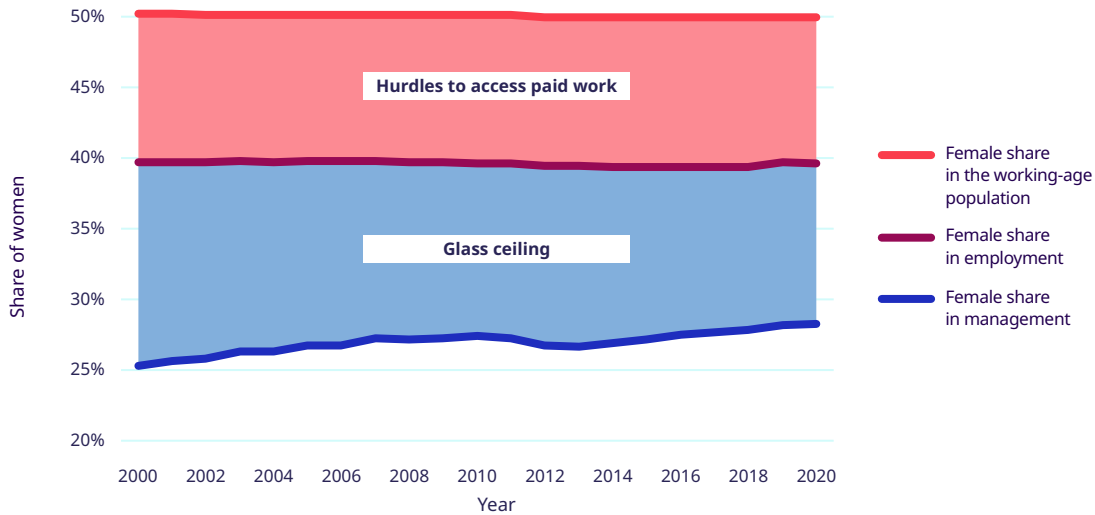
The global business community is making considerable efforts to reap the benefits of gender equality and diversity. However, progress has been patchy and, in some cases, the pace of change has not been compatible with the corresponding benefits. More can be done to tap into the significant pool of female talent.

Today:

- ▶ Women and men are not yet represented in the workforce on an equal footing. While women make up 50 per cent of the global workforce, their share of employment is just 40 per cent (see figure 1).<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Fewer women attain management and executive level positions compared to their male counterparts. Women occupy 28 per cent of management positions.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Globally, across the public and private sectors, women earn on average about 20 per cent less than men.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Yet women are surpassing men in higher education and across diverse disciplines. More than half (52 per cent) of students awarded a degree in 2020 were women.<sup>5</sup> Not only are there more women than men in tertiary education enrolment in 74 per cent of the countries with available data, but they also outperform men on virtually every educational higher education indicator.<sup>6</sup>

This means that there is an abundant talent pool of educated women to meet critical skills needs. There is plenty of scope for enterprises to build their competitive advantage by more effectively sourcing from this pool.

► **Figure 1. Female share management, employment, and working-age population 2000-2020<sup>7</sup>**



Source: ILO 2023. ILOSTAT.

## COVID-19 gave fresh impetus to gender equality and diversity

In terms of labour market statistics, the pandemic set women back. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, women experienced higher employment losses than men. While employment recovery is picking up pace, it remains uneven. The gap in the pandemic's impact on men's and women's employment is expected to diminish globally in the upcoming years, but a significant difference is still anticipated to persist.<sup>8</sup>

A 2023 monitoring report by the IOE and Deloitte<sup>9</sup> shows that while G20 countries have increased the participation of women in the labour force, labour market security and working conditions for women have worsened. Moreover, G20 countries are far behind in the implementation of their commitments on women's empowerment.

However, the picture is far from all negative. The pandemic acted as a catalyst for accelerating progress in the realm of diversity and inclusion (D&I), including gender equality and diversity. In a 2022 global workforce survey conducted by the ILO<sup>10</sup>, which received responses from over 12,000 participants and covered businesses of different sizes and sectors, the results were promising. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of respondents acknowledged that the heightened awareness of inequalities in society, brought about by the pandemic, had spurred increased focus and action on D&I within their companies. Furthermore, 69 per cent of all respondents said that the pandemic had increased their expectations of their employers when it comes to promoting D&I.

Finally, COVID-19 provided enterprises with evidence that offering flexible working can foster gender equality without compromising overall business productivity. Due to the lockdown measures imposed by COVID-19, enterprises globally gained substantial experience in implementing flexible working arrangements and how to make these effective for both businesses and workers. One of the many advantages of teleworking (working from home), for instance, is improved work-life balance, enabling both women and men to more effectively manage their caregiving and work responsibilities. Simultaneously, telework can lead to cost savings for businesses and improvement in workers' productivity.<sup>11</sup>



## EBMOs are in a powerful position to drive change

EBMOs have the capacity to drive the necessary change and enable their members, the broader business community, and their nations to unlock the complete potential of gender equality and diversity. EBMOs have unparalleled influence in the private sector and beyond. When they assume a leadership role in championing gender equality and diversity, they effect significant positive transformations.

EBMOs exert their influence in two main ways.

- ▶ They offer services and support to their members, who are either businesses or other business associations. This includes training, information, guidance, sharing of good practice, consultation and more.
- ▶ They shape national legislation and policies and harness public sector support to create an enabling business environment for the private sector through advocacy and social dialogue.

## Research methodology

It has been six years since the original 2017 ILO report on EBMOs and gender equality and diversity<sup>12</sup>. What is more, 2023 marks the tail end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now is the right time to take stock and gain further insights into gender equality and diversity at EBMOs.

This report aims to answer the following questions:

- ▶ What progress have EBMOs made on gender equality and diversity over the past six years:
  - Within their own organizations?
  - In terms of support and services for members?
  - When it comes to advocacy and social dialogue?
- ▶ What are their success stories on gender equality and diversity?
- ▶ What challenges remain and how can these be overcome?
- ▶ What lies on the road ahead for EBMOs?



This report is based on a global study of EBMOs and gender equality and diversity. The study comprises a survey of, and interviews with, EBMOs, supplemented with secondary research. Key terms related to gender equality and diversity used in this report can be found in annex 1.

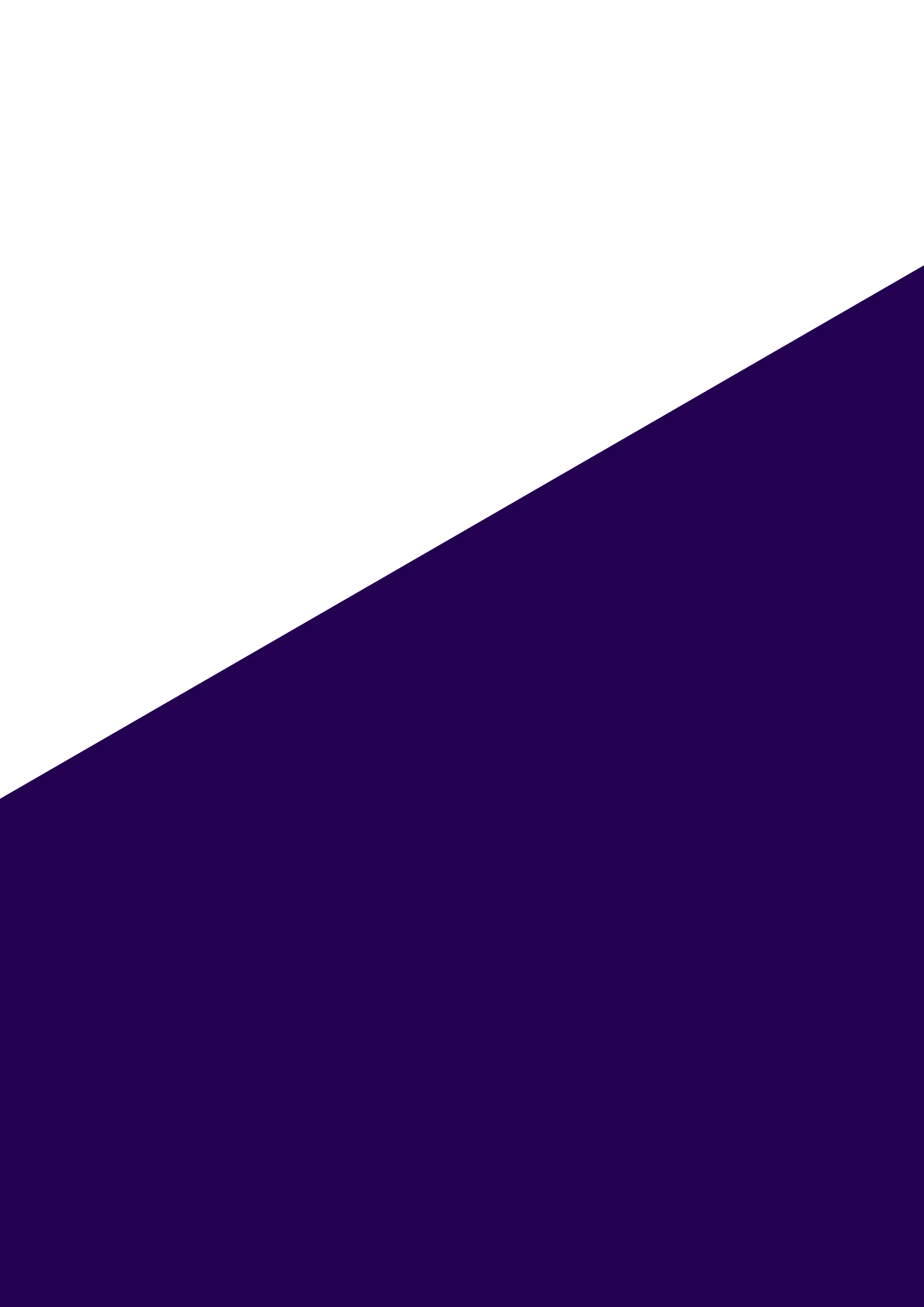
ILO-ACT/EMP and the IOE conducted a survey (see annex 4) from 17 April to 9 May 2023. A total of 95 EBMOs replied to the survey. The sample displayed the following characteristics:

- Almost a third (29 per cent) of EBMOs were based in Africa, 25 per cent in the Americas, 25 per cent in Europe and Central Asia, 19 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, and 2 per cent in the Arab States.
- Of the total responses, 37 per cent came from small organizations (employing 1 to 10 workers), 28 per cent came from medium-sized organizations (employing 11–30 workers), and 35 per cent came from large organizations (employing over 30 workers).
- Most of the enterprise members of these EBMOs (82 per cent) were local enterprises, while around a fifth (18 per cent) were multi-national companies.

For further information on survey demographics, please see annex 2. Annex 3 features a list of all countries covered by the survey according to region.

Two-thirds (66 per cent) of survey respondents volunteered to be interviewed. A total of 21 interviews were carried out between 25 May and 12 July 2023 by independent consultants (see annex 5 for a list of the EBMOs who were interviewed).

This report is structured around the key insights that flow from the new study and the secondary research. It also features a comparative analysis, comparing the results of this study to those of the original study carried out in 2017. The sample sizes for the 2017 and 2023 surveys have meant limited opportunities to determine statistically significant differences. The comparative trends identified in this report therefore need to be interpreted as indicative.



# Chapter 2



# The business case for gender equality and diversity

The business case for gender equality and diversity strengthens every year as evidence accumulates. Not only does the business case apply to individual enterprises, but it also extends to national economies and the global economy. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that many EBMOs participating in our report assert that gender equality and diversity enhance their business outcomes.

## Gender equality improves outcomes at enterprise, national, and global level

Gender equality and diversity is a smart business strategy.<sup>13</sup> It leads to:

- ▶ Higher profitability and productivity.
- ▶ Increased ability to attract and retain talent.
- ▶ Greater creativity, innovation, and openness.
- ▶ Enhanced reputation.
- ▶ Improved ability to gauge consumer interest and demand.

In addition, as already discussed, in an era of skill shortages, women represent a formidable talent pool which is widening globally.

There is plenty of concrete evidence demonstrating the benefits to enterprises of gender equality and diversity, including the below, making the business case incontrovertible.

- ▶ In 2019 the ILO surveyed almost 13,000 businesses in 70 countries.<sup>14</sup> It was found that, of those companies that track the quantitative impact of gender initiatives promoting women in management, nearly 74 per cent report a profit increase of between 5 and 20 per cent. Of the enterprises surveyed reporting improved business outcomes, over 60 per cent report higher profitability and productivity. These are significant numbers, considering the measures companies take to achieve just 2–3 per cent increases in margins.
- ▶ Analysis of the largest 3,000 US companies (the Russell 3,000 Index) over a 17-year period shows that firms with female Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) are more profitable. In the two years following their appointment, female CFOs saw a 6 per cent increase in profitability and 8 per cent larger stock returns.<sup>15</sup>
- ▶ Company performance goes beyond the financial bottom line. An analysis by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) covering 33 countries<sup>16</sup> found that the presence of more women on boards and in senior-level management positions is connected with better company environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards.
- ▶ Globally, just one in three start-ups is owned by women, partially because women face more obstacles than men when it comes to accessing finance.<sup>17</sup> Yet evidence from the US suggests that while start-ups founded or co-founded by women secure less investment, they perform better over time.<sup>18</sup>

While these facts and figures are significant, they do not represent the full picture, with the real benefits of gender equality and diversity being even higher. This is because while women and men have the same potential, they also contribute different and complementary skills and ideas that are economically valuable in the workplace, such as different attitudes to risk and collaboration.<sup>19</sup> What this means is that it is more beneficial to bring more women into the workplace than bringing on board more men where there are fewer women to begin with. The opposite is also true: where there are more women, it is more beneficial to bring on board more men.

The impact of gender equality and diversity at enterprise level is considerable, but when considered cumulatively at national or global level it becomes truly impressive. The loss associated with current levels of gender discrimination globally is estimated to be up to US\$12 trillion or 16 per cent of world income.<sup>20</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that, for countries where gaps between female and male labour market participation rates are the largest, closing these gaps would add 35 per cent to GDP. Four-fifths of the gains would come from adding workers to the labour force, but a full one fifth would arise from the boost to productivity brought about by greater gender diversity, in other words by the fact that women and men bring different skills, experiences, ideas, and more to the workplace.<sup>21</sup>

## The business case for EBMOs is equally strong

Our new research shows that the business case for gender equality and diversity not only applies to businesses, but also extends to EBMOs. EBMOs that improve gender equality and diversity internally are better positioned to serve the needs of their members. EBMOs can also expand their membership base and network circles by attracting women business owners as members. Promoting gender equality and diversity helps to enhance the EBMO's image in the public arena and to win the support of women business owners and leaders.

### ► Box 1. Filipino EBMO uses business case for gender equality as first step to bring employers on board

“We need to show companies the business case, so they understand the impact of gender diversity and inclusion programmes on their bottom lines”, says Jelermina Abigail Roxas-Gorospe, Deputy-Director General at the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP).

To achieve this vision, ECOP, together with the ILO and Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian government, produced a research brief in 2020: [The business case for women in business and management in the Philippines](#). It presents evidence of the positive impact of gender diversity practices on Filipino enterprises, including higher profitability and productivity and a greater ability to retain talent.

Building on the interest created by the brief, ECOP partnered with the Philippines Business Coalition for Women Empowerment – a coalition of businesses that advances workplace gender equality – to train ECOP members on sexual harassment and gender-inclusive communications. Even though the training sessions are relatively new (around 25 members have been trained so far), employers' feedback has been very positive. ECOP is currently developing additional training and service offerings on gender equality and diversity.

To ensure its approach to gender equality and diversity is holistic, ECOP also:

- Set up a diversity and inclusion (D&I) member committee in 2021 to promote workplace gender equality, women's empowerment, and equal opportunities for all workers regardless of gender.
- Carried out the ILO's [Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check \(WE-Check\)](#) in 2022, a self-assessment that is helping ECOP to better respond to the needs of women entrepreneurs, business owners, and leaders.\*

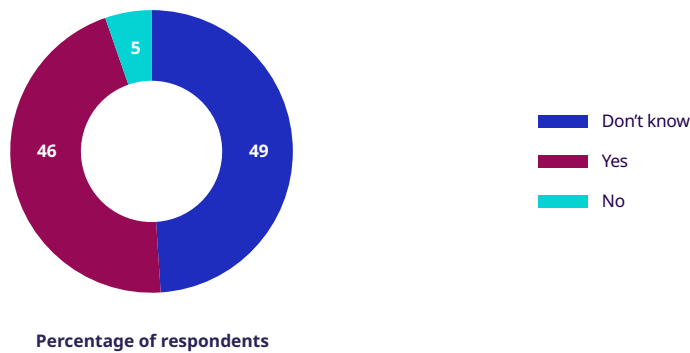
\* For more on WE-Check, please see the Nigeria case study in Box 8.



Almost half (46 per cent) of survey respondents said that their EBMO’s initiatives on gender equality and diversity have helped enhance business outcomes (see figure 2). The top three business benefits identified were:

- ▶ increased income from membership subscriptions, training revenue, and other advisory services (43 per cent);
- ▶ enhanced EBMO reputation (30 per cent);
- ▶ and increased ability to attract and retain talent (23 per cent).

▶ **Figure 2. EBMOs that experienced better business outcomes as a result of gender equality and diversity, 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

Half (49 per cent) of the surveyed EBMOs do not know whether gender equality and diversity initiatives improve their business outcomes. As all respondents who replied ‘Don’t know’ to the question on business outcomes also said that their EBMOs have one or more initiatives to promote gender equality and diversity, it is likely that these EBMOs do not track the impact of their initiatives. This also became apparent from the interviews.

At a regional level, Asia and the Pacific stands out. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of EBMOs in this region report that their initiatives on gender equality and diversity have enhanced business outcomes, compared to 50 per cent of EBMOs in Africa, 42 per cent of EBMOs in the Americas, and just 30 per cent of EBMOs in Europe and Central Asia. This also suggests that more EBMOs in Asia and the Pacific are actively tracking the impact of gender equality and diversity initiatives on their performance than in any other region.

## Gender equality and diversity is moving up the EBMO agenda

The survey highlights the growing significance of gender equality and diversity within EBMOs. This is evident through several key indicators, including the substantial increase in survey response rates between 2023 (94 respondents) and 2017 (53 respondents). Additionally, the willingness of two-thirds of respondents to participate in interviews on this topic underscores its importance.

Notably, in 2023 a total of 25 per cent of EBMOs had an allocated focal person on gender and 21 per cent had an official team/department, compared to 15 per cent and 6 per cent respectively in 2017. These results indicate a heightened awareness among EBMOs regarding the importance of gender equality and diversity, leading to changes in their organizational structures.



The respondents to the 2023 survey were also somewhat more senior compared to those who responded in 2017. In 2023, 66 per cent of respondents were in a senior/executive decision-making position, compared to 60 per cent in 2017. In 2023, 21 per cent of respondents managed/supervised one or more other people or a department/business unit, compared to 11 per cent in 2017.

It is very clear to me that diversity and inclusion, including gender inclusiveness, are now much higher priorities in corporations. There is a growing recognition that this is not something that just happens organically. There need to be deliberate strategies in place. Within our membership, the advances around gender equality and inclusiveness are tremendous, of which our members are proud. We're in a different world compared to 20 or 30 years ago. But, of course, more can always be done. This is a learning process for all. Our members realize that being inclusive is simply the right thing to do. Period.

► **Derrick Hynes** – President & CEO / Federally Regulated Employers – Transportation and Communications (FETCO) (Canada)

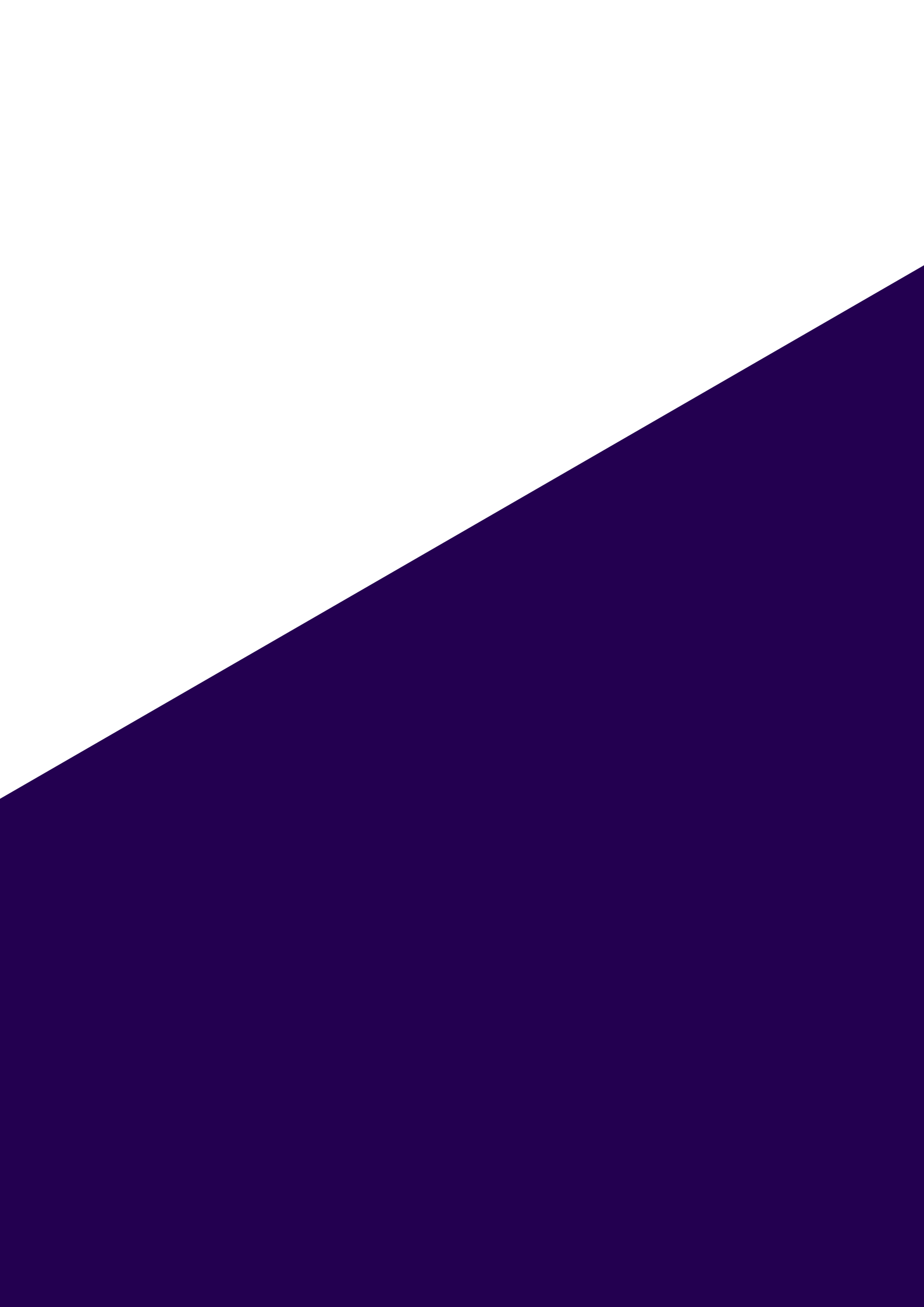
#### ► **Box 2. Malaysian EBMO embarks on gender equality journey by launching new national summit**

Picking up the pace on gender equality and diversity, the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) held its first [National Summit on Leadership, Empowerment, Equity, and Protection in the New Malaysia](#) to mark International Women's Day 2023. The summit celebrated women's leadership, put inspiring women in the spotlight, and raised awareness of harassment and other issues that predominantly impact women.

Both members and non-members were enthusiastic about the summit, and about 200 people attended. Malaysia's Women, Family, and Community Development Minister officiated the summit. MEF also invited high-level female panellists and speakers from different sectors, including a prominent lawyer and human rights advocate, a high court judge, and senior managers from multinational corporations in banking and property development.

The summit had several sessions and panel discussions on women's leadership in Malaysian society, discrimination and sexual harassment, and women's empowerment. The session on discrimination and sexual harassment was particularly useful in raising awareness of new protection in the law for victims of harassment, which some women attendees were unaware of.

Moving forward, MEF plans to hold a yearly summit on women's issues and invite both women and men to participate.



# Chapter 3



# Gender equality and diversity inside EBMOs

EBMOs hold a powerful position to set an example for their members and the wider business community. This section delves into the EBMOs' internal efforts to achieve gender equality and diversity within their own organizations. To borrow phrasing from the IOE, do EBMOs “walk the talk” on gender equality by “creating access, providing support, and promoting the participation of ... women in all levels of decision-making processes”?<sup>22</sup>

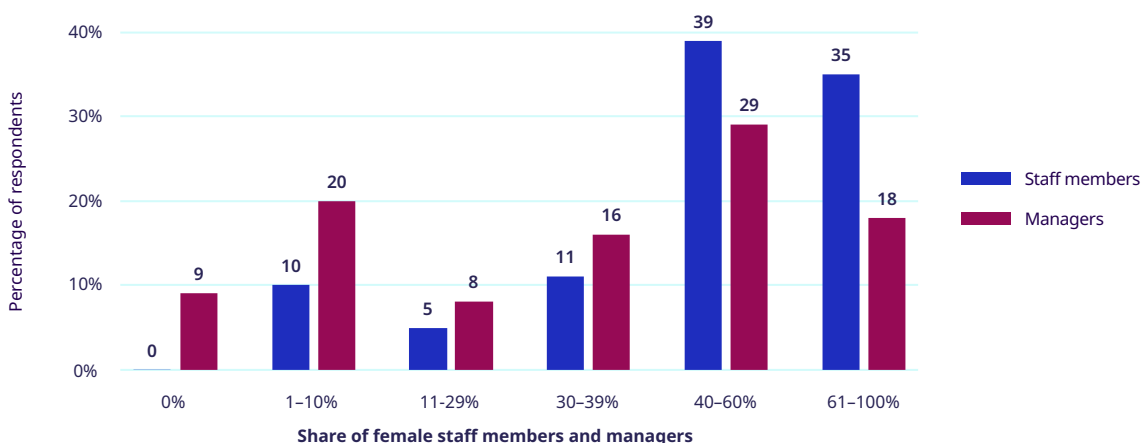
## Women’s representation inside EBMOs

### Women are generally well-represented within EBMO secretariats but notably absent at the managerial level

In around three-quarters of EBMOs who answered the survey women comprise at least 40 per cent of all staff, with women comprising a strong majority (61-100 per cent of employees) in over a third of EBMOs. Half (54 per cent) of survey respondents also says that the number of women staff members in the last two years has increased.

While women represent a significant share of EBMO staff, they are under-represented at managerial level (see figure 3). In 2023 just under a third (28 per cent) of EBMOs have achieved gender balance at managerial level, with 40 to 60 per cent of managers being women. Nearly 40 per cent of EBMOs do not have a critical mass of women managers.\* One out of ten EBMOs have no female managers at all. A total of 18 per cent of EBMO’s have more female than male managers, with 61-100 per cent of managers being women.

► **Figure 3. Share of female staff members and managers, 2023 results**



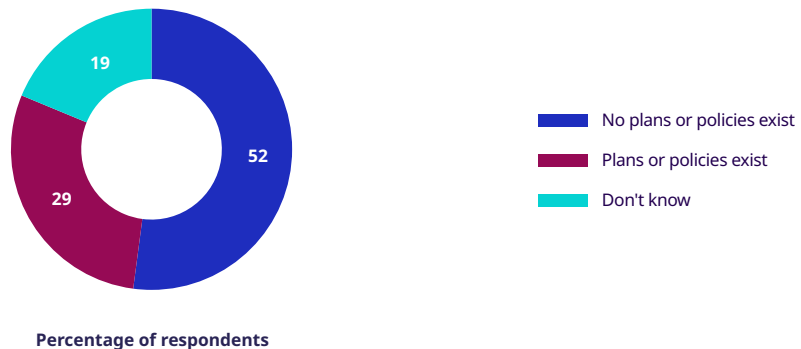
Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

\* Defining a critical mass varies; however, an increasing number of countries are using the 30 per cent figure due to targeted initiatives such as the 30% Club. Studies suggest that organizations need to reach a critical mass of women in top positions to reap the benefits of gender diversity. Reaching this threshold allows a minority to exert their influence and ensure their voice is heard.

At regional level, Europe and Central Asia accounted for the highest shares of EBMOs (43 per cent) with between 40 and 60 per cent of women managers. About a third of EBMOs in the Americas (33 per cent) reported achieving gender balance in managerial roles. Conversely, Africa and Asia and the Pacific represent the lowest share of EBMOs achieving gender balance in management at 18 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. Half of the EBMOs in Africa (50 per cent) reported that women accounted for 10 per cent or less of total managers.

Recent trends show positive development. Half (48 per cent) of EBMOs say that the number of women managers has increased in the past two years, indicating progress. Importantly, almost a third (29 per cent) of EBMOs have plans or policies in place to recruit and promote women into managerial positions, which potentially indicates that more EBMOs will achieve gender balance at managerial level in the future (see figure 4).

► **Figure 4. Plans or policies to recruit and promote women into managerial positions, 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

► **Box 3. Cyprus EBMO advances gender equality on all fronts**

The Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB) takes a holistic approach to gender equality and diversity. This includes advocacy and training but also the design and implementation of certification schemes for members, with a tailored certification scheme for SMEs and a code of conduct on harassment and sexual harassment adopted by members.

In 2022, the OEB worked with trade unions to draft the Code on the Prevention of Harassment and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, which prevents and addresses unacceptable behaviour. The code has already been included in numerous collective labour agreements.

The EBMO also leads by example. The organization has been growing since 2016, leading to more staff and opportunities for restructuring. In particular, the OEB wanted to tackle a glass ceiling and ensure women were given more opportunities to occupy senior management positions. To achieve this, the OEB improved work-life balance for all staff. The OEB also amended its articles of association to make the promotion of gender equality in employment, women's entrepreneurship, and the promotion of gender balance in decision-making positions formal organizational objectives.

Now, in 2023, the OEB has perfect gender balance at senior management level.

## Women are under-represented in EBMO boardrooms and executive management

While there are more female role models as leaders today than ever before, there remains a continuing dearth of women in top decision-making positions, such as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), board members and politicians. In 2023, data from 146 countries shows that women hold just 32 per cent of global senior leadership roles across the public and private sectors.<sup>23</sup> A similar picture emerges from the survey data on EBMOs.

### The boardroom

Only 16 per cent of EBMO boards have a woman serving as a chairperson. Additionally, the vast majority of EBMO boards exhibit gender imbalance (see figure 5). Specifically, just 13 per cent of boards have women constituting at least 30 per cent of their members, and a mere 9 per cent have gender-balanced boards. The interviews conducted for this report underscore the challenge many EBMOs face when it comes to recruiting female board members.

Unfortunately, this gender disparity results in missed opportunities for EBMOs. A diverse board leads to better decision-making. Research demonstrates that enterprises with higher gender diversity on their boards tend to be more profitable.<sup>24</sup> This phenomenon is partially attributed to the fact that a more gender-balanced board fosters a wider diversity of thought. Such boards encompass a broader spectrum of mindsets, thought processes and perspectives. For instance, men often bring valuable experience in finance and operations, but may lack expertise in human resources, governance, risk management, and other areas where women have historically excelled.<sup>25</sup>

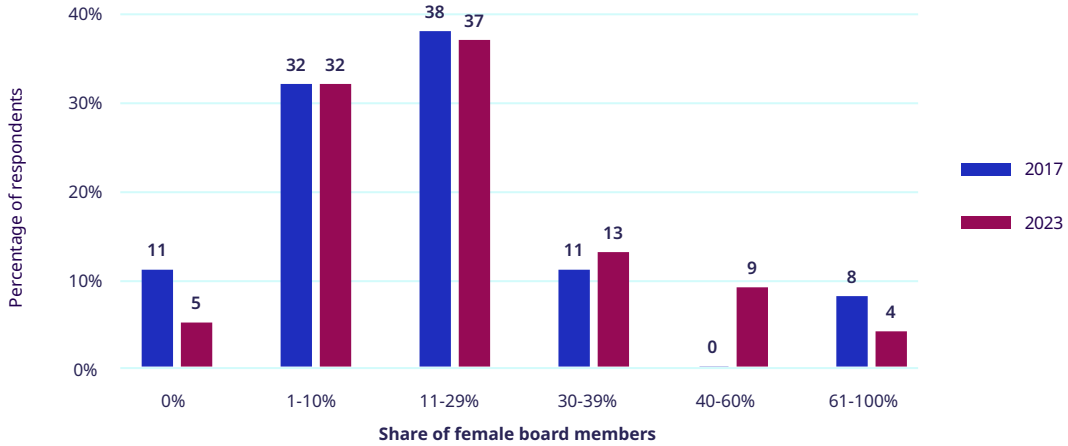
Organizations need to achieve a critical mass of at least 30 per cent women in their boardrooms to fully realize these advantages.<sup>26</sup> According to ILO research<sup>27</sup>, when boardrooms consist of 30-39 per cent women, enterprises are 19 per cent more likely to achieve improved business outcomes. However, only one-third (32 per cent) of enterprises are governed by boards that have reached this critical mass (although all-male boards are gradually decreasing). EBMOs are therefore slightly behind their community in terms of female representation on boards.

Undeniably EBMOs have made significant progress in the past six years in terms of improving the gender balance of their boards. However, there is still ample room for improvement and an opportunity to lead the business community by setting an example.

- ▶ In 2017, just 19 per cent of EBMOs indicated that women comprised at least 30 per cent of board members, compared to 26 per cent in 2023.
- ▶ In 2017, 11 per cent of EBMOs had no women on their boards, compared to 5 per cent in 2023 (again adding to the existing evidence that all-male boards are on the decline).
- ▶ While just 16 per cent of EBMO boards had a woman as a chairperson in 2023, this is double that in 2017 when 8 per cent of EBMO board chairpersons were female.
- ▶ Almost half (45 per cent) of EBMOs say that the number of women on their boards has increased in the past two years.



► **Figure 5. Share of women board members, 2017 and 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP survey on women leaders and managers in employers' organizations, 2017; ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

Furthermore, achieving gender-balanced boards seems to pose a greater challenge for larger EBMOs. According to the 2023 survey, while 42 per cent of small EBMOs (employing 1 to 10 workers) and 43 per cent of medium-sized EBMOs (11-30 workers) had boards consisting of at least 30 per cent women, this was only the case for nine per cent of large EBMOs (employing over 30 workers).

When examining regional data, the study reveals that EBMOs in the Americas have the highest proportion of women board members, with 42 per cent of EBMOs having at least 30 per cent of female board members. The lowest percentage of EBMOs with at least 30 per cent of board members was found in Asia and the Pacific (17 per cent), followed by Africa (21 per cent), and Europe and Central Asia (26 per cent).

Lastly, the study identified positive effects associated with having a female chair who can serve as a role model for the overall composition of the board. EBMOs in the 2023 survey with a female board chairperson were 22 per cent more likely to have over 30 per cent of female board members compared to EBMOs with a male board chairperson.





#### ▶ Box 4. EBMOs work together across borders to tackle female leadership void

When the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) realized in 2010 that less than 12 per cent of the women working for their 600+ member companies were in leadership positions, the EBMO decided to act. FUE took inspiration from the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise's (NHO) pioneer Female Future programme.

NHO's Female Future, launched in 2003, is a leadership training programme for women working for member companies. Nearly 2,000 women have participated from around 1,000 member businesses.

The programme focuses on personal development, management and communication skills, as well as networking. It takes place annually and lasts nine months with six in-person sessions. Participants obtain credits towards a Master of Science in boardroom competence.

Following support and training from the NHO, the FUE launched its own Female Future programme in 2011. At first FUE members had to be convinced. With fees at US\$ 3,300 per person, just seven of the 15 available spaces were taken.

But as word about the effectiveness of the programme got out interest increased. The FUE quickly started running two courses a year, has just increased the available spaces to 45 per year, and there is already a waiting list for the 2024 programme.

Feedback from FUE members on Female Future has been incredibly positive. Women who have participated are:

- ▶ Clear about their goals.
- ▶ Better able to take control.
- ▶ More effective.
- ▶ Good communicators.

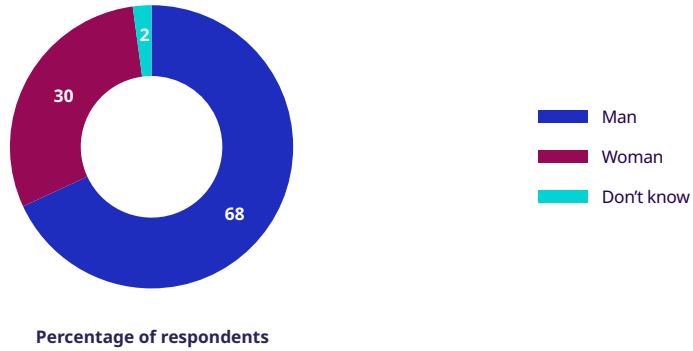
As of 2023, around 150 women have been trained, with 88 per cent subsequently receiving promotions and 40 per cent joining company boards. The FUE holds a graduation ceremony at its annual Women Leadership Conference.

FUE is currently working on a business case for its Female Future programme that will include a figure for return on investment (ROI), while the NHO has most recently helped a Jordan EBMO to implement its own Female Future programme. All together seven EBMOs in different countries are now running a Female Future programme.

### Executive management

In the 2023 survey, EBMOs compare very favourably to the global business community, with 30 per cent having a female CEO heading the secretariat (see figure 6). In businesses around the world, women CEOs continue to be underrepresented, especially at larger enterprises. They account for only 5 per cent of all CEOs globally<sup>28</sup> and are concentrated in small and micro-businesses.<sup>29</sup>

► **Figure 6. Gender of the CEO, 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

This bodes well for future progress on gender equality and diversity within EBMOs because there is a positive association between having a female CEO and greater gender diversity in middle, senior and top management positions.<sup>30</sup> Results from the 2023 EBMO survey revealed that EBMOs with female CEOs were 25 per cent more likely to employ over 40 per cent of women in managerial positions compared to EBMOs with male CEOs.

Smaller EBMOs are more likely to be led by a woman. According to the 2023 survey, 49 per cent of small EBMOs (employing 1 to 10 workers) had a female CEO compared to 29 per cent of medium-sized EBMOs (11-30 workers) and 12 per cent of large EBMOs (employing over 30 workers). This reflects trends in the business community more widely, where the share of enterprises with a female CEO shrinks as enterprises grow.<sup>31</sup>

► **Box 5. Georgian EBMO helps its women managers reach the top**

Elene Makharashvili has worked for the Georgian Employers Association (GEA) for more than 16 years. She has recently become its new CEO.

“The support of my employer has been invaluable in becoming a leader”, says Elene. She was encouraged to join the ILO’s [Malkia](#) programme - a learning and coaching package for women managers. The programme is designed to help women move up the ladder and take up leadership positions. As part of her work-based training, Elene also completed the ILO’s [Master Training in Management of EBMOs](#).

One of Elene’s first long-term priorities as new CEO is to support other women in the business community. “Entrepreneurship is difficult for women in Georgia”, explains Elene, “bank loans are backed by men or real estate, but men tend to also own the real estate. This leaves women without credit. We want to change this”.

As part of a 2022 pilot project, the GEA helped ten women entrepreneurs successfully start businesses. Under Elene’s leadership, the GEA is now expanding this to two groups of 15-20 women entrepreneurs a year. Each will receive a GEA start-up grant, funded by members. In return, the members will receive a CSR credit.

Having a woman heading the GEA has also led to short-term impacts on gender equality. Elene started as CEO in February 2023. By early June, more than 15 new companies had joined the GEA, among them five women-led enterprises.

## More EBMOs are driving gender equality and diversity internally

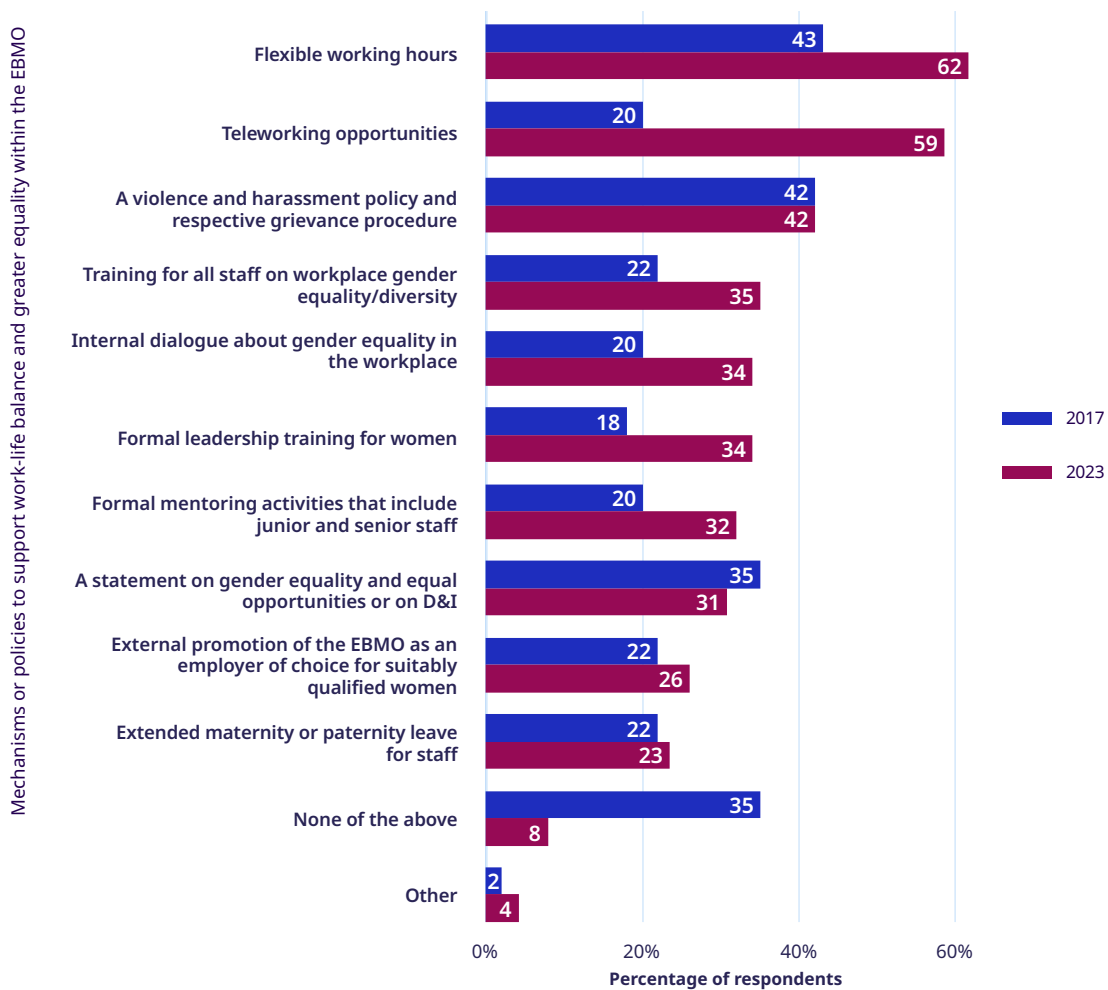
The 2017 and 2023 surveys of EBMOs investigated EBMO initiatives, mechanisms, and policies to improve the representation of women at all levels and drive gender equality and diversity. Overall, more and more EBMOs are taking action to support work-life balance and greater equality. While in 2017 almost a third (31 per cent) of EBMOs did not have any initiatives, mechanisms, or policies, in 2023 this proportion was just 9 per cent – remarkable progress over a relatively short period of time.

Currently, the top three most popular initiatives by EBMOs are (see figure 7):

- flexible working hours (62 per cent of EBMOs);
- teleworking opportunities (working from home or remote working) (59 per cent);
- and a violence and harassment policy (42 per cent).

It is likely that the improvements in flexible working options and teleworking stem, at least partially, from the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. This gave many employers and their workers the opportunity to experiment with and fine-tune such arrangements.

► **Figure 7. EBMO mechanisms or policies to internally support work-family balance and greater equality, 2017 and 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP survey on women leaders and managers in employers' organizations, 2017; ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

EBMOs are advancing on the path to achieving gender equality and diversity, but some are further ahead than others. For example, currently:

- ▶ 35 per cent of EBMOs train their staff on gender equality and diversity in the workplace;
- ▶ 34 per cent discuss gender equality in the workplace internally;
- ▶ 31 per cent have a formal statement on gender equality and equal opportunities, or on diversity and inclusion;
- ▶ and only 23 per cent offer extended maternity and/or paternity leave.

#### ▶ Box 6. Barbados EBMO supports work-life balance through flexible working and time off

“Our organization has a very flexible approach to work, and we have retained remote work as a feature of our operations,” says Ms. Sheena Mayers-Granville, CEO of the Barbados Employers’ Confederation (BEC).

BEC supports work-life balance through a formal written policy on flexible work arrangements. It establishes that employees can work three days from the office and two days from home per week. BEC’s policy allows for flexibility outside core work hours (9 am to 3 pm), in which employees can leave the office to fulfil family or personal responsibilities such as collecting their children from school.

In addition to statutory holiday leave, BEC provides employees with six days of “personal leave” a year when staff can take time away from the office to take care of personal matters, including medical appointments or spending time with family. BEC also has up to six weeks of fully paid sick leave, going beyond national legislation as employers in Barbados are not legally required to pay for sickness.

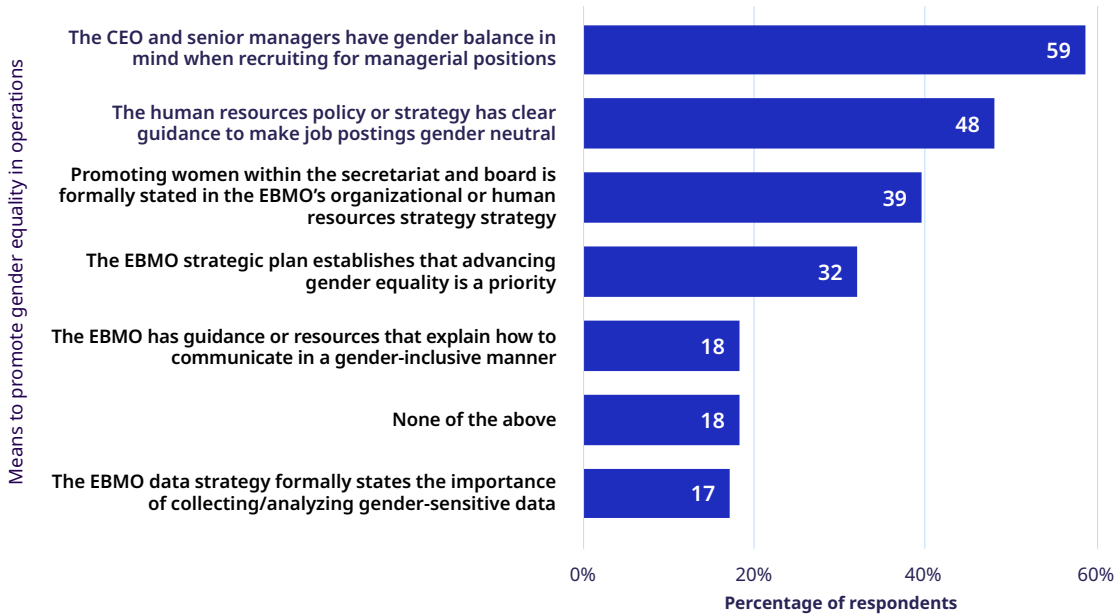
These initiatives have positively impacted BEC’s work culture. Staff appreciate BEC’s policies to support their work-life balance and allow more time to fulfil their roles and responsibilities outside the workplace.

## Most EBMOs are driving gender equality in their operations

Eight out of 10 (82 per cent) of EBMOs are making a concerted effort to improve gender equality and diversity in their operations. The top three most popular means to do so all involve leadership at managerial and executive levels, as well as making the most of tools such as organizational policies and strategies (see figure 8):

- ▶ The CEO/Director-General and senior managers have gender balance in mind when recruiting for managerial positions (59 per cent).
- ▶ The EBMO human resources policy or strategy has clear guidance to make job postings gender neutral (48 per cent).
- ▶ Promoting women within the secretariat and board is formally stated in the EBMO’s organizational or human resources strategy (39 per cent).

► **Figure 8. Means to promote gender equality in operations , 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

Women’s talent is often hidden. They need opportunities to become visible. For example, when we ask our members to send representatives for a panel discussion or meeting, we often have to really push to find a woman. It’s important to go beyond the usual suspects.

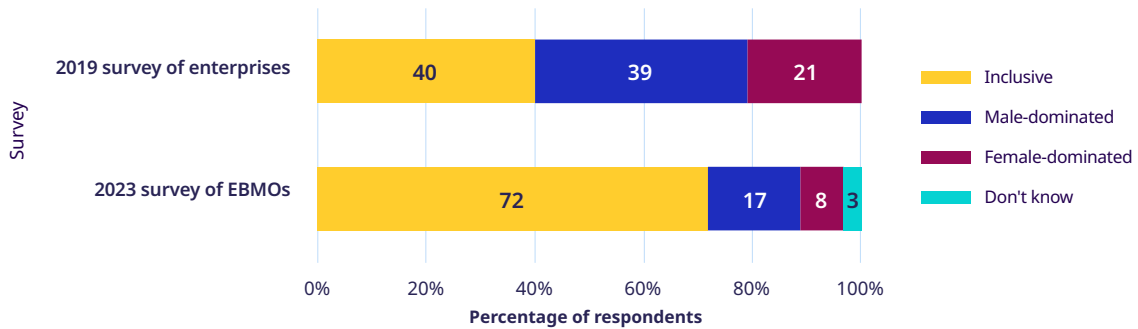
► **Female director** – large EBMO

### **Inclusive organizational cultures: EBMOs outperform the wider business community**

Given how many EBMOs are actively driving gender equality and diversity internally, it is not surprising that a large majority of EBMO survey respondents (72 per cent) consider their EBMOs to have an inclusive culture (see figure 9). Just under two-fifths (17 per cent) of EBMOs say their cultures are male-dominated. Even fewer EBMOs (eight per cent) are seen to have a female-dominated culture.

An ILO survey of nearly 13,000 enterprises in 2019<sup>32</sup> also asked respondents to assess their organizational culture. Just 40 per cent of respondents considered their organizational culture to be inclusive, with a similar proportion (39 per cent) saying it was male dominated. While the sample sizes for these surveys are vastly different, these figures indicate that EBMOs may be leading the way when it comes to achieving gender inclusive cultures.

► **Figure 9. Assessment of organizational culture in enterprises and EBMOs, 2019 and 2023 results**



**Note:** The 2019 survey of enterprises did not include a 'Don't know' answer option.

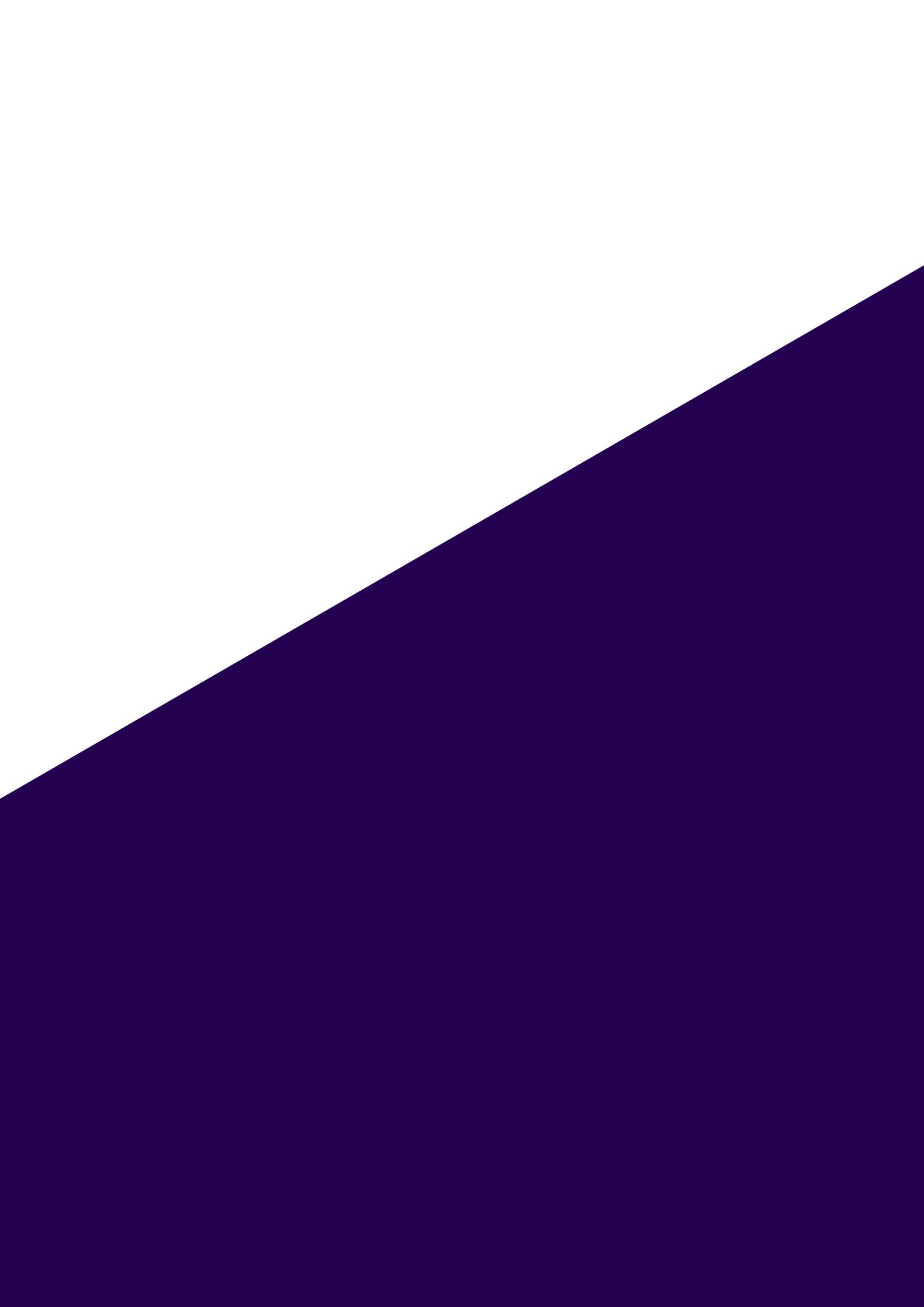
**Source:** ILO-ACT/EMP enterprise survey on the business case for change, 2019; ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

National culture also influences the organizational cultures of EBMOs and their members and can be a barrier to achieving gender equality. The latest research by the United Nations Development Programme, conducted in 2023 using data accounting for 85 per cent of the global population, shows that almost 9 out of 10 men and women hold fundamental biases against women.<sup>33</sup> According to the ILO, there are still many people who believe it is unacceptable for a woman to have a paid job outside the home: 20 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women globally, in fact.<sup>34</sup> Many women report that their immediate family disapprove of their decisions to work outside the home.

These attitudes can hinder women from progressing in the workplace, and even from entering it in the first place. The importance of changing wider culture cannot be underestimated. Fortunately, due to their often-high levels of influence, EBMOs can play an important role here.

► Here culture dominates. Women tend to be relegated to second place. We started our own National Employers' Women's Day two years ago to change this. This year (2023) we organized a roundtable where our members explored how the business community can promote gender equality. More than 100 people attended. We plan to increase and scale up the events taking place on this important day.

► **Bih Dewolheur** – HR Officer / Confédération Générale des Entreprises de Côte d'Ivoire (CGECI)





# Chapter 4



# EBMO advocacy and member services that drive gender equality and diversity

A wide range of EBMO member services helps to promote gender equality and diversity in the private sector. These services include tailored support for businesswomen associations, participation in social dialogue on gender equality and diversity issues, conducting research on gender equality and diversity, advocating for the right regulatory framework, and more.

Comparing the 2017 and 2023 data reveals that more EBMOs are assisting their members to drive gender equality today. In 2017, one-third (31 per cent) of EBMO survey respondents reported not having regular activities or initiatives promoting gender equality and targeting their members. Six years later this figure has dropped to 17 per cent. Currently, over a third of EBMOs (36 per cent) have a standing member committee or council specifically dedicated to promoting gender equality and diversity.

## ► Box 7. Greek EBMO drives sea change on gender equality

“We are really proud of putting gender equality on the agenda”, says Christos A. Ioannou, Director of Employment and Labour Market affairs at the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV).

Gender equality was not a priority for Greek society. This all changed when ILO constituents adopted the [Violence and Harassment Convention \(No. 190\)](#) in 2019. The SEV used this as an opportunity to create momentum and put the spotlight on gender equality and diversity.

The SEV successfully advocated for the Convention to be ratified and for it to be accurately reflected in new legislation, which came into force in early 2023. Among other positive changes, the new regulations give women working in the private sector the right to the same amount of maternity leave (previously just six months) as offered in the public sector (nine months). The SEV also ensured public funding of maternity leave to help businesses, especially SMEs, cover costs.

The SEV produced a support package for members to help them comply with the new rules, including:

- a guide featuring the business case for gender equality and diversity, descriptions of legal cases, and more;
- training workshops;
- and a new internal steering group on equality, diversity, and inclusion composed of 15 managers representing companies and sectoral associations.

In 2023 the SEV also surveyed businesses and the general public on their views on women at work. It showed that negative stereotypes persist. The SEV has just launched a new public awareness campaign to change hearts and minds.

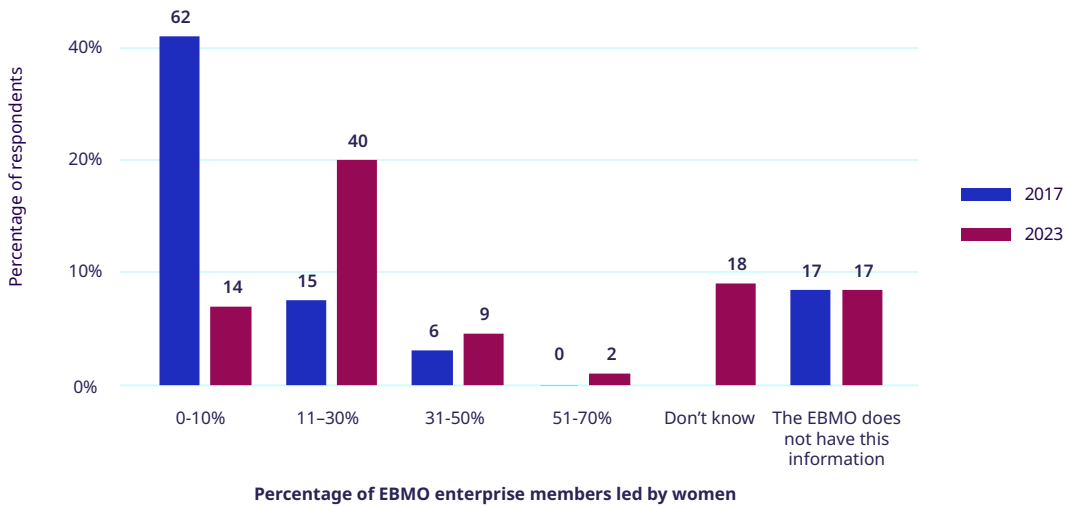
While it's too early to measure impact, the overall response from members to SEV's action on gender has been extremely positive. As of June 2023, 118 human resources managers at member companies have been trained and the SEV is now scaling up member support given the high interest shown.

## More EBMO enterprise members are led by women

The trend is clear: more EBMO enterprise members are headed by women. This shows that it is not just EBMOs making substantial progress on gender equality and diversity, but their members as well.

The survey data show that while in 2017 nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) of EBMO survey respondents said that between zero and 10 per cent of their enterprise members were headed by women, this was only the case for 14 per cent of respondents in 2023 (see figure 10). Even more encouragingly, 40 per cent of EBMOs say that 11-30 per cent of their direct enterprise members are headed by women, compared to just 15 per cent in 2017.

► **Figure 10. Share of EBMO enterprise members led by women, 2017 and 2023 results**



Note: The 2017 survey of enterprises did not include a 'Don't know' answer option.

Source: ILO-ACT/EMP survey on women leaders and managers in employers' organizations, 2017; ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

However, it is important to note that women-led enterprises continue to be a minority. Furthermore, over a third (36 per cent) of EBMOs are not aware what proportion of their enterprise members is headed by women. This means that they are not tracking and segregating relevant high-level organizational data according to gender.

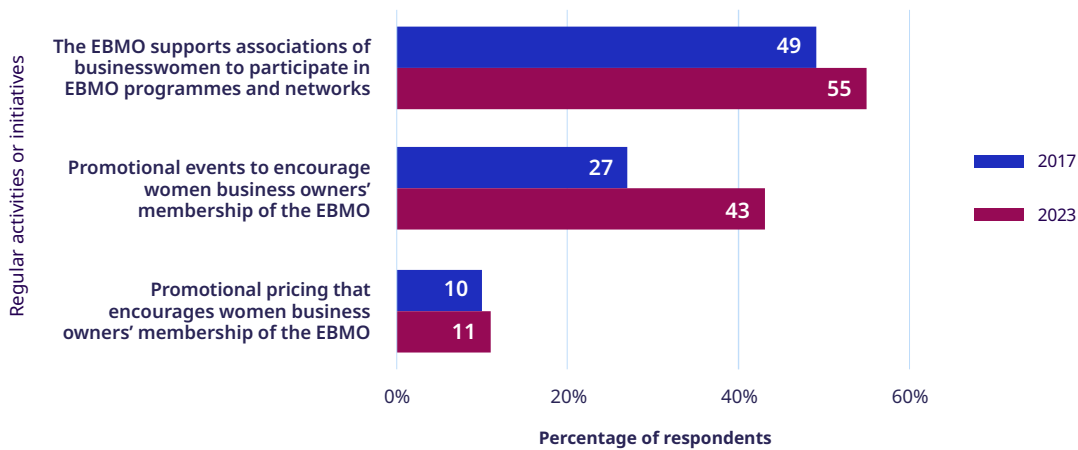
## More EBMO members represent women's interests

The proportion of EBMO members who specifically represent women's interests, such as women's entrepreneurship associations or organizations of professional women, has increased significantly. While in 2017, 39 per cent of EBMOs had such members, this was the case for over half (56 per cent) of EBMO survey respondents in 2023.

The progress made in recruiting members representing women's interests can likely be attributed, in part, to increased support for women-owned businesses and heightened efforts to promote EBMO membership among women business owners. For instance, while in 2017 just over a quarter of EBMOs held events at least once a year for female business owners to promote EBMO membership, this increased to 43 per cent in 2023 (see figure 11).

These findings are encouraging given the barriers to entrepreneurship experienced by many women. Access to business finance continues to be an obstacle despite many initiatives promoting and supporting female entrepreneurship, and with many banks now offering better loan packages to women entrepreneurs.

► **Figure 11. Regular activities or initiatives targeting members to promote gender equality, 2017 and 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP survey on women leaders and managers in employers' organizations, 2017; ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

► **Box 8. Nigeria's Network of Entrepreneurial Women picks up the pace**

The Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA) set up NECA's Network of Entrepreneurial Women (NNEW) 18 years ago. It helps small women-led businesses, including home-based enterprises, to start up and thrive. Around 3,000 women entrepreneurs in total have benefited from network support.

In 2022, NECA teamed up with the ILO to help the NNEW reach new heights. Using the ILO's [Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check \(WE-Check\)](#) tool, NECA developed an action plan to better target and serve women entrepreneurs.

The action plan was developed by middle and senior managers at NECA and NNEW following an in-depth institutional assessment of both organization. This included training, a survey, focus groups, and analysis of organizational documents such as the employee handbook, the NECA and NNEW constitutions, and member communications.

The action plan is currently being implemented. It contains timebound actions that have been allocated resources where necessary. Examples of actions include:

- Systematically collect gender-segregated client/beneficiary data.
- Adopt and use an agreed definition of "woman entrepreneur" and "woman-led business".
- Carry out regular research on women entrepreneurs and women-owned and led businesses, including on training needs.
- Specifically consider the needs of women entrepreneurs and women-owned and led businesses when implementing or delivering products or services.
- Offer products and services that are tailored to women entrepreneurs and women-owned and led businesses.

**► Box 9. Implementing a comprehensive strategy for gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in Colombia**

In 2019, the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI) developed a comprehensive strategy to promote gender equality, diversity, and inclusion among its members. This strategy is based on three main pillars.

**1. Measure to act**

ANDI conducts its annual equality, diversity, and inclusion survey with members to assess the representation of women in managerial and decision-making positions, policies, and strategies for diversity and inclusion. On average, 300 member enterprises have participated in this survey since its launch in 2020 and have benefitted from ANDI's recommendations to promote gender diversity in their organizations.

Additionally, ANDI assesses its policies and practices to improve gender equality and diversity yearly using the AEQUALES methodology, which measures and ranks organizations on gender equality in Latin America.

**2. Know to apply**

ANDI conducts research and activities to promote gender equality in business settings. In 2018, ANDI published the "Closing Gaps" toolkit. It provides tools and guidance to help enterprises assess their practices and policies from a gendered lens and design a gender equality strategy to reduce inequalities. Member companies from different sectors and regions attended workshops in which they could use these tools to design their gender equality strategies.

More recently, in 2023, ANDI conducted its fifth forum on equality, diversity, and inclusion, a yearly event in which the government, public and private stakeholders discuss challenges particularly affecting women and progress made regarding the representation of women in leadership roles. ANDI also shares the findings of yearly member surveys at this event.

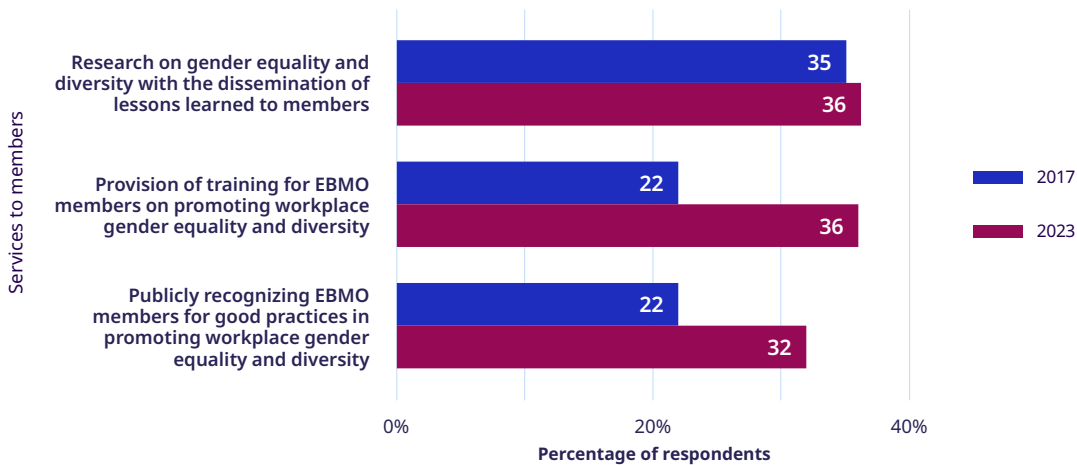
**3. Add to transform**

ANDI has established strategic partnerships with organizations, universities, and governments at both national and international levels to implement women's leadership programs, increase women's representation on boards of directors, and improve the retention of women single parents. Through ANDI's Women's Leadership Program, launched in cooperation with a prestigious Colombian university, more than 350 women have obtained corporate governance and leadership skills training to help them reach senior decision-making positions in boardrooms.

## A growing minority of EBMOs train their members and recognize efforts

A minority of EBMOs actively trains members on gender equality and diversity, and they also publicly recognize their achievements. Both in the case of training provision and public recognition this minority has increased, rising from around a fifth of EBMOs in 2017 to a third in 2023 (see figure 12). Additionally, more than a third of EBMOs carry out research on gender equality with a view to providing their members with new insights. This research covers various aspects, such as women in leadership, the gender pay gap, occupational segregation, and more.

► **Figure 12. Services to members that promote gender equality and diversity, 2017 and 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP survey on women leaders and managers in employers' organizations, 2017; ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

## Equal pay for work of equal value is EBMOs top advocacy priority

Advocacy and lobbying are key activities for EBMOs. Around four-fifths (81 per cent) are involved in advocacy and two out of five (39 per cent) participate in social dialogue events on gender equality and diversity.

EBMOs top three advocacy priorities are:

- equal pay for work of equal value (37 per cent of EBMO respondents to the survey);
- women in leadership positions (22 per cent);
- and diversity and inclusion in business settings (12 per cent).

It is not surprising that equal pay for work of equal value is EBMOs top advocacy priority given the persistence of pay gaps despite significant efforts to eradicate these. The latest global data from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) on education and pay gaps show that the average income gap is at 39 per cent even in those 57 countries where women are more educated than men.<sup>35</sup>



### ► Box 10. Canadian EBMO helps members prepare for new pay equity legislation

In 2018, the Canadian government established the Pay Equity Act, which mandates that employers of federally regulated workplaces with ten or more employees examine their compensation practices to ensure equal pay for work of equal value regardless of gender. The Pay Equity Act came into force in 2021, requiring these businesses to post a pay equity plan by September 2024.

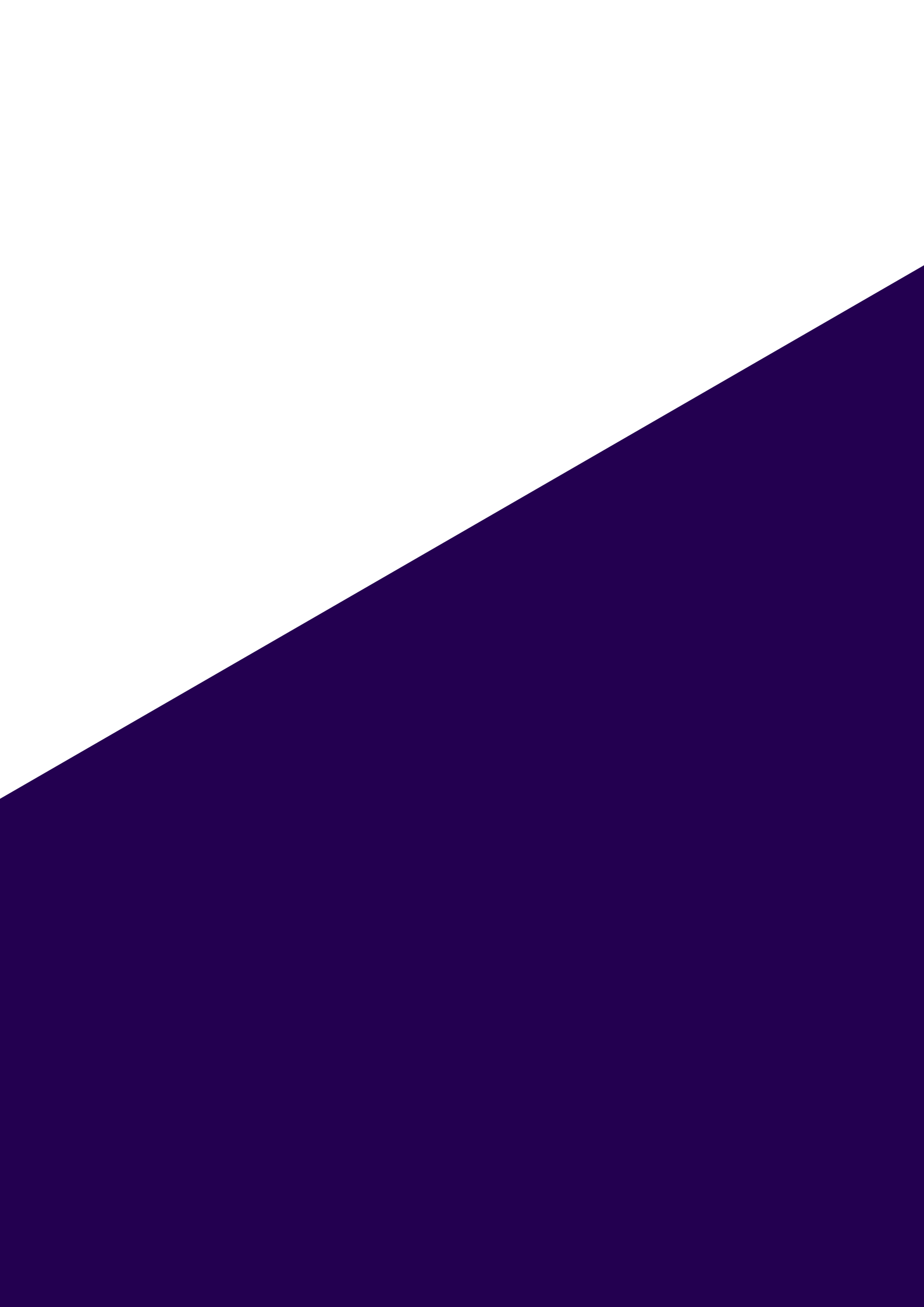
Federally Regulated Employers - Transportation and Communications (FETCO) is the main EBMO for Canadian federally regulated companies. It represents about 40 federally regulated enterprises, encompassing more than 500,000 employees. FETCO has fully committed and supported the pay equity act to close the gender pay gap. The EBMO was involved in the pre-consultation before the legislation and organized working groups with members in preparation for the Pay Equity Act. These working groups provided a platform for members and experts in this field to exchange information and learn from each other.

Since 2021, after the act came into force, FETCO has been working closely with members to help them develop their pay equity plans. This time-consuming task requires planning and a thorough assessment of compensation systems. Employers must identify job classes and establish which are predominantly female, predominantly male, or gender neutral based on specified factors. Pay equity plans also set out the total compensation for female- and male-dominated job classes as well as wage gaps.

For more information on pay equity plans please see Natasha Hyppolite and Jennifer Hodgins, [Federal Employers, the Wait is Over: New Federal Pay Equity Regime Coming](#) (Norton Rose Fulbright, 4 August 2021).

Other gender equality issues are lower on the list of advocacy priorities.

- Despite EBMOs progress internally on measures that support work-life balance and gender equality, a mere 2 per cent are advocating for enhanced access to, and availability of, care infrastructure and services such as childcare and elderly care.
- Despite the increase in women-led EBMO members, only 4 per cent of EBMOs are advocating for women's access to finance and entrepreneurship. The interviews also revealed that access to finance continues to be difficult for women entrepreneurs.
- Just 2 per cent of EBMOs are advocating for more girls and women in science, technology, and engineering (STEM subjects), even though the study results overall indicate that developing talent pipelines can be difficult and that occupational segregation continues to be a challenge.



# Chapter 5



# Conclusions:

## What next for EBMOs?

EBMOs have made significant strides in advancing gender equality and diversity in the past six years, and their efforts are yielding positive results. The data on organizational culture and the presence of women CEOs alone demonstrate that EBMOs around the world can and do lead the business community.

Yet many EBMOs have only started to tap into the potential of gender equality and diversity. While this report presents a picture of progress, it often begins from a modest starting point. The report often finds that a minority of EBMOs act on, or pursue to achieve the transformative agenda for gender equality. While this minority has grown substantially in recent years, it remains a minority.

The following recommendations can help EBMOs to fully turn the potential of gender equality and diversity into reality.

### Achieve internal gender balance and lead by example

Many EBMOs encounter challenges in achieving gender balance at senior levels within their organizations, whether it's in managerial, CEO, or board positions. For instance, while women are generally well-represented among EBMO staff, they often face glass ceilings. Only 9 per cent of EBMOs have gender-balanced boards, with an additional 13 per cent having boards where women constitute at least 30 per cent of members.

EBMOs are missing significant opportunities not only to enhance their business outcomes but also to set an example for their members. The organizational structures of EBMOs, which involve member representatives, such as standing committees, the board, and more, can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality and diversity, where women are encouraged to assume these positions.

There are many initiatives that can help address internal barriers, such as:

- ▶ Enhancing the skills of women in EBMOs through training, mentoring and similar programmes. Notably, seven EBMOs are already running Female Future (see Box 4), which provides training and mentoring to women, proving effective in helping them advance in their careers, and could serve as a model for others.
- ▶ Improving staff work-life balance.
- ▶ Addressing negative cultural attitudes.
- ▶ Contributing to the education and skill development of women beyond the workplace, such as advocating for increased access to quality education for girls and women.
- ▶ Ensuring that women have access to female role models, including women EBMO board members or woman CEOs or other influential figures.

### Track the impact of gender equality and diversity initiatives

Many EBMOs are not tracking the impact of their initiatives. This represents a missed opportunity not only to improve the performance of gender equality initiatives, but also to share valuable information with members regarding the attributes of effective initiatives and the reasons members should participate.

For example, half (49 per cent) of EBMOs surveyed do not know whether their gender equality and diversity initiatives improve their business outcomes. At a more basic level, over a third (36 per cent) of EBMOs is not aware of what proportion of their enterprise members is headed by women.

In essence, to effectively align their actions with their commitment to gender equality, EBMOs need access to the right information. For instance, although a training course for women managers proves valuable, knowing how many of them have advanced into more senior positions as a direct result not only facilitates the evaluation and enhancement of the course, but also serves as persuasive information to attract more women to participate.

Importantly, EBMOs are encouraged to collect and categorize staff and member data according to gender and conduct regular monitoring. Research can be employed to gather supplementary information.

### Increase and improve gender equality services to members

Many EBMOs offer certain services to their members aimed at promoting gender equality and diversity. Yet these services can be limited. For example, just 36 per cent of EBMOs in the report offer relevant training.

As exemplified by the inspiring case studies in this report, services can encompass a wide offer ranging from research, mentoring programmes, advocacy, and certified training courses to codes of conduct, events, public information campaigns, and much more. Ideally, the needs of EBMO membership should be established and shape the services on offer.

### Broaden advocacy to encompass more gender equality and diversity issues

While most EBMOs engage in some gender equality-related advocacy, several highly relevant issues deserve greater attention. For example:

- Despite EBMOs' progress internally on measures that support work-life balance, more EBMOs can advocate for enhanced access to, and availability of, care infrastructure and services such as childcare and elderly care.
- More EBMOs can advocate for women's access to finance as it is a significant barrier to female entrepreneurship. This obstacle was frequently mentioned during the interviews with EBMOs. The lack of advocacy on access to finance and entrepreneurship also appears at odds with the increase in women-led EBMO members.
- EBMOs can advocate for more girls and women in science, technology, and engineering (STEM subjects), as the study results overall indicate that developing talent pipelines can be difficult and that occupational segregation continues to be a challenge.

It appears that some EBMOs and their members are facing obstacles to achieving gender equality and diversity, but EBMOs are not advocating in line with these challenges. It would be beneficial to reassess these obstacles and align advocacy priorities accordingly.

### **Mainstream gender equality and diversity and focus on inclusion**

EBMOs in the study that address gender equality and diversity on multiple fronts simultaneously (internally, services to members, advocacy, and so on) appear to achieve more progress than those with only one or two initiatives. This is not merely a question of number of initiatives. These initiatives can feel like an add on, an additional element that is not fully integrated into the organization as a whole and its activities.

This observation becomes clearer when we consider the results of a recent ILO study<sup>36</sup>, which found that while many businesses are making efforts to drive diversity and inclusion, these actions often do not result in a fundamental shift in the way the business operates. As a result, these businesses do not achieve full inclusion and do not benefit fully from the associated positive business outcomes.

Parallels may be found in EBMOs. EBMOs that have integrated gender equality and diversity into their core operations are arguably more likely to achieve complete inclusion. When an EBMO accomplishes this, it undergoes the necessary fundamental shift in how it operates, leading to corresponding benefits.

While equality and diversity tend to focus on quantity (for example, the number of women managers), inclusion is focused on quality: the experience of individuals and groups in the workplace. A person's feeling of inclusion at work is related to their personal characteristics, their own behaviour and that of others and the environment they are in. That environment includes, for example, the EBMO's strategy, leadership, systems, services, and culture but also the wider social and economic environment in which it operates.

Full inclusion happens when individuals experience a balance between belonging with others at work – feeling they are part of the whole enterprise – as well as being seen, understood, and valued as an individual, with a unique personality, skills, and experience. Where employees experience full inclusion, they perform better, leading to improved business outcomes.

Running a small number of initiatives that are not part of the EBMOs DNA is unlikely to lead to full inclusion. For example, while an EBMO may successfully advocate for better maternity rights, this is unlikely to lead to inclusion for women staff if the EBMO is not also, for instance, actively seeking to achieve gender-balance on its board, adopting flexible working, offering training to members, and so on.

To achieve a fundamental shift in the way EBMOs operate and reap the full benefits of gender equality and diversity, they therefore need to focus on inclusion and mainstream gender equality and diversity throughout their work environment. This will also enable them to better lead their membership, helping businesses to transform their ways of working.

### **Mind the gap: EBMOs who are ahead can inspire their peers**

Finally, the study revealed that while some EBMOs are far ahead on the path to gender equality and diversity, arguably having achieved that fundamental shift in ways of working, others have only just started out. For example, just 31 per cent of EBMOs have a formal statement on gender equality and equal opportunities, or on diversity and inclusion, which can be considered a basic tool for achieving gender balance.

This gap has important implications for organizations supporting EBMOs, who need to ensure that support is tailored to EBMO needs. The aim of this support should be to close the gap over time.

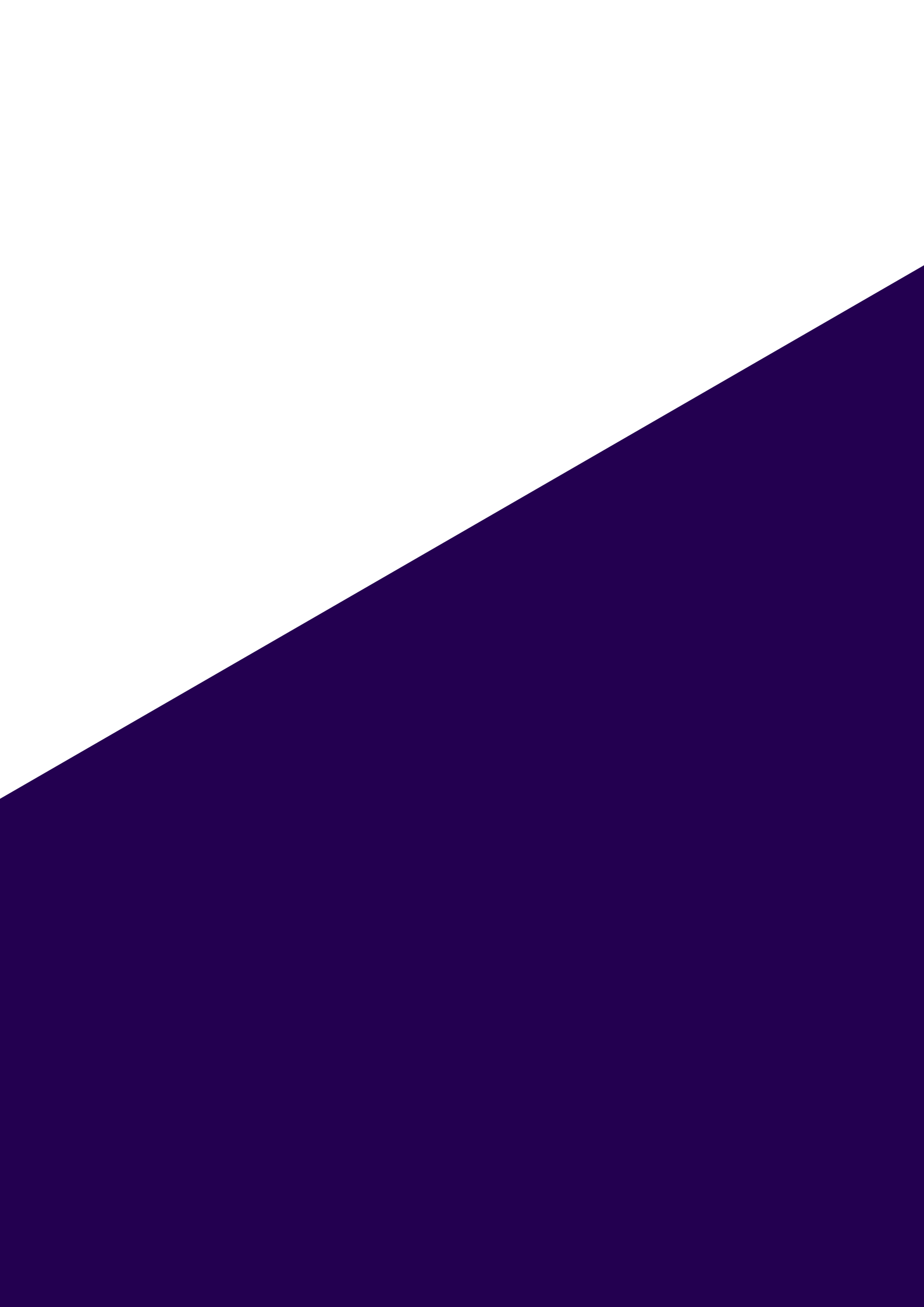
The disparity between EBMOs on gender equality and diversity also presents opportunities. As demonstrated by the Female Future training and mentoring programme (see Box 4), those EBMOs that are ahead can inspire and support their peers, allowing them to benefit from their experience.



My advice to EBMOs who visit us and who are starting out on the road to gender equality is to get down to basics. You need to change hearts and minds. Raise your members' awareness of women's rights and relevant ILO conventions. Make your business leaders aware that women are just as good as men at being business owners and leaders. Things are already changing for the better. Previously EBMO delegations meeting with us regarding gender equality issues were often composed entirely of women. We are now also starting to see men joining these delegations.

► **Mariette C. Boe** – Assistant Director / Department of Labour Market and Social Affairs / The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)





## ► Endnotes

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# Annexes



## ► Annex 1. Key gender equality and diversity terms

- **Equal opportunities and treatment.** All persons regardless of their personal characteristics, including gender, can participate in and contribute to the labour market according to their capacity without interference of discrimination or bias. According to the IOE<sup>37</sup>, gender equality in the workplace means equal treatment and access of employees regardless of gender to recruitment, promotion, and training activities along with mentoring and decision-making bodies.
- **Diversity** in the workplace refers to the similarities and differences that exist between people and that can impact employment and business opportunities and outcomes. Diversity refers not only to similarities and differences linked to personal characteristics such as gender, but also similarities and differences such as values, workstyles, caring responsibilities, hierarchical levels, and work roles. Each person has multiple groups they identify with which can change over time, potentially influencing and shifting their employment opportunities and outcomes. Diversity is about recognizing, respecting, and valuing these differences.
- **Discrimination** refers to any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation, as defined in the [ILO Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#).
- **Inclusion** is relational. It refers to the experience people have in the workplace and the extent to which they feel valued for who they are, the skills and experience they bring and the extent to which they have a strong sense of belonging with others at work. A person's feeling of inclusion at work is related to their personality, their own behaviour and that of others and the environment they are in. Creating an inclusive workplace culture and environment enables diverse employees to thrive, increases employee engagement and influences business performance.

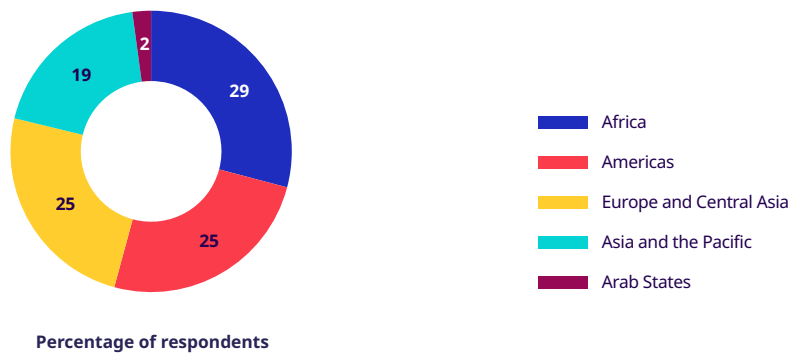
These terms have been adapted from ILO's 2022 report [Transforming Enterprises Through Diversity and Inclusion](#).



## ► Annex 2. Survey demographics

The ILO and IOE disseminated the survey to all five ILO regional groups: Africa, Americas, Europe and Central Asia, Asia and the Pacific and Arab States. Of total respondents, the highest share came from Africa (29 per cent), followed by the Americas (25 per cent), Europe and Central Asia (25 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (19 per cent), and the Arab States (2 per cent) (see figure 13).

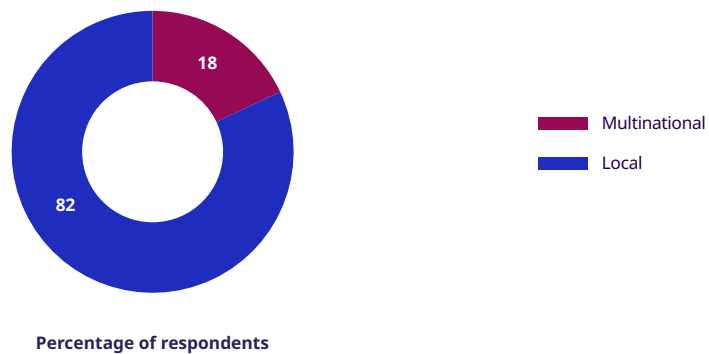
► **Figure 13. Percentage of EBMO respondents to the 2023 survey, by region**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

On average, surveyed EBMOs represented 82 per cent of local enterprises and 18 per cent of multinational enterprises (see figure 14).

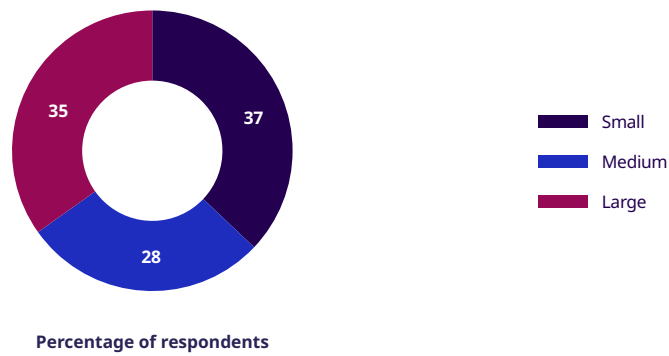
► **Figure 14. Share of multinational and local enterprises represented by EBMOs, 2023 results**



Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

The survey reached organizations of different sizes. Of the total responses, 37 per cent came from small-sized organizations (employing 1 to 10 workers), 28 per cent came from medium-sized organizations (employing 11–30 workers), and 35 per cent came from large-sized organizations (employing over 30 workers) (see figure 15).

▶ **Figure 15. Size of EBMOs, all results**



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Source: ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE survey on women leaders in EBMOs, 2023.

## ► Annex 3. Countries covered in the 2023 survey by region

Region	Countries
Africa	Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Uganda
Americas	Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Grenada, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay
Arab States	Jordan, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory
Asia and the Pacific	Bangladesh, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam
Europe and Central Asia	Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine

## ► Annex 4. Survey questionnaire

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### Section 1: About the respondent

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1. Choose the position that most closely aligns with your role in your organization.

- I am in a senior/executive decision-making position
- I manage/supervise one or more other people or a department/business unit
- I am an employee without management/supervision responsibilities

### Section 2: About your EBMO

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2. What is the full name of your EBMO? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What region is your EBMO based in?

- Africa
- Arab States
- Asia and the Pacific
- Europe and Central Asia
- Latin America and the Caribbean

4. Specify the share of multinational and local enterprises that your EBMO represents.

Multinational : \_\_\_\_\_

Local : \_\_\_\_\_

Total : \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many staff does your EBMO employ?

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 25-30
- Over 30

### Section 3: Gender equality and diversity at your EBMO

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6. Who in the EBMO is responsible for working on gender equality and diversity?

- An allocated focal person
- An official team/department
- Everyone
- No one
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Is your current top management position (chief executive officer) held by a woman or a man?**

- Woman
- Man
- Don't know

**8. Is your EBMO's current chairperson/president of the board of directors a woman or a man?**

- Woman
- Man
- Don't know

**9. What is the proportion of women in the following positions in your secretariat?**

If you do not know the exact values, please give us your best estimation.

	Staff members	Managers	Board members
0%			
1-10%			
11-29%			
30-39%			
40-60%			
61-100%			

**10. According to your human resources unit or personnel, how did the number of women in the following positions change in the past two years?**

	Staff members	Managers	Board members
Increased			
Decreased			
Stayed the same			
Don't know			

**11. Does your organization have policies and/or plans to recruit or promote women into managerial positions?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**12. Does your EBMO have any of the following mechanisms/policies/initiatives to internally support work-family balance and greater equality? Select all that apply.**

- A statement on gender equality and equal opportunities or on diversity and inclusion in its human resources or other management policies
- Extended (beyond the national legal requirements) maternity or paternity leave for staff
- Flexible working hours for staff
- Teleworking (working from home or remote working) opportunities are offered to staff
- Formal mentoring activities that include junior and senior staff
- A violence and harassment policy and respective grievance procedure
- Training for all staff on gender equality/diversity in the workplace
- Formal leadership training initiatives for women within your organization
- Internal (within the EBMO) dialogue about gender equality in the workplace
- External promotion of the EBMO as an employer of choice for suitably qualified women
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**13. How would you assess your organizational culture on gender equality and diversity?**

- Male-dominated
- Female-dominated
- Inclusive
- Don't know

**14. Does your EBMO do any of the following to promote gender equality in its operations? Select all that apply.**

- Promoting women within the secretariat and board is formally stated in the EBMO's organizational or human resources strategy
- The EBMO strategic plan establishes that advancing gender equality is a priority
- The CEO/Director-General and senior managers have gender balance in mind when recruiting for managerial positions
- The human resources policy or strategy has clear guidance to make job postings gender neutral
- The EBMO data strategy formally states the importance of collecting/analyzing gender-sensitive data
- The EBMO has guidance or resources that explain how to communicate in a gender-inclusive manner
- None of the above

#### **Section 4: Promoting gender equality and diversity among the members of the EBMO**

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**15. Do any of your EBMO's members specifically represent the interests of women? (For example, a woman's entrepreneurship association or an organization of professional women).**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know



**16. Does your EBMO have a standing committee/council that specifically focuses on promoting gender equality and diversity? (e.g., a standing committee on diversity and inclusion, gender issues, human resources, skills, etc.)**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**17. Are there any initiatives and activities that take place regularly (i.e., a minimum of once a year) that target members and are aimed at promoting gender equality? Select all that apply.**

- Social dialogue events on gender equality and diversity
- Promotional events to encourage women business owners' membership of the EBMO
- Promotional pricing that encourages women business owners' membership of the EBMO
- Research into issues around gender equality and diversity (e.g., women in leadership, gender pay gap, occupational segregation), with the dissemination of lessons learned to members
- Lobbying on legislation that promotes gender equality and diversity
- Publicly recognizing EBMO members for good practices in promoting gender equality and diversity in the workplace
- Provision of training for EBMO members on promoting gender equality and diversity in the workplace
- The EBMO supports associations of businesswomen to participate in EBMO programmes and networks
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**18. Has your EBMO submitted policy proposals to the government or conducted advocacy activities supporting any of the following issues? Select all that apply.**

- Equal pay for work of equal value
- Women in leadership positions
- Diversity and inclusion in business settings
- Women's access to finance and entrepreneurship
- Women in STEM disciplines
- Enhanced access to and availability of care infrastructure and services (e.g., childcare, elderly care)
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**19. What estimated percentage of your EBMO's direct enterprise members are headed/led by women?**

- 0-10%
- 11-30%
- 31-50%
- 51-70%
- 71-90%
- 91-100%
- The organization does not have this information
- Don't know

### Section 5: The benefits of gender equality and diversity for the EBMO

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20. Have your EBMO's initiatives on gender equality and diversity helped enhance business outcomes?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

21. How have your business outcomes improved? Select all that apply.

- Increased income from membership subscriptions, training revenue, and other advisory services
- Increased ability to attract and retain talent
- Enhanced EBMO reputation
- Greater creativity, innovation, and openness
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know

### Section 6: Thank you!

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22. Do you have any further information you would like to share related to gender equality and diversity initiatives or programmes at your EBMO?

\_\_\_\_\_

23. Would you be willing to be interviewed by us to add further detail to your responses?

- Yes
- No

24. Please share your name and email address:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## ► Annex 5. List of EBMOs interviewed

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Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF)  
Barbados Employers Confederation (BEC)  
Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA)  
Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)  
Cook Islands Chamber of Commerce  
Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB)  
Employers Confederation of Latvia (LDDK)  
Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP)  
Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago (ECA)  
Federally Regulated Employers – Transportation and Communications (FETCO)  
Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE)  
Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF)  
General Confederation of Ivory Coast Companies (CGECI)  
Georgian Employers Association (GEA)  
Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)  
Indonesia Employers' Association (APINDO)  
Malaysian Employers' Federation (MEF)  
Movement of French Enterprises (MEDEF)  
National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI)  
Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA)  
Serbian Association of Employers (SAE)



**ilo.org**

International Labour Office  
Route des Morillons 4  
1211 Geneva 22  
Switzerland

**ioe-emp.org**

International Organisation of Employers  
71 Avenue Louis-Casali  
1216 Cointrin, Geneva  
Switzerland