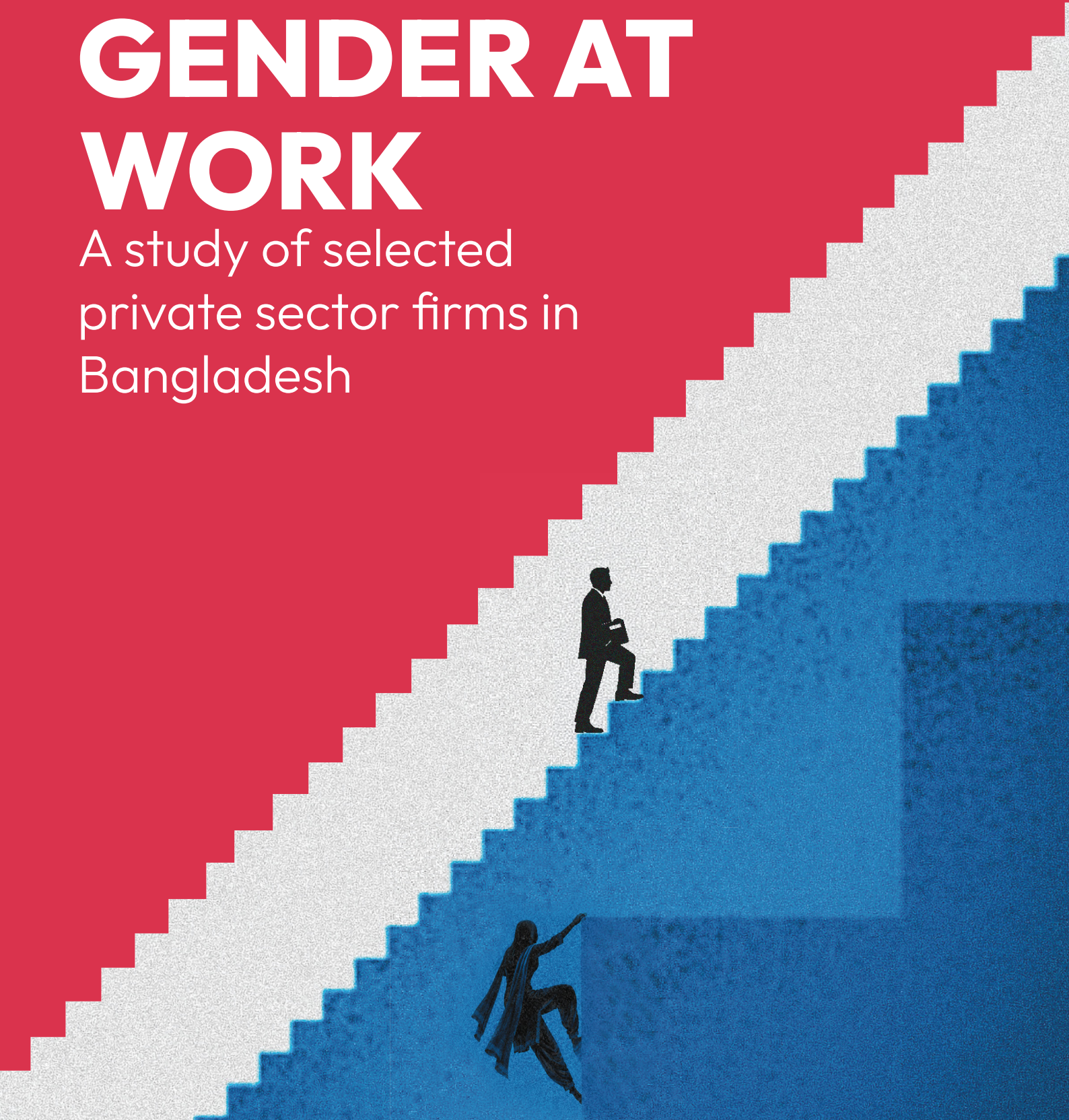


# GENDER AT WORK

A study of selected  
private sector firms in  
Bangladesh



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report titled “**Gender at work: A study of selected private sector firms in Bangladesh**” presents baseline findings from the study “**Advancing Gender Equity in the Private Sector in Bangladesh**” a **pioneering research initiative** (IRB protocol 2025-011-SFIRB) under the umbrella of Gender Champions Network (GCN), led by SAJIDA Foundation with support from the Gates Foundation. The Gender Champions Network (GCN) is an emerging platform that brings together visionary business leaders and philanthropists committed to driving workplace gender equality and fostering systemic change within Bangladesh’s private sector. This study explores practices across diverse industries including manufacturing, health, finance, pharmaceuticals, real estate, and the leather sector by partnering with companies that have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) to advance gender equity in the workplace.

The study examines six core areas: gender representation, pay equity, fair recruitment and promotion, career advancement and mentorship, workplace culture and protections, and access to benefits and services, including sexual and reproductive health and financial services. Using a mixed-method research design and a **multi-perspective** and **triangulated** approach, it captures workplace realities through organizational data, leadership insights, and employee experiences, providing a clear picture of both existing practices and implementation gaps.

Beyond generating evidence, the initiative emphasizes collaboration and practical solutions. GCN works with partner companies to co-design interventions, provide advisory support, and test workplace improvements, sharing insights through workshops, roundtables, and engagement with policymakers to promote scalable, gender-equitable practices.

The baseline findings presented in this report capture existing policies, practices, and employee experiences, providing a reference point to track future progress.

The following section highlights key findings across the six focus areas, showing areas of progress and critical gaps that require targeted action, forming an evidence-based foundation for prioritizing interventions and advancing more inclusive workplaces.

# KEY FINDINGS

Across all domains, the findings reveal a consistent pattern: while formal policies and organizational structures are largely in place, gender inequality persists through uneven implementation, differential access, and cumulative disadvantage across the employee lifecycle.

## 01

### Women's representation declines sharply at mid-career level

Women's representation decreases from 22% at entry-level roles to 6% at mid-management, indicating a structural bottleneck in progression often referred to as a "broken rung" (Sandberg, 2013; McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019) in the gender and work literature. Recruitment patterns in technical and operational roles further reinforce existing pipeline constraints. Perceptions of fairness in recruitment also differ by gender, with women more likely to report bias in hiring processes.

## 02

### Pay and economic security gaps widen with seniority

The overall gender pay gap stands on average at 15.5% at all levels of employment, but increases substantially with seniority, exceeding 40% at the leadership level. Women are also more likely to be in less secure forms of employment and report lower access to benefits such as health insurance, life insurance, and retirement provisions. While pay structures are generally described as position-based and gender-neutral by the managers, the absence of systematic pay audits limits the ability to detect and correct disparities.

## 03

### Unpaid care work reflects structural inequality in social and institutional systems

Women carry a significantly higher total workload due to unpaid care responsibilities alongside paid employment. This does not reflect an individual constraint, but rather a structurally unequal distribution of care work shaped by social norms and institutional arrangements. As a result, women's overall daily workload is substantially higher, reducing their ability to participate equally in overtime, training, networking, and other career-enhancing opportunities. This creates a structural constraint on progression that operates independently of individual motivation or capability.

## 04

### Policy presence does not translate into equal access or protection

Although most organizations report having formal HR policies, women are less aware of these policies and less likely to know how to access grievance and reporting mechanisms. This reflects a clear gap between policy existence and policy usability. Differences in perceived safety and confidence in reporting systems further indicate that institutional protections are not experienced equally across employees.

## 05

### Unequal access to career development and informal opportunity systems

Women are less likely to access mentorship, sponsorship, training, and networking opportunities, both formal and informal. These gaps limit visibility, skill development, and access to career-shaping relationships. Despite strong stated support for gender equality in leadership, underlying assumptions about job suitability continue to influence opportunity allocation and career trajectories.

## 06

### Lower engagement among women reflects cumulative disadvantage across workplace systems

Using the Gallup employee engagement framework (Gallup Organization, 1992-1999) which is widely used to measure employee engagement, the analysis shows that women report slightly lower levels of engagement than men across key workplace dimensions, including recognition, access to opportunities, and perceptions of fairness in promotion. While overall engagement remains relatively strong, these consistent gaps indicate that women experience less favorable day-to-day workplace conditions. Over time, these small but persistent differences accumulate, contributing to unequal career progression and outcomes which provides a clear picture of cumulative disadvantage.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS (CO-DESIGNED ACTION PATHWAYS)

These strategic directions are intended as **priority areas for collaborative action**, to be further developed through co-design between GCN, participating organizations and technical advisers. They are not prescriptive solutions, but structured entry points for reform that can be adapted to organizational context, readiness, and institutional capacity.

## 1. Strengthening visibility through gender-disaggregated data systems

A foundational priority is improving the visibility of gender gaps across HR systems to support evidence-informed decision-making.

### Potential co-designed actions:

- Develop gender-disaggregated dashboards covering recruitment, pay, promotion, and retention
- Conduct periodic internal gender audits (annual or biannual)
- Integrate gender indicators into routine HR reporting systems
- Use GCN-supported tools to standardize measurement approaches across organizations

## 2. Addressing the mid-career “broken rung” in progression pathways

The sharp decline in women’s representation at mid-management indicates structural barriers in promotion systems.

### Potential co-designed actions:

- Define transparent and documented promotion criteria across job levels
- Track gendered transition rates at each career stage
- Introduce structured sponsorship pathways for mid-career women
- Require documented justification and review processes for promotion decisions

## 3. Expanding equitable access to development and opportunity systems

Access to mentorship, sponsorship, training, and networking remains uneven and often informal.

### Potential co-designed actions:

- Establish formal mentorship and sponsorship systems
- Ensure equitable participation in leadership and technical training programs
- Introduce transparent nomination systems for all development opportunities
- Track gender balance in training, assignments, and leadership exposure

## 4. Reducing structural constraints linked to care responsibilities through institutional design

Women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work limits their availability for paid work and career progression. This is not an individual constraint but is shaped by social norms and workplace policies. Organizational practices such as leave policies, flexible work arrangements, and childcare support can either reinforce these constraints or help reduce them.

### Potential co-designed actions:

- Formalize flexible work arrangements with clear and equitable eligibility criteria
- Strengthen parental leave systems for both women and men
- Actively encourage uptake of paternity leave to normalize shared caregiving
- Explore childcare and lactation support facilities where feasible

Importantly, parental leave policies also function as an institutional signal that caregiving is a **shared responsibility, not a women-specific role**, reinforcing more equitable workplace norms

## 5. Closing the gap between policy existence and policy access

While formal policies exist, their reach, understanding, and usability remain uneven.

### Potential co-designed actions:

- Strengthen multi-channel policy communication (HR, supervisors, digital platforms)
- Improve onboarding and periodic policy refresh systems
- Ensure confidential and accessible grievance mechanisms
- Regularly assess employee awareness of key policies and reporting systems

## 6. Strengthening fairness in opportunity allocation and workplace norms

Informal systems continue to influence assignments, visibility, and advancement.

### Potential co-designed actions:

- Standardize allocation of high-visibility assignments and responsibilities
- Integrate gender equity indicators into managerial performance systems
- Conduct bias-awareness and inclusive leadership training
- Monitor gender patterns in task allocation and leadership exposure

The findings demonstrate that gender inequality in the private sector is not primarily driven by the absence of formal policies, but by gaps in implementation, unequal access to key opportunities, including high visibility work, development opportunities and promotion pathways. The persistence of disparities across multiple domains highlights the need to move from formal policy presence to effective, measurable, and equitable systems of practice.

Through the GCN platform, these strategic directions provide a foundation for co- designed, iterative, and context-sensitive reform, enabling participating organizations to progressively reduce cumulative disadvantage and strengthen gender-equitable outcomes in workforce participation and leadership.



## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Bangladesh has made notable progress in economic growth and development, but gender disparities in the labor market, particularly in the private sector—remain a persistent challenge (World Bank Group, 2025; BBS, 2023). While national indicators suggest some progress, there are still major gaps that persist in women's participation, access to opportunities, and career advancement (UN Women, 2025; Wodsak et al., 2024; Al Zabir et al., 2018). Women are disproportionately concentrated in entry-level roles, while their representation declines sharply at mid- and senior-level positions, highlighting missed opportunities for progress and leadership in the private sector (Akter et al., 2026; Benson et al., 2026; LEAN IN, 2025). These disparities are driven by structural and institutional barriers, including gender pay gaps, limited access to benefits, and inadequate career development (Akter et al., 2026; World Bank, 2026; Umme, 2024; Al Zabir et al., 2018). Although many companies reported having workplace policies related to employee protection and benefits, their implementation is often uneven, and awareness, particularly among women, remains scarce (Akter et al., 2026; Chowdhury et al., 2026).

Recent labor market and policy development in Bangladesh and ongoing reforms (Labor Law Amendment Act 2026) related to

employment security, layoffs compensation, and strengthened trade union rights, reflect an evolving regulatory landscape aimed at improving worker protection and labor market governance (The Daily Star, 2026). These shifts provide an important contextual backdrop for understanding persistent gender disparities in access, progression, and workplace experience within the private sector.

Given the expected pivotal role of the private sector in Bangladesh's economic trajectories, addressing gender equity in this domain is both a policy and social imperative (UN Women, 2025; World Bank, 2025). Recent evidence shows that women in Bangladesh continue to face persistent barriers in economic participation, including occupational segregation, workplace safety concerns, discrimination in hiring and promotion, and the unequal burden of unpaid care work (Sajeda Amin, 2026; Kabeer, 2025; Rahman et al., 2025; World Bank, 2025). Empirical research that systematically examines gender dynamics in the private sector is limited, particularly from the perspectives of both employees and employers (Chowdhury et al., 2026; LEAN IN, 2025). Most existing studies have focused on public institutions or the ready-made garment sector, leaving a gap in our understanding of how gender inequality

To address this gap, the Gender Champions Network (GCN), led by SAJIDA Foundation with support from the Gates Foundation, has established a collaborative platform to advance gender equity in Bangladesh's private sector through evidence, dialogue, and action (SAJIDA Foundation, 2024). Against this backdrop, the research study establishes a set of objectives to systematically examine gender equity dynamics within Bangladesh's private sector.

## What is GCN

(Gender Champions Network)?

### Overview

The Gender Champions Network (GCN), led by SAJIDA Foundation with support from the Gates Foundation, is a collaborative platform that brings together corporate leaders, non-profits, and policymakers to advance gender equity in Bangladesh's private sector. It works through evidence generation, multi-stakeholder dialogue, and practical action to strengthen inclusive workplace systems and practices.

### Approach to Implementation

Rather than operating as a purely diagnostic exercise, the initiative emphasizes collaboration with participating organizations. It supports co-designed workplace interventions, provides technical and sector-specific advisory support and facilitates pilot testing of practical changes within real workplace settings. A key feature of the approach is iterative learning, where insights from implementation are continuously used to refine strategies and improve outcomes.

### Vision

Ultimately, GCN aims to generate critical data and drive organizational change through scalable, evidence-based solutions that can strengthen gender equity, inclusion and leadership opportunities for women across Bangladesh's private sector. Together, these efforts aim to transform workplaces and economies.

### Research Initiative

Within this framework, GCN hosts the research study **Advancing Gender Equity in the Private Sector in Bangladesh**. This initiative examines how gender equity policies and practices are designed and implemented across diverse private sector organizations. By generating robust empirical evidence, the study aims to address critical data gaps and inform more effective, context-specific workplace interventions.

### Knowledge Sharing and Policy Engagement

Findings from the research are actively disseminated through workshops, roundtables, and engagements with policymakers, academics, and private sector leaders. These platforms are designed to foster dialogue, support adaptive learning, and translate evidence into actionable workplace practices and policy recommendations.

# STUDY OBJECTIVES

## Primary objective

To assess the current state of gender equity in selected private sector organizations in Dhaka, Bangladesh, by examining organizational policies and employee experiences related to 1) gender representation, 2) pay equity, 3) fair recruitment and promotion, 4) career advancement, 5) workplace protections, and 6) access to gender-responsive services and asset building.

## Specific objectives:

- 1. To document gender-disaggregated data** on workforce composition, pay bands, recruitment, promotion, and training from private sector organizations across diverse industries.
- 2. To explore the presence and implementation** of gender-equity related workplace policies, such as anti-harassment, maternity leave, flexible work arrangements, and gender-sensitive infrastructure.
- 3. To understand employee perceptions and experiences** related to gender fairness in recruitment, promotion, pay, mentorship, and workplace safety.
- 4. To assess organizational practices and leadership perspectives** regarding barriers and enablers to gender equity and inclusion.
- 5. To evaluate access to and availability of SRHR information/services and financial inclusion mechanisms** in the workplace, especially for women and gender-diverse employees.
- 6. To establish a gender equity baseline and scoring framework** for participating organizations to monitor progress over time and support evidence-based intervention planning.
- 7. To generate actionable insights and recommendations** for organizations and stakeholders, including SAJIDA Foundation, to strengthen gender-inclusive workplace practices and policies.

# SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

## Who participated?

### Private sector organizations

The study adopts a strategic, practice-oriented approach by working directly with private sector organizations who have committed to advancing gender equity through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with GCN. In its first phase, it partnered with eight organizations across manufacturing, health, pharmaceuticals, finance, services, real estate, and the leather industry in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with plans to expand in future phases.

Purposive selection of companies allowed to capture diversity across key dimensions, including industry sector, organizational size (small, medium, large), and levels of progress and engagement with gender equity policies and practices.

While the study was not intended to produce a statistically representative sample of the national labor force, it provided a nuanced understanding of gender equity practices across diverse private sector workplaces in Bangladesh. By exploring these variations, the research generated actionable insights into factors that enable progress, the barriers organizations encounter, and opportunities for driving institutional change.

## What areas of gender equity were covered?

Drawing on these diverse organizational contexts, the study examined gender equity across six core domains:

Domain	Key Variables/Indicators
1. Gender Representation	Gender distribution by job level, department, and contract type
2. Gender Pay Equity	Average salary and benefits by gender and job level
3. Fair Recruitment & Promotion	Recruitment, promotion, and retention rates by gender; perceived fairness
4. Career Advancement & Mentorship	Access to mentorship, training, and leadership programs
5. Workplace Culture & Protections	Existence and enforcement of policies (anti-harassment, maternity leave, flexible hours); perceived safety and respect
6. Access to SRHR & Financial Inclusion	Employee access to SRHR info/services and financial services/facilities

## Why a Multi-Lens Approach Matters

A distinctive feature of the research is it takes a triangulated approach of three key sources of data to assess gender equity with a more holistic approach. Understanding gender equity in the workplace requires more than a single source of data. Experiences of equity and inequality in the workplace are shaped by individual perceptions, managerial practices, and organizational structures. To capture this complexity, the assessment intentionally combined complementary data sources to contextualize evidence from multiple perspectives, both from employers' and employees' ends.

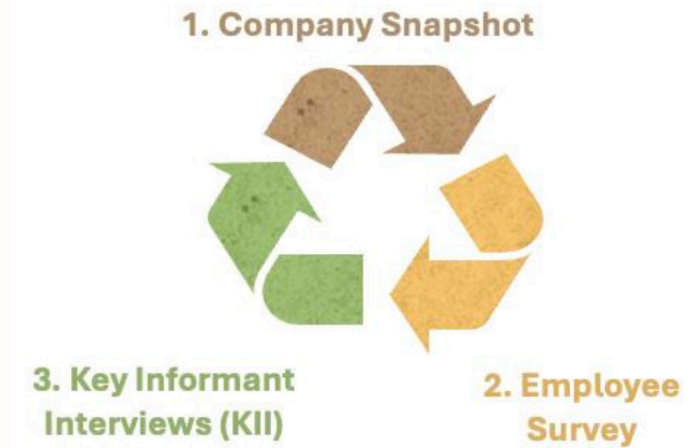
Integrating these sources and triangulation of findings strengthens the credibility of findings, adds depth by linking quantitative trends with qualitative insights, and reduces bias associated with relying on a single method, resulting in a more accurate and actionable understanding of gender equity in practice.

# METHODS

Baseline data were collected over a period of four months, from November 2025 to February 2026. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture gender equity dynamics in the private sector from multiple perspectives.

## The study draws on three complementary data sources:

- employee surveys
- key informant interviews (KII) with managers
- company snapshot surveys drawing on organizational records



Employee surveys capture lived experiences, perception and inclusion, and access to opportunities. KIIs with HR managers, senior leadership, and gender focal persons provide insights into organizational policies, decision-making processes, workplace culture, and barriers and opportunities for gender equity. Organizational data provides an objective view of structures and outcomes. Together, these three data sources enable methodological triangulation, allowing findings to be validated and interpreted across employee experiences, employer perspectives, and organizational records or practices. This multi-angled approach strengthens the robustness of the evidence and reduces reliance on any single data source.

## Data sources

**1. Employee survey:** The employee survey collected quantitative data from 836 employees across eight private sector companies. Respondents included women and men at junior, mid-level, senior, and leadership positions, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of smaller subgroups.

Data were collected through structured phone interviews using the SurveyCTO platform, with interviews lasting 30–35 minutes. The survey covered employees' experiences and perceptions related to recruitment and promotion, fairness in organizational processes, workplace facilities and grievance mechanisms, workload and caregiving responsibilities, access to training and networking opportunities, and pay and benefits. This component places employee perspectives at the center of the analysis.

**2. Key informant interviews with managers:** Qualitative data were collected through eight key informant interviews (KIIs) with HR managers, senior leaders, and gender champions.

The interviews explored organizational policies, decision-making processes, and workplace culture, with a focus on how practices related to hiring, performance evaluation, promotion, workload distribution, flexibility, and gender equity are implemented in practice. These interviews provided contextual insights into institutional norms, informal processes, and implementation gaps that are not captured through survey data alone.

**3. Company snapshot:** Organizational - level data were collected through eight company snapshot surveys, completed by the HR departments of each participating organization using a self - administered checklist.

The snapshot captured administrative and policy data, including workforce composition by gender, leadership representation, pay bands, recruitment and promotion patterns, training participation, leave utilization, and the presence of HR policies and workplace practices such as anti-harassment mechanisms, maternity provisions, and flexible work arrangements. This data provided an objective basis for assessing organizational structures and can be used to identify systemic patterns over time.

The analysis integrates three data sources - organizational snapshot data, survey data, and qualitative insights from key informants - to enable triangulation of findings. This approach allows for cross - validation of observed patterns, identification of consistencies and divergences of data sources, and deeper interpretation of underlying dynamics.

## Use of statistical testing

Statistical significance testing is applied to survey data to assess whether observed differences between groups (e.g., men and women) are unlikely to be due to chance. Such testing is not conducted for snapshot or qualitative data due to smaller sample sizes and the nature of these data sources. As a result, findings from snapshot and qualitative inputs are interpreted as directional rather than statistically tested.

# GENDER EQUITY LANDSCAPE: WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL?

The findings from the baseline are organized around six key domains covering critical dimensions of gender equity across workplace systems, employee experiences, and organizational practices. Statistical significance is reported for survey-based findings only; other data sources are presented as directional insights.

The next six sections delve into each domain, presenting the key findings and insights.



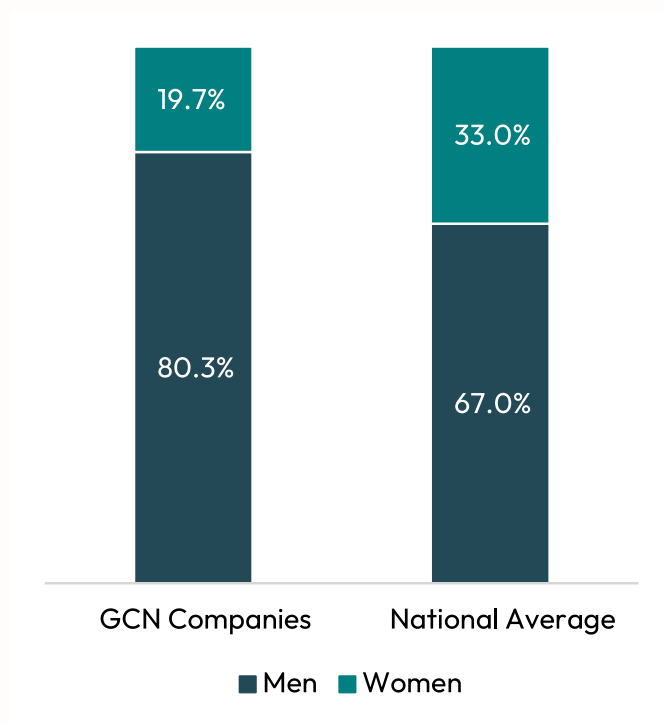
## 1. GENDER REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP

Women remain underrepresented in the workforce, with clear constraints in progression to management and leadership roles. The transition to mid-management is a key bottleneck. Hiring and promotion patterns, based on the participating organizations' data, showed higher representation of men in both recruitment and

advancement into higher roles, slowing the closure of representation gaps. In addition, differences in how recruitment and workplace processes are experienced by men and women, as reported in the employee survey, suggest that formal systems do not always translate into equitable outcomes in practice.

Overall representation of women remains low: Structural and sectoral barriers continue to limit participation of women at scale even among committed employers.

Across the nine GCN companies, women represented 19.7% of the total workforce — significantly below the national average of 33%. This gap among employers showcases how structural and sectoral barriers continue to limit female participation at scale.



**Figure 1: GCN gender composition**

Source: GCN Snapshot (2025)

The participating companies span industries with markedly different starting points. For companies with manufacturing facilities on the outskirts of the capital city, hiring is influenced by factors pertaining to long commutes and the perceived risk of women traveling far for work.

The career pipeline of women narrows sharply at mid-management.

The pipeline for women narrowed sharply as seniority increases, with a particularly steep drop at the mid-management level. Women accounted for 22% of entry-level roles but just 6% of mid-management positions — a loss of nearly three-quarters of female representation at the first major career transition point. Representation recovered modestly at senior roles (8%) and

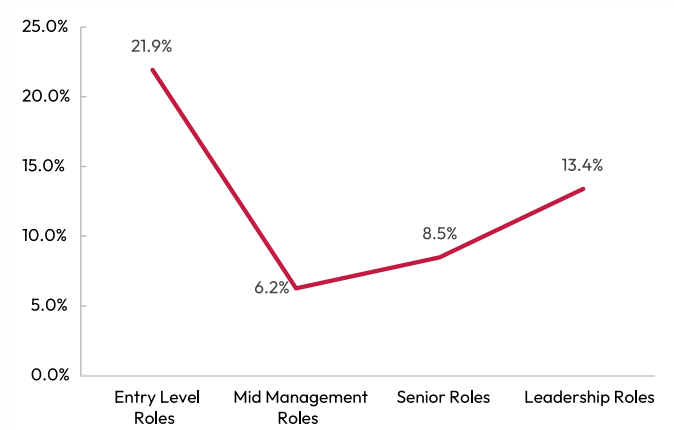


**Our office is located outside the city — women face barriers to join. They often have bindings from their family.**



**Because women cannot be placed on the night shift, it is difficult to smoothly swap shifts and unfair to the male workers who have .**

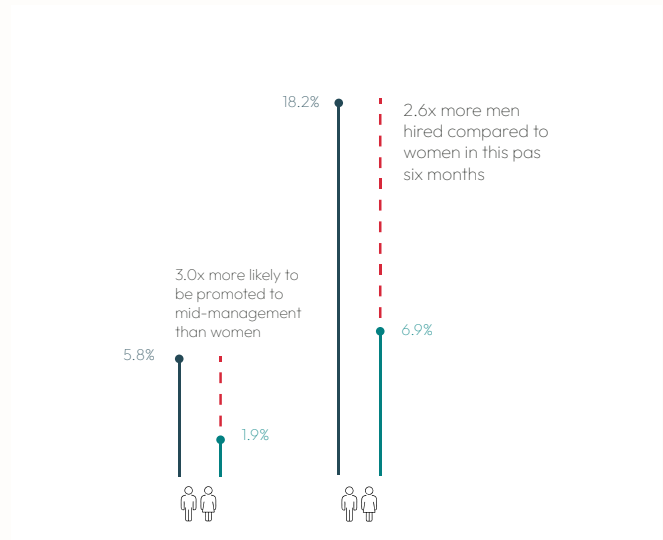
leadership roles (13%), though the latter may reflect isolated examples of female senior appointments rather than systemic advancement.



**Figure 2: Gender representation across levels**  
Source: GCN Snapshot (2025)

This pattern — limited representation at the entry, a sharp decline at mid-level, and only partial recovery at leadership — presents evidence of barriers to career advancement: Women are being hired but are not progressing at the same rate as male peers into management. KII discussions pointed to a convergence of factors at this transition: additional responsibilities associated with management roles conflicting with domestic obligations, inadequate mentorship pipelines, and in some organizations, implicit assumptions about women's readiness or willingness to lead.

Hiring and promotion patterns reinforce existing gaps: Men were also hired at higher rates than women across job levels, based on the recent recruitment data from company records.



**Figure 3: Promotion and recruitment gap**  
Source: GCN Snapshot (2025)

The promotion data reinforces the pipeline concern. Men accounted for 5.8% of total employees promoted to mid-level roles, compared to 1.9% for women — a gap of over three times. At the senior level, the numbers were negligible for both groups (0.04% and 0.02% respectively), reflecting the small absolute scale of senior openings.

However, the proportional gap at mid-management is a significant signal that the transition from junior to managerial roles appears to be structurally more constrained for women.

**“We include ‘females specially encouraged to apply’ in all job circulars and lowered entry thresholds for our Management Training Program to increase the female candidate pool.”**

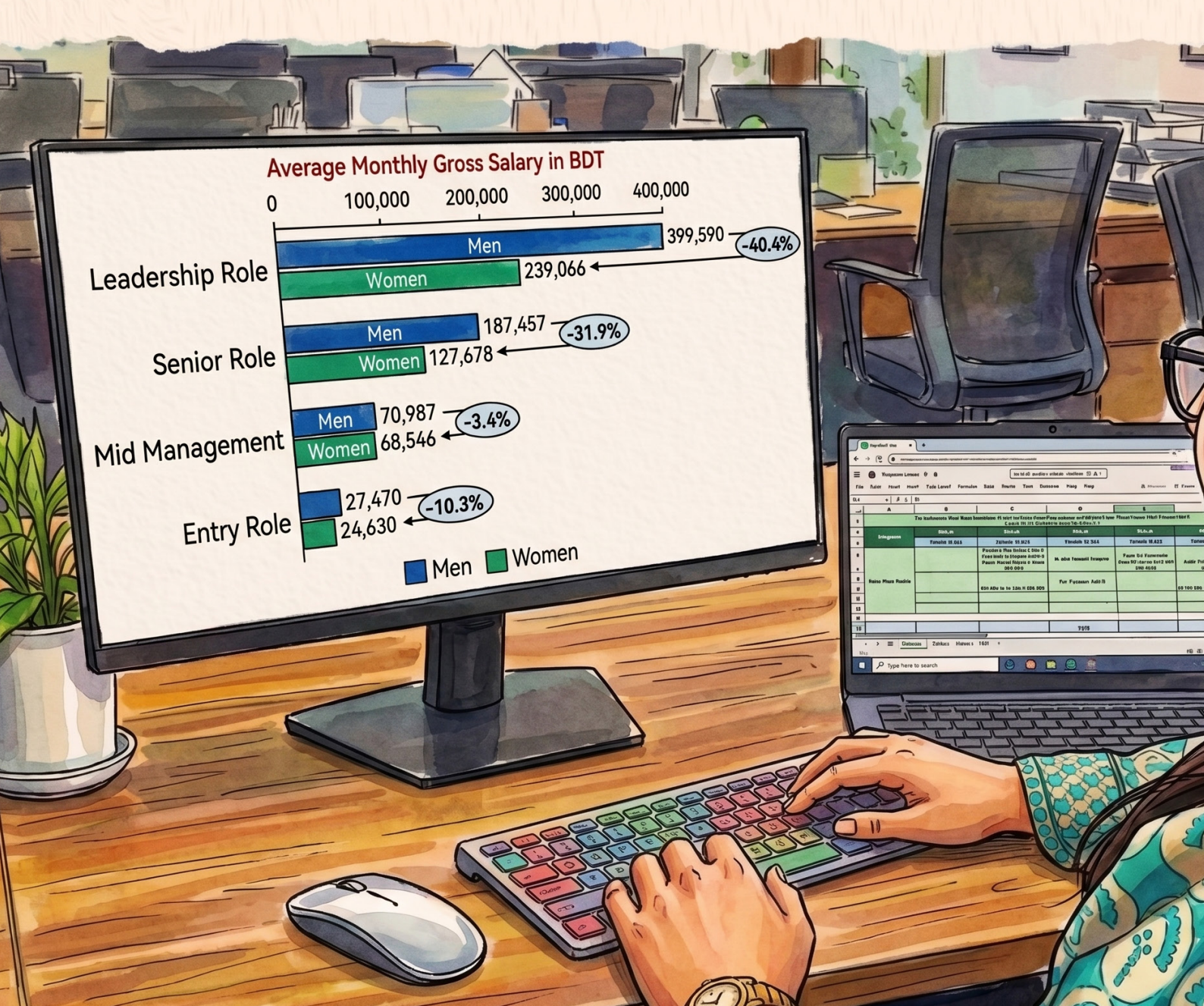
Among the new hires recorded in the past six months, 18.2% were men and only 6.9% were women of the total workforce representation, indicating a gender imbalance in recent recruitment patterns. If sustained, this disparity is likely to widen rather than close the existing representation gaps at the organizational level. Several HR focal persons highlighted a structural constraint within the recruitment pipeline, noting that the pool of female applicants is smaller, particularly for technical, field-based, and operational roles. This suggests that disparities in hiring outcomes may be shaped not only by the recruitment process but also by upstream labor market segmentation and occupational norms.

Some companies are actively trying to shift this by including "female candidates encouraged to apply" in job circulars, requiring female panelists in interview committees, and — in some cases — applying positive preference where qualifications are equal.

Perception of recruitment fairness differed by gender: Women were less likely than men to perceive recruitment panels as balanced, and nearly twice as likely to report having experienced gender bias in hiring.

In the employee survey, approximately 48.5% of men and 40.2% of women agreed that recruitment panels in their organization are gender balanced. This difference in perception from the employee survey is statistically significant, indicating that the difference is unlikely to be due to chance and men and women experience or interpret the same recruitment environment in systematically different ways. On the experience of gender bias in recruitment, 16.1% of women reported that they had observed or experienced bias, compared to 9.3% of men, a difference that is also statistically significant, confirming that gender-based bias in hiring is not an isolated perception but reflects a substantively distinct experience reported more frequently by women across organizations. Gaps in gender representation and progression translate into unequal access to higher-paying roles and long-term economic opportunity. These barriers shape who enters and advances within organizations, and how benefits and financial rewards are distributed.

The next section examines how these dynamics manifest in pay, benefits, and broader economic equity.



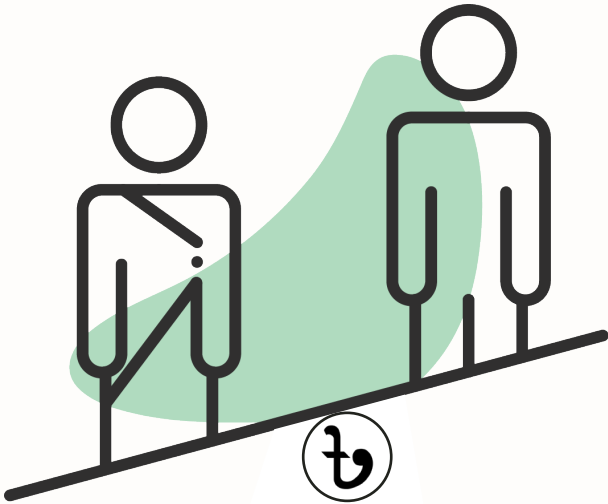
## 2. PAY, BENEFITS, AND ECONOMIC EQUITY

Gender pay gaps are persistent and increase significantly with seniority, driven by both role-level differences and women’s lower representation in higher-paying positions. Despite this, most organizations report confidence in the fairness of their pay structures.

However, gender pay audits were rarely reported, limiting visibility of potential disparities. Beyond pay, women also reported having lower access to key non-wage benefits, reflecting differences in job roles and contractual security that shape overall economic outcomes.

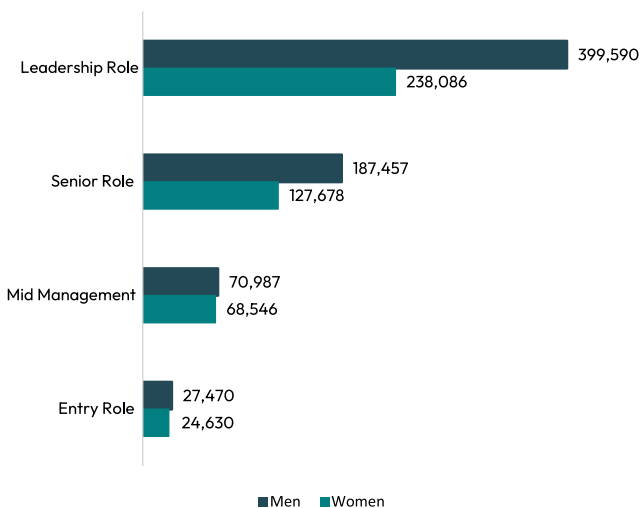
A gender pay gap exists and widens significantly with seniority. Pay disparities reflect both role distribution and progression pathways.

For every BDT 100 a man earns, a woman earns 85



**Figure 4: Gender pay gap**  
Source: GCN Snapshot (2025)

Data showed the underrepresentation of women at higher-paying positions. The pay gap widened significantly with seniority – from 3.4% at mid-management to 40.4% at the leadership level, where men earn on average BDT 161,000 more per month than women.



**Figure 5: Pay gap across levels**  
Source: GCN Snapshot (2025)

This pattern highlights how pay inequities are amplified at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy.

The absence of formal pay audits limits visibility of gender pay gaps.

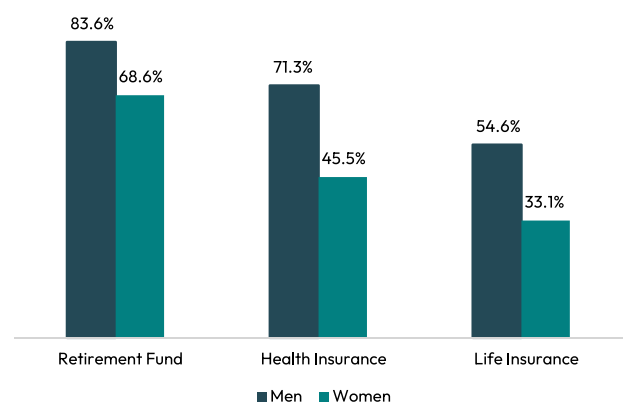
Across the participating companies, most HR focal persons described salary structures as position-based and qualification-based. Notably, when asked directly, most managers expressed confidence that no gender pay gap exists within their organizations – a perception that stands in sharp contrast to what the employee survey data reveals.



**Pay is standardized according to specific role, to ensure equity across the organization.**

A likely explanation is the absence of formal gender pay audits; currently no organization reported conducting one. Without systematic, gender disaggregated analysis, pay disparities that accumulate through hiring, increments, and role placement remain invisible and unaddressed.

**57.1% of respondents, with similar representation across men and women, indicated that they were comfortable raising concerns about pay disparity**



**Figure 6: Access to benefits**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

Women reported significantly lower access to non-wage benefits and that signals weaker employment security

Access to non-wage benefits further reflects gender disparities. Women consistently reported lower access to key benefits compared to men, with statistically significant differences, including health insurance, life insurance, and retirement benefits such as provident funds, pensions and gratuity. The largest gap was observed in health insurance (25.8%), followed by life insurance (21.5%), and retirement benefits (15.0%).

While these differences may be attributable to contracts, data disaggregation by contractual terms rules that out as an explanation. Women were more likely to be concentrated in lower tenure or junior roles, in some cases, in positions that do not qualify for full benefits. While this pattern may not reflect deliberate exclusion, it underscores the structural barriers that limit women’s integration into permanent and benefit-eligible roles.

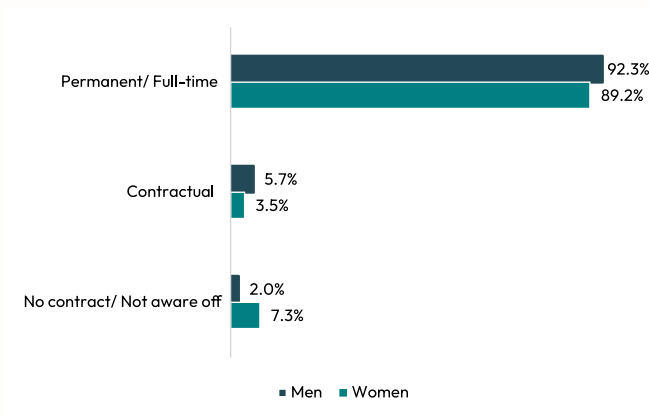
While most employees held permanent or full-time contracts, women were three times more likely than men to report having no formal contract – a vulnerability that limits their access to benefits and job security.

The findings on pay, benefits, and economic outcomes highlight how gender disparities are shaped by differences in roles, progression, and structural factors that affect women’s overall position within organizations.

The vast majority of both men (92.3%) and women (89.2%) held permanent or full-time contracts. However, a noticeable difference appears in contract awareness: a higher proportion of women (7.3%) reported having no contract or being unaware of their contract status compared with men (2.0%).

Beyond financial outcomes, these patterns are closely linked to how work is organized and experienced on a day-to-day basis.

The next section explores workload distribution, flexibility, and unpaid care responsibilities and how these factors intersect with women’s participation and career progression.



**Figure 7: Contract Type by Gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

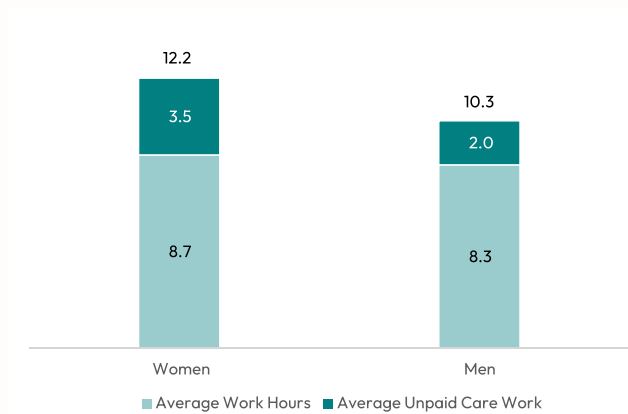


### 3. WORKLOAD, FLEXIBILITY, AND CARE RESPONSIBILITIES

Women report working slightly longer paid hours than men on average, but carry nearly double the unpaid care burden. This limits their capacity to take on overtime, pursue professional development, or accept the additional responsibilities typically required for promotion. Despite women having more care responsibilities, men reported using

arrangements and work-from-home options at nearly twice the rate of women. More women also reported that flexible policies were not available at all. Together, these patterns highlight a persistent gap between the existence of “flexibility” on paper and equal access to it in practice.

## The “double burden” constrains women’s career progression opportunities



**Figure 8: Work hours and unpaid care work by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

The employee survey data demonstrated, on average, women work slightly longer paid hours per day than men (8.7 hours vs 8.3 hours). When unpaid care work was added, the total daily burden for women was substantially higher: women perform an average of 3.5 hours of unpaid care work per day, compared to 2.0 hours by men.

This means that a typical woman in these organizations contributed nearly 12 hours of combined paid and unpaid work daily — a full 3.2 hours more than the average for men. This double burden is a critical structural driver of gender inequality in career progression. Yet again, there are strong and unequivocally stated assertions that care work is a major driver of gender differences.

**“After working 5 to 10 years, female employees are unable to continue to fulfill their household responsibilities — they think their home and children need them, so they decide to leave.”**

## Care responsibilities act as a structural barrier to advancement in career

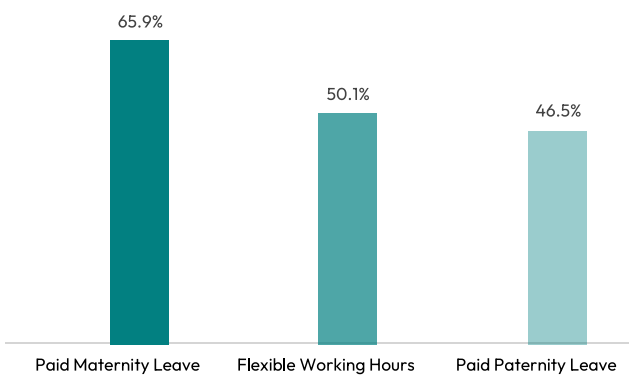
It limits women's ability to work overtime, take on additional responsibilities associated with promotion, pursue after-hours networking, or invest in professional development — all of which are typically required for upward mobility. Several HR focals noted that female employees often decline supervisory roles.

**“Female employees are not interested in supervisor positions as they need to take more responsibilities — they need to manage household responsibilities as well.”**

**Paid maternity and paternity leave, and flexible hours are top priorities for staying in employment after major life events.**

## Demand for workplace flexibility and care support is high

In the employee survey, when asked what support would help them to remain in employment after major life events (e.g., child birth, marriage, severe illness in the family), paid maternity leave emerged as the top priority, followed by paid paternity leave, and flexible working hours. Overall, the demand for these supports was reported to be higher among men than women, except for paid maternity leave, where women showed the highest need.



**Figure 9: Supports needed for retention after major life events (top 3)**

Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

Childcare and lactation facilities were identified as important by roughly a third of women respondents (32.0%), consistent with KII accounts of the practical challenges mothers face upon returning from maternity leave.



**There should be community childcare—one company cannot carry this alone. Centralized, government-funded daycares in industrial hubs, with contributions from participating companies, would be the ideal solution.**

The findings on workload and care responsibilities highlight how structural barriers constrain someone's ability to participate fully in paid employment and career progression. These constraints operate alongside organizational systems that are intended to support inclusion and protection.

The next chapter examines workplace culture, safety, and policies - focusing on the existence of formal frameworks and also on differences in awareness, access, and effectiveness.



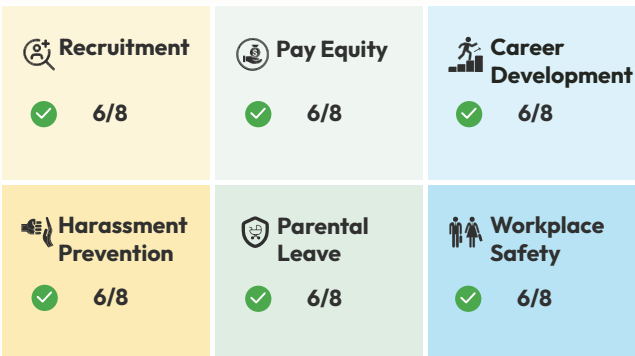
## 4. WORKPLACE CULTURE, SAFETY, AND POLICIES

Most companies have established a strong set of formal workplace policies covering key areas such as recruitment, pay, harassment prevention, parental leave, career development, and workplace safety. However, the findings show a clear gap between the existence of these policies and employee awareness, with women being less familiar with available systems than men.

This gap is most pronounced with relation to harassment reporting mechanism, where women were less likely to know how to access formal complaint mechanisms. The findings highlight that policy presence is not sufficient—its effectiveness depends on equal awareness, accessibility, and usability.

Policies are widely available but awareness is uneven; women are less connected to policy information.

Policies are widely available across the participating companies; however, the mere existence of formal policies does not necessarily mean all employees have equal awareness of or ability to benefit from these policies. Six out of eight companies reported having formal policies related to workplace safety, grievance handling, and GBV prevention. This suggests a relatively strong institutional foundation.



**Figure 10: Gender Inclusive Policy Coverage**

Source: GCN Snapshot (2025)

Policy effectiveness depends on communication and access, not just existence.

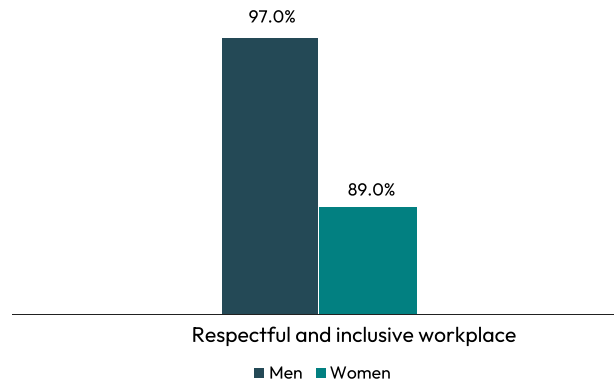
In practice, however, employee survey results show that women were less familiar with organizational HR policies than men, with a 12.8% gap in reported awareness. This indicates a policy-to-practice gap: rules may exist centrally, but their reach is not equally distributed across the workforce.

**89% of men familiar with HR policies compared to 77% of women**

This gap is important to address because policy effectiveness depends not only on whether a document exists, but on whether employees know that it exists, understand what it covers, and trust that it can be used without penalty. In many workplaces, policy communication is often informal and uneven, travelling through supervisors, peer networks, induction processes, or office-based channels that may not reach all staff equally.

Workplace culture is broadly positive but experienced differently by gender.

A large majority of both men and women described their workplaces as respectful and inclusive, but women did so at a lower rate than men, with agreement levels of 89.4% and 97.2% respectively.



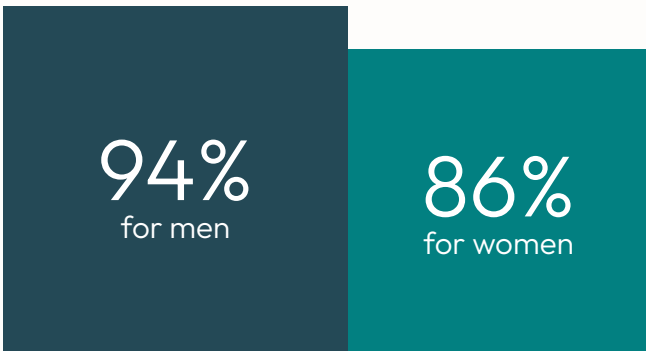
**Figure 11: Perception of workplace culture by gender**

Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

This should not be read as a contradiction. A workplace can be seen as broadly respectful overall while still being experienced less positively by women in everyday ways. Inclusion is not simply the absence of open hostility; it also depends on whether employees feel equally informed, equally heard, and equally safe in raising concerns. The gender gap in these perceptions suggests that workplace culture is experienced differently across gender, even where the overall climate appears positive.

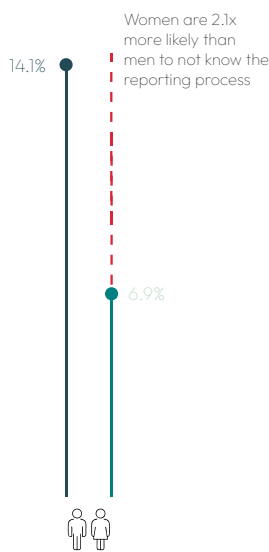
Awareness of harassment reporting mechanisms was lower among women.

When employees were asked whether the company has a clear policy against sexual harassment, both men and women reported high levels of agreement, with responses above 80% for both groups. However, a 7.7% gap was found between men and women. While 93.5% of men said they know how to report harassment or discrimination in the workplace, the comparable figure for women was 85.9%.



**Figure 12: Awareness on sexual harassment policies by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

This gap is important because reporting systems can only function when employees know how to access them. In practice, lower awareness among women may mean that those who are more likely to face inappropriate behavior are also less likely to know the formal pathway for seeking support, which weakens the protective value of existing policies and procedures.



**Figure 13: Knowledge on sexual harassment reporting process by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

When employees were asked whether the company takes action on sexual harassment complaints seriously and fairly, around 90% of both men and women agreed with the statement. However, there remains a slight gap of 4.3 percentage points between men and women. This suggests that, although confidence in the organization’s response mechanism is high across both groups, women report slightly lower confidence than men.

Implementation gaps exist in formal compliance structures.

Companies stated that they have a zero tolerance policy regarding harassment. However, employee survey results present a more nuanced picture.

The findings suggest that most companies are not yet fully aligned with Bangladesh government requirements of inclusion of an external member in the sexual harassment committee.



**There is actually no scope for them [external committee members] to be involved. Our process is entirely internal, and the law does not explicitly require the inclusion of an external member. It is handled within the organization.**

Overall, the findings indicate that while policies are largely in place, their reach, accessibility, and implementation remain uneven. Policy existence alone is insufficient; effectiveness depends on whether employees are informed, able to access systems, and confident in their use.

Most employees acknowledged the presence of policies against harassment and report knowing how to report such incidents. However, 97.6% of men reported that no harassment incidents had happened to them at work in the last 30 days, the comparable figure for women was only 83.3%. Meaning that 16.7% of women experienced at least one such incident, compared to just 2.4% of men.



**We make sure that investigations are conducted properly. There have even been cases where a senior person lost their job because the process was initiated. So people know that there is zero tolerance for any kind of money-related misconduct and zero tolerance for harassment. This is a very basic principle, and starting from the Managing Director, we are very strict about it."**

While workplace policies provide the formal framework for inclusion, the findings show that awareness and access to these systems vary significantly across gender. This gap between policy existence and practical accessibility shapes how employees engage with organizational support mechanisms.

The next section examines how access to training, mentorship, and networking opportunities influences visibility, opportunity, and advancement over time.



## 5. CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASED VISIBILITY AND CHOICE

Unequal access to training, mentorship, and networking is shaping career trajectories well before promotion decisions are made. Women were less likely than men to have reported access to mentorship or sponsorship programs, with a 25 percentage-point gap, and less likely to have personally received such support. Men reported higher participation across all three types of training —

technical, leadership, and soft skills — and engaged more frequently in both formal and informal networking. These are not marginal differences in employee benefits; they represent unequal access to the mechanisms through which careers are built and visibility is earned. When women are less connected to development systems, the conditions for advancement are unequal even where formal promotion criteria appear neutral.

Access to training, mentorship, and sponsorship was uneven across genders: Formal mentorship may exist, but women appear less connected to these support networks.

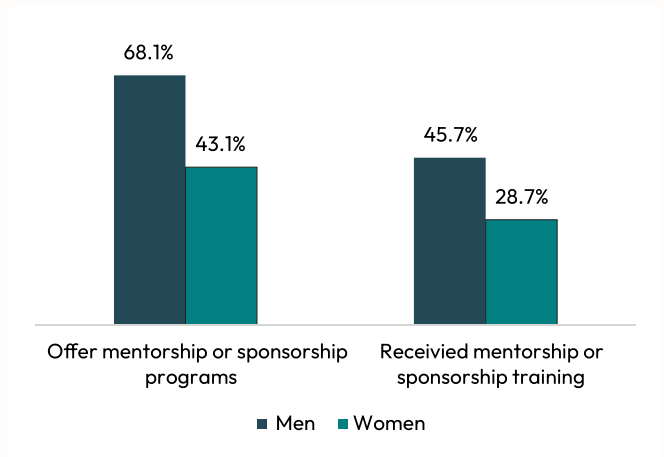
Most organizations in the first phase appear to provide some form of professional development, including technical, leadership, and soft-skills training. However, employee responses suggest that access to these opportunities is not experienced equally.

Most organizations provide some form of professional development opportunities for employees.



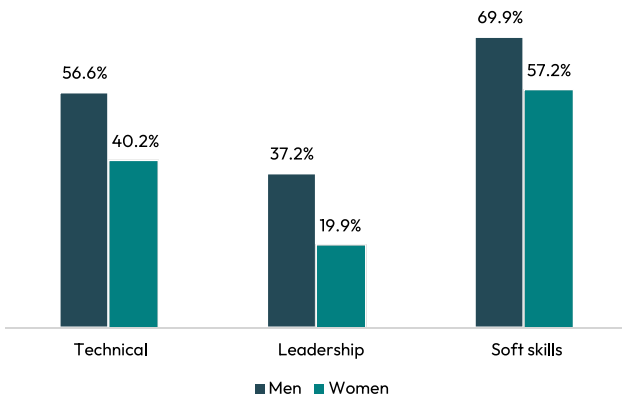
**Figure 14: Training opportunity for employees**  
Source: GCN Snapshot Survey (2025)

However, employee responses suggest that access to these opportunities is not experienced equally. Women were less likely than men to report that mentorship or sponsorship programs exist for them, with a 25.0 percentage-point gap, and they were also less likely to say that they have personally received such support, with a 17.0 percentage-point gap. Men also reported higher participation across all three types of training. These are not minor differences in employee benefits; they point to unequal access to the very mechanisms through which careers are built.



**Figure 15: Mentorship or sponsorship gap by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

This is important to address because career advancement depends not only on formal job performance, but also on access to skill-building, advice, advocacy, and organizational visibility. Training builds human capital, but mentorship and sponsorship build social capital. When women are less connected to these support systems, they are less likely to accumulate the experiences, confidence, and institutional backing that often shape promotion decisions. In that sense, unequal access to development opportunities helps explain why gender gaps persist even where formal promotion criteria appear neutral.



**Figure 16: Received training on technical/leadership/soft skills by gender**

Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

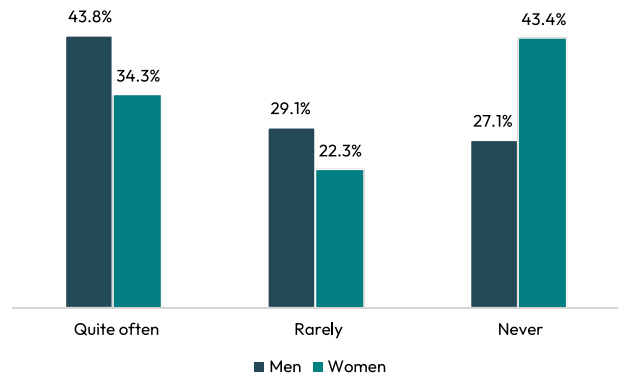
The KII evidence supports this interpretation. Managers themselves acknowledged that retaining women in higher positions requires more intentional investment in training and support. This suggests that the issue is not simply whether programs exist, but whether women are being identified, encouraged, and enabled to participate in them at the same rate as men. Without deliberate effort, development systems can reproduce existing inequalities by benefiting those who are already more visible, more connected, or more easily seen as future leaders.



**To retain the women who have reached higher positions, we need to provide them with training and support their skill development. We should work on identifying what kinds of training can be provided. At that level, since both men and women are present, both groups should be trained on how to work together and support each other.**

Women reported fewer networking opportunities in both informal and formal settings.

Women also reported fewer opportunities than men in both informal and formal networking spaces. They were less likely to describe frequent informal interaction with colleagues and less likely to report access to structured networking opportunities within the workplace.

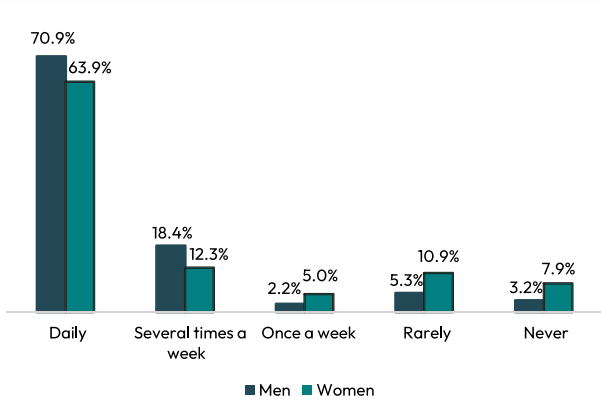


**Figure 17: Formal networking opportunities by gender**

Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

In formal settings, 43.8% of men reported getting networking opportunities quite often, compared with 34.3% of women. This gap is especially important because networking is not peripheral to career growth; it is one of the main ways employees gain visibility, information, trust, and access to advancement pathways.

Also, informal networking during work breaks is common for both men and women, but men participated more frequently. This suggests that women may be less integrated into everyday informal workplace networks where relationship-building, information-sharing, and visibility often develop. Over time, lower participation in these routine informal interactions can reduce women's access to support, insider knowledge, and professional recognition, even when formal workplace structures appear gender neutral.



**Figure 18: Engagement in informal networking by gender**

Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

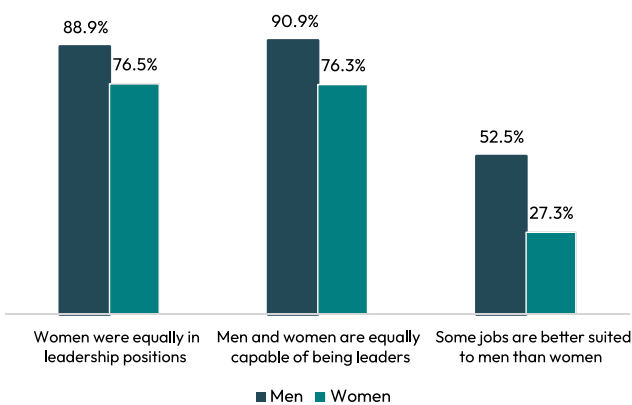
Limited participation in networking activities can restrict employees' professional visibility and reduce their ability to access information about career opportunities, mentorship, and advancement pathways. For women, these networking gaps may reinforce existing inequalities in professional growth and leadership representation.

However, employee responses indicate a persistent pattern of gendered perceptions, particularly regarding job suitability. A notable share of employees believed that certain jobs are better suited to men than to women, reflecting underlying patriarchal norms within the workplace that can influence task allocation and exposure to career building opportunities, reinforcing unequal pathways to advancement. This tension is analytically important. It shows that support for women's leadership at an abstract level can coexist with traditional assumptions about which jobs women should do.

In practice, this means organizations may endorse gender equality in principle while still reproducing occupational segregation in everyday decisions about task assignment, mobility, field exposure, late-hour work, technical roles, or supervisory responsibility. These assumptions matter because the jobs seen as more suitable for men are often the same jobs that build the experience, visibility, and authority needed for promotion.

The findings on career development show that unequal access to training, mentorship, and networking shapes women's visibility and progression within organizations. These differences extend into how employees perceive fairness and opportunity in the workplace.

The next section examines employee engagement with the organizations, belongingness, and perception of fairness, highlighting how these experiences vary across gender.



**Figure 19: Perception on leadership and job suitability by gender**

Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

Gender equality in leadership was widely agreed on, but traditional views on job suitability remain more common among men.

Employees generally expressed strong support for gender equality in leadership. Large majorities of both men and women agreed that women are equally considered for leadership roles and are equally capable of being leaders.



## 6. PERCEPTION INDICATORS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

While overall employee engagement was relatively strong, women consistently reported lower scores than men across Gallup Q12, indicating less positive day-to-day workplace experiences and being less likely to have advanced themselves.

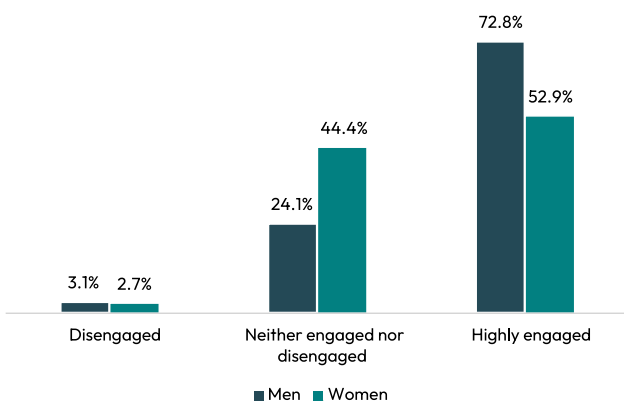
Employee survey data demonstrates that women were also less likely to perceive promotion process as fair or representative

and less likely to have progressed at the same pace.

These perception gaps reflect what employees observe around them daily — who gets promoted, who is visible, who is trusted with high-responsibility work. Even where formal systems appear neutral, consistent differences in outcomes highlight a disconnect between policy as written and workplace reality as experienced.

## Employee Engagement and Workplace Experience

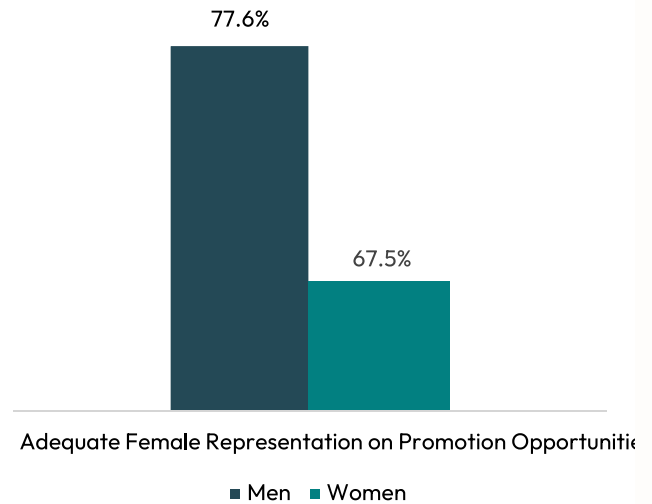
Employee engagement was measured using a composite indicator based on Gallup's Q12 framework, capturing dimensions such as recognition, support, growth, and connection to organizational purpose. Overall engagement appeared relatively strong across the participating companies, but women consistently reported slightly lower positive experiences than men. Although these differences may appear modest, they are meaningful because engagement is cumulative: it reflects how employees experience the workplace on a day-to-day basis, not simply whether they remain employed.



**Figure 20: Employee engagement by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

Lower engagement among women should therefore be interpreted as a signal of unequal workplace conditions rather than as an individual attitude problem. Employees tend to be less engaged when they feel less recognized, less supported, less informed, or less confident about future growth. This aligns with the wider patterns already visible in the data: lower access to mentorship, weaker policy awareness, fewer networking opportunities, and more concern about promotion fairness.

Women were more likely than men to question whether promotion opportunities are fairly represented.



**Figure 21: Perception on adequate representation of women in promotion opportunities by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

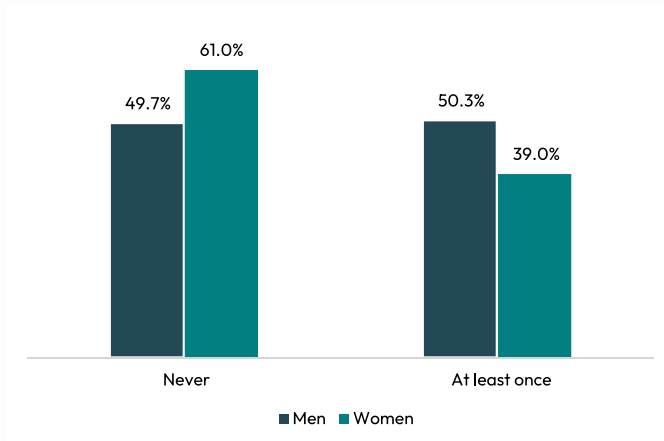
Most employees agreed that women are adequately represented in promotion opportunities, but men were notably more likely than women to hold this view. Approximately 77.6% of men agreed, compared with 67.5% of women. This gap is important because perceptions of fairness are not secondary to organizational outcomes; they shape whether employees see advancement as attainable and worth pursuing. When women are less convinced that promotion systems reflect them fairly, it signals that formal equal-opportunity claims may not fully match lived experience.

These perceptions are likely shaped by what women observe around them. Employees do not assess fairness only by reading policy documents. They assess it by looking at who gets promoted, who receives mentorship, who is visible in decision-making spaces, and who is trusted with high-responsibility assignments. If women see fewer women moving upward, they may reasonably conclude that advancement is more constrained, even where organizations understand themselves to be merit-based. This is why perception data is analytically valuable: it captures the gap between formal procedure and experienced reality.

Women appeared to progress more slowly in their careers, even where formal equal-opportunity policies exist.

The promotion data suggests that these concerns are grounded in actual outcomes. Half of men reported having received at least one promotion, compared with 39.0% of women. This indicates that women are not only less confident in the fairness of promotion opportunities; they also appear to advance more slowly in practice. Over time, even moderate differences in promotion rates accumulate into much larger disparities in pay, representation, authority, and retention.

This is a classic pattern of cumulative disadvantage. A small early gap in access to opportunity, visibility, or support does not remain small. It compounds over time through repeated decisions about assignments, evaluations, promotions, and leadership readiness. As a result, organizations may maintain formally gender-neutral systems while still producing gendered outcomes. The findings here suggest that the central challenge is not only opening the door to women's employment but ensuring that women are equally able to convert employment into voice, progression, and long-term organizational power.



**Figure 22: Promotion gap by gender**  
Source: GCN Employee Survey (2025)

# DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a consistent pattern of gender inequality across the employee lifecycle in participating organizations. While women are entering the workforce, their representation declines steadily at mid-management and leadership levels, indicating a persistent breakdown in progression pathways. This is reinforced by widening disparities in pay, benefits, and economic security, alongside differences in workload distribution, access to workplace systems, and career development opportunities.

Across multiple dimensions, the data demonstrates that formal policies and structures are in place, but their effectiveness is uneven in practice. Gaps in awareness, access, and utilization mean that women often do not benefit equally from systems designed to support progression, protection, and inclusion. These structural inconsistencies collectively shape unequal career trajectories well before promotion decisions are made.

## HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS

- **Female representation starts dropping at mid-level and further narrows in senior and leadership roles:** Women are concentrated in entry and junior-level positions, with their representation decreasing at mid-level roles and further thinning at managerial and leadership levels, indicating potential barriers to career progression.
- **Pay, benefits, and economic security gap persists:** Gender pay gaps persist and widen significantly with seniority, exceeding 40% at leadership levels. Women have lower access to key benefits and are more likely to be in non-contractual roles, limiting their economic security. While pay structures are widely perceived as gender-neutral, the absence of formal pay audits creates a critical blind spot, allowing disparities to persist across organizations.
- **Unequal workload and structural constraints on advancement of women in the workplace:** Women experience a significantly higher total workload, burden of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities. This “double burden” constrains their ability to take on additional responsibilities and advance professionally. Despite reported availability of flexible work arrangements, men are far more likely to use them, while women face limited or inconsistent access. These patterns highlight gaps between policy and practice and underscore the need for more equitable, care-responsive workplace systems.
- **Gaps in policy awareness and access to workplace systems:** While most companies have formal workplace policies in place, women remain less aware of them and less likely to know how to report harassment. This gap is critical, as women are significantly more likely to experience harassment but less equipped to access support systems. The findings highlight a disconnect between policy presence and effective implementation, underscoring the need for stronger communication, accessibility, and accountability mechanisms.
- **Higher exposure to harassment among women and the most affected are least informed:** Women report lower awareness of harassment policies and reporting channels, while experiencing harassment more frequently than men. Confidence in the grievance process is also limited among women employees, highlighting persistent workplace safety and inclusion challenges.
- **Flexibility used more by men:** Contrary to typical assumptions, men report higher use of remote work and flexible arrangements than women, suggesting women face barriers to accessing or using these benefits.
- **Lower access to and uptake of benefits among women:** Women report lower access to retirement benefits and health insurance, and lower utilization of key workplace benefits, including company loan facilities, reflecting potential gaps in awareness, accessibility and workplace support.
- **Learning, growth, and visibility gaps:** Data clearly shows that men and women have different levels of access to technical and leadership training opportunities. Data also reveal that men participated more in structured networking opportunities and are more likely to showcase their work, giving them greater visibility and influence within the organization. Women also report lower scores than men in employee engagement, satisfaction, and sense of belonging (Gallup tool), which may limit career progression and leadership opportunities.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND CO-DESIGNED ACTION PATHWAYS

These strategic directions are grounded in the evidence generated through the GCN Phase 1 baseline assessment. They are intended as priority areas for action rather than prescriptive instructions, recognizing that participating organizations vary in size, sector, and internal systems. As such, the pathways outlined below are best understood as co-design entry points, to be further refined through collaboration between GCN, partner companies, and technical advisers, and adapted through iterative implementation and learning.

## Making gender gaps visible through data and accountability systems

# 01

A consistent finding across all themes is that gender gaps are not consistently measured or used in organizational decision-making. Strengthening organizations' internal systems to regularly measure and track, analyze and report gender gaps across recruitment, pay, promotion, and workforce composition is therefore a key entry point.

Rather than a single standardized model, organizations may explore the development of gender-disaggregated dashboards and periodic internal reviews, with the scope and complexity of these systems adapted to organizational readiness. In collaboration with GCN advisors, companies can co-design appropriate indicators and reporting cycles that are feasible within existing HR structures while progressively strengthening analytical depth over time.

## Addressing progression bottlenecks in mid-career transitions

# 02

The evidence points to a pronounced drop in women's representation at the transition from junior to mid-management levels, suggesting a structural "broken rung" in progression pathways. This does not indicate a single point of failure, but rather a set of interconnected decision processes related to promotion readiness, visibility, and opportunity allocation.

A key area for co-design is the development of more transparent and structured promotion pathways. Participating organizations, with technical support from GCN, may explore options such as clearer promotion criteria, documented decision-making processes, and tracking of gendered transition rates. The form and sequencing of these mechanisms should be adapted to each organization's existing HR maturity and leadership structure.

## Expanding equitable access to mentorship, sponsorship, and development opportunities

# 03

The findings indicate that women are less connected to mentorship, sponsorship, training, and networking opportunities that shape long-term career trajectories. This reflects participation gaps along with structural differences in how opportunity is accessed and distributed.

In response, there is scope to co-design more structured and inclusive development systems. These may include formal mentorship arrangements, sponsorship pathways for high-potential employees, and more transparent nomination processes for training and leadership exposure. Rather than a uniform model, these systems can be tailored through joint design with participating firms to reflect organizational size, sector, and existing informal practices, while ensuring that access is not dependent on networks or discretion alone.

**Reducing the impact of unpaid care responsibilities through flexible work systems**

04

The evidence highlights a significant gendered disparity in total workload, driven by the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. This shapes women's ability to engage in overtime, training, and career-enhancing activities.

A key co-design entry point is the strengthening of workplace flexibility and care support systems. Organizations may explore formalizing flexible work arrangements, clarifying eligibility criteria, and ensuring more consistent application across teams. In parallel, there is scope to enhance parental leave systems and encourage more equitable uptake across genders, alongside broader workplace supports such as childcare or lactation facilities where feasible. The design of these measures should be adapted to operational requirements and co-developed with HR teams and leadership.

**Closing the gap between policy existence and lived experience**

05

While most organizations report having formal HR policies, the evidence suggests that awareness, accessibility, and usability remain uneven for women. This includes gaps in knowledge of reporting mechanisms and grievance systems.

Rather than introducing additional policies, a key priority is strengthening the reach and usability of existing systems. Co-designed approaches may include improving communication strategies across multiple channels, strengthening onboarding processes, and regularly testing employee awareness of key policies. Grievance and reporting systems can also be reviewed jointly with GCN advisers to ensure they are accessible, trusted, and aligned with national standards.

**Strengthening fairness in opportunity allocation and workplace culture**

06

Across phase 1 participating organizations, opportunity allocation — particularly in training, assignments, and informal networking — appears to be shaped significantly by informal systems. This contributes to uneven access to visibility and career progression pathways.

A co-design approach may involve exploring ways to make opportunity allocation more structured and transparent, while also addressing underlying perceptions of job suitability and gendered norms in the workplace. This could include inclusive leadership practices, bias-awareness initiatives, and integration of gender equity considerations into managerial decision-making processes. The specific combination of interventions should be determined jointly with participating organizations based on cultural context and readiness.

Finally, it is to be noted that the intent is not to prescribe a single model of reform, but to identify priority systems where inequities are consistently emerging and to support organizations in developing context-specific responses. The GCN platform is positioned as a collaborative mechanism to enable this process, bringing together evidence, technical support, and peer learning to co-create solutions that are both practical and scalable across diverse private sector settings.

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