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Paving the Way for Women in Male- Dominated Industries

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Diversity, Equity,
and Inclusion:
Stop losing talent
you can't afford
to lose.

With demographic changes, flexible work models, automation and AI, the world of work is changing faster than ever before. Especially in times of economic downturn, retaining and attracting critical talent is essential. While efforts must cover all high-potential employees, male-dominated industries cannot ignore substantial untapped female talent as demand for new skills increases.

Mercer's Global Talent Trends (GTT) 2026 emphasize that people risk is business risk. Proactive talent foresight focused on diverse talent pools is an organization's best risk mitigation strategy.

Keeping women's exits framed as a caregiving issue misses the point; the real causes are systemic— limited career progression, unequal pay, and a lack of belonging. For male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing, this requires making workplaces more attractive and inclusive to women by addressing their core expectations as employees.

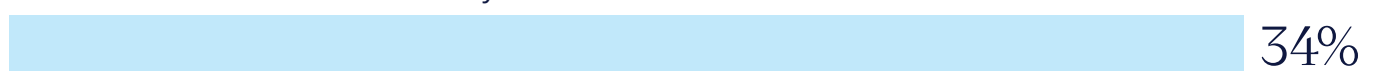
The Global Talent Trends 2026 show that women are more likely to cite unfair or low pay as reasons for leaving their employer. However, how can female employees feel fairly treated if they still face an **average global pay gap of 31%** (World Economic Forum, 2025) compared to their male counterparts? At the current rate, global pay parity will take about 120 years.

The GTT also show that compared to men, women place higher importance on work-life balance, skills development, and clear career progression. However, how many manufacturers truly provide flexible working arrangements that accommodate different life stages while preserving transparent, credible promotion pathways in mostly onsite and shift-based environments?

Mercer's GTT also display that 50% of women want to feel a sense of belonging to their employer. However, when basic facilities like changing rooms at production sites are lacking, can women realistically feel respected and included in the workplace?

The examples are a compelling illustration of the significant gap between the expectations of female employees and the current reality they face in the workplace – especially challenging male-dominated industries. The consequence is evident: unfilled positions that hinder productivity and come at a substantial financial cost to organizations. Therefore, it is crucial to not only acknowledge but actively address this disparity between expectations and reality.

Overall share of women in the industry in 2025



Share of women with industry leadership positions in 2025



Fig. 1: Share of women in male-dominated industries such as manufacturing

Source: Global Gender Pay Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2025)

Beyond the buzzword “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”

Mercer’s roadmap to your business success

Keeping women in key roles and helping them develop is not just a DEI goal — it’s a business necessity. Oliver Wyman’s report “Unlocking £2–3.5 billion” shows the high costs when skilled women leave male-dominated sectors like tech — and manufacturing faces the same risk. Organizations must act now to attract and retain female talent by becoming employers of choice: provide clear career paths, targeted development and sponsorship, fair pay, and flexible, inclusive hiring and working practices.

1

Listen and diagnose

The first crucial step for organizations is to deeply understand the root causes of inequalities and talent drain. By asking important questions such as why is there a lack of women in leadership positions, why do women leave or do not enter your organization, and why a gender pay gap exists, you uncover the underlying issues that need to be addressed.

2

Revise organizational processes

Armed with new knowledge, we adapt and revise organizational processes, programs and day-to-day practices. Our recommendation is to fix practical barriers on-site, redesign career paths and ensure equal development opportunities are given. Pay special attention to important personal moments that matter such as birth, relocation, and conflicts. By addressing these areas, you can create a more inclusive workplace and provide support and opportunities for women.

3

Communicate, measure and scale

As positive changes emerge, organizations need to take the next step by engaging in open and honest communication. It is essential to transparently convey what your organization can offer and how you can fulfill the aspirations of your employees. At the same time, measure progress with a few clear KPIs (e.g., promotion speed, internal fill rate, pay gap) and scale what works across your business.

Breaking barriers: Women4Metals empowers women in the metals industry

A prime illustration of our dedication to DEI is the Women4Metals (W4M) case, which exemplifies our commitment to empowering women in male-dominated industries.

What is Women4Metals about?

Like many manufacturing companies, Aurubis – a global leader in copper recycling and a trusted supplier of non-ferrous metals – faces the challenge of attracting women as an employer and ensuring their long-term retention by fostering an inclusive culture where female employees feel welcome. To tackle these challenges, a dedicated group of Aurubis employees took proactive measures by founding the women's initiative Women4Metals (W4M) in 2019.

As a grassroots initiative, W4M started with the aim of giving visibility to women to pull others into the respective industry. As the initiative grew, new objectives emerged, such as supporting career growth, fostering diversity and equal opportunities, and cultivating inclusivity.

To achieve these objectives, W4M extended its internal work within Aurubis with launching an industry-wide external initiative. The internal work of the initiative involved increasing collaboration between male and female employees from all locations, along with ESG and HR experts, to conduct a thorough needs analysis, shedding light on the conditions for women at production sites worldwide. The analysis resulted in specific actions such as the construction of female sanitary facilities, provision of hygiene products, and the use of inclusive language in job ads and postings to attract individuals of all genders. Additionally, W4M recognized the importance of creating safe spaces where women can openly discuss their experiences and concerns.

Simultaneously, the external work of the initiative focused on building partnerships with companies, associations, and individuals globally. This increased the visibility of women in the metals industry and facilitated the creation of platforms for exchange and networking, such as cross-mentoring, empowerment days, training sessions, and plant tours. With their dedication, W4M have become pioneers who aspire to transform not only Aurubis but the entire metals industry.

The growth of the initiative can be attributed to several key success factors. These include strong board support and adequate funding, a passionate and engaged team, a focus on tangible impact, a broad network and strong presence, as well as an inclusive approach with 30% male allies.

Mercer was fortunate enough to guide W4M on its journey through sharing best practices and developing the focus topics that now serve as the structural foundation of the initiative. However, W4M is far from reaching its destination. Next steps include offering specialized recruiting training, a buddy program, cultural workshops, factory tours, and launching a newsletter and podcast.



Our recommendations for your business success with DEI

When it comes to achieving extraordinary results, the W4M case serves as a compelling example of how even an idea with initial small budget and resources can turn into something truly remarkable.

To support you in attaining comparable success, here are some key considerations:

Define your purpose

Start by clearly articulating your organization's purpose. This sets the foundation for creating a powerful vision, a mission that resonates, and a roadmap that leads to tangible outcomes.

Engage your stakeholders

Involve relevant stakeholders from the very beginning. Empower them as ambassadors for your initiative. Their passion and commitment will make a difference in establishing necessary structures and developing actionable measures.

Be authentic

Ensure that your initiative reflects the authentic values and identity of your organization. Stay true to your core principles and beliefs throughout the journey to gain trust and credibility but also attract like-minded individuals and organizations to join your cause.

Develop a strategic plan

Create a comprehensive plan that outlines the steps, resources, and timelines needed to bring your purpose-driven initiative to life. This plan should be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.



Leonie Brügner
Manager People Strategies
leonie.bruegner@mercer.com



Michael Eger
Partner People Strategies
michael.eger@mercer.com

Keep your assembly line moving and contact Mercer's experts for hands-on solutions to attract and retain female talent.

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