

# GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE AND ESG

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## SUMMARY

The measurable business benefits of workplace gender equality (WGE) —ranging from employee well-being and enhanced reputation to improved risk management and financial performance—are well documented.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, transparent reporting on WGE and diversity metrics builds trust, attracts socially conscious investors and consumers, and strengthens overall business value. This brief explores how integrating robust gender data enhances the quality and credibility of a company's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments, while reinforcing gender equality strategies and actions in the workplace. It also introduces the Gender Equality Assessment, Results, and Strategies (GEARS), a WGE diagnostic tool that can support companies in this process.

## GENDER AND ESG

In today's competitive business environment, most investors, regulators, and stakeholders expect businesses to transparently disclose their ESG contributions in sustainability reports.<sup>2</sup> This growing focus on ESG information and disclosures means that advancing WGE can boost corporate value by improving the *social* and *governance* aspects of ESG. Linking WGE to ESG information and disclosures can help companies meet regulatory demands, demonstrate leadership, and create diverse, inclusive workplaces simultaneously. Incorporating gender data into sustainability reports enhances their quality and supports WGE strategies.

- **Standards, Disclosures, and Requirements:** Companies can focus not only on mandatory gender equality-related data disclosure but also on how best to present this information in sustainability reports, regardless of the reporting framework adopted.
- **Strategy and Governance:** Organisations can approach gender equality integration in two ways:
  - **Specific Gender Equality Initiatives:** Highlighting targeted actions such as setting measurable goals for increasing the number of women on the Board of Directors or implementing policies to address workplace sexual harassment.
  - **Integrated Gender Equality Approach:** Embedding gender considerations into broader policy or strategy descriptions, ensuring alignment with overall corporate objectives and stakeholder demands (including regulators, employees, local communities and suppliers).

ESG information and disclosures also need to be globally consistent, comparable, and credible<sup>3</sup>, supported by **clear processes, analysis, and high-quality data, including gender-specific metrics**. Many organisations struggle with gender equality disclosures due to a lack of agreed reporting standards and gaps in data availability. In the Philippines, for example<sup>4</sup>, a major challenge is the absence of “pipeline” data to track progress in gender diversity at middle and senior management levels. Moreover, regulators leave it to

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey & Company. (2020). [Diversity wins: How inclusion matters](#).

<sup>2</sup> PwC Asia and Pacific (2022), [Sustainability Counts](#)

<sup>3</sup> PwC Asia and Pacific (2022)

<sup>4</sup> Philippine Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (2023), [Workplace Gender Equality and Sustainability Reporting](#)

companies to determine whether diversity information is material, resulting in **inconsistent and voluntary disclosures**. This not only limits comparability between organisations, but also makes it difficult to track progress, identify systemic gaps, and drive meaningful change across the market. Companies are increasingly recognising the importance of credible gender reporting **but often lack the frameworks, tools, or experience needed to report effectively and with confidence**.



One tool that companies can use is the **Gender Equality Assessment, Results, and Strategies (GEARS)**. It is the first and only WGE diagnostic tool designed specifically for the ASEAN market. GEARS data enable analysis and reporting by looking at gender balance and employee movements, policies and implementation against leading practices, and validating findings through an employee perception survey. GEARS can also support companies to recognise overlooked aspects of WGE that have not been covered by ESG standards.<sup>5</sup>

## NAVIGATING ESG AND SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

**ESG is a set of metrics**, primarily used by investors, to assess a company's risk and performance based on Environmental, Social, and Governance factors. ESG performance is typically disclosed in sustainability reports aimed at a wide range of stakeholders.

Sustainability reporting can be **mandatory** (imposed by a regulator) or **voluntary** (carried out independently by a corporation). Voluntary reporting is mostly reputational in nature, in that it helps reporting entities communicate and manage reputational risks. Mandatory reporting involves compliance with regulation and therefore, from a corporate perspective, carries more weight. In other words, a company that does not meet its mandatory reporting obligations is non-compliant with the law and can face regulator-imposed penalties.

Mandatory reporting, where a regulator sets the reporting requirements, is increasing. Environmental performance is measured using a set of agreed data, while governance is reported based on local regulations. However, **reporting obligations are evolving, and not all metrics are clearly defined**. This makes it difficult for companies to comply with emerging requirements especially around "social" aspects. But **it also presents an opportunity for companies to shape the scope and depth of their ESG disclosures, including gender related data and strategies**.

Understanding the ESG and sustainability reporting landscape helps companies to leverage their sustainability reporting to advance WGE.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on GEARS, visit [GEARS - Investing In Women](#)

## NATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

Gender reporting is in a nascent stage in ASEAN; countries like Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam illustrate a diversity of sustainability reporting requirements including gender equality. The table below provides a snapshot of regulatory requirements in each country and **highlights the opportunity that the GEARS framework provides businesses in those markets as they navigate reporting requirements.**

	INDONESIA	VIETNAM	THE PHILIPPINES	MYANMAR
Regulatory requirements	Otoritas Jasa Keuangan (OJK) mandates annual sustainability reporting for financial institutions, issuers and publicly listed companies.	Publicly listed companies are required to submit sustainability reports as mandated by the State Securities Commission (SSC/UBCKNN).	Sustainability reporting is poised to become mandatory for publicly-listed companies, as outlined in a memorandum circular issued by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in January 2025. <sup>6</sup>	There are no formal national requirements for sustainability reporting. International companies voluntarily report using frameworks like GRI.
Gender reporting	Gender is part of the social performance category, focusing on policies/statements related to inclusivity and workforce diversity. Companies are encouraged to disclose gender-related data.	Gender equality is part of social performance disclosures, addressing workforce composition, labour policies, and local community engagement.	Gender falls under social disclosures, emphasising workplace conditions, labour standards, and human rights, alongside contributions to the UN SDGs.	Gender is minimally addressed, often part of broader workforce and community initiatives reported voluntarily by international entities.
How GEARS can help	GEARS provides reliable data on gender representation and pay equity, enabling compliance with OJK mandates.	GEARS provides reliable data on gender composition and a range of HR policies, strategies and procedures.	GEARS offers actionable metrics aligned with SEC templates, addressing gaps in workforce composition and policy transparency.	GEARS helps organisations align with GRI, providing credible data collection and reporting.

## GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING FRAMEWORK

In addition to local reporting requirements, forward-thinking companies are aligning with a growing mix of global sustainability frameworks, both voluntary and mandatory. Global sustainability standards aim to provide guidance to the companies and regulators. Global standards are adapted to national jurisdictions whereby national regulatory authorities set their own list of ESG topics to be disclosed by companies.<sup>7</sup> Dependent on their compliance requirements and organisational contexts, **companies will determine which approach works best for them.** The most widely used frameworks are discussed on the next page, together with an assessment of how GEARS can help companies to report against them.

<sup>6</sup> Previous SEC guidelines required companies to submit sustainability reports on a “comply or explain” basis, allowing them to disclose data where available and provide justifications where gaps existed. Following the January 2025 memorandum circular, SEC will implement mandatory sustainability reporting for listed companies by 2026, adopting a phased approach to facilitate the transition.

<sup>7</sup> However, these required topics are often too broad - like disclose “safe workplace” - companies can report in multiple ways to address that requirement.



The **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** provide a global framework for addressing critical social, environmental, and economic challenges by 2030. Businesses can use GEARS to help them measure their contributions to SDG 5 targets, related to gender equality and empowering all women and girls, as well as to embed gender equality into their broader ESG strategies.



The **UN Global Compact (UNGC)** is a voluntary initiative that encourages businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies. Businesses can use GEARS to support implementation of the UNGC principles by defining measurable KPIs that enable businesses to implement and track gender-related commitments.



The **European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** mandates businesses to disclose detailed information on their ESG performance with a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion, including gender equality. Business can use GEARS to help them meet CSRD requirements by offering reliable gender-related data.



**International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards** provide a framework for managing environmental and social risks, widely adopted by organisations seeking investment and operational credibility. Businesses can use GEARS to collect, analyse, and report gender-related data, giving them the ability to showcase their compliance with workplace standards and community engagement.



The **International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB)** establishes a global baseline for sustainability disclosures, emphasising decision-useful for investors. The standards prioritise transparency and comparability in ESG reporting, including workforce-related metrics such as diversity and inclusion. Businesses can use GEARS to provide standardised gender-related data supporting diversity and inclusion reporting requirements.



The **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)** is one of the most widely adopted voluntary sustainability reporting frameworks emphasising transparency and accountability in ESG performance. GEARS aligns with GRI by providing a structured approach to collect, analyse and report gender specific metrics. Businesses can use GEARS to enhance their GRI disclosures.

## HOW CAN GEARS HELP?

As companies determine the extent of their own disclosure and approach to reporting, a **GEARS analysis can provide nuanced and contextual analysis of WGE data** that serves multiple purposes. Companies can use GEARS to report on gender and enhance their ESG reporting in the following ways:



**Determining material topics.** GEARS evaluates WGE across 13 interconnected focus areas, providing **granular insights into gender equality**. This allows corporations to precisely identify material topics, develop strategies, and shape policies aligned with their goals.



**Developing strategies and targets.** Following assessments, GEARS **supports companies in prioritising focus areas for action**. This assists corporations in developing action plans and policy to improve specific areas of gender equality performance, and to monitor and evaluate progress.



**Ensuring compliance.** GEARS delivers validated results, **helping organisations align with local regulations and international conventions** on gender equality. These insights can be seamlessly integrated into ESG reports.

In addition, GEARS can help companies **uncover previously overlooked gender equality focus areas**, kickstarting meaningful performance assessments and action plan development for businesses. Progress can then be tracked, monitored, and reported, enabling continuous improvement.

## HOW HAS GEARS HELPED COMPANIES?

### Enhancing sustainability reporting with comprehensive gender data



**IDX**

Indonesia Stock Exchange  
Bursa Efek Indonesia

The **Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX)**, a member of the Indonesia Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (IBCWE), has consistently championed gender equality. To evaluate and strengthen its approach, IDX participated in the GEARS assessment in 2020 and 2022. The tool provided a detailed picture of IDX’s performance across ten WGE focus areas—from aligning gender strategies with business goals to delivering targeted workplace training. These **GEARS findings were integrated into IDX’s 2024 Sustainability Report, reinforcing its credibility with data-backed evidence of commitment and progress.**



BANK SMBC INDONESIA

As part of its sustainability self-assessment, **SMBC Indonesia** (formerly Bank BTPN), a founding member of IBCWE, used the GEARS tool in 2020 to evaluate gender equality within its ESG framework. Drawing on GEARS findings, the bank incorporated concrete data on gender pay equity, workforce composition, flexible work arrangements, professional development, and equitable recruitment into its 2024 Sustainability Report. This allowed SMBC to **demonstrate how gender equality underpins its sustainability strategy** and aligns with its contributions to the SDGs.

### Driving WGE change with robust data, insights, and analysis

In 2021, **DDB Group Philippines** undertook the GEARS assessment, supported by the Philippine Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (PBCWE), to formally measure its progress on WGE. The **insights and analytics from GEARS became a key input in the company’s transformation process**—informing stronger WGE policies, reshaping workplace culture, and reinforcing their sustainability narrative with credible, data-driven evidence.<sup>8</sup>



## GEARS IN PRACTICE

Since 2016, Business Coalitions (BC) and partners across Southeast Asia, with support from Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government, have played a catalytic role in shaping the market for WGE.<sup>9</sup> Through strategic engagement with employers, they have raised awareness, driven changes, and supported companies to build **fairer workplaces, attract and retain diverse talent, and strengthen ESG performance.** BCs and partners deliver the GEARS service, which includes the use of the diagnostic tool and expert guidance to interpret results and develop targeted, evidence-based action plans.



Companies interested in GEARS and other WGE services may go to <https://investinginwomen.asia/gears/> for more information.

<sup>8</sup> Read [Sustaining an Inclusive Culture for Women at the DDB Group Philippines](#)

<sup>9</sup> To know more about BCs’ and partner’s work, visit [Workplace Gender Equality - Investing In Women](#)

