

# TOGETHER WE CAN



**Twenty-two companies have taken 265 gender-smart actions as part of IFC's Together We Can initiative.**

**This has led to 636 more women in the workforce, a 55 percent increase in the share of women in management, and a 17 percent increase in the share of women on boards. Three-quarters of companies said employees felt safer at work and reported increased employee satisfaction levels, while half of the companies reported productivity improvements.**

The TogetherWeCan (TWC) Peer Learning Partnership was a two-year initiative to improve business outcomes by advancing workplace gender equality. TWC took place in the midst of Covid-19 and during Sri Lanka's worst ever economic crisis (see timeline page 2), so the partnership also focused on supporting companies to maintain business continuity during times of crisis. Forty-four companies, employing over 30,000 employees, participated in a series of online training sessions led by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and coordinated by the Federation Chamber of Commerce Sri Lanka (FCCISL), under the Women in Work Partnership between IFC and the Government of Australia. TWC grew out of the demand from local businesses to replicate the SheWorks Sri Lanka partnership which brought together 15 leading companies and benefited over 170,000 employees.

TWC companies represent multiple sectors including banking, finance, food and beverages, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, services, and trading. The partnership offered an opportunity for businesses to learn, share knowledge, and act on promoting a more inclusive workplace.

In partnership with





# TOGETHER WE CAN Partner Companies

## TWC companies that participated in the end-line survey

Akbar Brothers (Pvt) Ltd

Alcoa (Pvt) Ltd

Anuine Holdings

B Braun Lanka

Bopitiya Auto Enterprises

DFCC Bank

DJ Products

Edinburgh Products (Pvt) Ltd

Fortude (Pvt) Ltd

JAT Holdings (Pvt) Ltd

K&D Management Services (Pvt) Ltd

Lak Latex Centrifuge (Pvt) Ltd

Mega Heaters (Pvt) Ltd

Nestlé Lanka

Packsense (Pvt) Ltd

Prem Electricals & Construction (Pvt) Ltd

Roofmart (Pvt) Ltd

Royal Food Marketing (Pvt) Ltd

Ruhunu Foods (Pvt) Ltd

Sampath Bank PLC

Sripalie Contractors (Pvt) Ltd

Wijaya Products (Pvt) Ltd

Arava (Pvt) Ltd

British Cosmetics (Pvt) Ltd

Coca-Cola Beverages Sri Lanka (Pvt) Ltd

D Samson Industries

Electro Metal Pressing (Pvt) Ltd

ESOFT Metro Campus (Pvt) Ltd

Growell Lanka (Pvt) Ltd

IFS Sri Lanka

Just In Time Group

Lihini Sea food (Pvt) Ltd

Maersk Lanka (Pvt) Ltd

Manisha Auto Engineers

Nature's Beauty Creations (Pvt) Ltd

New Philip Hospitals

Orel IT (Pvt) Ltd

Room to Read Sri Lanka

Sachithra Hospital (Pvt) Ltd

Sakya Academy of Higher Education (Pvt) Ltd

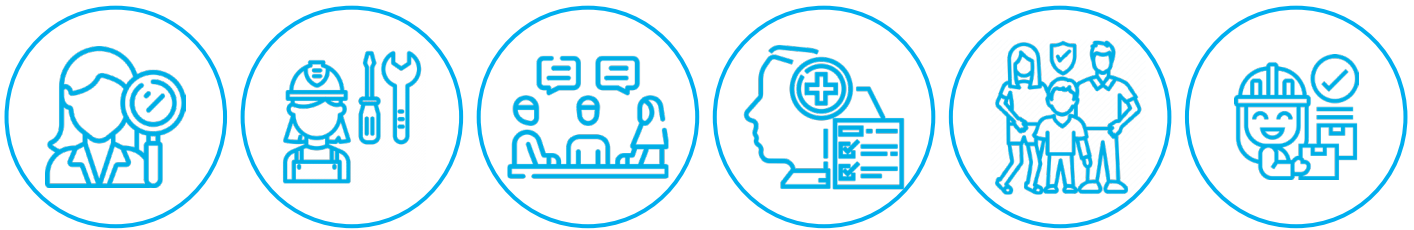
Seefirst Holdings

Third Space Global (Pvt) Ltd

Unilever Sri Lanka

Vision Care Optical Services (Pvt) Ltd

As part of TWC, IFC provided gender intelligence training and workshops, tools, best practice examples, and peer learning opportunities on the following action areas:



Increasing women in leadership and supporting diversity in recruitment

Retention and promotion of women in non-traditional job roles

Creating respectful workplaces

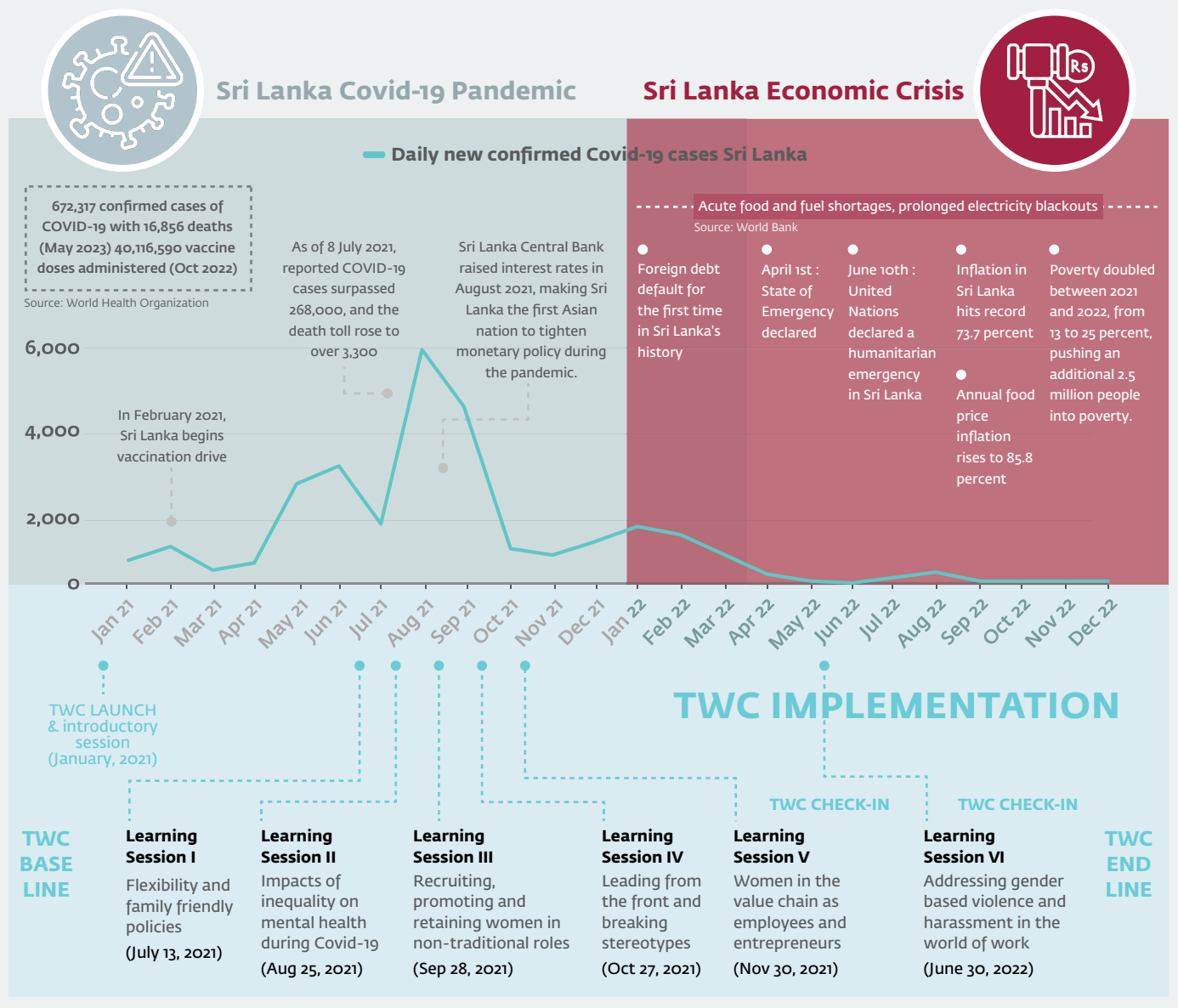
Supporting employee mental health during times of crisis

Flexible and family-friendly workplaces

Women in the value chain as employees and entrepreneurs

## Twenty-two companies participated in the end-line survey. Collectively they took 265 actions to increase workplace gender equity across the six action areas.

TWC took place in the midst of Covid-19 and during Sri Lanka's worst ever economic crisis



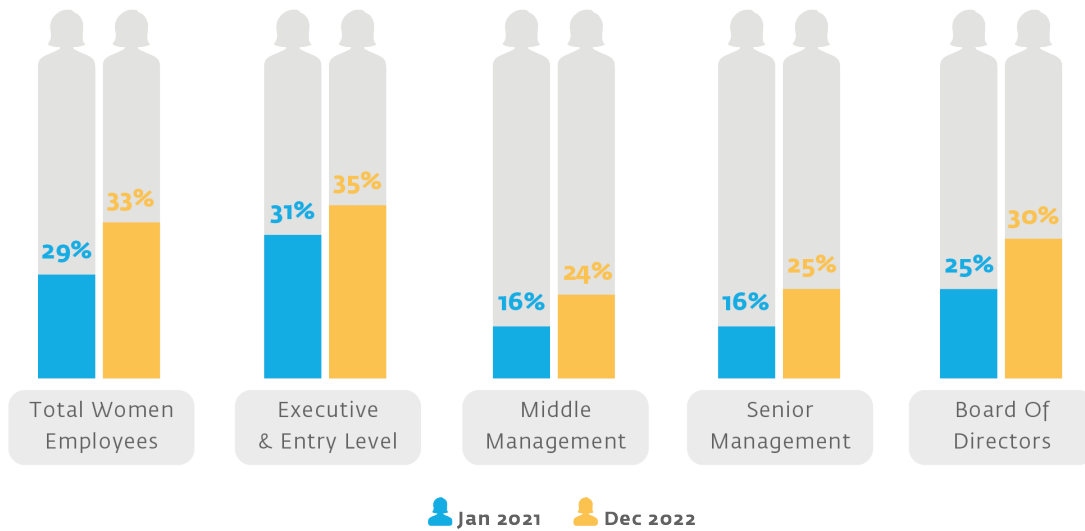
# Business Results:

TWC companies advance women's participation in the workplace and reap business benefits

Overall, 22 TWC companies took 265 actions to increase women's participation in the workforce during the two-year TWC partnership. Almost three-quarters of TWC companies (73 percent) reported that these changes helped maintain business continuity during Covid-19 and/or helped their business during the economic crisis.



SHARE OF WOMEN IN TWC COMPANIES ACROSS WORK LEVELS (JAN 2021-DEC 2022)



## 01. Increasing representation of women across all levels

Despite Covid-19 and a national economic crisis, TWC companies experienced a 14 percent increase in the share of women employed, equating to 636<sup>1</sup> more women employed across 22 companies. The World Bank reports that in 2022 at least half a million people lost their jobs in Sri Lanka. Women were hit the hardest, with an unemployment rate of 7.9 percent in comparison to 3.7 percent for men.<sup>2</sup> However, TWC companies increased both the total number and share of women employees, with women comprising one-third of employees as of December 2022, up from 29 percent in 2020.

TWC companies took 117 actions to increase the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women, including into non-traditional job roles. This included the introduction of non-discrimination/equal opportunity

policies, gender representative recruitment panels, employee resource groups, gender diversity employee targets, and leadership training programs including mentorship and sponsorship. It also included implementing targeted recruitment campaigns to hire more women into male-dominated roles as well as ensuring the work environment met the needs of both male and female employees through the provision of correctly fitting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), changing rooms, etc.

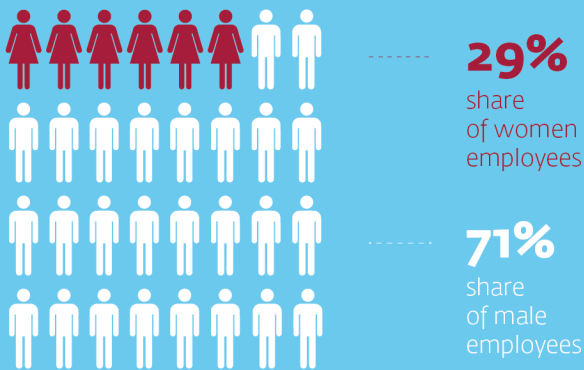
The increase in the overall share of women was largely driven by the increase in the number of women employed at 11 TWC companies. Notably, Prem Electricals & Construction (Pvt) Ltd and Akbar Brothers (Pvt) Ltd, increased their share of women by over 150 percent.

<sup>1</sup> This was calculated as the change in number of women employed by TWC companies at endline compared to baseline. A total of 4293 women were employed at endline, compared to 3657 at baseline.

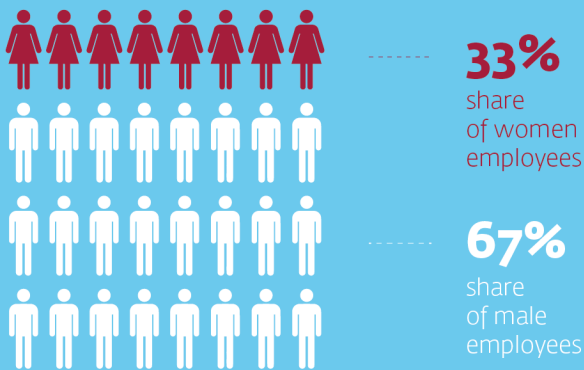
<sup>2</sup> Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey Annual Report 2021, Department of Census and Statistics – Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies. [Pg.07](#)

SHARE OF FEMALE AND MALE EMPLOYEES BETWEEN JANUARY 2021 AND DECEMBER 2022

2021



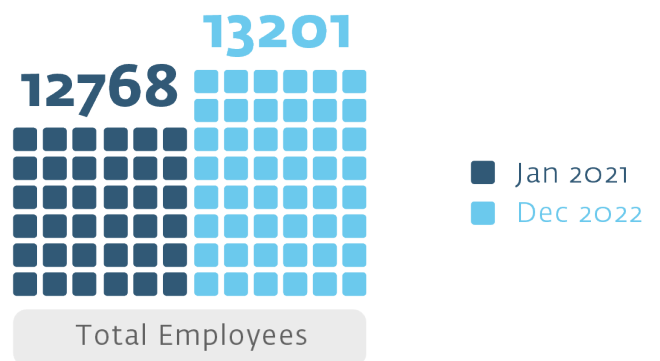
2022



Women Men



Image courtesy: Fortude



## 02. Strengthening women in leadership

**TWC companies increased the share of women in leadership.** Twenty-one TWC companies took 40 actions aimed at increasing the number of women in leadership. The share of women in management increased by 55 percent from Jan 2021 to Dec 2022. Across 18 companies, 224 women were promoted to positions of senior or middle management. Of these, two companies previously had no women managers at the time of joining TWC.

**Women make up almost one-quarter of both senior and middle managers.** Despite an overall contraction of 26 percent in the total number of senior managers, the share of women increased by nine percentage points, with

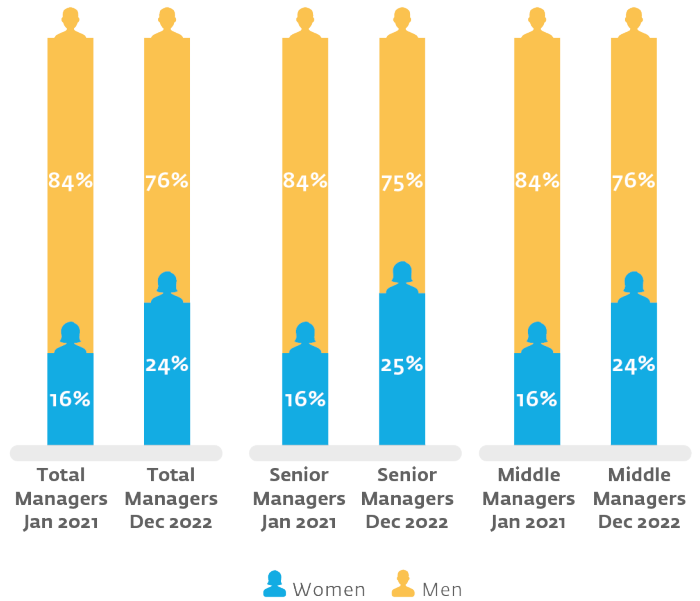
women now comprising one-quarter of senior managers. The leadership pipeline was further strengthened by the promotion of 216 women to middle management, increasing the share of women middle managers from 16 to 24 percent. Leadership training and development programs were implemented by more than two-thirds of companies, while succession planning, mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching programs for women were also widespread.

“

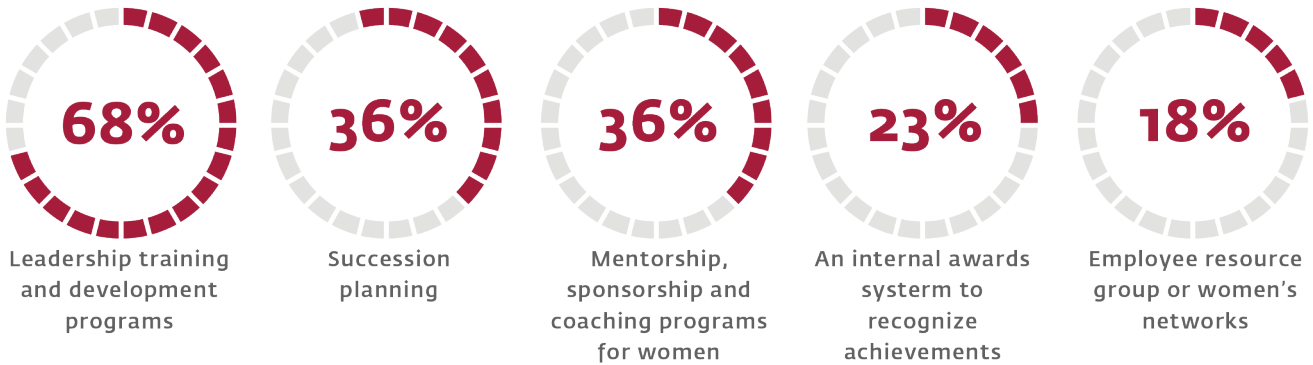
The family counseling sessions have been very useful in helping retain women staff members. In cases where an employee experiences family pressure to resign, we direct them to counselling. The sessions have helped couples identify specific challenges while supporting them to find their own solution. This has helped retain women who otherwise would have left.”

**Dr. Lalith Weragoda, Group Chief Human Resource Officer, Sampath Bank**

**INCREASE IN SHARE OF FEMALE AND MALE MANAGERS BETWEEN JAN 2021 AND DEC 2022**



**SHARE OF COMPANIES THAT TOOK ACTIONS RELATED TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**



**Investing in a strong talent pipeline: Sampath Bank**

Sampath Bank is investing in the future by building a strong pipeline of leadership talent, and a push towards greater gender diversity is key in this strategy. The bank introduced women's leadership development as a key focus area in their 'Specific Stakeholder Priorities for 2022.'

To understand the unique challenges faced by women employees, Sampath Bank conducted internal research on women's career progression. They found that women tended to stagnate mid-career. The root causes were related to child and elder care responsibilities in the household that disproportionately fall to women. To address this, Sampath Bank introduced family counseling services, as part of their family friendly workplace practices - which include maternity leave, flexible and remote working. Through family counseling, employees were given access to professional counseling, together with their spouses, to navigate challenges associated with career advancement and family responsibilities.

Furthermore, the bank conducts special leadership programs for women, targeting middle and senior management. For example, the 2022 leadership development forum for women middle managers included a focused group discussion led by Sampath Bank's Managing Director Designate, Ayodhya Iddawela Perera. This session resulted in the introduction of a dedicated counseling hotline for female team members.

Sampath Bank has also taken purposeful steps to increase the number of women in branch offices across Sri Lanka, through incorporating both men and women in job adverts and conducting targeted recruitment drives.

Image courtesy: Sampath Bank

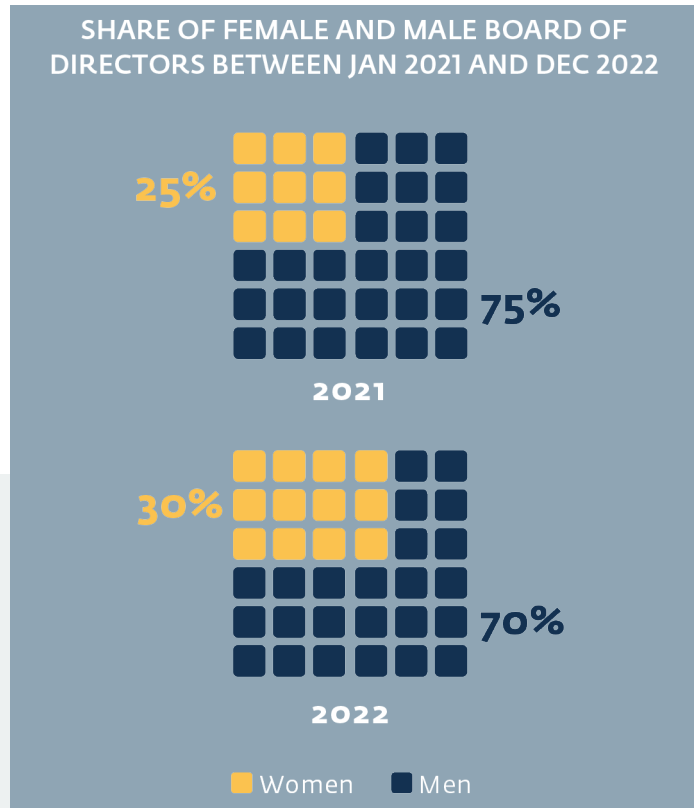


# 03 ■ Enhancing women on Boards of Directors

The share of women on boards of TWC companies increased by five percentage points from January 2021 to December 2022, with women now comprising almost one-third of directors. Eight women board members were appointed to new directorships across six TWC companies. Of these, five companies had no women board members at the time of joining TWC. In comparison, over five years the number of women on Colombo Stock Exchange-listed boards increased by less than two percentage points (from 8.2 percent in 2018 to 10 percent in 2023).

## Women on Boards: Bopitya Auto Enterprises

Bopitya Auto Enterprises is a manufacturer, distributor and exporter of automobile spare parts and light engineering components, with over 50 employees of which 31 percent are women. For over 40 years the company was a male-owned sole proprietorship. However, in 2022 they converted to a partnership company – with women comprising three-quarters of the board.



“

My sister and I represented Bopitya Auto Enterprises at the Together We Can Partnership. As the sessions were run during Covid-19, we participated while working from home – where my father also listened in. The TWC sessions inspired him to think about succession planning for the sustainability of the company. We decided to shift to a partnership model to mitigate future risk and ensure the sustainability of the company.”

**Dr. Manisha Rodrigo, Partner  
Bopitya Auto Enterprises & Managing Director,  
Bopitya Auto Springs**

Manishka Rodrigo, her sister, and her mother - having previously worked at the company in senior management - have now officially joined their father as Partners.

Furthermore, the company offers leadership training for women supervisors, who make up 45 percent of total managers. Investing in building a respectful workplace, they introduced an open-door policy where employees were able to directly connect with senior management on factory grounds. They also offered counseling services and introduced a formalized process for attending to claims of sexual harassment. Staff can now raise issues through the counselor.

During the crisis, Bopitya Auto Enterprises provided all employees a transport allowance and economic crisis allowance in addition to quarterly provisions of dry rations. Rodrigo reflects that she believes these measures have contributed to low employee turnover at the company in comparison to other businesses in the area.



Image courtesy: Bopitya Auto Enterprises



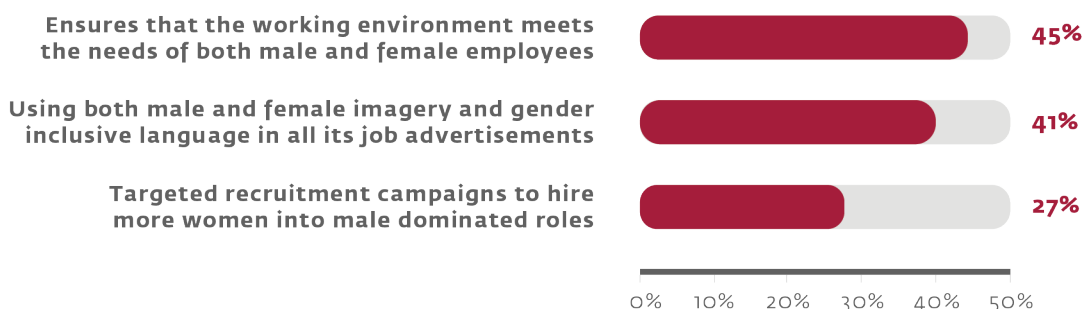
# 04 ■ Setting gender targets and increasing women in non-traditional job roles

**Most companies that set gender targets experienced an increase in the share of women in the targeted categories.** Four out of five companies that introduced gender diversity targets increased the share of women in senior leadership, while four out of six companies increased the share of women on boards and six out of eight

increased the overall share of women employed.

Furthermore, 16 companies took action to recruit and retain women in non-traditional roles, including ensuring that working environments met the needs of all employees and conducting inclusive recruitment campaigns.

SHARE OF COMPANIES THAT TOOK ACTION RELATED TO RECRUITMENT, RETENTION OR PROMOTION OF WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES



## Measuring success: B Braun Lanka

B. Braun Lanka, a provider of medical devices and equipment, is taking proactive steps to reach their target of 40 percent women in the workforce.



It's an ambitious target and recruiting women to sales and marketing has been especially challenging. To get more women to apply, we incentivized existing employees to recommend B Braun. If the new recruits confirm their employment after probation, the recommender receives an incentive. And if the recruit is a woman, the incentive is a little higher."

**Nathalie de DIEULEVEULT,**  
Managing Director, B. Braun Lanka

The company is taking innovative measures to encourage more women into roles traditionally occupied by men. The company also has a robust mentorship program targeting mid-career women, connecting them with mentors across the group's global network.

Investing in working parents, B Braun provides parental and caregiver leave, as well as supporting daycare costs. In addition to maternity and paternity leave, caregiver leave allows both mothers and fathers to take up to 16 days of leave until children reach the age of three. Shanika Ranaweera, Head of Human Resources & Corporate Communications at B Braun Lanka said, "The first beneficiary of this new caregiver leave was a male colleague. We have also observed that B Braun is becoming popular as an employer among young people as they appreciate the family-friendly policies and practices we have." During the Sri Lankan economic crisis, the company extended a special allowance to parents supporting the cost of school transport for their children.

Despite challenges experienced due to the pandemic and crisis, B Braun Lanka is focused on achieving their target, having reached 28 percent women in the overall workforce and 35 percent of women in management.

# 05 - Building respectful workplaces

Over three-quarters of TWC companies reported that employees now feel safer at work.

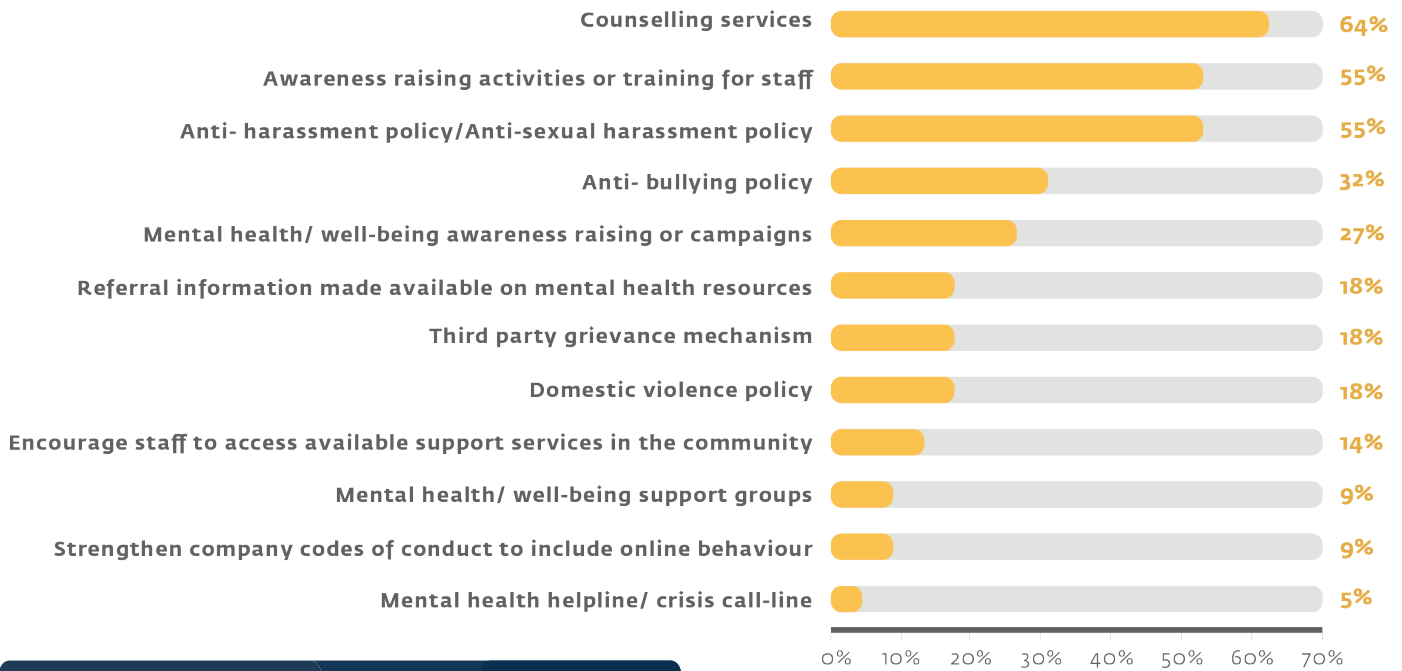
Twenty companies have created more respectful workplaces by implementing 72 actions that enhance employee well-being and address bullying and harassment. This includes policies and practices to support the mental health of employees through crisis, rolling out anti-bullying, anti-sexual harassment, and domestic violence policies, awareness raising and training of staff on respectful workplaces, and introducing third-party grievance mechanisms.

“

Through the IFC Respectful Workplace training, we were able to gather useful insights and solutions which are currently being implemented in partnership with Diversity Collective Lanka”

**Sonali Jayasinghe, Senior Vice President - Human Resources, DFCC Bank**

SHARE OF COMPANIES THAT TOOK ACTION RELATED TO RESPECTFUL WORKPLACES



“

Following participation at TWC, we introduced a formal process for reporting on sexual harassment. We informed staff about the new steps through announcements and notices around the factory. Our mental-health counselor also began creating awareness among staff on sexual harassment, and is focal point in case anyone wants to make a complaint”

**Dr. Manisha Rodrigo, Partner Bopitiya Auto Enterprises & Managing Director, Bopitiya Auto Springs**

Counseling session | Image courtesy: Bopitiya Auto Enterprises



# 06 ■ Creating flexible and family-friendly workplaces

Nineteen companies are actively supporting working parents to stay employed and achieve better work-life balance. TWC companies took 62 actions to promote flexible and family-friendly workplace solutions. The actions that had the most uptake were the introduction of flexible working hours and working locations, flexible work arrangements for pregnant or nursing mothers and parents to meet childcare needs, and extended maternity leave. Four companies also introduced enhanced paternity leave support for new fathers, making great progress in a country where paternity leave is not government mandated.

“

I would recommend Fortude to other working parents, because of the support system that I had access to when I became a mother. The flexibility in time and work modalities, especially working from home, have really helped me transition back to work smoothly. I'm not stressed or distracted due to childcare and can balance my time because work gives me the support I need.”

**Raneesha Sandali, Assistant Manager Global Talent Development, Fortude**

“

Paternity leave isn't something that's spoken of in Sri Lanka, though I do believe perceptions are changing especially in the Information Technology industry. When my twins were born, my wife and I had to juggle our 2-year-old as well as some medical challenges. Being able to work from home, have flex hours and take paternity leave were extremely helpful during this time. Today I can be a proper parent because of the flexibility at work.”

**Ruchira Dasanayake, Senior Project Manager, Fortude**

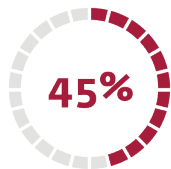


Ruchira and family | Image courtesy: Fortude

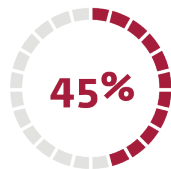
## SHARE OF COMPANIES THAT TOOK ACTION RELATED TO FLEXIBLE AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES



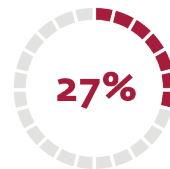
Flexible working hours or working location



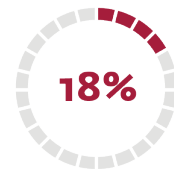
Flexible work arrangements for pregnant/ nursing mothers/ parents to meet childcare needs



Extended maternity leave (over government stipulation of 84 days)



Flexible careers<sup>3</sup>



Childcare subsidies for employees



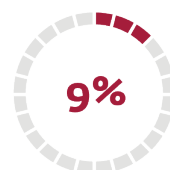
Referral information about available childcare resources is provided



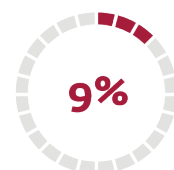
Paternity leave



Lactation/ breastfeeding room is made available



Job sharing



Compressed work hours

<sup>3</sup> Staff can enter, exit and re-enter employment with the same organization, or increase or decrease workload or career pace to suit different life stages.

# 07 ■ Supporting women in the value chain

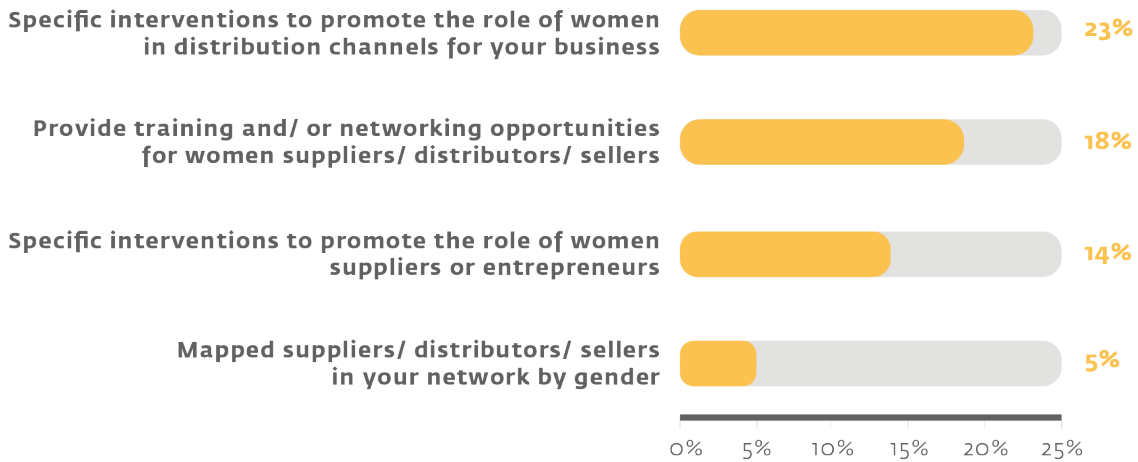
Eleven companies are proactively supporting women employees and entrepreneurs in the value chain.

Companies took 14 actions targeted to promote the role of women in the distribution or supply channels of their business and to provide training and networking opportunities for women in the value chain.



Image courtesy: Nestlé Lanka

## SHARE OF COMPANIES THAT TOOK ACTION RELATED TO WOMEN IN THE VALUE CHAIN



## Empowering women across communities: Nestlé Lanka

Nestlé Lanka plays a vital role in Sri Lanka’s dairy industry as one of the largest private sector milk collectors. Across this value-chain, 30 percent of Nestlé’s farmers and 25 percent of all chilling center owners are women. The company provides entrepreneurship training and financial support, including interest free loans aimed at uplifting the livelihoods of the women within the dairy community.

Furthermore, Nestlé Lanka implements focused efforts to accelerate gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated operations - such as supply chain, technical and sales - through increasing the capacity of potential recruits. For example, in 2022 Nestlé launched many fast-track youth programs to introduce young women to these career paths. Initially awareness sessions were



We needed to create the right environment of support and nurturing to help our young female trainees integrate into their new roles in sales, technical and supply chain departments. Accordingly, we set up regular check-ins, a focused learning plan and support system to assist them in case they face challenges or difficulties along the way.”

**Rovina Vandersay, Senior Manager – Talent Acquisition & Development, Nestlé Lanka**

conducted at local universities to inspire students to consider applying for supply chain, technical and sales roles. Upon onboarding, focused training plans were introduced, including coaching and mentoring. In 2022, Nestlé recruited 12 new women employees into sales and operations in the permanent cadre.

Image courtesy: Nestlé Lanka



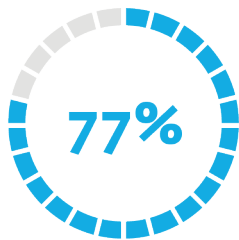
# Business level impacts:

Companies reported a range of positive business benefits following their engagement in TWC.

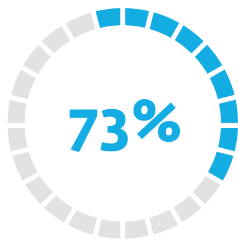
Around three-quarters of TWC companies said employees felt safer at work and reported increased employee satisfaction levels because of introducing or improving policies and practices recommended by TWC. Half of the companies reported productivity improvements. These findings reinforce the business value of fostering more diverse, inclusive, and respectful workplaces.

“  
During Covid-19, we were one of the first to implement working from home. Today, we love our hybrid work set up, which helps us leverage the best of both worlds. We still retain the increased flexibility of working from home, whilst continuing to increase engagement and connectivity at office. This has really boosted productivity and collaboration amongst our teams and supports their overall wellbeing.”  
Nestlé Lanka

## BUSINESS LEVEL IMPACTS EXPERIENCED SINCE IMPLEMENTING OR IMPROVING POLICIES AND PROCESSES AT YOUR COMPANY AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN TWC



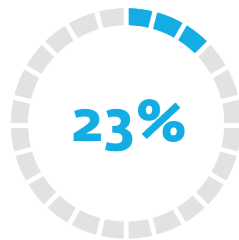
Employees feel safer at work



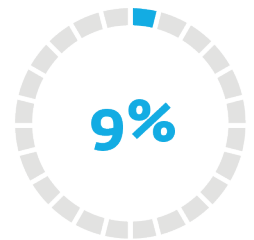
Increased employee satisfaction



Improvements in productivity



Cost savings due to reduced absenteeism and/or turnover



Increased access to new markets (international buyers/ clients)

“  
We have implemented several workplace practices to ensure participation of female employees in the organizational process as equal partners. “TogetherWeCan” inspired us to think more in this direction and make improvements where necessary.’  
Sampath Bank

“  
After the TWC session on women in non-traditional roles, we conducted an awareness session at the factory. We announced that women who wanted to transfer to the packing and labeling departments – which previously only had male workers – can do so. Ten women decided to make the shift. Four of them were recently promoted to team leader positions.”  
J Shantha Kumar, Sales Coordinator, ALCOA Aluminum Design and Workshop

Image courtesy: Sampath Bank



Image courtesy: Alcoa



# Call to action: Lessons from the TWC peer learning partnership

“

As a TogetherWeCan member, we were able to participate in many knowledge sharing sessions. These helped us understand best practices towards accelerating gender diversity in our workforce.”

**Nestlé Lanka**

## **Advancing gender equality is good for business and supports employees of all genders.**

- Policies and practices that support gender equality, such as flexibility, family-friendly policies, mental health support, and building respectful workplaces help increase employee satisfaction and can drive overall productivity. They are particularly important for ensuring business continuity and productivity during times of crisis.

## **Building a pipeline of women leaders through training, mentoring, sponsorship, and coaching sets-up leadership teams for success.**

- Consider targeted leadership training for women in junior and middle management to ensure women are ready to take on leadership roles.

- Identifying barriers to women's progression, including those that exist outside the organization, and working with women to overcome those, can ensure the retention of high-performing women who may otherwise have to choose to leave the workforce.

## **Setting targets help boost progress toward gender equality.**

- Setting quantifiable targets for the share of women and men at different levels throughout the organization, and measuring progress against those targets, can help ensure the company continues to advance its gender agenda.

## **Building respectful workplaces help boost retention and ensure all employees can thrive at work.**

- Creating policies and procedures that support respectful workplaces and discourage bullying or harassment helps build a culture of trust and enhances employee wellbeing.

- Ensuring employees have confidential channels for reporting incidents if they do occur and transparent processes for reviewing and deciding on appropriate responses is an essential prerequisite of a respectful workplace.

- Supporting employees' mental health helps ensure they can bring their best selves to work. This is particularly critical during times of crisis or transition.

## **Designing flexibility and family-friendly policies in ways that address the specific needs of women and men is a win-win for all.**

- Offering alternative work arrangements, such as part-time or flexible working hours, career by choice, and career breaks to help all employees manage work and family responsibilities.

- Encouraging fathers to take paternity leave, utilize flexible working, and proactively take up childcare support can build greater employee engagement and loyalty and encourage both parents to remain in the workforce.

- Explore childcare as an investment rather than a cost. Measure business results like productivity and retention to understand the cost to business when working parents are not supported.





**Together We Can (TWC)**

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*Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities*