

From Network to Workforce: Expanding Opportunities *in* the Maldives

“Dhiraagu’s purpose is to enrich lives through digital services. Our partnership with IFC plays an important role in supporting this progress, particularly in advancing gender equality and empowering more women to contribute to the digital economy. Together, we are breaking barriers, fostering diversity, and building a more inclusive future where everyone can benefit from the opportunities of a truly connected Maldives.”

ISMAIL RASHEED, MD & CEO, DHIRAAGU

In a country where fewer than 10 percent of ICT graduates are women, Dhiraagu is helping to reshape the talent landscape and delivering better access to jobs - raising the share of women in technical roles by more than 300 percent in just three years.

These results show how targeted, practical actions, backed by leadership, can drive meaningful change and offer lessons for closing gaps in the digital economy.

With 99% of its territory covered by ocean, and communities scattered across 26 atolls and nearly 1,200 islands, the Maldives faces unique connectivity challenges.

Geographic dispersion, small populations, and high infrastructure costs combine to make connecting people with the opportunities of the digital age a significant challenge. These barriers also disproportionately affect women, who often have fewer mobility options and face constraints in traveling between islands for work, training, or business opportunities. The data reflects this imbalance: women's labor force participation is just 41%, compared to 76% for men.¹

While improved digital connectivity is expanding economic opportunities across the Maldives,² persistent structural barriers,³ continue to impact women's economic participation.

As a result, the benefits are not being felt equally, limiting pathways to formal work and career advancement, and often leaving informal workers without adequate social protection or income security.

The opportunity is clear. Increasing women's economic participation to equal that of men's could boost GDP per capita by up to 20%.⁴ Globally, companies with gender-diverse teams are 45% more likely to grow market share and 70% more likely to enter new markets.

Dhiraagu's Commitment to Change

Established in 1988 as the Maldives' sole telecommunications service provider, Dhivehi Raajjeyge Gulhun Public Limited (Dhiraagu) launched its Gender Action Plan on International Women's Day 2021.

The plan sets clear, measurable, and relevant targets to strengthen women's representation across technology, management, and leadership roles.

In 2022, with support from the European Union's Global Gateway ACSIS program (Accelerating Climate-Smart and Sustainable Infrastructure in South Asia), Dhiraagu partnered with IFC to advance the objectives of its 2021 Gender Action Plan and unlock pathways that empower women to connect, thrive and lead.

2021 Gender Action Plan Objectives



Attraction: Increasing visibility and outreach to women, especially in technical roles.



Career Pathways: Establishing structured mentoring and leadership development programs.



Workplace Policies: Introducing flexible work and returnship initiatives.

Through its partnership with IFC, Dhiraagu reviewed its operations using an inclusive framework and implemented data-driven policies and initiatives to cultivate an equitable workplace. To attract more women to its technical apprenticeship program, the company began engaging directly with universities in October 2023, to drive participation and uptake.

At the end of 2024, Dhiraagu had demonstrated a strong focus on creating an equitable workplace through policy innovation, mentorship programmes, and talent pipelines for women in technical areas and leadership.

¹ World Bank, "Gender Data: Maldives," World Bank Gender Data Portal, accessed March 8, 2026.
² Dhiraagu, "Dhiraagu Extends High-Speed Fibre Broadband Connectivity to All Inhabited Islands in the Maldives," press release, Dhiraagu Media Centre
³ International Labour Organization, Decent Work Country Programme for Maldives 2025–2031 (Geneva: ILO, 2025).
⁴ World Bank, "New Data Show Massive, Wider-Than-Expected Global Gender Gap," press release, March 4, 2024.

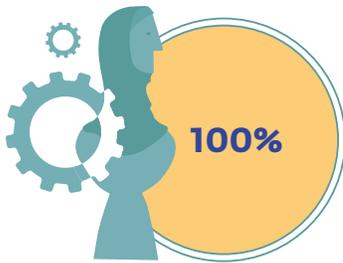
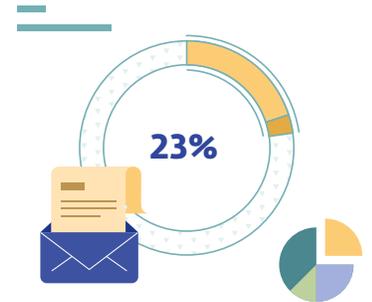
Outcomes at Project Close (2024)

Flexible work policy implemented in December 2023

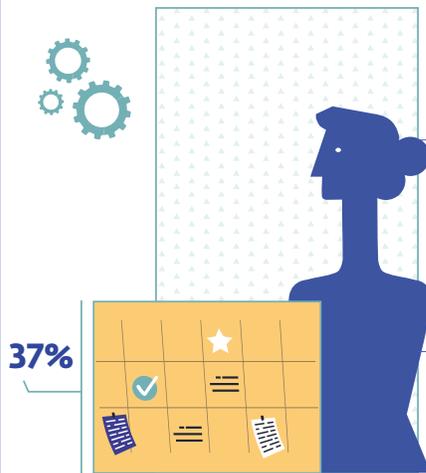


Returnship guidelines published January 2024

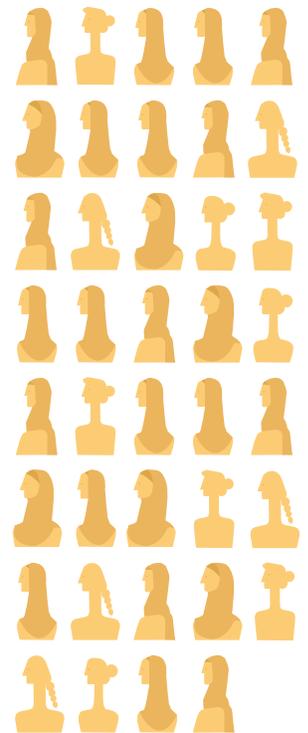
In 2024, **23%** of junior managers were women (up from 20% in 2021)



100% of technical apprentices in 2024 were women (up from 0% in 2021)



In 2024, **37%** of participants in technical awareness sessions were women (up from 0% in 2021)



39 WOMEN

By project completion, **25 women** were employed in technical roles (up from 6 at baseline and above the 2024 target of 20)



Leadership training provided to **12 mentors**



Participation in structured mentoring (up from 0 in 2021 to 39 women by 2024)



The outcome of the partnership showed Dhiraagu had made significant strides in creating more and better jobs for women, with women in technical roles having grown from 6 to 25 women, surpassing the 2024 target. An apprenticeship program was well established, and all technical apprentices in 2024 were women. Structured mentoring saw 39 female employees joining a lean-in mentorship circle by end of 2023, and 12 women receiving leadership training. Flexible work and returnship policies were introduced, supporting career continuity. These initiatives aim to attract, develop, and retain female talent, supporting women's participation in the Maldives' digital economy.

In a region where only 3.2% of students graduated in ICT field in 2019,⁵ and only 10% of ICT graduates in the Maldives are women,⁶ Dhiraagu's approach shows how targeted interventions can contribute meaningful action to addressing gender gaps in the digital economy.

Achieving these results is the outcome of a comprehensive approach, backed by leadership and implemented from the ground up. To operationalize its Gender Action Plan, Dhiraagu implemented a series of initiatives designed to embed gender inclusion across the organisation. These included integrating gender targets into employee goals, linking them to performance bonus outcomes; strengthened governance through Board oversight, and include reporting on progress toward the targets in its annual reports.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme, *The State of Digital in the Maldives: An In-Depth Assessment* (Malé: UNDP, 2025).

⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Graduates by Field of Education (ICT)," via World Bank Gender Data Portal.



“Working on the Gender Action Plan made me realize how important it is for women to support and uplift each other. It’s been a meaningful experience that helped me grow personally and professionally, while helping the company build a more inclusive and empowering workplace.”

AISHATH RASHEEDA, SENIOR MANAGER EMPLOYEE RELATIONS & COMPLIANCE.

The Way Forward for Dhiraagu

Following the 12-month partnership with IFC, Dhiraagu were already seeing the benefits of investing in women within their organization, and wanted to further their investment in the talent essential for the growth of the economy.

In the next phase, Dhiraagu will focus on bridging the digital divide by increasing awareness of digital solutions, expanding employee support to strengthen work–life balance, and continuing to build a future-ready workforce. These efforts aim to sustain gains in women's participation, support workforce retention, and ensure that the benefits of digital transformation are shared more broadly.

From Support to Action

The Dhiraagu Gender Advisory project is supported by funding from the European Union through the Accelerating Climate-Smart and Sustainable Infrastructure in South Asia (ACSIIS) program. By enabling partnerships such as the collaboration with Dhiraagu, and by supporting this case study, the program has helped translate promising ideas into delivered impact.

About IFC

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, creates opportunity for people to escape poverty and improve their lives. We foster sustainable economic growth in developing countries by supporting private sector development, mobilizing private capital, and providing advisory and risk mitigation services to businesses and governments. This report was commissioned by IFC through its Gender (Solutions and Impact) department.

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