Global Women's Leadership: Research & Insight Brief 2026

International Women's Think Tank (IWTT)

Advancing Women and Girls Through Research, Policy, and Innovation

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Executive Summary

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2025) provides a snapshot of women's progress in global leadership. Progress toward gender parity has stalled, and in some sectors, regressed. Women now hold just 31.0% of leadership roles worldwide despite comprising 44.0% of the global workforce. The overall gender gap is 68.8%, showing that women are 31.2 % away from full parity. Full economic equity is now projected to be 123 years away. In the past twenty years, progress has been made in positions for women in technical fields, ministerial occupations, senior officers, managers and legislators, as well as women in parliament. However not one of these areas has shown women increasing in pay more than 17%. Progress has been incremental, but slow.

Still, the value of women in leadership roles for companies and communities has remained the same. According to McKinsey's 2023 "Diversity Matters Even More" report, companies with gender-diverse executive teams are 21% more likely to be profitable. When at least 30% of women in businesses are in leadership roles, the organizations outperform those with less gender diversity (McKinsey, 2023). McKinsey’s (2023) research was not unique.” The Peterson Institute for International Economics (2016) surveyed 21,980 publicly traded companies in 91 countries and found that the presence of more female leaders in top corporate positions correlates with increased profitability.” (Noland, Moran, and Kotchwar, 2016). When women lead, companies prosper.

Likewise, when women are in leadership roles, communities are the beneficiaries. While 30-40% of men earn returns to support families and communities, a full 90% of every dollar a woman earns is invested back into the communities where they live (Women's Economic and Leadership Development, 2025). This impact creates prosperity throughout the community. Ajewumoiolin's (2025) research shows that females in leadership support more equity, sustainability, and community involvement. Women promote economic growth and this is especially true in Africa.

Empirical evidence shows that female leaders invest in equitable policies, sustainable practices, and grassroots outreach, promoting community involvement and economic growth. In developing regions especially, women-led cooperatives and social enterprises directly address poverty and food insecurity

The economic case for women's leadership has never been more compelling. Closing the gender gap in could add up to $28 trillion or 26% to the global GDP. Companies with gender-balanced leadership are 20% more likely to report improved business outcomes. Unfortunately, women are seldom able to move beyond the first promotion and few move beyond the level of vice president. The impact of AI-driven job displacement, and chronic underfunding of women-focused organizations also limit women's advancement at every stage of the pipeline. The International Women's Think Tank seeks to explore ways to address these roadblocks and support women's advancement. This brief synthesizes the most current evidence to identify where IWTT's work is most urgently needed and most strategically positioned to catalyze change.

References

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