

A close-up, profile view of a woman's face, looking towards the left. The image is heavily stylized with a digital, futuristic aesthetic. The face is overlaid with glowing blue and purple circuitry, resembling a circuit board or a neural network. The background is a gradient of purple and blue, with some abstract, flowing patterns. The overall mood is high-tech and innovative.

When the going gets tough, female leaders succeed with agility, resilience and digital competencies

Global Female Leaders Outlook 2025

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Foreword

Dear readers,

We are living in times of fundamental change, marked by economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, new regulatory requirements and a public discourse that is becoming increasingly polarised. The risk of global armed conflicts is also present. At the same time, technological change is progressing at a rapid pace, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence, which – even in times of economic difficulty – is considered a clear investment priority.

For companies, this requires them to be more agile, more adaptable, faster and more strategically forward-thinking than ever before. Leaders need to combine strength, orientation and resilience in this challenging environment. Those taking part in the Global Female Leaders Outlook 2025 demonstrate in impressive fashion the personality traits that are decisive for female leaders today. These include hard work, leadership qualities, strategic thinking and a high level of personal ambition.

Our study this year also confirms just how important digital media has become in terms of achieving professional success. However, this visibility also entails risks. Digital violence is on the rise and extends from verbal harassment to targeted attacks on personal reputation. Many of the leaders surveyed reported having had their own experiences of this.

Nonetheless, a large number of the participants demonstrated a pragmatic approach, a clear stance and remarkable resilience. They utilise digital spaces as an opportunity, while not underestimating the risks involved. It is a balancing act that requires a combination of the utmost professionalism and personal strength.

At the same time, it appears that progress is slowing in crucial areas such as diversity, equality and inclusion, which is a warning sign that companies should take seriously. This is because differing perspectives and experiences represent enrichment for companies, especially in times of major transformation.

The Global Female Leaders Outlook 2025 is the latest in our series of studies. Since 2018, almost 5,000 female leaders from more than 50 countries have taken part. We'd like to thank all the top female managers who shared their perspectives with us and hope that we can use these insights to contribute to more resilient organisations, more inclusive management structures and a more equal future.

We hope you find it an inspiring read.

Angelika Huber-Straßer

Regional Head South, KPMG AG
Wirtschaftsprüfungsgesellschaft



Profiles of top female managers – who are our global female leaders?

475

participants
from 46 countries



33%



have more than 20 years of
management experience



Approximately half work
for companies that generate
an annual revenue of at least

USD 500 million

– and a good 10% report more than USD 10 billion



C-level positions dominate, with

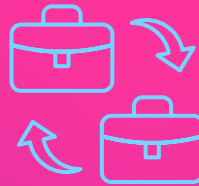
46%

in top management

More than

two thirds work

at least predominantly in the office



82%

have changed companies
at least once to take their
next career step

25%

work in finance, making it
the most represented area



74%

are mothers

Two thirds live
in a dual-income household with
full-time working partners





01

Economic outlook and strategy

How are companies reacting to geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainties?

Optimism about company performance and national stability defy global uncertainties

For top managers, the medium-term economic outlook continues to present an area of conflicting influences: despite a volatile global economy coupled with global uncertainties, their confidence in their own industry and companies remains stable. What is striking is that the participants were most optimistic when it comes to the medium-term growth prospects for their own company. This is also reflected in the exceedingly positive outlook for company earnings and the expectations of a growing workforce. This suggests that companies are able to realise their own potential despite the external uncertainties.

Seeing development opportunities in their own country has a stabilising effect and reinforces optimism in their own company. Almost half of the respondents expressed confidence, representing the second-highest confidence rating for the company dimension since the survey was first conducted in 2018. However, the global economy paints a different picture: here, only around one third expressed

9 out of 10

respondents anticipate an increase in revenue over the next three years.

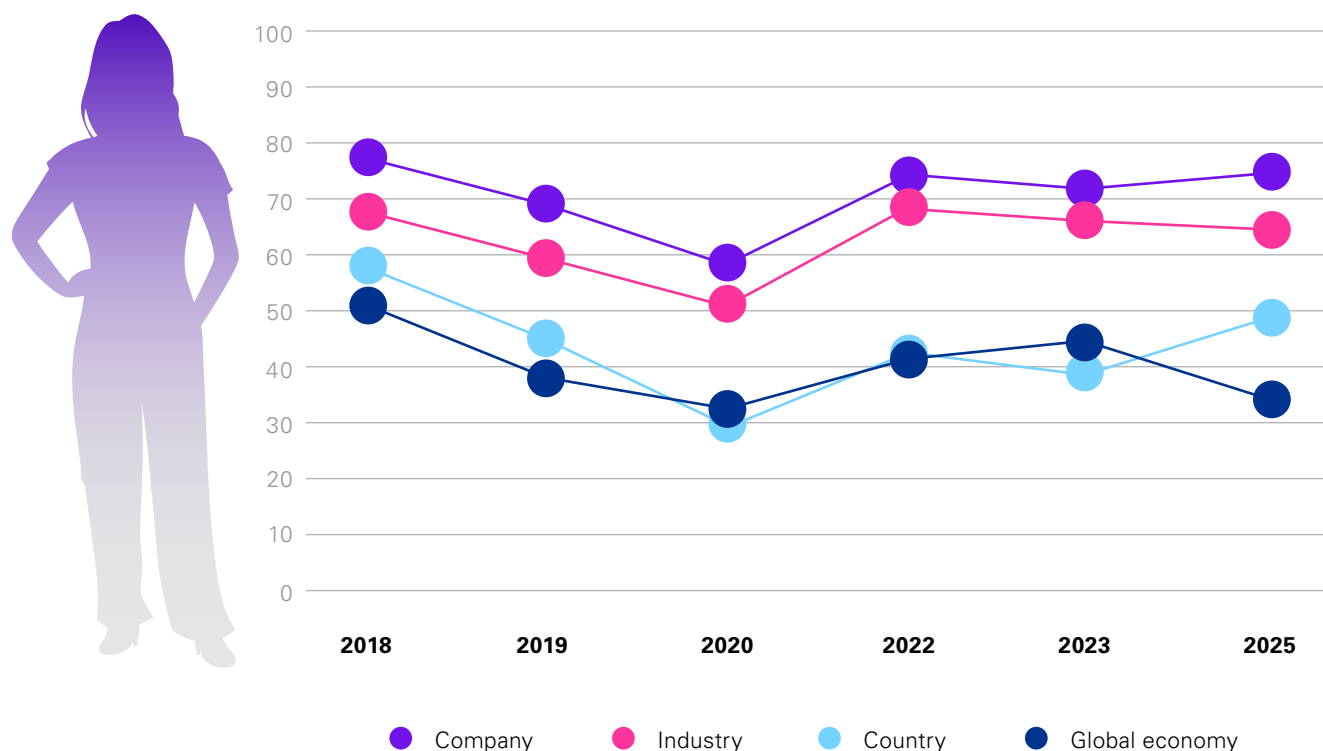
confidence, a figure that was previously only undercut in the coronavirus year of 2020. Overall, the extreme values in both dimensions reflect today's special and challenging situation.

Confidence in the growth prospects varies from region to region: Asian top managers are significantly more optimistic than their Western European counterparts, who are more sceptical, particularly with regard to the growth prospects of their own countries.

Figure 1

Share of top female decision-makers with confidence in growth prospects, year-on-year

Figures are displayed in percentages



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

38% of respondents consider concerns surrounding potential global armed conflicts to be one of the three greatest current challenges.

Most important challenges: geopolitics and economic uncertainty

The top female managers consider the biggest immediate challenges to be geopolitical complexity and economic uncertainty. These two factors also determine the pessimistic assessments regarding the global economic situation. There is also growing concern about the possibility of an armed conflict – a risk that almost 40% of respondents cited as one of the most pressing concerns. In its Global Risk Report 2025, the World Economic Forum also warns that armed conflict represents the most likely trigger for a global crisis and describes the situation as the most tense it has been since the Cold War. Nearly two thirds of the participants feel that their companies are facing increased pressure due to the current geopolitical complexity and the many challenges.

Regulatory focus

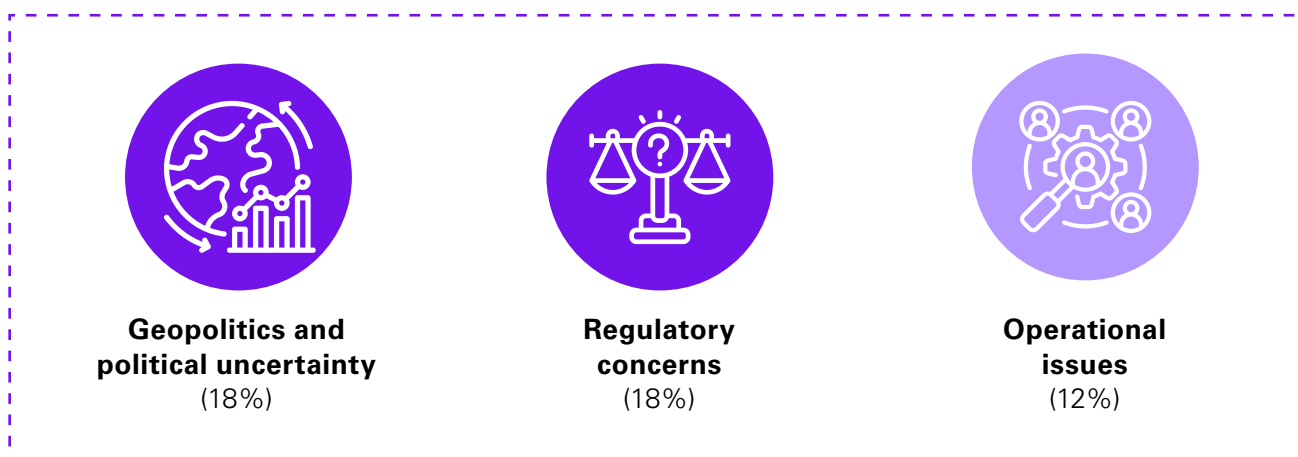
Also looking forward to the next three years, top managers believe that geopolitical uncertainties pose the greatest risks to corporate growth. This is further exacerbated by regulatory hurdles. Increasing bureaucratisation is a particular cause for concern. This is an issue that is particularly important to top female decision-makers in Western Europe and one that has already been a key issue in previous years. In contrast, the male CEOs in the KPMG Global CEO Outlook were more likely to cite supply chains as a key risk, while this aspect was barely mentioned in the Global Female Leaders Outlook.

By contrast, however, human resources issues such as the “war for talent” and changing working patterns were significantly less likely to be perceived as a risk. Climate risks were also mentioned less frequently by top female managers in 2025, contradicting the assessments of the World Economic Forum, which continues to classify environmental issues as a key threat to global stability.

Human resources and climate-related aspects are no longer among the top five risks for the next three years.

Figure 2

Top three greatest risks to corporate growth over the next three years

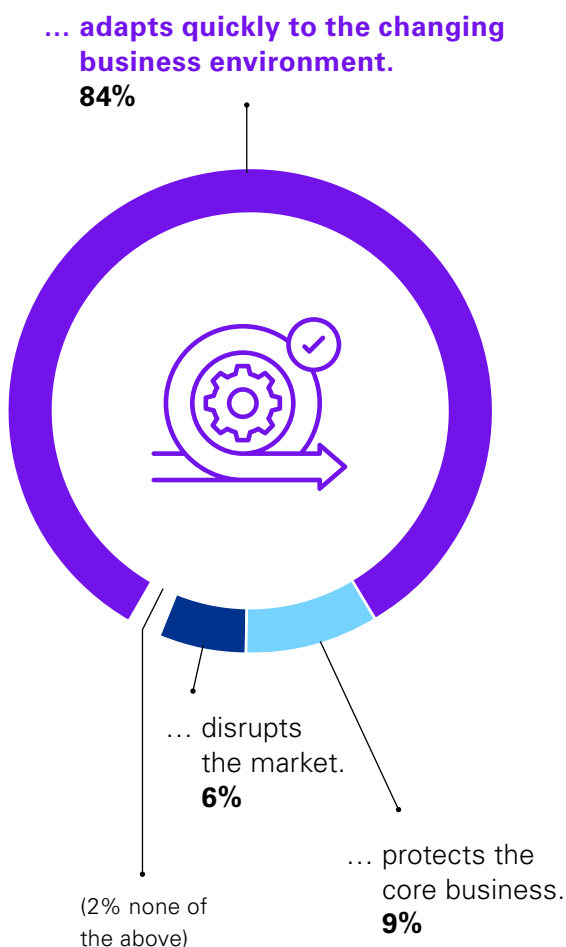


Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Figure 3

Above all, in an uncertain business climate, a truly resilient business is one that ...

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Agility as a success factor

In a volatile environment, the majority of top managers consider agility and adaptability to be key success factors. To them, resilience means above all being able to adapt quickly to change, i.e. acting less disruptively or protecting the core business. The ability to react quickly and remain agile are both essential when it comes to ensuring success amid the current polycrisis.

Our perspective



Despite global tensions and increasing uncertainty in the geopolitical environment, a large number of top female managers remain confident with regard to their companies. Expectations in terms of revenue growth and staff expansion indicate that entrepreneurial resilience is increasingly based on the ability to actively shape one's own operating environment, even when faced with adverse external conditions.

Here, agility has become the cornerstone of strategic resilience. Companies with a flexible organisation, the ability to take quick decisions and a culture geared towards change have a structural advantage. In a climate of multiple crises, adaptability has long ceased to be seen as simply a reaction, but is now a key prerequisite for sustainable growth.

At the same time, geopolitical risks and regulatory complexity are increasingly taking centre stage, particularly in Europe. Concerns about increasing bureaucracy and interference in entrepreneurial freedom highlight the need for companies to be aware at an early stage of regulatory developments, such as the EU AI Act or ESG requirements. Acting with foresight and thinking strategically not only helps control risks, but also allows companies to actively make use of regulatory requirements to gain a competitive advantage.

Establishing geopolitical resilience is also essential: having diversified locations and resilient supply chains and conducting scenario planning are central building blocks when it comes to remaining capable of acting, even in the face of unexpected external shocks.

What is noticeable is the declining focus on HR and climate risks. Despite their continued long-term importance, they are currently attributed less priority. It is important to strategically anchor these future topics and to embed them in corporate risk management, not only to stay ahead of regulatory developments, but also to remain competitive over the long term.

Companies are facing the challenge of combining short-term resilience measures with long-term strategic foresight. Those that manage to combine agility with stability, efficiency with sustainability and compliance with strategic added value will remain future-oriented, even in an increasingly complex environment.

Why is artificial intelligence a top investment priority in times of crisis?

Change in strategy from employee development to investment in technology

For the first time in five years, the investment focus among the top female managers surveyed in 2025 is on the acquisition and implementation of new technologies, particularly generative AI. Compared to the survey from 2023, there is a difference of 30 percentage points in the investment focus on employee development, which is a clear signal of a shift in priorities. Only in Asia does employee development remain a priority. At a time of multiple crises, many companies are thus relying on technology as a key lever for growth and transformation.

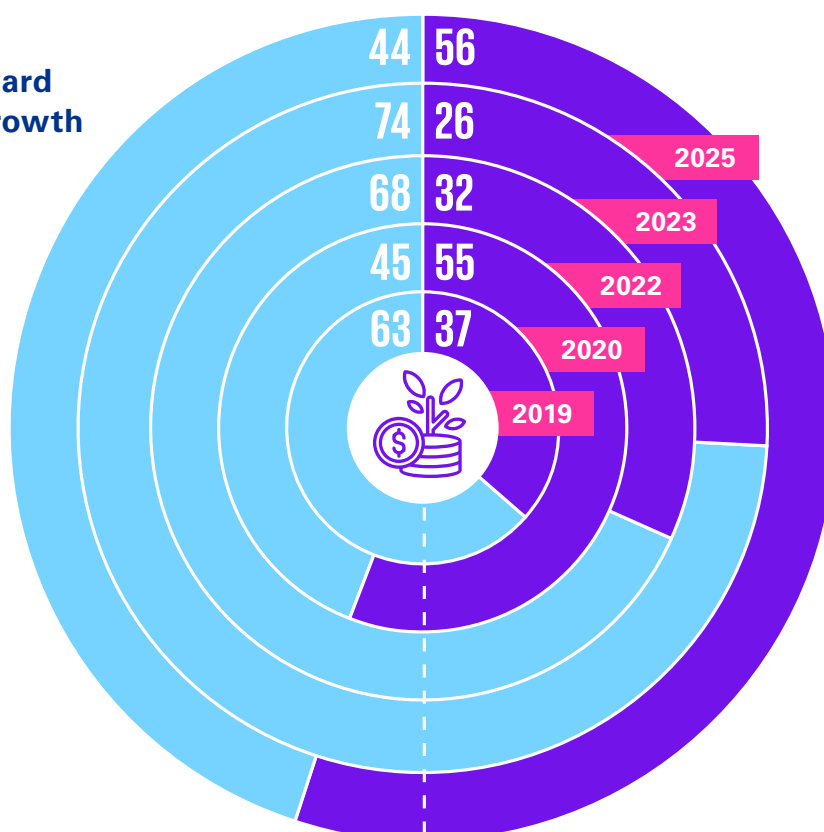
Artificial intelligence remains a priority – even in times of crisis

Despite economic challenges, generative AI remains a main investment priority among the top decision-makers surveyed, and their expectations are clear: almost two thirds anticipate a return on their investment within three years, with one in five expecting this to happen as early as next year. At the same time, 40% of respondents believe that one of the greatest current challenges lies in the rapid and effective integration of generative AI, with pressure to act being accordingly high.

Figure 4 Investment priorities with regard to achieving the company's growth and transformation targets

Figures displayed in percentages

- We are placing more capital investments in buying and implementing new technology
- We are placing more capital investments in developing our workforce's skills and capabilities



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

More than half

prioritise AI investment in times of crisis.

Figure 5

Expectations regarding the impact of AI implementation on employment

- 80% expect that **generative AI will not fundamentally impact the number of jobs**, but will require upskilling and redeployment of existing resources.
- 15% expect that **generative AI will eliminate more jobs** than it creates.
- 5% expect that **generative AI will create more jobs** than it eliminates.

Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Human and machine: employment remains stable, collaboration is in focus

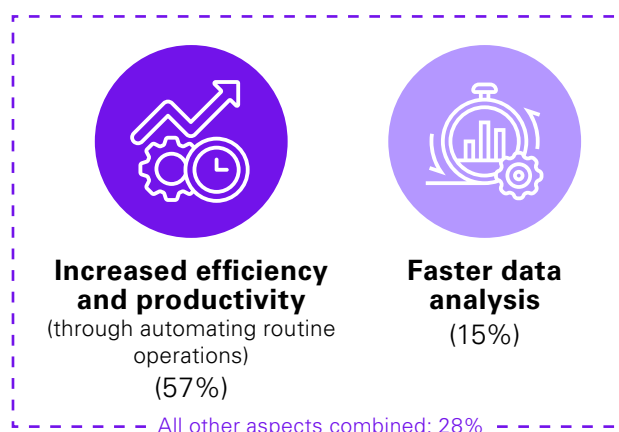
Despite human resources issues losing priority to technology investments, many decision-makers are aware that the implementation of AI can only be successful if the company environment is conducive. Most of the respondents do not expect a reduction in jobs due to the implementation of AI, but rather a stable employment situation accompanied by an increasing need for retraining. The goal is to create a productive interplay between humans and machines, and to mitigate demographic challenges. However, differences exist between regions today: while employees in Asia, Northern Europe and Oceania already have a good understanding and a high level of acceptance of AI, there is still room for improvement, particularly in South America and Southern Europe.

AI as a tool for optimising processes and increasing productivity

The expectations for AI implementation are clearly articulated: the focus is on increasing efficiency and productivity, particularly through enhanced automation. Following at a significant distance is the desire for faster data analysis. These results demonstrate that companies primarily view AI as a tool for process optimisation and cost reduction and for strengthening competitiveness. It is seen less as a driver of innovation and more as a tool for maximising efficiency.

Figure 6

Greatest advantage of AI implementation for companies



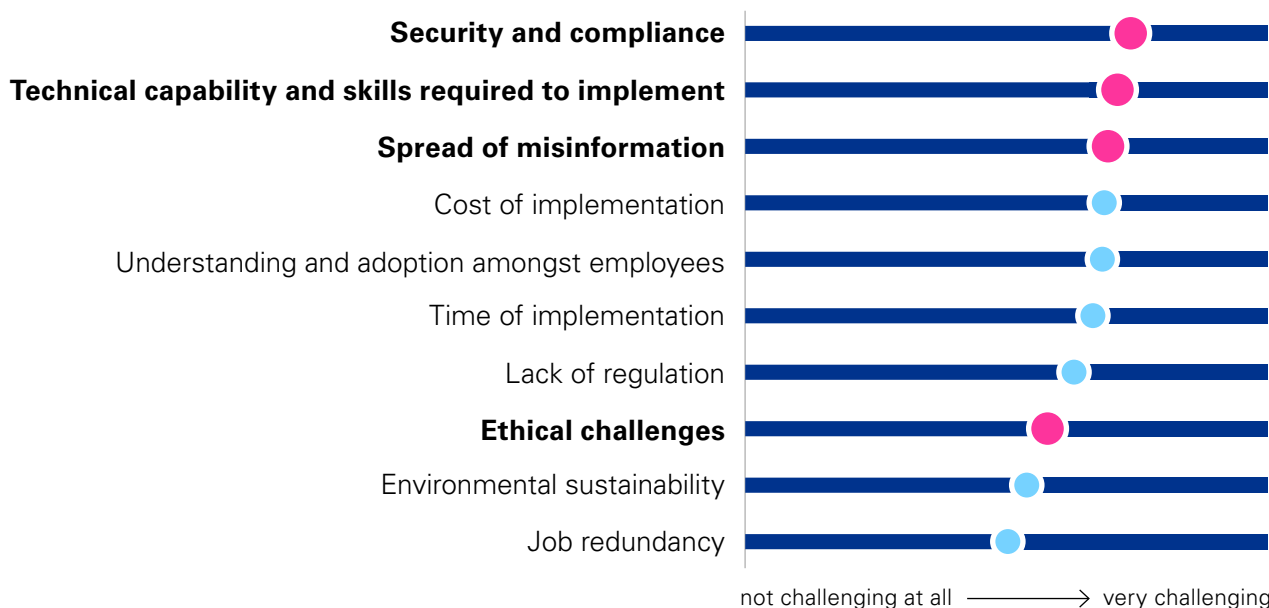
Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

AI implementation is complex – competence, security and trusted AI as key factors

The introduction of generative AI brings about a variety of challenges – primarily in the areas of cyber-security and compliance – and a lack of skills, according to respondents. The fear of spreading misinformation (fake news) ranks third. Ethical issues are perceived as much less of an obstacle, clearly contradicting other surveys. These results, along with insights from other management perspectives, such as those reported in the CEO Outlook, highlight the need to implement trusted AI (i.e. transparent, fair and comprehensible systems) in order to build trust, prevent discrimination and ensure societal acceptance.

Figure 7

Greatest challenges for companies when implementing AI

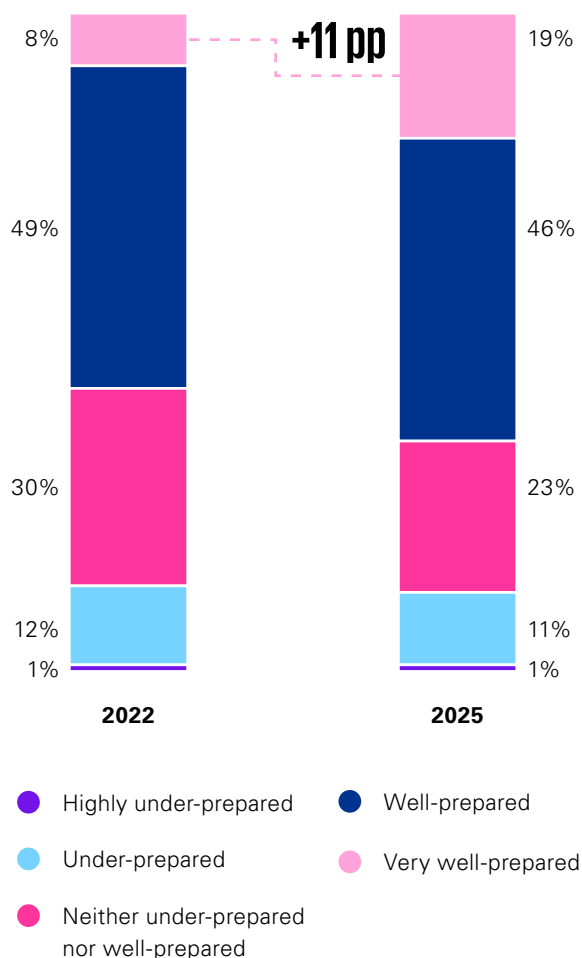


Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Improvement in cyber-security

Compared to the 2023 survey, participants no longer perceive cyber-security as one of the greatest risks. At the same time, confidence in their company's own defence capabilities continues to rise: nearly two thirds of respondents considered themselves to be at least "well-prepared" for cyber-attacks. Particularly striking is the continuous increase in companies that classify themselves as "very well-prepared", with their share having more than doubled in recent years. Meanwhile, the percentage of those who consider themselves poorly prepared for cyber-threats remains almost unchanged. The positive development is therefore primarily attributable to companies that are already in a strong position. As a result, a growing disparity is emerging: while some organisations are continuously enhancing their resilience, others risk falling behind.

Figure 8
Degree of preparedness for cyber-attacks



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Our perspective



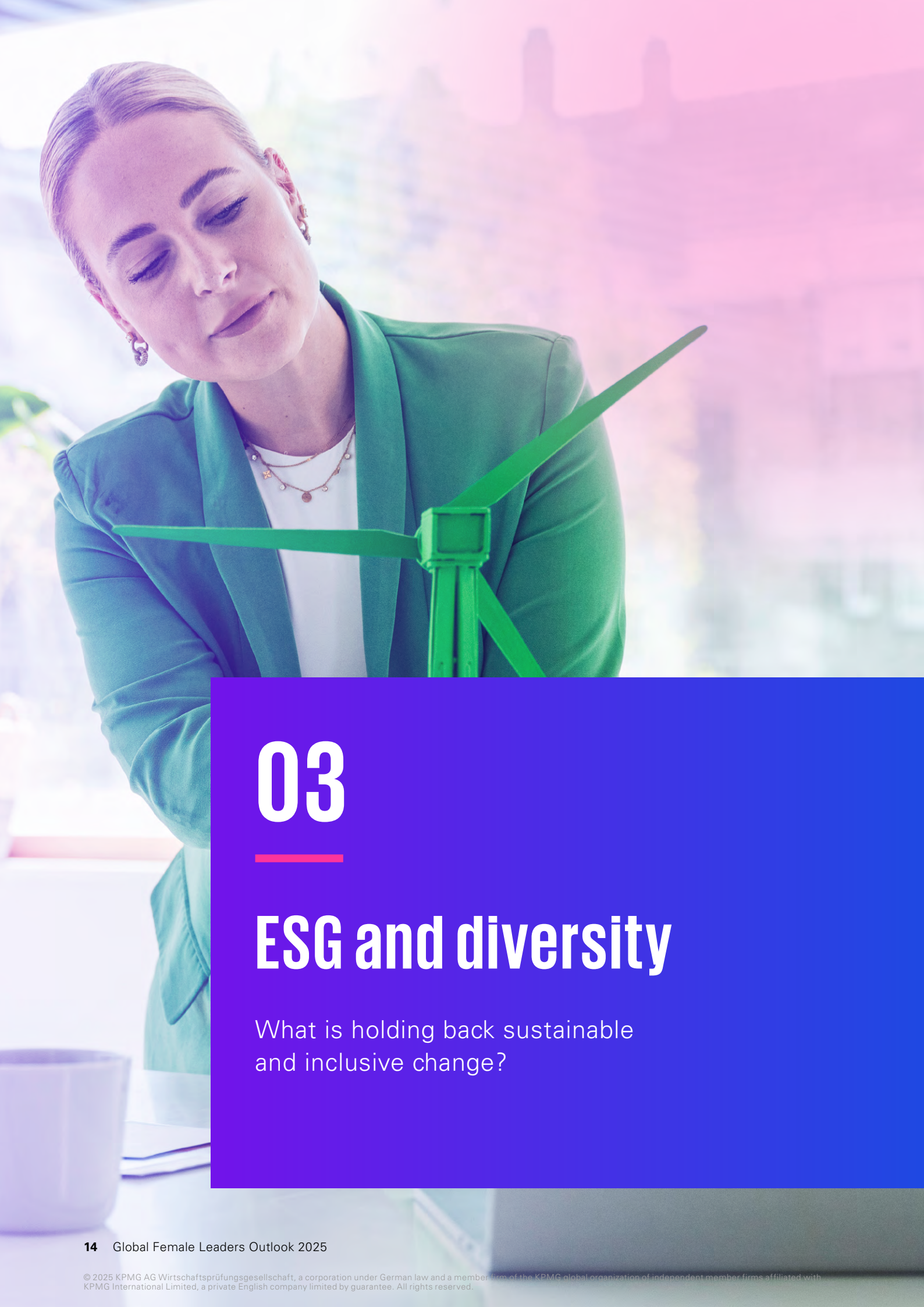
New technologies, especially generative AI, represent a pivotal shift in strategy: for the first time in years, companies are shifting their focus from employee training and development to investing in new technologies. Here, the focus is less on radical innovation and more on the practical application of technology to enhance efficiency and to automate and stabilise operational processes, particularly during periods of economic volatility.

This makes it all the more important to strategically align investments in technology. It is crucial to have clear objectives, robust implementation models and scalable applications that measurably contribute to value creation. The focus should be on solutions that simplify processes, use resources more efficiently and, at the same time, reduce organisational complexity.

The introduction of generative AI not only changes business processes, but also affects how humans and machines interact. A noticeable reduction in jobs is not expected, but quite the opposite: the working world is becoming more diverse, new roles are emerging and further training is becoming a determinant of success. Companies need to proactively drive this transformation by creating new roles, cultivating a corporate culture that builds trust and empowering employees at all levels.

The sustainable use of AI also requires clear ethical guidelines. Despite the fact that many decision-makers currently perceive ethical issues to be of little relevance, trusted AI is a fundamental requirement for the long-term acceptance of AI. Transparency, fairness and comprehensibility need to be integral components of every AI initiative, integrated into governance, organisational structures and system architecture.

At the same time, there is a growing disparity in cyber-security: while some companies are continuously improving their defence mechanisms, others are at risk of being left behind. It is essential that companies which perceive themselves as being in a good position do not fall into a false sense of security. Today more than ever, a resilient cyber-security framework demands a holistic approach and continuous further development, particularly in the context of increasing AI-based applications.



03

ESG and diversity

What is holding back sustainable and inclusive change?

Creating value from ESG remains a challenge

Despite years of endeavour, increasing the value of ESG initiatives remains a key challenge. The most significant impact of the ESG strategy over the next three years will be seen in the improvement of customer relationships and brand perception, while measurable financial effects will scarcely play a role. Although ESG creates added value in terms of communication, it is rarely perceived as an instrument for direct value creation. This suggests that the strategic integration of ESG into corporate value creation continues to be insufficiently implemented.

For 42%, the ESG strategy has the greatest impact on building customer relationships and positive brand association.

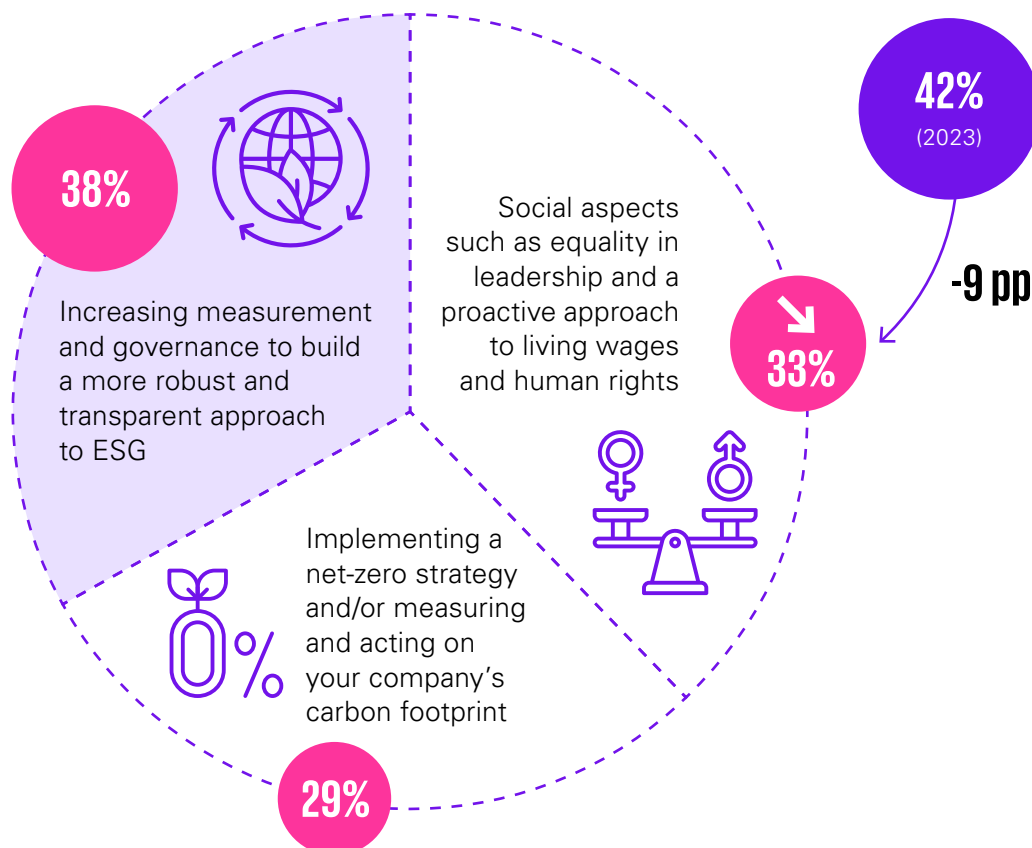
Governance and measurability need to catch up – Net-Zero is falling behind

The lack of focus on achieving net-zero emissions, one of the core demands presents a further problem area. Global carbon emissions are still too high and the decarbonisation of supply chains is complex, but the lack of necessary framework conditions is nonetheless considered a key aspect in tackling net-zero emissions comprehensively. Precise measurement and clear governance are crucial when it comes to effectively monitoring and reducing carbon emissions. This prioritisation is causing the actual reduction of emissions to fade into the background. Less than half of the top managers surveyed are confident that their company will be able to achieve its own net-zero targets by 2030.

When it comes to the biggest levers for ESG strategy in three years' time, social aspects such as a clear diversity strategy or investments in living wages are less of a focus compared to the GFLO 2023, and this trend could continue. With the new US administration, ESG issues have changed, but this trend is not (yet) visible in the data of North American respondents.

Figure 9

Greatest levers for the own ESG strategy in three years



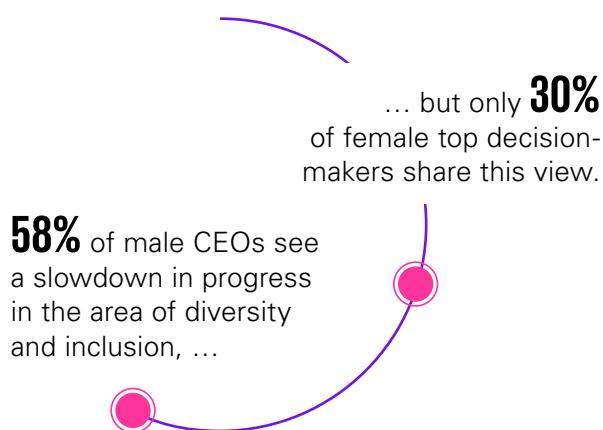
Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

ESG losing importance as a strategic investment

Compared to innovative technology topics such as generative AI, ESG is becoming less important in times of crisis. While more than half of companies consider AI investments to be a top priority even in difficult times, the same is not true for ESG investments. In times of crisis or when other business areas require attention, the respondents find it difficult to maintain and prioritise investments in ESG. In comparison to previous surveys, this trend of management prioritising other risks is gradually continuing (see 01 – Economic outlook & strategy).

Diversity and inclusion are stagnating

The respondents are increasingly reporting stagnation in the area of diversity and inclusion. Since the last survey two years ago, the data shows no progress. Particularly noteworthy is that although female leaders rate progress in terms of diversity and inclusion more positively overall than their male CEO colleagues, as before, they have a more negative view of developments over the medium term: only 58% (vs 70% of male CEOs) are confident that efforts will be intensified in the next three years – a significant decline compared to 2023, when 76% of female top decision-makers were still confident.



Quotas and targets under fire

Quotas and targets to ensure sustained diversity remain an area of tension. Opinions differ on this: More than one third of those surveyed view them critically, while another good third believe they are necessary. In contrast, the picture is clear when it comes to the crucial factors for professional success among top female decision-makers: quotas and targets are again far behind, ranking in last place. This suggests that alternative and complementary approaches will be necessary to achieve broader acceptance and sustainable change.

72%

concur that gender parity at C-level will facilitate reaching growth objectives.

Bias and discrimination

Nearly two thirds of the participants state that they have experienced bias and discrimination in their working environment in the past three years. This figure remains unchanged compared to the 2023 survey, which indicates little improvement in the working environment.

An unresolved problem is the gender pay gap. Of those surveyed, 53% report that there is transparency regarding equal pay in their companies, so we see at least a slight improvement in this respect compared to 2023. In the regional analysis, it is noticeable that top female leaders in Northern Europe experience significantly less bias and discrimination and also have significantly more transparency on equal pay. Nowhere else do women rate these aspects so positively.

Exploring the gender pay gap:

The gender pay gap describes the average difference in income between men and women – a key indicator of structural imbalances in the employment market.

In the USA, the gender pay gap is 17%, which means that women there earn 17% less than men on average.¹ In Germany, until 2024, this difference amounted to around 16% and was therefore above the European average of 12%.²

However, a look at other European countries shows a more varied picture: in southern European countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal, the pay gap is significantly lower, with values between 2% and 9%. Luxembourg is particularly noteworthy: here women even earn 0.9% more than men on average. A clear trend can also be seen emerging: as the level of education increases, the pay gap widens.²

¹ Destatis, 2025

² Payscale, 2025

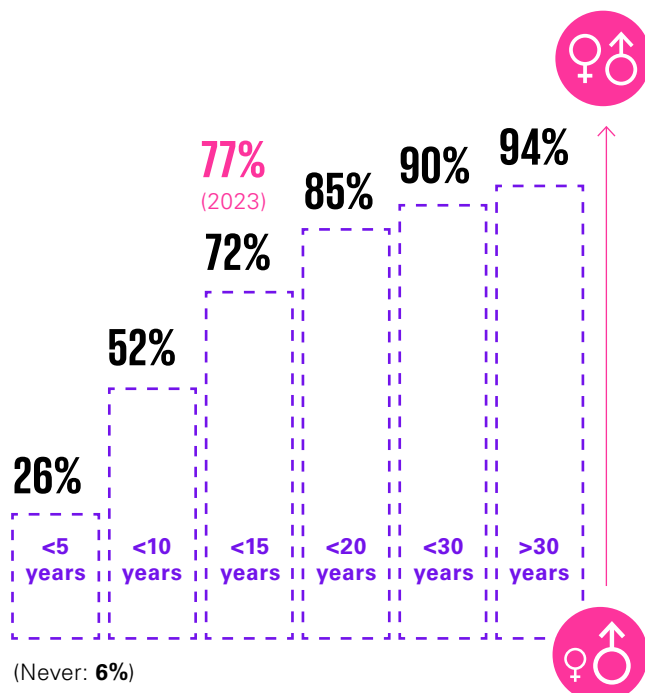
62% have experienced bias and discrimination in the work environment in the past three years.

47% still have no transparency on equal pay.

Gender equality on boards as a long-term goal

Gender equality at the board level is considered very important. Almost three quarters of the respondents agree that achieving this goal will lead to better company performance and higher growth targets. Interestingly, this consensus is greater among male CEOs than among female top decision-makers. At the same time, the timeline is extending: although two years have passed since the last survey, slightly fewer female decision-makers now believe that this goal can be achieved within the next 15 years.

Figure 10
Expected time horizon until gender equality on the board is achieved



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Our perspective



ESG remains a strategic imperative – but a significant gap between aspiration and reality remains. In an environment of multiple crises, ESG initiatives are less of a priority, particularly compared to technology-driven investments. While the communication benefits are recognised, there is often a lack of systematic anchoring in corporate value creation – a risk that could cost companies competitiveness in the long term.

An integrated approach is required to effectively anchor ESG in the company. It must be managed by top management – as a cross-cutting issue that permeates all areas of the business. ESG must not end where operational constraints begin. Rather, it requires robust KPIs, transparent reporting structures and clear governance to make progress measurable – when it comes to both climate and social factors such as diversity and equality of opportunities.

At the same time, ESG must be considered a business case: sustainable positioning, brand loyalty, customer confidence and access to capital markets increasingly depend on credible ESG standards. In practice, this means that companies need to secure resources for ESG even in difficult times and must build up their resilience in this area in a targeted manner – not least in order to increase the value of the company.

Change is not driven by intention, but by rigorous implementation. Those who downgrade ESG in times of crisis run the risk of underestimating societal dynamics, regulatory developments and market requirements. Companies must now recognise ESG for its true role: a key driver of future viability and value creation.



04

Female careers in transition

What qualities really count in a complex environment?

Hard work and leadership qualities as success factors

When it comes to achieving equal opportunities, it is important to understand which factors for career success are rated most highly by today's top female leaders. In a tough economic environment, qualities such as hard work (particularly in Southern Europe, North America and Oceania) and a high level of personal ambition (particularly in Western Europe) are gaining in importance. While the focus on strategic thinking and leadership skills established in recent editions remains, the significant increase in the importance of hard work (+77% compared to 2023)

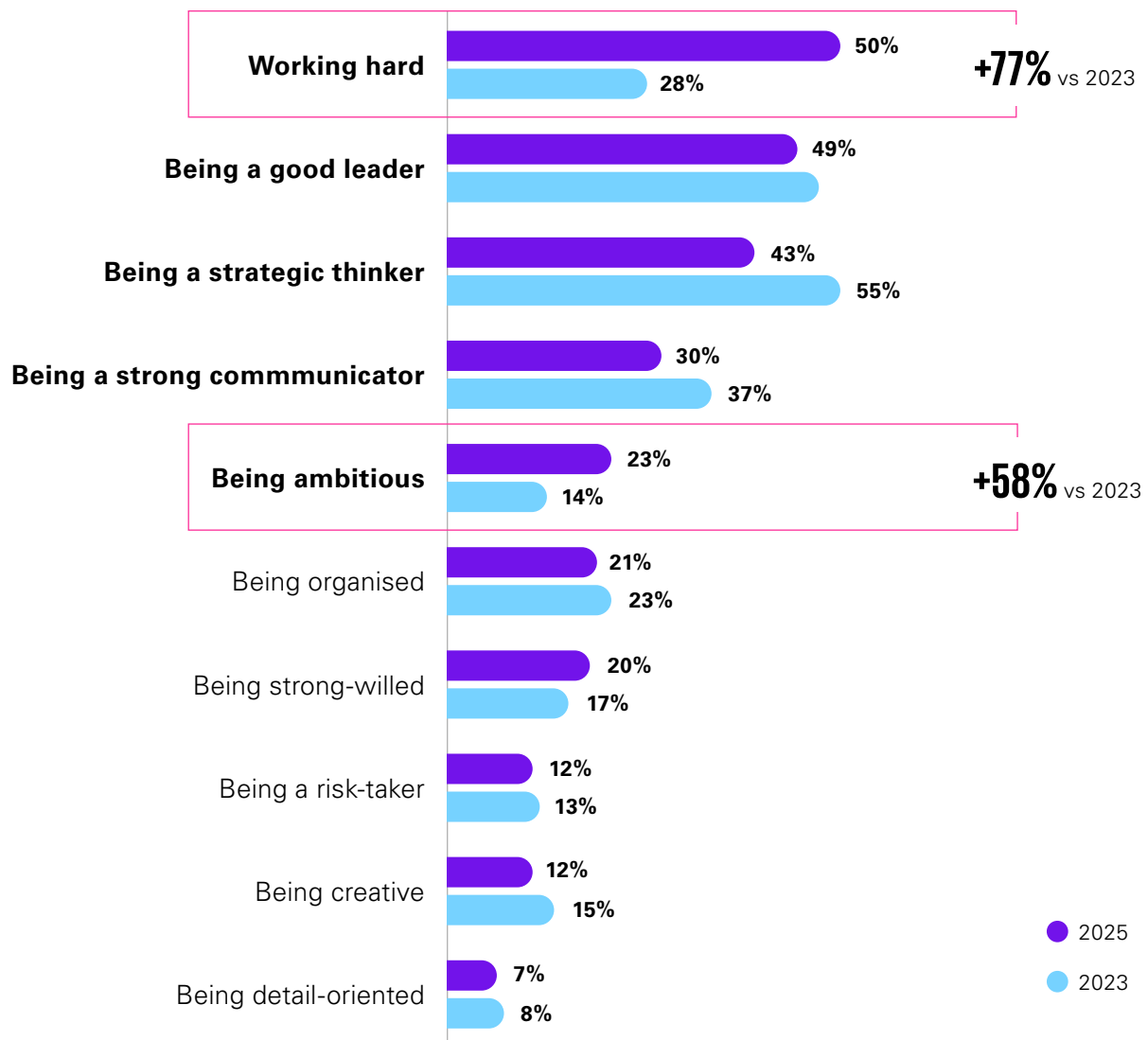
and personal ambition (+58% compared to 2023) shows that those who succeed in difficult times are those who act with determination and perseverance. This underscores the critical role of personal resilience in challenging times.

When the going gets tough,
the tough get going.

Figure 11

Personality traits with the greatest impact on professional success

Multiple selections were possible



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025



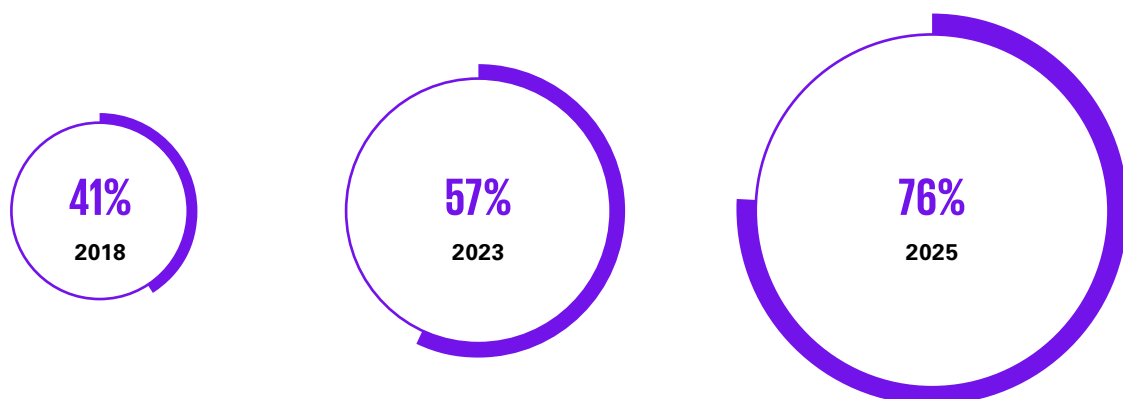
Personal network as a key to success

Another career success factor is the increasing importance of personal networks. More than three quarters of those surveyed highlighted the importance of having a strong network – a significant increase compared to recent years. This trend

highlights how important it has become for female leaders to be able to fall back on a solid network in order to overcome professional hurdles and make use of opportunities for promotion. This development is particularly true for top female leaders in Western Europe and Oceania.

Figure 12

Trend in the proportion of respondents who consider their personal network to be of great importance to their professional success



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Internal career steps are becoming increasingly important

While, in the past, women were more likely to change companies to take the next step in their career, today only 25% are planning to change companies, compared to 35% in 2018. This could indicate that there has been improvement in the professional environment within many companies and that women are beginning to see more opportunities within their current organisations. Younger women in particular tend to plan their next career steps internally, while older leaders are more likely to consider moving to a new employer.

82% needed to switch companies to advance in their careers.

Generational differences in career planning

Younger participants (under 40) are significantly more likely to say they have no clear idea of their next career move – almost half of this group are unsure about their professional future. In contrast, older leaders (aged 50+) have a clearer idea of what their next step should be, possibly indicating a generational difference in career planning.

Our perspective



Our findings show that career advancement among women continues to be shaped by structural challenges. Strong leadership, strategic thinking and communication skills remain decisive success factors. In times of economic difficulty, hard work, commitment and increased personal ambitions must also be taken into account. Networks are becoming increasingly vital: they are essential for women's professional success, as they help in overcoming obstacles and utilising opportunities for promotion.

In order for women to pursue sustainable careers, it is clear that more than just individual effort is required; it also demands structural improvements. Transparent career paths within organisations are crucial to retaining women over the long term and promoting their career advancement. Biases in career paths need to be eliminated.

Furthermore, networks and visibility require targeted support. Mentoring and sponsoring programmes are key instruments to help women network better, both within their company and externally, thus increasing their opportunities. These programmes should be sustainably anchored in the corporate culture.

Companies should also recognise the different needs of their leaders and should offer flexible working time models and individual career paths. This not only strengthens loyalty, but also the resilience and adaptability of organisations.

Finally, fostering leadership skills and personal resilience is crucial. Programmes to strengthen self-leadership and ambition prepare women for the challenges of demanding work environments.

All in all, it is clear that women have the potential to be particularly successful in companies if their individual achievements are enhanced by a supportive and inclusive corporate culture. Companies that foster this kind of environment allow their female leaders to realise their full potential and make the most of their skills. Not only does this strategic approach promote the success of women, it also enriches the entire company.

A woman with short grey hair is looking down at a smartphone. She is wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt with a small black pattern. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. A large blue rectangle is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, containing the page number and title.

05

Violence against women in the digital sphere

What risks does a digital presence pose
for female leaders?

Digital presence as a necessity and a risk

Nearly all the top female leaders surveyed use social media, and the vast majority of them also use it for professional purposes. As seen in the previous chapter, it is particularly important for networking with other professionals, increasing external visibility and conducting marketing and branding activities for oneself or the company. Nowadays, having a digital presence is a must when it comes to professional success, especially in leadership positions.

81% use social media for professional purposes, with over one third using it regularly.

However, it is precisely this visibility that poses risks. Nearly one third of the women surveyed reported having experienced violence in a digital environment or having observed it in their own personal environment. This entails different forms of violence, including verbal harassment, defamation, hate speech and even targeted cyberbullying. The problem is real, and it has a severe impact on those affected – especially given that digital attacks are often carried out unexpectedly and anonymously.

Background on digital violence against women

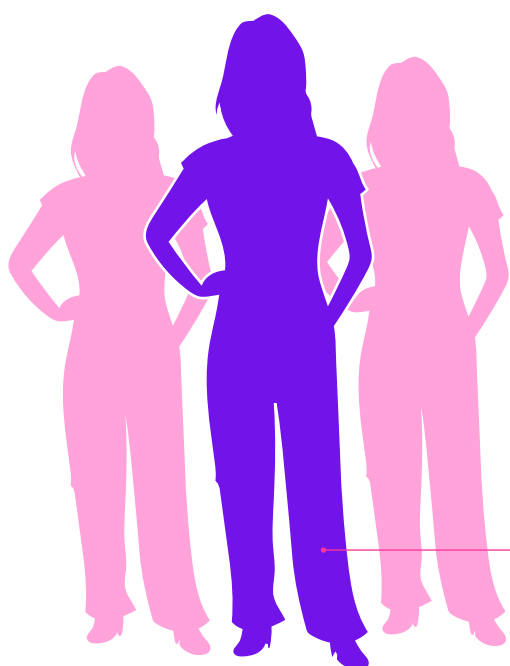
Women in leadership roles are more frequently exposed to digital violence than the average woman. According to a survey by Women Political Leaders (WPL), 85% of the female politicians surveyed worldwide reported their own experiences – with a high number of unreported cases.¹ Such attacks are often aimed at undermining credibility and forcing women out of public discourse spaces. The resulting “chilling effect” often leads to a withdrawal from media visibility and professional presence – with negative consequences for diversity, innovation and societal participation.²

With a directive adopted in June 2024, the EU has created a binding legal framework to combat gender-based cyber-violence for the first time. The directive obliges member states to prosecute online violence as a criminal offence, expand protective measures for those affected and strengthen digital education and prevention.³

¹ WPL, 2024

² GIWPS, 2024

³ Bundeskanzleramt, 2024



Almost
one in three women surveyed had already experienced digital violence or observed it in their immediate personal environment.

Figure 13

Forms of digital violence reported by the top decision-makers

Multiple selections were possible



41%

Harassment:

Unwanted and persistent behaviour causing distress, including sending threatening or abusive messages

24%

Trolling:

Deliberately posting provocative, offensive or inflammatory comments to elicit reactions

37%

Defamation:

False statements made online that damage someone's reputation

21%

Catfishing:

Creating a fake identity or profile to deceive someone, often for malicious purposes

35%

Hate speech:

Online communication that expresses hatred or encourages violence against a person or group based on attributes such as gender, race, religion or sexual orientation

15%

Stalking:

Repeated and unwanted attention and surveillance, often involving tracking someone's online activities

31%

Impersonation:

Creating fake profiles or accounts to impersonate someone and cause harm or mislead others

10%

Threats:

Expressions of intent to cause physical or psychological harm

29%

Spamming:

Sending unsolicited and often repetitive messages, which can be used to harass or overwhelm the recipient

9%

Doxxing:

Publishing private or identifying information about someone without their consent

26%

Cyberbullying:

Repeated, aggressive behaviour intended to harm

4%

Sextortion:

Threatening to distribute private, sensitive material unless demands (often of a sexual or financial nature) are met

2%

Revenge porn:

Sharing or threatening to share intimate images or videos without consent

Data includes only those who have personally experienced or observed digital violence in their immediate environment.

Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Violence from digital anonymity and the professional environment

These attacks do not only come from anonymous strangers – although this is true in most cases – but also from the direct professional environment. A significant proportion of those affected report digital attacks by colleagues, leaders or even subordinates. This makes it clear that the risk not only comes from the anonymous online world, but can also manifest itself in the work context.

68%

of those affected by digital violence identify strangers as the perpetrators, ...

... but **36%**

have also been victims of digital violence at the hands of colleagues or subordinates.



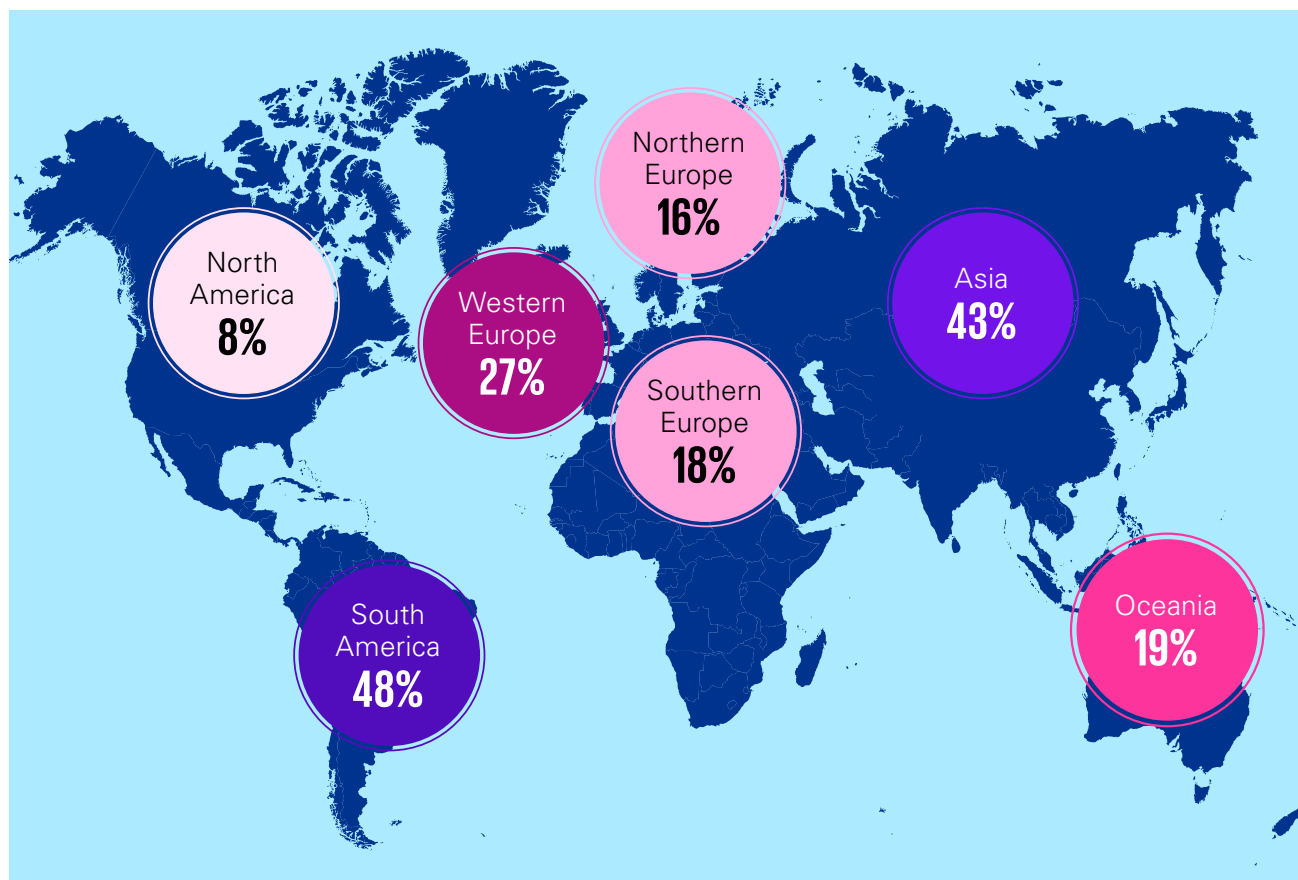
There are also major regional differences: while almost half of the respondents in Asia and South America have either been affected themselves or have observed cases in their immediate environment, the figures in North America are significantly lower. Here, none of the respondents stated that they had personally been victims of digital violence, and only a small proportion had observed such incidents personally.

57% report having perceived an increase in cases of digital violence against women over the past three years.

52% see this development as being particularly prevalent among women in leadership positions or in other positions with increased public visibility.

Figure 14

Regional distribution of digital violence against women reported by top decision-makers



Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

Dealing with digital attacks: resilience and pragmatism

It is astonishing how resilient many of the women affected are in dealing with their experiences. In most cases, perpetrators are blocked or the incidents are reported on the respective platform. Only rarely are legal steps taken or is professional help sought. This may reflect a pragmatic coping strategy on the part of many top female leaders – but it could also indicate that those affected see obstacles or little chance of success in defending themselves more comprehensively. Depending on the country and jurisdiction, legal action can also be associated with uncertainties or considerable hurdles.

Nevertheless, the emotional impact should not be underestimated: many of those affected in our survey reported feeling unwell, stressed and angry. More serious psychological consequences such as anxiety or depression are less common, but still present. This shows that digital violence can leave its mark.

Those affected are resilient in how they deal with violence. Nevertheless, **four out of five** perceive a negative impact on their well-being.

When digital violence extends into the real world

What is particularly concerning is that in some cases, digital attacks also cross over into the real world. A number of the top female decision-makers surveyed reported experiencing physical stalking or personal threats following digital violence. These cases are rare, but it shows that online violence can lead to serious consequences, both digitally and offline.

Digital violence is not to be underestimated

While the figures may seem low at first glance, each case represents a real human being who has had to endure a stressful experience. The high use of social media and the increasing digital presence of women in management positions make them visible targets. Companies need to take this issue seriously and take more preventive measures to protect their leaders from digital abuse.

Our perspective



The increasing digital presence of women, especially in leadership, is a crucial prerequisite for professional success. At the same time, however, this visibility also entails risks. Digital violence, such as harassment, defamation and cyberbullying, is a growing problem that comes not only from anonymous digital spaces, but also from the professional environment. Women in public and visible positions are especially affected by this problem. The psychological and emotional impacts of these attacks are not to be underestimated, even though many leaders deal with them pragmatically. Protection against digital violence and preventive measures must therefore be on the agenda as a strategic issue for companies.

Given the impact on the well-being and mental health of the women affected, it is crucial that companies take measures aimed not only at raising awareness and educating members of the organisation, but also at protecting leaders in the digital world. This should provide clear guidelines for action and should ensure support for affected leaders.

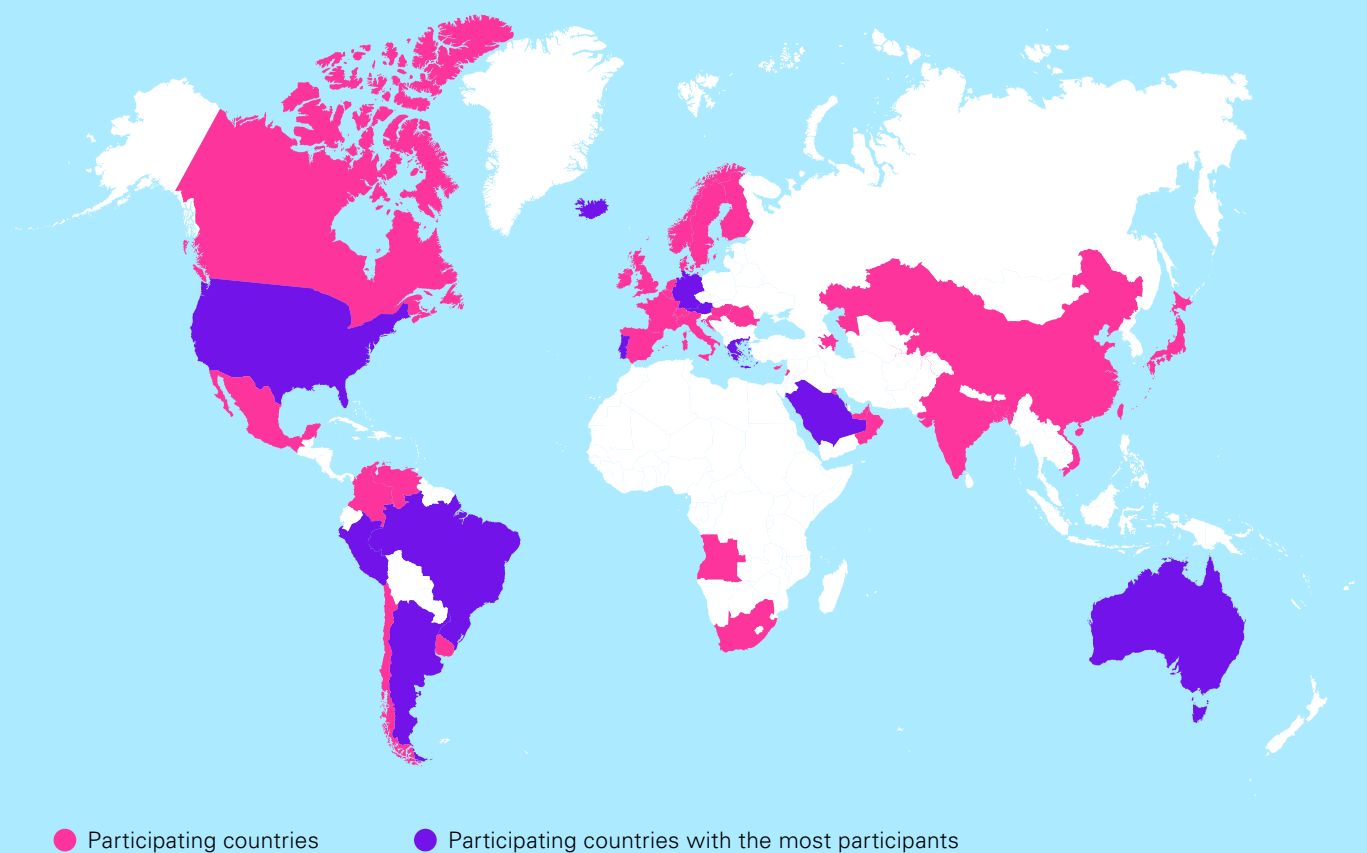
A key aspect is to promote a respectful corporate culture in which behaviour in the digital space is also clearly defined. Violations of these rules must have consequences in order to ensure a respectful, safe working environment. In addition, simple response mechanisms should be established so that affected leaders can report digital violations quickly and have them dealt with accordingly. Close cooperation with platform operators and legal institutions plays a key role here.

Psychological support for affected leaders is also essential. Companies must ensure that those affected have access to professional help in order to deal with the emotional and psychological consequences. An environment must be created in which the topic of digital violence can be addressed without shame and leaders can receive the support they need.

Overall, the increasing digital presence of leaders – both men and women – requires a forward-looking, integrated strategy that includes both prevention and rapid response mechanisms and that offers the necessary support to the leaders affected.

Sampling and methodology

The Global Female Leaders Outlook 2025 online survey was conducted between 25 November 2024 and 17 February 2025. We would like to thank the 475 female leaders from 46 countries for their participation.

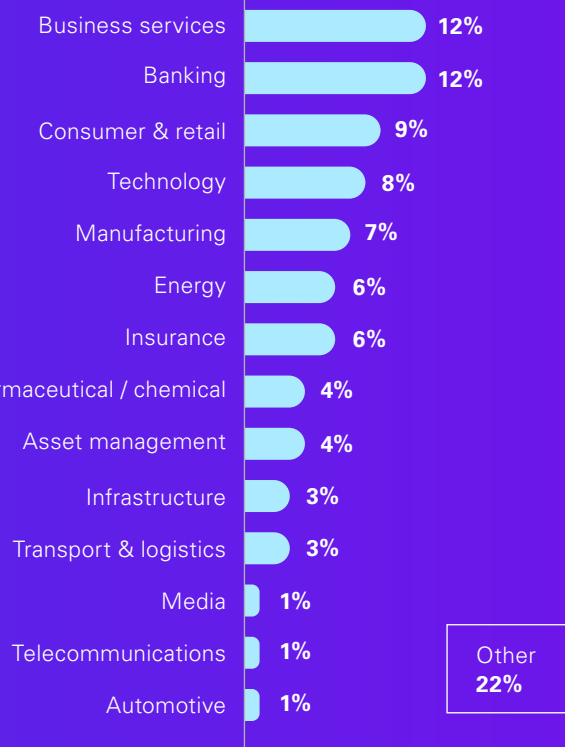


49%



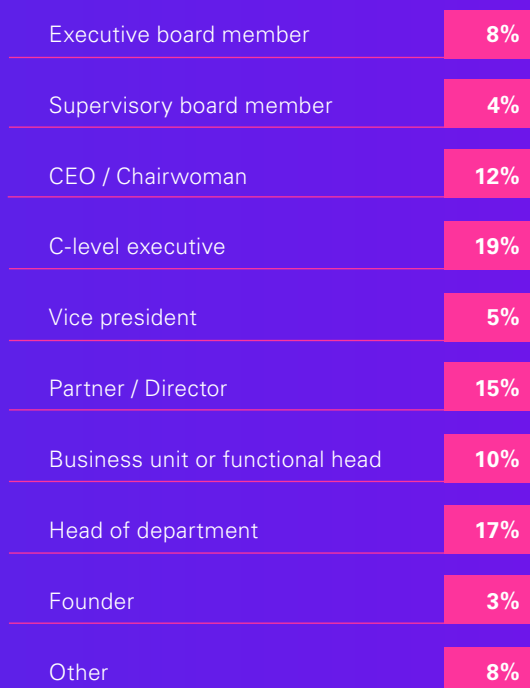
are from companies with an annual turnover of more than USD 500 million.

Industries



Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Job title



Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Source: KPMG in Germany, 2025

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