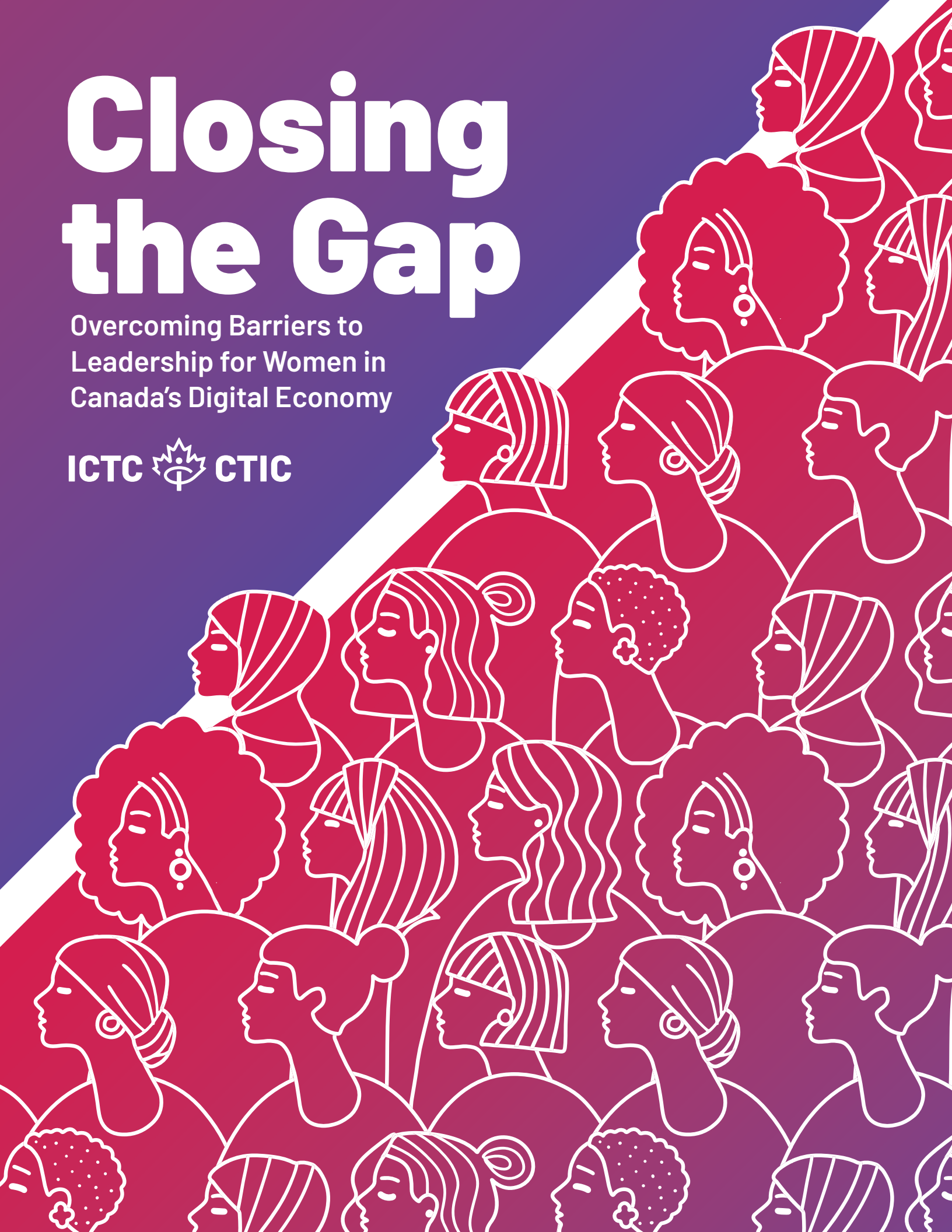


Closing the Gap

Overcoming Barriers to
Leadership for Women in
Canada's Digital Economy

ICTC  CTIC



Research by



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

This project is funded by the Government of
Canada through Women and Gender Equality Canada.

PREFACE

The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) is a neutral, not-for-profit national centre of expertise with the mission of strengthening Canada's digital advantage in the global economy. For over 30 years, ICTC has delivered forward-looking research, practical policy advice, and capacity-building solutions for individuals and businesses. The organization's goal is to ensure that technology is utilized to drive economic growth and innovation and that Canada's workforce remains competitive on a global scale.

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To Cite This Report:

Suzanne Spiteri. *Closing the Gap: Overcoming Barriers to Leadership for Women in Canada's Digital Economy*. Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2025. Ottawa, Canada.

Researched and written by Suzanne Spiteri (consultant), with generous support from Maryna Ivus, Anne Patterson, Faun Rice, and the ICTC research & policy team.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contributions made to this report by our key informant interviewees are greatly appreciated. We would like to acknowledge all the contributors to this report, along with the following specific individuals:

Connie Stacey, CEO, Grengine Inc.

Bethany Edmunds, PhD, Assistant Dean of Computing Programs—Vancouver and Seattle, and Teaching Professor, Northeastern University

Chenny Xia, Co-Founder and CEO, Gotcare

Daniela Tomasevic, Director, Business Process, Customer Success, Bell Canada

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary presents an overview of terminology used but not fully expanded upon in the text.

Digital economy: Both digital occupations and digital industries, comprised of tech workers (in all sectors) and (all) workers in the tech sector.¹

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI or EDI): This refers to three separate but sometimes related ideas to improve an environment for various individuals. Diversity measures representation from different communities (including identity, background, and culture). Equity is “the promotion of fairness and justice that considers historical, social, systemic and structural issues.”² Finally, inclusion refers to a sense of belonging and respect, and the ability to fully participate. “While an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group is not always inclusive.”³

Implicit (unconscious) bias: Refers to the stereotypes and prejudices that individuals hold about others, often without realizing it.

Woman: A person who identifies as a woman, including cis and trans women.

Women in tech: A colloquial term used to describe women working in the digital economy. Women in tech are, therefore, inclusive of women working in digital occupations and digital industries, and thus comprise women tech workers (in all sectors) and (all) women workers in the tech sector.

Sponsors: Leaders within an organization who use their reputation and influence to advance women in the workplace. Sponsors look for ways to expand an individual's visibility by putting their name on the table for a promotion or opportunities to showcase their leadership skills. Sponsors can advocate for women in tech by highlighting their positive performance, mentioning them in conversations when they are not present, and introducing them to their networks.⁴

¹ Alexandra Cutean, Rosina Hamoni, Ryan MacLaughlin, and Zhenzhen Ye, “Canada's Growth Currency: Digital Talent Outlook 2023,” Information and Communications Technology Council, 2023, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/articles/overview-canadas-growth-currency>.

² “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion,” University of Toronto, accessed July 2023, <https://research.utoronto.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/equity-diversity-inclusion>.

³ “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion,” University of Toronto, accessed July 2023, <https://research.utoronto.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/equity-diversity-inclusion>.

⁴ “Roles and Responsibilities of Sponsors,” Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Government of Canada, accessed March 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/corporate/organization/centre-diversity-inclusion/mentorship-plus/roles-responsibilities-sponsors.html>.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the well-documented benefits of workplace diversity, women are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within Canada's digital economy. While a large and growing body of research highlights the barriers that women face in the broader workforce, there remains a lack of focused studies on the systemic and institutional challenges that prevent women from advancing into leadership positions in the digital economy.

This report is informed by a series of interviews with women in the technology sector and subject matter experts and is supplemented by secondary research. It highlights key barriers to women's advancement into leadership roles in the digital economy. Based on these findings, several evidence-based recommendations have been developed. Grounded in literature review and the insights shared by the women who participated in this research, these recommendations provide organizations with actionable strategies to effectively address these challenges and promote women's leadership in the digital economy.

Although women comprise nearly half (48%) of the Canadian workforce, data from 2023 indicates that they represent only 32.6% of those employed across all levels in Canada's digital economy. Their representation drops even further in leadership roles. As previous research by ICTC has shown, women continue to be underrepresented in management positions across the broader economy, a trend that also persists in the digital economy.

The case for advancing women in leadership is both economically compelling and rooted in equity. Research shows that organizations with diverse leadership teams experience greater organizational performance, higher profit margins, and stronger

governance practices. Empathetic leadership traits position women as transformational leaders who excel in crisis and change management, especially at the helm of global, multicultural organizations. Moreover, closing the gap in women's labour force participation has the potential to increase household incomes by \$18 billion.

ICTC's research reinforces that gender stereotypes; implicit, or unconscious, biases in hiring and promotion; motherhood bias; a lack of role models, mentorship and sponsorship opportunities; and workplace culture all contribute to the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions.

Specific recommendations to advance women into leadership positions in the digital economy are as follows:

-
1. **Increase the visibility of diverse leadership.**
 2. **Invest in programs, policies, and initiatives that support new parents and caregivers.**
 3. **Design responsive mentorship programs.**
 4. **Develop sponsorship programs to complement mentorship initiatives.**
 5. **Implement organizational culture and workplace experience initiatives that address harassment and exclusion.**
-

These recommendations apply to more than just organizations, HR teams, and business leaders; industry and sectoral stakeholders have an important role in advocating for best practices among their membership and firms in their verticals to ensure that women benefit from systematic, top-down change, programs, initiatives, and policies.



INTRODUCTION

Despite the well-documented benefits of workplace diversity and the risks that a lack of diversity poses to both business success and society at large,⁵ women continue to be significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within Canada's digital economy.

While extensive research highlights the workplace barriers women face broadly, there is a significant lack of studies examining the specific challenges hindering women's progression into leadership roles within the global digital economy. In particular, there is a notable gap in research on the systemic and institutional barriers that contribute to their underrepresentation in this rapidly evolving sector.

The advancement of women in leadership roles is shaped by systemic and institutional factors at multiple levels. The first objective of this report is to identify the key systemic and institutional barriers that hinder women's advancement into leadership positions, particularly within the digital economy. The second objective of this report is to present evidence-based recommendations that organizations can adopt to tackle these barriers.

The findings are informed by a review of the relevant literature, data analysis, ICTC research, and interviews with 14 women leaders across Canada. This ensures that the recommendations are practical and aligned with the realities of Canada's digital economy.

This report builds on previous research conducted by ICTC,⁶ but it addresses a critical gap by focusing specifically on the systemic barriers preventing women from advancing into leadership positions within the digital economy. While prior studies have examined gender diversity at various levels, there has been less emphasis on the unique challenges women face in attaining executive roles in the digital economy.

⁵ Paul M. Fires and Kenneth E. Sharperson, "Making the Case: How Diversity and Inclusion Can Improve Your Firm's Financial Outlook," *Defense Counsel Journal* 85, no. 1 (2018), https://www.iadclaw.org/securedocument.aspx?file=1/19/Diversity_Inclusion_in_House_L_F_M_JOINT_-_November_2017.pdf.

⁶ Maryna Ivus and Olena Podolna, *Breaking Barriers and Building Futures: Women Entrepreneurs as Catalysts for Sustainable Growth*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), October 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/breaking-barriers-and-building-futures>; Allison Clark, Farzeen Foda, Maryna Ivus, and Miranda McKie, *Advancing Women in the Digital Economy: A Gender Equity Toolkit for Technology Leaders, Organizations, and Ecosystem Players*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/advancing-women-digital-economy-toolkit>; Allison Clark and Maryna Ivus, *Impact Analysis: Advancing Women in the Digital Economy by Implementing Actionable Solutions with Canadian Organizations*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), April 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/impact-analysis-advancing-women-digital-economy-implementing-actionable-solutions-canadian>; Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), *Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy>.



BACKGROUND: GENDER EQUITY AND CANADA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY

Canada's digital economy has seen remarkable growth in recent years. ICTC measures Canada's employment in the digital economy as the sum of information and communications technology (ICT) workers across all sectors of the economy and non-ICT workers within the ICT sector.⁷ The digital economy contributed approximately 10% to the national GDP, totalling \$223 billion in 2024.⁸ The ICT sector plays a crucial role in this growth. In 2023, the ICT sector's GDP had risen to \$132 billion, accounting for 5.7% of the national GDP.⁹ The ICT sector has consistently outpaced the overall Canadian economy in growth.

Employment in the digital economy has experienced significant growth in the last decade, and this growth is expected to continue. As of 2024, the digital economy employed 2.4 million Canadians, 1.1 million of whom worked in the ICT sector.¹⁰ Projections indicate that by 2030, approximately 2.8 million Canadians, roughly 12% of the workforce, will be employed in the digital economy.¹¹ Despite this growth, women continue to be underrepresented in Canada's digital economy.

Although women comprise nearly half (48%) of the Canadian workforce, data from 2023 indicates that they represent only 32.6% of those employed in Canada's digital economy.¹² Their representation drops even further in leadership roles. As previous research by ICTC has shown, across the broader economy, women continue to be underrepresented in management positions, a trend that persists in the digital sector.¹³

Women are primarily employed in entry- to mid-level roles within the digital economy, and their representation sharply declines at senior levels, especially in tech leadership. In the broader economy, across private sector businesses, women occupy 44.7% of all management positions, but this percentage drops to 37.4% for senior management roles.¹⁴ Specifically within the ICT sector, the representation of women in executive and senior management positions is even lower, at just 9%.¹⁵

⁷ Maryna Ivus, Todd Legere, Christopher Lindstrom, Sheldon Lopez, and Faun Rice, *Canada's Digital Economy: Talent Outlook 2030*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), forthcoming April 2025.

⁸ Maryna Ivus, Todd Legere, Christopher Lindstrom, Sheldon Lopez, and Faun Rice, *Canada's Digital Economy: Talent Outlook 2030*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), forthcoming April 2025.

⁹ "Canadian ICT Sector Profile 2023," Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, last modified October 9, 2024, <https://ISED-ISEDCANADA.CA/site/digital-technologies-ict/en/canadian-ict-sector-profile>.

¹⁰ Maryna Ivus, Todd Legere, Christopher Lindstrom, Sheldon Lopez, and Faun Rice, *Canada's Digital Economy: Talent Outlook 2030*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), forthcoming April 2025.

¹¹ Maryna Ivus, Todd Legere, Christopher Lindstrom, Sheldon Lopez, and Faun Rice, *Canada's Digital Economy: Talent Outlook 2030*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), forthcoming April 2025.

¹² Maryna Ivus and Olena Podolna, *Breaking Barriers and Building Futures: Women Entrepreneurs as Catalysts for Sustainable Growth*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), October 2024. <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/breaking-barriers-and-building-futures>.

¹³ Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, and Mansharn Sangha (Toor), *Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy>.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada, "Table 33-10-0791-01 Average Percentage of Women and Men in Management Positions, First Quarter of 2024," February 26, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?>

¹⁵ Allison Clark and Maryna Ivus, *Impact Analysis: Advancing Women in the Digital Economy by Implementing Actionable Solutions with Canadian Organizations*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), April 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/impact-analysis-advancing-women-digital-economy-implementing-actionable-solutions-canadian>.



Gender Equity in Emerging High-Growth Sectors

The situation for women is similar across five emerging high-growth sectors in Canada: cleantech, health tech, biotech, agtech, and advanced manufacturing. In these sectors, women continue to face significant underrepresentation, particularly in leadership roles.

Cleantech, health tech, biotech, agtech, and advanced manufacturing are all high-growth sectors that are critical to the digital and green transition.¹⁶

Research shows that the intensifying impacts of climate change disproportionately affect women and exacerbate social and gender inequalities on a global scale,¹⁷ yet the representation of women in senior-level roles in the high-growth sectors that specifically provide climate solutions is even below that of the broader digital economy.¹⁸ As such, it is crucial that women and people of marginalized genders¹⁹ have a seat at the decision-making table.²⁰ Their perspectives, experiences, and insights will bring a fresh dimension to leadership and increase innovation to address complex global challenges while enabling Canada to thrive in the twin transition.²¹ Their inclusion will lead to greater economic prosperity and offer more creative solutions and strategies in Canada's thriving sectors.²²

Clean technology, commonly referred to as "cleantech," represents a rapidly growing and vital sector within Canada's economy. In 2021, it contributed \$73.1 billion, or 2.9% of the country's GDP. That same year, the sector employed 314,257 people, representing 1.6% of all jobs in Canada, and accounted for 2.3% of total annual exports and 2.8% of imports. However, despite the sector's expansion, women remained underrepresented in environmental and clean technology (ECT) jobs; women made up just 28.6% of the workforce in 2021. This underrepresentation is even more pronounced in leadership roles, with women holding only 26.6% of management positions, which is 12.6 percentage points lower than their share of all management positions across Canada (39.2%).²³

Similarly, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within Canada's health technology and biotechnology sectors. Despite comprising over 60% of post-secondary graduates in physical and life sciences, women are still notably underrepresented in management positions within the bioeconomy.²⁴ They make up only 34% of the workforce in this sector, and their presence in executive leadership is even more limited. Furthermore, in life sciences and health tech, women hold less than 15% of board positions.²⁵

¹⁶ Alexandra Cutean, Mairead Matthews, and Khiran O'Neill, *Thinking Green: Building a Sustainable Digital Economy for Canada*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), April 2022, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/thinking-green>.

¹⁷ "Explainer: How Gender Inequality and Climate Change are Interconnected," UN Women, February 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>.

¹⁸ "Women in Senior Management Roles at Energy Firms Remains Stubbornly Low, but Efforts to Improve Gender Diversity are Moving Apace," IEA, Paris, 2021, <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/women-in-senior-management-roles-at-energy-firms-remains-stubbornly-low-but-efforts-to-improve-gender-diversity-are-moving-apace>.

¹⁹ People who experience marginalization due to their genders. This includes transgender women, cisgender women, transgender men, and nonbinary people, among many other marginalized gender identities.

²⁰ "Women in Science, Not in Silence: Pioneering Change in the Global Climate Crisis," UNESCO, February 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/women-science-not-silence-pioneering-change-global-climate-crisis>.

²¹ Sigita Strumskyte, Sara Ramos Magaña, and Helene Bendig, "Women's Leadership in Environmental Action," *OECD Environment Working Papers*, April 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f0038d22-en>.

²² Maryna Ivus and Olena Podolna, *Breaking Barriers and Building Futures: Women Entrepreneurs as Catalysts for Sustainable Growth*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), October 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/breaking-barriers-and-building-futures>.

²³ "A Profile of Women Working in the Environmental and Clean Technology Sector," Statistics Canada, July 24, 2024, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/6696-profile-women-working-environmental-and-clean-technology-sector>.

²⁴ "Connecting and Advancing Women in the Canadian Bio-Economy Project," BioTalent Canada, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://www.biotalent.ca/connectingwomen>.

²⁵ "International Women's Day 2024 – Celebrating Women Leaders Across Ontario's Life Sciences Sector," Life Sciences Ontario (LSO) and Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization (OBIO), March 8, 2024, <https://lifesciencesontario.ca/celebrating-women-leaders-across-ontarios-life-sciences-sector-international-womens-day-march-8th-2024/>.



Across Canada, agricultural technology, or agtech, is driving a transformation in farming practices, enhancing efficiency, sustainability, and profitability. Women in Canada's agtech sector have made significant progress in recent years; however, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles. According to the 2021 Census of Agriculture, women accounted for 30.4% of all farm operators, up from 28.7% in 2016, marking the first increase since 1991.²⁶ Despite this progress, leadership positions in agtech continue to be dominated by men. In 2020, women held only 12% of officer roles in the agriculture industry, the lowest representation across all sectors.²⁷

Women in Canada's advanced manufacturing sector continue to face significant underrepresentation, reflecting broader trends in emerging tech sectors. The share of women in this field has remained unchanged for over 30 years, with women representing only 29% of the manufacturing workforce. In some production-related occupations, they hold less than 5% of the jobs. Beyond workforce participation, barriers to leadership persist. While two-thirds of women in the sector aspire to management roles, one in five feels that their company does not support their advancement. Furthermore, 61% believe women are underrepresented in manufacturing, and 37% perceive a promotion bias favouring men in management positions.²⁸

²⁶ "Canadian Agriculture at a Glance: Female farm operator numbers increase for the first time in 30 years," Statistics Canada, November 23, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2021001/article/00013-eng.htm>.

²⁷ "Representation of Women on Boards of Directors and in Officer Positions, 2020," Statistics Canada, May 29, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230529/dq230529b-eng.htm>.

²⁸ "Untapped Potential: Attracting and Engaging Women in Canadian Manufacturing," Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://cme-mec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CME-WIM-Summary-Report.pdf>.



GENDER DIVERSITY AS AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is not merely a social issue; it represents a missed economic opportunity. Closing the gender gap in labour force participation can lead to sizable gains for economies—an average 20% increase in GDP per capita.²⁹ In Canada, a report by RBC Economics estimates that achieving wage parity between women and men in comparable jobs could boost Canadian household income by \$18 billion, representing a 1.5% increase.³⁰

Promoting women into leadership roles is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic business decision supported by a compelling case.³¹ The business argument for gender diversity—which leverages diversity to gain a competitive edge, improve the organization's economic standing, and enhance its reputation—underscores a values-driven approach.³²

²⁹ Daniel Halim, Michael B. O'Sullivan, and Abhilasha Sahay, "Increasing Female Labor Force Participation," *World Bank Group Gender Thematic Notes Series, Evidence and Practice Note*. World Bank Washington DC, 2023, <https://hdl.handle.net/10986/39435>.

³⁰ "Equal Measures: Advancing Canada's Working Women in a Post-Pandemic Economy," RBC Economic, 2024, <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/equal-measures-advancing-canadas-working-women-in-a-post-pandemic-economy/>.

³¹ Tessa L. Dover, Cheryl R. Kaiser, and Brenda Major, "Mixed Signals: The Unintended Effects of Diversity Initiatives," *Social Issues and Policy Review* 14 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjpr.12059>.

³² Marilyn Y. Byrd and Torrence E. Sparkman, "Reconciling the Business Case and the Social Justice Case for Diversity: A Model of Human Relations," *Human Resource Development Review* 21, no. 1 (2022): 75–100, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843211072356>.



Gender Diversity Enhances Organizational Performance

A growing body of literature indicates that increased gender diversity in leadership enhances firm performance. Substantial evidence shows that a diverse leadership team positively influences company outcomes. Research demonstrates that when women occupy top leadership positions, such as executive and board roles, they bring significant financial advantages to organizations. For example, a global survey of 21,980 firms across 91 countries reveals a positive correlation between profitability and the percentage of women in corporate leadership at the director and board levels.³³

A recent report from the Peterson Institute for International Economics found that companies with at least 30% female executives experience 6% higher profits.³⁴ According to this report, firms with women in executive and director positions consistently report stronger annual profit margins, and this advantage becomes more pronounced over time. The report attributes these financial benefits to the diverse expertise and perspectives that women bring to leadership, which enhance decision making and overall company performance.

Studies have shown that gender diversity in leadership enhances organizational performance by reducing biases and stereotypes, ensuring that decisions are based on merit rather than personal prejudices, and fostering diverse perspectives. Previous studies

indicate that women can improve the decision-making process through their unique insights and innovative ideas, which boost firm performance.³⁵ Additionally, research consistently demonstrates that diverse teams make better decisions by promoting more thorough information processing and minimizing groupthink. Rather than merely introducing new ideas, diversity fosters critical evaluation and problem solving by integrating a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and cognitive approaches. This dynamic leads to more innovative solutions, improved decision making, and greater adaptability in complex environments compared to homogeneous groups.³⁶

Gender Diversity Leads to Higher Profit Margins

Research by consulting firm McKinsey & Company found that greater representation of women in top management is linked to higher profit margins.³⁷ Their findings indicate that companies with the most gender-diverse executive teams outperformed those with the least diversity by 21%. Furthermore, companies with women in top leadership positions are 50% more likely to outperform their peers, benefiting from stronger client retention, organic growth, and profitability. Organizations in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are also 25% more likely to surpass their competitors.

³³ Marcus Noland, Tyler Moran, and Barbara R. Kotschwar, "Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey," *Peterson Institute for International Economics Working Paper* 16, no. 3 (2016), <https://www.piie.com/publications/working-papers/gender-diversity-profitable-evidence-global-survey>.

³⁴ Soyoung Han and Marcus Noland, "Women Scaling the Corporate Ladder: Progress Steady but Slow Globally," *Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), Policy Brief* 20, no. 7 (May 2020), <https://www.piie.com/publications/policy-briefs/women-scaling-corporate-ladder-progress-steady-slow-globally>.

³⁵ Putri Alberty, Zaitul Zaitul, Desi Ilona, and Daniati Putri, "Board Diversity and Government Link Company Performance: The Case of Emerging Country," *Journal Markcount Finance* 1, no. 3 (2023): 196–205, <https://doi.org/10.55849/jmf.v1i3.145>.

³⁶ Lu Hong and Scott E. Page, "Groups of Diverse Problem Solvers Can Outperform Groups of High-Ability Problem Solvers," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101, no. 46 (November 8, 2004): 16385–16389, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0403723101>; Aneesh Rai, Edward H. Chang, Erika L. Kirgios, and Katherine L. Milkman, "Group Size and Its Impact on Diversity-Related Perceptions and Hiring Decisions in Homogeneous Groups," *Organization Science* 35, no. 6 (2024): 1990–2015, <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2020.14705>.

³⁷ "Diversity Matters Even More: The Case for Holistic Impact," McKinsey & Company, December 5, 2023, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>.



Recent research from 2024 reveals that S&P 500 companies led by women have consistently outperformed their male-led counterparts.³⁸ Currently, 89.6% of S&P 500 companies have male CEOs (448), while only 10.4% (52) are led by women.³⁹ Despite their smaller numbers, female-led companies have demonstrated stronger financial performance. Over the past decade, they have delivered a 384% return, compared to 261% for companies with male CEOs, reinforcing the business advantages of gender-diverse leadership.⁴⁰

Gender Diversity Strengthens Governance Practices

As highlighted by the National Girls Collaborative Project,⁴¹ research from MSCI, a leading index provider, demonstrates a strong correlation between gender diversity on corporate boards and improved risk management, particularly in reducing governance-related scandals. Analyzing data from over 6,500 company boards worldwide, the study found that organizations with a higher proportion of women in leadership positions were significantly less likely to face issues such as bribery, fraud, or shareholder disputes. These findings suggest that female board representation can enhance governance practices and mitigate corporate misconduct.

³⁸ Jennifer McCollum, "Why the Leadership Gender Gap Matters—And What Organizations Can Do to Close It," *Leader to Leader* 2024, no. 112 (2024): 19–25, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ltl.20809>.

³⁹ "Women CEOs in America: Changing the face of Business Leadership," Women Business Collaborative, 2024, <https://wbcollaborative.org/women-ceo-report/>.

⁴⁰ "The Business Case for Gender Diversity: Why More Women in Leadership Benefits Everyone," National Girls Collaborative Project, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://ngcproject.org/business-case-gender-diversity-why-more-women-leadership-benefits-everyone>.

⁴¹ "The Business Case for Gender Diversity: Why More Women in Leadership Benefits Everyone," National Girls Collaborative Project, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://ngcproject.org/business-case-gender-diversity-why-more-women-leadership-benefits-everyone>.



BARRIERS TO GENDER DIVERSITY IN CANADA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY

Gender-based discrimination and stereotypes, as well as the biases that uphold them, create deeply entrenched systemic barriers to women's advancement. These barriers perpetuate women's underrepresentation in leadership roles and reinforce structural inequalities that hinder career progression.⁴² ICTC's previous gender equity research has identified these issues as systemic obstacles that hinder women's career advancement in the digital economy.⁴³

Gender stereotypes are general beliefs about the characteristics attributed to men and women in society.⁴⁴ They involve judging males and females based on their culturally prescribed roles and categorizing them accordingly. According to a review of relevant research, women are underrepresented in management partly due to entrenched stereotypes about their roles.⁴⁵

Research indicates that gender stereotyping affects women at any level or position within an organization. However, the effects become especially pronounced in managerial or leadership roles.⁴⁶

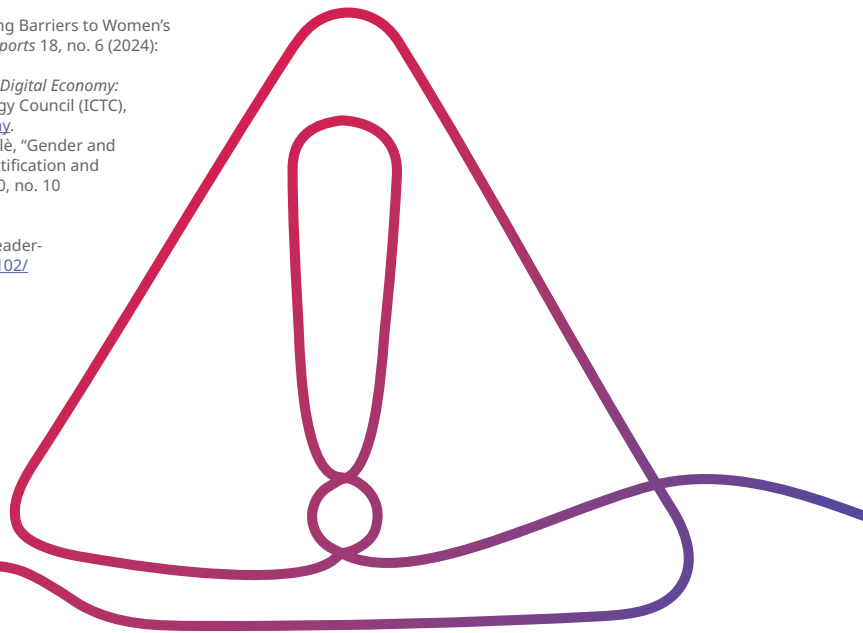
⁴² Chanda Chansa Thelma and Loveness Ngulube, "Women in Leadership: Examining Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership Positions," *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports* 18, no. 6 (2024): 273–290, <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajarr/2024/v18i6671>.

⁴³ Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), *Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy>.

⁴⁴ Fabrizio Santoniccolo, Tommaso Trombetta, Maria Noemi Paradiso, and Luca Rollè, "Gender and Media Representations: A Review of the Literature on Gender Stereotypes, Objectification and Sexualization," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 10 (2023), 5770, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20105770>.

⁴⁵ Emmerentia N. Barkhuizen, Gwendoline Masakane, and Lidewey van der Sluis, "In Search of Factors That Hinder the Career Advancement of Women to Senior Leadership Positions," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 48, (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v48i0.1986>.

⁴⁶ Tabassum, Naznin, and Bhabani Shankar Nayak, "Gender stereotypes and their impact on women's career progressions from a managerial perspective," *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review* 10, no. 2, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975220975513>.



Biased Perception of Leadership Traits

Many researchers have investigated gender stereotypes and uncovered significant gender bias in perceptions of leaders.⁴⁷ For instance, studies consistently show that men are generally viewed as more magnetic and competent than women, while women are seen as more expressive and communal than men.⁴⁸ Both genders agree that successful leaders are typically associated with traits traditionally linked to men, such as leadership ability, competitiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, aggressiveness, ambition, and a strong sense of responsibility. In contrast, women are associated with qualities related to caring for the well-being of others, including being affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, and sympathetic, as well as interpersonally sensitive, gentle, and soft-spoken.⁴⁹

Based on these gendered associations, some argue it is “natural” for men to take on the dominant managerial roles in workplaces, and for women to be relegated to subordinate positions.⁵⁰

Similarly, research indicates that when describing the “typical woman,” people often use communal traits such as being affectionate, helpful, or gentle. In contrast, individuals tend to depict the “average leader” using agentic characteristics, including assertiveness, confidence, ambition, dominance, independence, and self-sufficiency—traits that are stereotypically associated with men.⁵¹

Research has confirmed that these associations can have detrimental effects on women's careers. For example, a study analyzed letters of recommendation for academic positions and found that letters for women were more likely to emphasize communal traits—concern for the welfare of others (i.e., descriptions of kindness, sympathy, sensitivity, and nurturance), helpfulness, acceptance of others' direction, and a desire to maintain relationships—over agentic traits, like assertiveness, influence, and initiative.⁵²

Interviewees who participated in this research also highlighted the presence of institutional gender bias concerning ideas of leadership. For example, one participant argued that there is often “one idea of what leadership looks like and how leaders show up” and that those who do not conform to this standard are “not as valued” or are perceived as “combative.” The participant also noted that “there's an idea of what it means to be a leader, and that idea is more associated with traditionally masculine leadership style.”

Another participant explained how implicit bias affects hiring decisions, pointing out that women often encounter a higher standard for demonstrating their qualifications, while men are presumed to be suitable for management by default.

I can use my own personal experience being alongside a guy with the same amount of experience that I had. [The managers of the company] assume he's management material, but I had to prove that I was management material... They would hire men to come in to lead parts of this organization that hadn't any demonstrable experience in the areas that they were leading.

⁴⁷ Eagly, Alice H., and Steven J. Karau, “Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders,” *Psychological review* 109, no. 3, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295X.109.3.573>.

⁴⁸ Sczesny, Sabine, “A closer look beneath the surface: Various facets of the think-manager-think-male stereotype,” *Sex roles*, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025112204526>.

⁴⁹ Naznin Tabassum and Bhabani Shankar Nayak, “Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Women's Career Progressions from a Managerial Perspective,” *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review* 10 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975220975513>.

⁵⁰ Margaret M. Hopkins, Deborah Anne O'Neil, Diana Bilimoria, and Alison Broadfoot, “Buried Treasure: Contradictions in the Perception and Reality of Women's Leadership,” *Frontiers of Psychology* 12 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.684705>.

⁵¹ Stephan Braun, Sebastian Stegmann, Alina S. Hernandez Bark, Nina M. Junker, and Rolf Van Dick, “Think Manager—Think Male, Think Follower—Think Female: Gender Bias in Implicit Followership Theories,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 47, no. 7 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12445>.

⁵² Juan M. Madera, Michelle R. Hebl, and Randi C. Martin, “Gender and Letters of Recommendation for Academia: Agentic and Communal Differences,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94, no. 6 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016539>.



These gender biases lead to two distinct forms of prejudice: first, women are viewed less favourably than men as candidates for leadership roles; second, when women display behaviours typically associated with leadership, they are rated less favourably compared to their male counterparts.⁵³

Overall, women are often hired for jobs traditionally associated with their gender and remain underrepresented in positions that are viewed as inconsistent with these gender expectations, particularly in leadership roles.

Research on women in the tech industry, such as the Elephant in the Valley survey of women working in Silicon Valley, highlights the gender biases that impede career advancement. Traits valued in men that contribute to their professional success often have the opposite effect when exhibited by women. The survey found that 84% of women were told they were too aggressive, and 66% reported being excluded from key social and networking opportunities because of their gender.⁵⁴

These outcomes may be shaped by explicit (conscious) or implicit biases.⁵⁵ Implicit bias “rests on the belief that people act on the basis of internalised schemas of which they are unaware, and thus can, and often do, engage in discriminatory behaviors without conscious intent.”⁵⁶ The concept of implicit bias is regarded as

a significant factor in discrimination during hiring and promotion decisions.⁵⁷ One interview participant clarified how implicit bias influences hiring choices:

Investors and hiring managers tend to gravitate toward people who look like them. Most of them are straight white men, so when they see a founder or job candidate, they unconsciously compare them to someone they knew when they were younger and think, ‘He reminds me of me when I was starting out.’ That’s how implicit bias keeps reproducing itself.

The Motherhood Bias

Motherhood bias, or maternity bias, is another factor known to hinder women’s career advancement. A study by Statistics Canada indicates that women executives were less likely to be married (71.2%) compared to men executives (83.8%) and women executives were less likely to have at least one child (37.9%) compared to men executives (39.8%).⁵⁸

Motherhood bias reflects prejudices that arise from assumptions about a woman’s ability to lead due to her actual or anticipated responsibilities as a mother.⁵⁹ These assumptions are rooted in gendered norms and biases, which still reflect on men’s experiences, value male attributes, and reinforce traditional notions of leadership.⁶⁰ As a result, women are often perceived as less capable leaders due to societal expectations that they will prioritize family responsibilities over professional obligations.

⁵³ Sabine Sczesny, “A Closer Look Beneath the Surface: Various Facets of the Think-Manager–Think-Male Stereotype,” *Sex roles* 49 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025112204526>.

⁵⁴ Kimberly A. Houser, “Can AI Solve the Diversity Problem in the Tech Industry: Mitigating Noise and Bias in Employment Decision-Making,” *Stan. Tech. L. Rev.* 22 (2019), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3344751>.

⁵⁵ Enav Friedmann and Dorit Efrat-Treister, “Gender Bias in STEM Hiring: Implicit In-Group Gender Favoritism Among Men Managers,” *Gender & Society* 37, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432221137910>.

⁵⁶ Cheryl Pritlove, Clara Juando-Prats, Kari Ala-Leppilampi, and Janet A. Parsons, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Implicit Bias,” *The Lancet* 393, no. 10171 (2019), [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32267-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32267-0).

⁵⁷ Maria Paz Espinosa and Eva Ferreira, “Gender Implicit Bias and Glass Ceiling Effects,” *Journal of Applied Economics* 25, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2021.2007723>.

⁵⁸ Dante Frias Corona, Léa-Maude Longpré-Verret, and Michelle Ouyang, “Gender Pay Gaps Among Board Directors and Officers in Canada,” *Analysis in Brief*, Statistics Canada, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-621-m/11-621-m2024012-eng.htm>.

⁵⁹ Barbara Sveva Magnanelli, Luigi Nasta, and Sergio Scicchitano, “Motherhood and Leadership: Exploring Employee Perceptions of Female Leaders in the Workplace,” *GLO Discussion Paper no. 1535*, 2024, <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/307514>.

⁶⁰ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Letícia Barbosa-Silva, Lígia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., “The Impact of Motherhood on Women’s Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions,” *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.



This motherhood bias often results in a **motherhood penalty**, where women with children are viewed as unfit for leadership roles, assessed as less committed to their careers, receive lower salaries (referred to as the “motherhood wage gap”), and are denied advancement opportunities.⁶¹ One interview participant argued that “motherhood triggers powerful negative competence and commitment assumptions” that can create a “maternal wall” of bias, which is an “order of magnitude” more powerful than other biases. Research confirms that this penalty leads to performance expectations that result in greater negativity toward mothers in career advancement decisions compared to non-mothers.⁶²

One interview participant noted slower career progression due to motherhood:

I do believe my career progression was slower. Part of that was by choice because I had children and wanted to spend time with them. But at a certain point, you get stuck in a cycle—you lack certain experiences and may be seen as less committed or not having enough time to dedicate to work.

In another example, a participant shared that a common penalty faced by mothers and expectant mothers is the perception of being less committed, resulting in lost opportunities. She recounted her experience returning to work after leave for pregnancy loss:

I came back, and my office was gone. My projects were gone. I came back in two months. I couldn't take the projects that I had because they were handed over to somebody else, and the organization's approach towards this shifted so dramatically that I'm just like, I don't think I can stay here anymore.

Beyond the effects of motherhood bias, becoming a mother can profoundly impact a woman's career trajectory. Mothers encounter systemic barriers that hinder their professional advancement.⁶³

Recent scoping research explains one way that motherhood impacts women's career progression:

Women with children are ... caught between a rock and a hard place where to be a good mother, they must prioritize their families over their careers, but to be a good leader, they must prioritize their careers over their families. Unable to accommodate such contradictory expectations, mothers commonly deviate from the traditional career path, taking career breaks, reducing working hours, or even leaving the workforce indefinitely, all of which negatively affect their chances of career advancement. This may cause mothers to forgo leadership opportunities or even cut back at work in an effort to be a 'good' mother. When they decide to return to the paid workforce, mothers are less likely to be interviewed, hired, or promoted, and they receive lower salaries.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Letícia Barbosa-Silva, Ligia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., “The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions,” *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.

⁶² Madeline E. Heilman and Tyler G. Okimoto, “Motherhood: A Potential Source of Bias in Employment Decisions,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.1.189>.

⁶³ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Letícia Barbosa-Silva, Ligia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., “The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions,” *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.

⁶⁴ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Letícia Barbosa-Silva, Ligia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., “The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions,” *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.



This view was shared by one interview participant who noted that some women are hesitant to pursue senior leadership roles because these positions are often structured in ways that do not accommodate the multiple roles women frequently assume, such as caregiving. She shared the following:

In some organizations, senior leadership roles are structured in a way that I've noticed some women don't want to pursue them. It's like, 'Why would I want that?' When I think about how women balance childcare while taking on leadership opportunities, it shouldn't be that being a mother automatically limits whether a leadership role makes sense for her.

She further noted that expectations such as frequent travel for senior roles might also deter women, particularly those balancing caregiving responsibilities. She explained, "Looking at the amount of travel that certain senior roles need ... can there be more diversity in what that looks like ... how we structure these senior roles?"

In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's member countries, one in ten individuals regularly supports and cares for a relative, and two-thirds of these caregivers are female.⁶⁵ Research indicates that since family caregivers are primarily women, caregiving responsibilities are more likely to impact women's labour force participation, with female caregivers experiencing more negative outcomes in the labour force compared to their male counterparts.⁶⁶ This caregiving burden further enhances the challenges women face in advancing their careers, as they often have to balance work responsibilities with family obligations, leading to reduced career progression and opportunities.

In another example, an interview participant discussed the systemic barriers beyond the workplace, including parenthood, that impact women's willingness to pursue leadership positions.

There's a difference between a woman's choice to pursue a leadership role and her ability to do so. While it's often framed as a personal decision, there are systemic barriers that make it harder for women to step into executive positions. Beyond workplace challenges, broader societal expectations and responsibilities also play a role in shaping these decisions.

Similarly, another participant observed that despite the presence of parental support policies, women frequently forgo leadership opportunities because of the ongoing demands of family responsibilities: "Regardless of policies around parental support and things like that, I think that women still often are more likely to opt out because of pressures at home."

She also noted that in her experience, women avoid roles that require frequent travel: "Women for sure are less likely to choose a role that required a ton of travel, and the more senior you get, the more likely you are to be on the road all of the time."

Similarly, another participant recounted her hesitation in applying for promotions due to ongoing fertility treatments, indicating that even the prospect of pregnancy influenced her career decisions. She noted, "I was always like, well, I don't want to go for that job if I'm just going to get pregnant."

⁶⁵ Diana Pacheco Barzallo, Aline Schnyder, Claudia Zanini, and Armin Gemperli, "Gender Differences in Family Caregiving. Do Female Caregivers Do More or Undertake Different Tasks?" *BMC Health Services Research* 24, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-11191-w>.

⁶⁶ Yeonjung Lee and Fengyan Tang, "More Caregiving, Less Working: Caregiving Roles and Gender Difference," *Journal of Applied Gerontology* 34, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464813508649>.



One participant explained that important work-related conversations often occur in social settings that frequently exclude women, especially mothers.

I wouldn't have the time or the mindset to go for drinks after work, to stay longer after another meeting for an after-party. And that's when the major kind of growth-and-promotion, loose conversations happen... I recognized that I was missing out on stuff because I wasn't at the after-party.

Women's experience returning to work after maternity leave or child-rearing can also be a barrier to career progression. According to one interview participant who took a 15-year career break to raise her children and struggled to re-enter the workforce, she felt not only like she was starting over but also that she was treated as though she was behind new entrants in the field: "I don't believe I started at ground zero. I think I started sub-zero."

Lack of Role Models and Mentors

Another factor contributing to gender bias in women's leadership progression is the lack of female role models and mentors. Mentorship plays a vital role in leadership development by offering guidance, knowledge sharing, and support to aspiring leaders.⁶⁷ In many fields, mentorship is regarded as the most important type of professional relationship for career development and has been shown to have a significant impact on mentees' personal growth, career paths, and career satisfaction.⁶⁸

Research has shown the multifaceted benefits of mentorship for women, including enhancing skills, building confidence, and broadening professional opportunities.⁶⁹ According to a research paper about mentorship in the digital age,

mentorship programs are instrumental in fostering the professional and personal growth of women, enabling them to overcome barriers, navigate career paths, and build lasting networks. These programs provide women with access to experienced mentors who offer guidance, encouragement, and support in achieving their goals. By addressing challenges such as gender bias, lack of representation in leadership, and limited access to opportunities, mentorship initiatives empower women to excel in their chosen fields.⁷⁰

The lack of mentorship has been identified as a barrier to women's ability to thrive and advance in the digital economy. The scarcity of women in leadership roles limits opportunities for mentorship and guidance.⁷¹ One interview participant noted, "I didn't see myself represented in the industry or in those roles. And so I just sort of thought it wasn't a career path for me.... People may not gravitate towards things if they don't think they belong."

Research has shown that women in tech are not fully supported professionally, primarily due to demographics.⁷² This continues to be the reason

⁶⁷ Hussein Kamaldeen Smith, "Mentorship in the Digital Age: Leveraging Technology for Women's Leadership Growth," 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387660100_Mentorship_in_the_Digital_Age_Leveraging_Technology_for_Women's_Leadership_Growth.

⁶⁸ Rachel B. Levine, Manasa S. Ayyala, Kimberly A. Skarupski, Joann N. Bodurtha, Marlís González-Fernández, Lisa E. Ishii, and Barbara Fivush, "It's a Little Different for Men"—Sponsorship and Gender in Academic Medicine: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 36 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-05956-2>; Manasa S. Ayyala, Kimberly Skarupski, Joann N. Bodurtha, Marlís González-Fernández, Lisa E. Ishii, Barbara Fivush, and Rachel B. Levine, "Mentorship is Not Enough: Exploring Sponsorship and Its Role in Career Advancement in Academic Medicine," *Academic Medicine* 94, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002398>.

⁶⁹ Lilly Hanks, "Gal Pals: The Importance of Mentorship for the Advancement of Women in the Workplace," (*Senior Honors Projects* 139, John Carroll University, 2022), <https://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers/139>.

⁷⁰ Hussein Kamaldeen Smith, "Mentorship in the Digital Age: Leveraging Technology for Women's Leadership Growth," 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387660100_Mentorship_in_the_Digital_Age_Leveraging_Technology_for_Women's_Leadership_Growth.

⁷¹ Prabha Ramseook-Munhurrin, Perunjodi Naidoo, and Sandhya Armoogum, "Navigating the Challenges of Female Leadership in the Information and Communication Technology and Engineering Sectors," *Journal of Business and Socio-economic Development* 5, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBSED-03-2023-0014>.

⁷² Maryna Ivus and Maya Watson, *Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Mid-Level Talent*, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem>.



women shy away from or fail to persist in careers in technology industries. The shortage of senior female professionals has made it challenging for companies to implement and sustain initiatives centred around senior female mentors, female role models, and informal networks led by women. Additionally, women entering their careers in technology often lack professional support from other women, as the number of women in tech who reach influential positions is limited, diminishing their ability to guide and support newcomers' career advancement.⁷³

This perspective was shared by several interview participants. For instance, one participant reflected on her own absence of mentorship and role models in career advancement and shared, "I didn't have enough mentors or role models, and everything that I received was very much not catered to me. I had to figure out what it looked like for me in my own terms."

Similarly, on the need to create mentorship opportunities, another participant noted,

We intentionally built in mentorship because we know role modelling is crucial. If they can see it, they can be it. If we can find women who look like these young girls, there's a better opportunity for them to say, 'Oh, she can do it. So can I, one day.'

According to another participant, mentorship and sponsorship programs, although still in their early stages in the digital economy, are essential for supporting women in leadership. They explained,

I think the mentorship programs and sponsorship programs, although they're in their infancy, are highly adaptable to women progressing in leadership roles. The training skill building is better. And the more women that we have in the C-suite [senior leadership] positions, I believe they're far more cognizant to promote that pipeline of qualified women.

Likewise, another participant emphasized the importance of structured mentorship opportunities:

We need to get more younger women connected with older women who have already accomplished and succeeded in their fields, overcoming many of the barriers that still exist. That kind of mentorship is incredibly valuable. I've found it helpful to connect with experienced women in leadership, many of whom are 60-plus, while I'm in my 50s. But there aren't many women under 40 in these networks. If more opportunities existed for younger women to build connections with senior professionals, it could make a significant difference. One of my advisors is a well-known business leader, and securing that mentorship was incredibly difficult—but her guidance, feedback, and ability to open doors have been invaluable. Creating more structured pathways for younger women to access these kinds of relationships would be enormously beneficial for those seeking to advance to the next level.

Similarly, another participant stressed the importance of "support and mentorship and, actually, encouragement." She questioned whether simply offering support is enough or whether women should be actively "encouraged to take on broader leadership roles" by being "pushed or given an opportunity."

⁷³ Miracle Okah, "The Male-Dominated Tech Field: Challenges Faced by Women," Document Women, January 30, 2024, <https://www.documentwomen.com/the-male-dominated-tech-field-challenges-faced-by-women>.



Organizational Culture and Workplace Experiences

Organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping the professional landscape for women, especially regarding their advancement to leadership positions.⁷⁴ It encompasses the values, principles, norms, and acceptable behaviours that define “how things are done here” in the workplace. Organizational culture is influenced by leadership styles and organizational characteristics such as structure and history, environmental factors, and the cultural philosophies of founders.⁷⁵

Studies have shown that widespread disrespect, harassment, and exclusion are common experiences for women in many workplaces, particularly in the ICT sector.⁷⁶

According to recent research from Statistics Canada on workplace harassment, nearly half of women (47%) across the country have experienced some form of workplace harassment or sexual assault. The most commonly reported issue among women is exposure to inappropriate sexualized behaviours (44%), followed by discriminatory behaviours (20%) and sexual assault (13%).⁷⁷ Additionally, research asserting that gender discrimination is a “major stumbling block for the high-tech industry” and that “sexism is a feature, not a bug” also indicates a “culture of rampant sexual harassment, persistent racial inequalities in positions of power, and pay and promotion inequalities industry-wide.”⁷⁸

According to research examining the results of the Elephant in the Valley survey,⁷⁹ which was designed to shed light on the issues American women in tech face, 87% of women reported receiving demeaning remarks from male colleagues, while 47% stated they were assigned lower-level tasks that their male counterparts were not asked to do. Additionally, 66% reported being excluded from key social or networking events. Survey responses highlighted various forms of disrespect, including being asked to take meeting notes or order food, or being overlooked in favour of male subordinates during discussions.

One interview participant shared very similar experiences:

You know, the assumption was that I was somebody's assistant or I was there to bring lunch in. And even when the male executives around me knew my job and what I was there for, they still very easily defaulted to asking me to make sure that somebody brought dinner in.... There was this sort of assumption that because I was the woman in the room that I was, it was my accountability to make sure that somebody was taking notes or that we were going to get food brought in.

In a related example, another interviewee described a situation in which she was assumed to be responsible for cleaning the office simply because she was a woman.

⁷⁴ Emmerentia N. Barkhuizen, Gwendoline Masakane, and Lidewey van der Sluis, “In Search of Factors That Hinder the Career Advancement of Women to Senior Leadership Positions,” *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 48 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v48i0.1986>.

⁷⁵ Emmerentia N. Barkhuizen, Gwendoline Masakane, and Lidewey van der Sluis, “In Search of Factors That Hinder the Career Advancement of Women to Senior Leadership Positions,” *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 48 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v48i0.1986>.

⁷⁶ Joan Williams, Rachel Korn, and Asma Ghani, *Pinning Down the Jellyfish: The Workplace Experiences of Women of Color in Tech*, The Center for Worklife Law, University of California Hastings Law, 2022, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4083914; Ethel L. Mickey, “Networks of Exclusion in a Gendered Organization in the High-Tech Industry,” (PhD diss., Northeastern University, 2018), <https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:cj82rh595>.

⁷⁷ “Gender Results Framework: A New Data Table on Workplace Harassment,” Statistics Canada, February 12, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/240212/dq240212a-eng.pdf?st=PZOHe6iZ>.

⁷⁸ Mar Hicks, “Sexism is a Feature, Not a Bug,” in *Your Computer is on Fire* (MIT Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10993.003.0011>.

⁷⁹ Kimberly A. Houser, “Can AI Solve the Diversity Problem in the Tech Industry: Mitigating Noise and Bias in Employment Decision-Making,” *Stan. Tech. L. Rev.* 22 (2019), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3344751>.



Someone suggested, 'Why don't we ask her to clean the office?' But another board member immediately shut it down, saying, 'You are not asking the highest-paid staff member here to clean the office just because she's a woman. There are people who work for her. Why would you ask her?' It was clear that my gender played a role in their assumption because no one would have suggested the same for any of the men who worked under me.

These workplace experiences can push women to leave their jobs before they have the opportunity to advance, creating a cycle where they are systematically excluded from leadership roles.⁸⁰ As one interview participant noted, "It's not only enough to get people into a position.... It's not so much the issue anymore to get women into science but to keep them there."

The women who participated in this research shared some of their experiences with widespread disrespect, harassment, and exclusion.

One interview participant reported enduring numerous instances where her knowledge and expertise were questioned. She often encountered statements like, "You're only there because you're a diversity hire."

Another participant provided several examples of what she identified as subtle exclusion; for instance, she pointed out her casual exclusion due to a workplace culture centred around sports conversations. She said, "There are women that love team sports. I do not love team sports. I do not play golf. And if those topics are the conversations before that steering committee meeting, I just don't feel included."

Yet another participant highlighted what she perceives as systemic racism and gender-based exclusion in prestigious leadership roles. According to her,

even now, it's really tough for women of colour to get on boards... I can get on the board of an immigrant women's association if I want to, any day. But if I want to get into something like an elite industry club—oh my God, no. It's like this prestige club that no woman of colour can get into.

Another interviewee described being addressed in a patronizing and disrespectful manner:

An investor turned to me and said, 'Now missy, have you signed up for that pitch competition?' ... His language put me in that [less technical, less authoritative] context. He always referred to me as dear, honey.... That's not appropriate. You're not saying it to Bob; you don't say it to me.

⁸⁰ Mar Hicks, "Sexism is a Feature, Not a Bug," in *Your Computer is on Fire* (MIT Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10993.003.0011>.

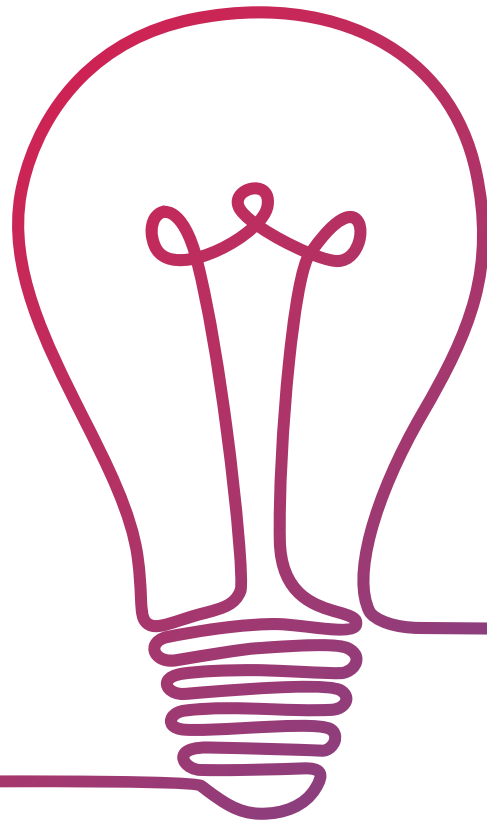
SOLUTIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN CANADA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY

Based on the evidence-based findings in this report related to advancing women into leadership positions in the digital economy, these recommendations build on those presented by ICTC in previous reports. These recommendations aim to boost women's participation in tech entrepreneurship;⁸¹ provide strategies for individuals, organizations, and policymakers to advance gender equity in the technology sector;⁸² and provide a tool kit for organizations seeking to build a pipeline for women to get into technology roles.⁸³

⁸¹ Maryna Ivus and Olena Podolna, "Breaking Barriers and Building Futures: Women Entrepreneurs as Catalysts for Sustainable Growth," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), October 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/breaking-barriers-and-building-futures>.

⁸² Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy>.

⁸³ Allison Clark, Farzeen Foda, Maryna Ivus, and Miranda McKie, "Advancing Women in the Digital Economy: A Gender Equity Toolkit for Technology Leaders, Organizations, and Ecosystem Players," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), 2024, <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/advancing-women-digital-economy-toolkit>.



RECOMMENDATION I

You Can't Be What You Can't See: Increase Visibility of Women Leaders

ICTC's research and interviews reveal that gendered biases about what makes a good leader discount the skills and competencies many women have, including collaboration, empathy, helpfulness, supportiveness, and concern for the welfare of others.

However, research shows that these traits position women as transformational leaders who excel in crisis and change management.⁸⁴ In global organizations, which must operate in cross-cultural and multicultural environments, empathetic traits make for the strongest leaders and are an essential ingredient of leadership.⁸⁵

Organizations and industry and sectoral stakeholders must recognize and promote the value of diverse leadership styles, including the empathetic traits that women bring to leadership roles. This could involve investing in the visibility of women leaders to showcase them as role models and examples, helping to break down stereotypes and biases. It could also involve making statements about the types of leadership traits that are valued by an organization, and which are most likely to advance performance, profit margins, and good governance.

⁸⁴ John G. Vongas and Raghid Al Hajj, "The Evolution of Empathy and Women's Precarious Leadership Appointments," *Frontiers of Psychology* 6 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01751>.

⁸⁵ Sanja Sivkovic, *Empathy in Leadership: How it Enhances Effectiveness*, April 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361952690_Empathy_in_Leadership_How_it_Enhances_Effectiveness.



RECOMMENDATION II

Invest in Programs, Policies, and Initiatives that Support New Parents and Caregivers

Interviews with women in Canada's digital economy reinforced the longstanding evidence-based conclusion that the motherhood bias hinders women's career advancement. Interview participants raised challenges with slow career progression, being perceived as less committed, losing opportunities, and facing systemic barriers like caregiving pressures and lack of caregiving support available to parents.

To address the specific barriers that motherhood imposes on women's career advancement, organizations should implement gender- and motherhood-sensitive interventions that actively reduce gender inequality while challenging structural biases and stereotypes. Transforming traditional notions of leadership to be more inclusive of motherhood is essential for fostering diverse approaches to problem solving. By redefining leadership expectations and creating supportive workplace environments, organizations can better integrate the needs of working mothers and promote equitable career progression.⁸⁶

To ensure that workplaces are inclusive of new parents and caregivers, and that companies can experience the full benefits of diverse workforces, organizations and industry stakeholders should consider:

1. Investing in programs or initiatives that help workers who have taken parental leave gain additional on-the-job experience and skill development opportunities to bridge the experience gap that can result from parental leave;
2. Offering caregiving support to employees, such as childcare and senior care subsidies, on-site childcare, and/or flexible work arrangements;
3. Offering return-to-work programs and support, including mentorship and sponsorship, for individuals returning from parental leave;
4. Valuing diverse identities and family responsibilities. This can be achieved by inviting returning mothers and caregivers to share their experiences, acknowledging the soft skills developed through parenthood, and encouraging leadership to openly support employees' family commitments;⁸⁷
5. Implementing performance assessment practices that consider caregiving responsibilities, career interruptions, and non-traditional career paths. Evaluations must include specific metrics that acknowledge the skills and experiences acquired through caregiving, ensuring that workplace policies do not unintentionally reinforce systemic disadvantages for working mothers.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Leticia Barbosa-Silva, Ligia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., "The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions," *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.

⁸⁷ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Leticia Barbosa-Silva, Ligia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., "The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions," *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.

⁸⁸ Ana Júlia Calegari Torres, Leticia Barbosa-Silva, Ligia Carolina Oliveira-Silva, Olívia Pillar Perez Miziara, Uly Carolina Rodrigues Guahy, and Alexandra N. Fisher et al., "The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions," *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>.



RECOMMENDATION III

Design Responsive Mentorship Programs

Many research participants highlighted the lack of female role models and mentors in technology as a barrier to their progression into senior roles. The scarcity of women in these roles limits opportunities for mentorship and guidance between seniority levels.

Organizations and industry stakeholders can address this gap by designing structured mentorship programs that are tailored to different career stages and needs. This could include senior-to-junior mentorship, where possible, in addition to peer-to-peer mentorship initiatives that establish supportive networks among women, and parent-to-new-parent peer mentoring initiatives that offer return-to-work support that can help individuals overcome the motherhood bias.

Peer mentorship can foster collaboration and mutual support among women at similar career levels, encouraging knowledge-sharing and skill development. Reverse mentorship allows junior employees to mentor senior leaders on emerging topics, fostering inclusive leadership and empowering younger professionals. Group or network mentoring connects multiple mentees with experienced mentors, creating a broader support system that is particularly beneficial in male-dominated fields such as STEM.⁸⁹

These programs should have clearly defined goals, including developing skills, advancing careers, and overcoming systemic barriers. Effective mentor-mentee pairings should be based on shared career goals, industry alignment, and relevant expertise, ensuring that women receive guidance from mentors with experience in leadership roles.⁹⁰ Mentorship programs should also incorporate gender-specific considerations, such as strategies for navigating workplace biases, overcoming imposter syndrome, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where women can openly share their experiences, mentorship initiatives can create a stronger pipeline of future leaders.

⁸⁹ Lawrence Emma, *Mentorship Programs as Catalysts for Enhancing Women's Professional and Personal Growth*, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387690967_Mentorship_Programs_as_Catalysts_for_Enhancing_Women's_Professional_and_Personal_Growth.

⁹⁰ Lawrence Emma, *Mentorship Programs as Catalysts for Enhancing Women's Professional and Personal Growth*, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387690967_Mentorship_Programs_as_Catalysts_for_Enhancing_Women's_Professional_and_Personal_Growth.



RECOMMENDATION IV

Develop Sponsorship Programs to Complement Mentorship Initiatives

There is growing awareness that mentorship may not be sufficient for career advancement, particularly for women.⁹¹ Sponsorship differs from mentorship. It is “a set of actions wherein an influential champion (sponsor) uses their position to actively support a colleague’s career by helping them gain visibility, recognition, and/or positions.”⁹² Accordingly, sponsorship requires the “active support by someone appropriately placed in the organization who has significant influence on decision-making processes or structures and who is advocating for, protecting, and fighting for the career advancement of an individual.”⁹³ Sponsorship requires the leveraging of power and influence to advance the career of a protégé.⁹⁴

Research reveals that sponsorship can play a crucial role in increasing the representation of traditionally excluded groups, including women, in leadership positions. Research has found that men are more likely than women to be sponsored.⁹⁵ Moreover, research also posits that “high-potential women” are often over-mentored but under-sponsored compared to their male peers, which hinders their career advancement.⁹⁶ Research shows that “sponsorship can be seen as one of the mechanisms involved in patriarchal reproduction

insofar as it reproduces male occupancy of positions of power through reflecting and reinforcing ties between men.”⁹⁷ Without sponsorship, women are not only less likely than men to be appointed to top roles but may also be more hesitant to pursue them.

One interview participant reflected on the impact of sponsorship in their career advancement:

Sponsorship is something you earn, but it also requires leaders willing to invest in you. I have relied heavily on male sponsors throughout my career, and everything I have achieved is because a few key individuals were willing to advocate for me. Sponsorship is more than just allyship—it’s an endorsement that signals, ‘This person is ready for the next role.’ Without it, many women remain overlooked for senior positions. An important question for men in leadership to ask themselves is: How many women are you actively sponsoring, and are you intentional about it?

In another example, an interview participant noted,

In some cases, [women] need to be told, encouraged, or even pushed forward with opportunities. Sponsorship plays a key role in this process, providing the necessary support to help women overcome barriers, including personal risk-taking, when considering senior-level roles.

⁹¹ Manasa S. Ayyala, Kimberly Skarupski, Joann N. Bodurtha, Marlís González-Fernández, Lisa E. Ishii, and Barbara Fivush et al., “Mentorship is Not Enough: Exploring Sponsorship and Its Role in Career Advancement in Academic Medicine,” *Academic Medicine* 94, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002398>.

⁹² Rachel Schwartz, Mia F. Williams, and Mitchell D. Feldman, “Does Sponsorship Promote Equity in Career Advancement in Academic Medicine? A Scoping Review,” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 39, no. 3 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-023-08542-4>.

⁹³ Manasa S. Ayyala, Kimberly Skarupski, Joann N. Bodurtha, Marlís González-Fernández, Lisa E. Ishii, and Barbara Fivush et al., “Mentorship is Not Enough: Exploring Sponsorship and Its Role in Career Advancement in Academic Medicine,” *Academic Medicine* 94, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002398>.

⁹⁴ Jennifer de Vries and Jennifer Binns, *Sponsorship: Creating Career Opportunities for Women in Higher Education*, Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW), 2018, <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UAEW-Sponsorship-Guide.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Nathan Barrymore, Cristian L. Dezső, and Benjamin C. King, “Gender and Competitiveness When Earning for Others: Experimental Evidence and Implications for Sponsorship,” *Strategic Management Journal* 43, no. 5 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3353>.

⁹⁶ Herminia Ibarra, Nancy M. Carter, and Christine Silva, “Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women,” *Harvard Business Review* 88, no. 9 (2010), <https://hbr.org/2010/09/why-men-still-get-more-promotions-than-women>.

⁹⁷ Pat O’Connor, Clare O’Hagan, Eva Sophia Myers, Liv Baisner, Georgi Apostolov, and Irina Topuzova et al., “Mentoring and Sponsorship in Higher Education Institutions: Men’s Invisible Advantage in STEM?” *Higher Education Research & Development* 39, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1686468>.



RECOMMENDATION V

Implement Organizational Culture and Workplace Experience Initiatives that Address Harassment and Exclusion

Organizational cultures that deprioritize women's needs and experiences and workplace experiences characterized by harassment were common themes among the women interviewed for this study.

There is a critical need for organizations and industry stakeholders to address culture and harassment through clear, actionable policies and internal accountability processes in order to retain women workers long enough that they have the opportunity to pursue senior roles.

Organizations can address these matters by:

1. **Training decision-makers using workshops that highlight common hiring biases and include group problem-solving strategies to address them. Awareness training helps employees recognize and manage their own biases.⁹⁸ Implicit bias education has been shown to effectively increase awareness, regardless of an individual's level of implicit or explicit bias, personal background, or professional experience. While increasing bias awareness is only one step, it is a crucial foundation for fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace.⁹⁹**
2. **Clearly identifying and exposing categories of bias that affect workplace decision making, including in hiring, promotions, compensation, and organizational culture.¹⁰⁰ Making these biases visible helps employees and leaders recognize their impact and fosters open discussions where experiences can be shared and addressed. By highlighting biases that have historically created challenges within the organization, leaders and employees become more aware of how these biases influence key decisions and workplace dynamics. Bringing biases to a conscious level encourages accountability and promotes a more equitable work environment.¹⁰¹**
3. **Implementing a gender equity enhancement program (GEEP) to systematically address gender discrimination through a multifaceted approach. This program should include comprehensive policy reforms, ensuring that anti-discrimination policies are clearly defined, enforced, and supported by appropriate penalties for violations. Additionally, mandatory gender-sensitivity training and workshops should be introduced to promote awareness and encourage behavioural change.¹⁰²**

⁹⁸ Himani Oberai and Ila Mehrotra Anand, "Unconscious Bias: Thinking Without Thinking," *Human Resource Management International Digest* 26, no. 6 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-05-2018-0102>.

⁹⁹ Janice Sabin, Grace Guenther, India J. Ornelas, Davis G. Patterson, C. Holly A. Andrilla, and Leo Morales et al., "Brief Online Implicit Bias Education Increases Bias Awareness Among Clinical Teaching Faculty," *Medical Education Online* 27, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10872981.2021.2025307>.

¹⁰⁰ Amarette Filut, Anna Kaatz, and Molly Carnes, "The Impact of Unconscious Bias on Women's Career Advancement," *The Sasakawa Peace Foundation Expert Reviews Series on Advancing Women's Empowerment*, 2017, https://www.spf.org/gff/publication/detail_24106.html.

¹⁰¹ Himani Oberai and Ila Mehrotra Anand, "Unconscious Bias: Thinking Without Thinking," *Human Resource Management International Digest* 26, no. 6 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-05-2018-0102>.

¹⁰² Abhishek Venkateshwar, Kiran Maney, Sabita Rani Lal, Anju Nair, and Najassim Pasha, *The Persistent Challenge of Gender Discrimination: An In-Depth Analysis of Its Impacts and Solutions*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387649497_Asian_And_Pacific_Economic_Review_The_Persistent_Challenge_of_Gender_Discrimination_An_In-Depth_Analysis_of_Its_Impacts_and_Solutions.



CONCLUSION

Women remain significantly underrepresented in Canada's digital economy, particularly in leadership positions. This gender-based leadership gap is not only an issue of equity but also represents a substantial economic opportunity. Research consistently shows that gender-diverse leadership enhances organizational performance, improves governance, and drives profitability. However, despite these well-documented advantages, women continue to be underrepresented in senior roles across the digital economy and in high-growth industries such as cleantech, health tech, biotech, agtech, and advanced manufacturing.

This research, which contributes to the literature on women's leadership representation, draws on the insights of women leaders across Canada's digital economy to illuminate the systemic barriers and challenges that Canadian women face in advancing to senior roles. It also provides insights into the systemic obstacles hindering women's advancement into leadership positions within Canada's digital economy.

These findings reinforce that systemic barriers, such as gender stereotypes, implicit biases in hiring and promotion, the motherhood bias, insufficient mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, and exclusionary workplace cultures, continue to obstruct women's leadership progression.

Achieving gender equity in leadership within Canada's digital economy depends on eliminating gender bias, transforming organizational cultures, and implementing structural interventions. This report provides evidence-based recommendations informed by interviews with women in the sector and grounded in existing literature to tackle systemic barriers to leadership advancement. The strategies highlighted in this report emphasize increasing the visibility of women leaders, creating mentorship and sponsorship programs, instituting family-supportive workplace policies, and nurturing inclusive organizational cultures that actively combat bias and harassment. These measures are crucial to ensuring that women not only enter the digital economy but also have the opportunity to excel in leadership roles. Beyond individual organizations and HR teams, industry and sector stakeholders must actively advocate for best practices, fostering systemic, top-down change through policies, programs, and initiatives that support women's leadership advancement.



APPENDICES

I. Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods research approach to identify the challenges and barriers that keep women out of leadership positions.

Secondary Research

The qualitative and quantitative portions of this project are supported by a thorough review of available literature and secondary data sources. The literature review helped shape the research methodology and questions and provided information to help further validate the findings in the report. The initial literature review helped identify interviewees for the research.

Primary Research: Key Informant Interviews

The study comprised 14 key informant interviews conducted in August 2024. It featured a diverse group of participants, including women in senior leadership roles such as vice-presidents, directors, and chief executive officers. The interviews collected data on barriers women face when advancing into leadership positions, and recommended solutions.

II. Limitations of Research

Sample Size and Representation

The study's qualitative approach, based on 14 key informant interviews, offers in-depth qualitative data but may not be fully representative of all women in leadership positions in Canada. The trends identified should be interpreted as reflective of the interviewees' experiences rather than definitive for the entire digital economy.

Intersectionality Gaps

While efforts were made to include diverse perspectives, the study may not fully capture the nuanced experiences of women in leadership positions across all intersections of identity, including various gender expressions and sexual orientations.

Geographic Representation

The study may not equally represent experiences from all regions of Canada, potentially overlooking unique challenges faced or innovative solutions proposed by women in leadership positions in specific provinces or territories.

Sector-Specific Insights

While focused on the digital economy, the research may not provide equal depth of insight across all sectors within the broad economy. However, the systemic barriers and gendered challenges identified in this research align with those reported in studies on women's leadership representation in other sectors and high-growth industries.

