

## Hey! What's New? 2026 – 26

### Women in Business 2026: The Value of Visibility

Grant Thornton International's *2026 Women in Business* research shows that mid-market firms who are maintaining their gender equality initiatives and plan to implement new ones were the most likely to report significant growth in revenue and staff numbers. "Investors are looking for gender-balanced leadership, or a commitment to achieving it, and employees view it as a reason to join or stay. And when the data explicitly shows that firms investing in gender equality initiatives outperform their peers, the global economy benefits."

According to the survey report, "in 2026, we find a mid-market that is still pursuing greater levels of gender diversity, despite global headwinds. 92.7% of mid-market firms have DE&I initiatives in place and 75.8% say they are committed to their gender equality initiatives. More than a third (36.8%) plan to introduce new measures."

Among businesses who are committed and plan to introduce new gender equality measures, says the report, "73.0% grew their revenue by more than 5%; 56.2% grew their staff levels by more than 5% and 48.8% grew their exports by more than 5% in 2025. The figures demonstrate that a positive stance on gender equality can clearly lead to increased performance and job creation in the economies in which these businesses operate."

Jenn Barnett, Director of I and D, and ESG, culture and brand, Grant Thornton UK, says that "gender equality is no longer just a values-driven initiative — diverse senior teams can reduce blind spots and outperform on client engagement and risk management when psychological safety exists. This is crucial as inclusion agendas are broadening and becoming embedded into processes, while regulation and disclosure are stepping up, especially on pay transparency."

In addition, mid-market leaders perceive that gender-diverse leadership teams contribute to their business being more innovative (22.1%), that their teams make better decisions (19.5%) and that there is improved financial performance (18.8%). These benefits are strategic imperatives in helping businesses grow, while navigating a quickly changing world.

Simonetta La Grutta, Partner and head of VAT, Grant Thornton Italy points out that "gender equality in business leads to an increased ability to understand problems, more opportunities to engage the market and a greater chance of finding solutions for clients. There are also lesser-known benefits such as bringing different perspectives to the table and the potential for women to align the adoption of artificial intelligence with human intelligence."

Having gender-balanced leadership is also essential for attracting investment. According to the survey, "potential new investors are the most likely external source to ask to see the gender balance of a firm's senior team or a commitment to improving gender diversity. 26.5% of businesses say they received a request from this source to see this in the last 12 months."

It adds that "attracting investment is vital to drive the growth of any business, and with 47.6% of mid-market firms reporting a shortage of finance as a constraint, businesses can increase their appeal to investors by highlighting their gender equality initiatives."

The survey also found that, this year, "more mid-market businesses report having gender equality strategies in place across nearly all the elements our research monitors. 42.2% now

have a gender equality strategy on employee pay (up 2.9pp), recruitment and selection increased to 41.1% (up 2.0pp) and senior management positions increased to 40.9% (up 3.2pp). Mid-market firms understand the value gender diversity brings and are seeking to ensure it's embedded across the business."

But, despite the benefits being reaped, "we have seen a drop in the global percentage of senior management positions in mid-market businesses held by women, down to 32.9%. While this represents a slight dip of 1.1pp from last year's 34.0%, occasional fluctuations are not unusual on a long-term path to progress. Over the past 22 years, female representation has risen by 13.4pp, even with occasional setbacks like this factored in."

Nevertheless, says the report, "there are positive signs this could be overcome, as gender equality is a priority for business leaders. This will bring significant benefits to helping attract and retain talent in mid-market firms. 91.9% of mid-market leaders say they personally consider a company's gender equality initiatives when applying for a new role, and for 66.6% it's a priority. If leaders act on this priority within their own organizations, they have a unique opportunity to shape culture and drive change — helping reverse the recent dip in the number of female leaders and building a stronger leadership pipeline."

Dig deeper into the findings at [women-in-business-2026---the-value-of-visibility.pdf](#).