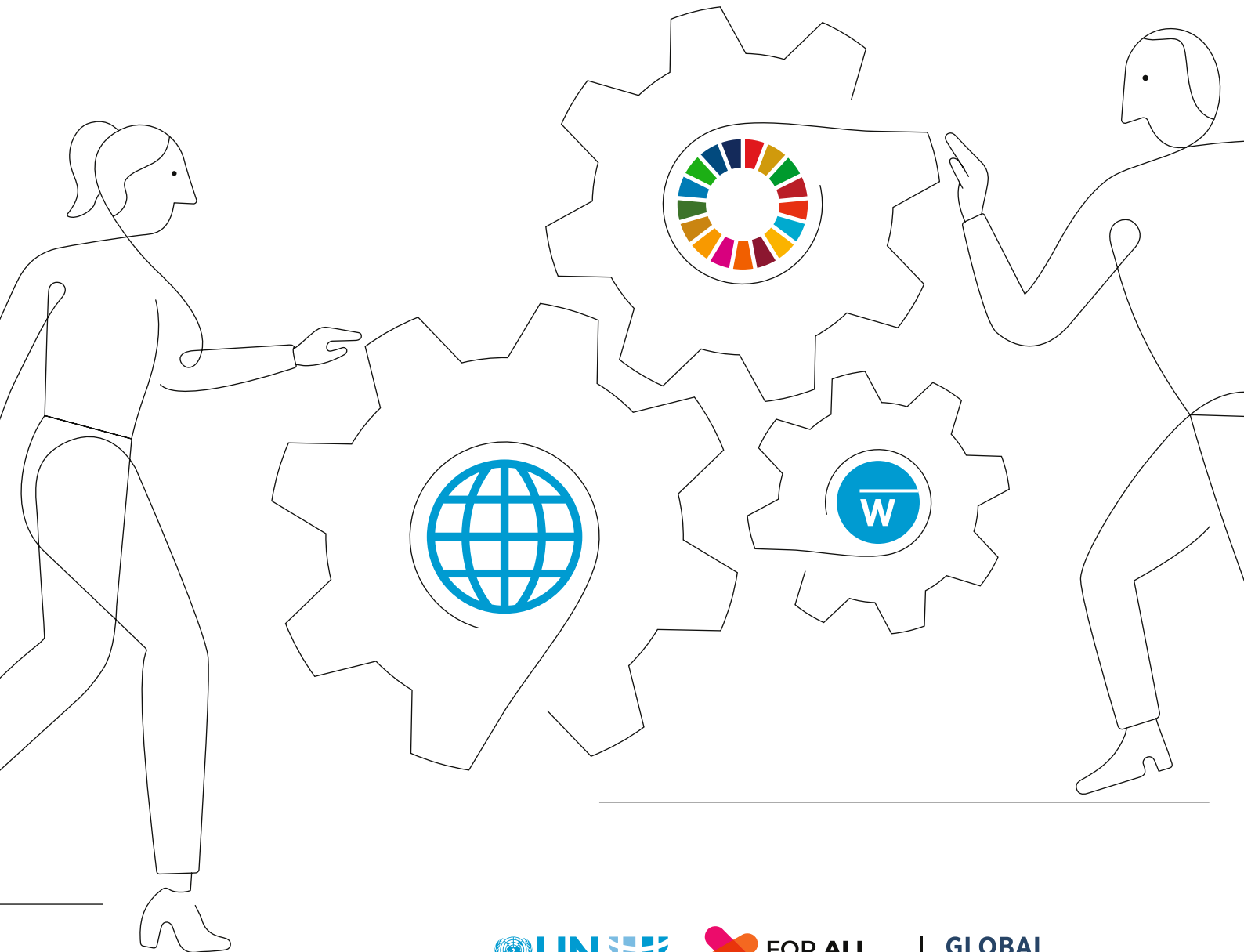


In cooperation with:



ISSUE 1

# GENDER EQUALITY AS A DRIVER OF RESILIENT GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS



ISSUE

1

# GENDER EQUALITY AS A DRIVER OF RESILIENT GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

**Global supply chains underpin the world’s production systems — connecting workers, companies and partners across regions and shaping jobs, rights and economic opportunities for millions of women and men.**

Yet three important and related dimensions remain underexamined:

1. The impact of supply chain practices on women’s rights and economic opportunities.
2. The ways gender inequalities weaken supply chain performance and resilience.
3. The power of gender-responsive supply chains in creating long-term value for business.

These dimensions matter because supply chains shape whether women and men have equal access to rights, decent work and economic opportunities — and because women’s participation as workers, business leaders and entrepreneurs is a source of resilience. Expanding that participation broadens sourcing options, strengthens agility and helps companies build more diversified, competitive and resilient supply chains in a period of fragmentation and volatility.



## The role of gender equality for supply chains

A supply chain encompasses the full network of entities involved in designing, sourcing, producing and delivering a product or service, from raw material suppliers and manufacturers to logistics providers and service partners. These networks often span multiple tiers, countries and regulatory environments with varying degrees of visibility and oversight.

Global supply chains are a major employer of women. The International Labour Organization estimates that approximately 190 million women work within them. Yet women and men often participate in, and experience, supply chains differently. These differences are not peripheral, they share risk exposure, productivity, resilience and long-term value creation.

Common gender inequalities in supply chains include:

- **Occupational segregation and limited leadership pathways**, with women disproportionately concentrated in lower-paid, lower-status roles and facing barriers to advancement into management and decision-making positions.
- **Unequal pay and precarious employment**, including overrepresentation in informal or temporary work that falls outside formal protections, increasing vulnerability and reduced income stability.
- **Risks to health, safety and dignity**, including unsafe working conditions, heightened exposure to violence and harassment, and limited access to effective grievance mechanisms and remedy.
- **Disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities**, which constrain women's participation in paid work, access to training and career progression.
- **Unequal access to procurement opportunities**, where women-owned and women-led businesses face systemic barriers to entering corporate supply chains, limiting supplier diversity and innovation potential.

When these dynamics are overlooked, companies face increased operational, legal and reputational risks. At the same time, opportunities to enhance resilience, strengthen supplier relationships, improve workforce stability and drive inclusive growth are missed.

Addressing gender inequality in supply chains is therefore not only a matter of compliance or corporate responsibility. It is a strategic lever for building smarter, more resilient and future-ready supply networks.



## Understanding and leveraging gender-responsive supply chains

A gender-responsive supply chain proactively integrates gender considerations into how a company sources, contracts, manages and supports its suppliers. This means understanding how gender inequalities shape risks, working conditions and access to opportunity; and taking practical steps so that women and men can participate on fair and equal terms across all tiers of the supply chain.

By embedding gender considerations into sourcing and supplier engagement, companies can better anticipate risks, strengthen supplier performance and support safe and equitable participation by women and men at every stage of the supply chain.

Key benefits of gender-responsive supply chains include:

- **Improved workforce stability.** When suppliers adopt fair and inclusive practices, from safe working environments to equitable pay and advancement pathways, companies benefit from lower turnover, fewer disruptions, and a more stable and skilled workforce across supply chain tiers.
- **Higher quality and safer operations.** Gender-responsive approaches support safer workplaces and more robust grievance and remedy systems. These systems help surface risks earlier, address issues more effectively and strengthen overall risk management.
- **Supplier diversification and new market opportunities.** Women-owned businesses currently access less than 1 per cent of global corporate procurement spend, indicating substantial untapped potential. Expanding opportunities for women-owned businesses also increases supplier diversity.
- **Stronger alignment with stakeholder expectations.** Investors, customers and regulators increasingly expect companies to demonstrate how they identify, prevent and address human rights violations and create social impact in their value chains. Integrating gender considerations signals credible, forward-looking supply chain management.
- **Enhanced reputation and trust.** Gender-responsive supply chains enable companies to demonstrate leadership, align with global standards and respond to growing demands for transparency and responsible business conduct.

Together, these benefits show why integrating gender considerations into supply chain strategies is both the right thing to do and a practical way for companies to build more resilient, competitive and future-ready operations.

## Collective action matters

Progress at scale cannot be achieved by individual companies acting alone. Collective action is necessary.

This is why the government of Germany and UN Women launched the Global Supply Chain Coalition: a co-creation platform that brings together companies and stakeholders to advance gender equality across supply chains and to strengthen alignment with evolving global standards.

By working together through the Global Supply Chain Coalition, companies can help deliver meaningful, measurable improvements for millions of women in their supply chains, while building more resilient, competitive and future-ready businesses. They also contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.



**Learn more:**

[www.weps.org/global-supply-chain-coalition](http://www.weps.org/global-supply-chain-coalition)  
[gsc@unwomen.org](mailto:gsc@unwomen.org)