



Progress beyond

Press release

The power of parity: How Solvay is embracing equity year-round

One Dignity: driving diversity, equity and inclusion across Solvay

Brussels, March 8, 2023

Did you know that at the current rate, it will take [132 years](#) to close the gender gap between men and women? What's more, at this pace, it will take 151 years to achieve gender equity in the workplace.

This year's International Women's Day (IWD) encourages all of us to fully #EmbraceEquity. As part of Solvay's One Dignity program, it has set the goal to achieve gender parity at mid and senior management levels by 2030. To do so, it is accelerating gender equity across its business through diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

Why gender equity matters

"A diverse organization is more likely to be able to face the challenges that lay ahead," [Philippe Kehren](#), President of Soda Ash & Derivatives explains. "As Solvay, we want to preserve our leadership position in a volatile environment, accelerate process innovation to achieve an ecological transition, and attract new talent. I have personally observed that complex projects like that are more likely to succeed if managed by diverse teams."

On top of that, customers actively look for companies whose DEI values align with their own. As a Global HR Business Partner, [Olivier Couteau](#) encounters the topic frequently: "Gender parity and DEI are always part of business discussions. Not being able to show concrete actions and initiatives can really affect relationships with customers."

And it's no different when it comes to current and prospective employees: "If you want to attract, develop and retain talent, not taking gender parity seriously will weaken your position. Candidates also often challenge us on DEI and sustainability. If you can't demonstrate concrete actions and progress, you won't attract them," Olivier explains.



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And then there's the fact that gender parity is just common sense. [Peter Browning](#), President of Solvay Peroxides agrees: "To be successful, we need to not only ensure we attract high-quality talent but also create an environment where everyone can contribute to the best of their ability. Striving towards gender parity is a great way to achieve both: it's the right thing to do and makes great business sense."

Inspiring the next generations

Solvay has already made significant strides in improving gender equity and parity across the Group. But there still remains a serious barrier to overcome: getting women into the talent pipeline.

Inclusive hiring processes are of course a must to attract female talent and at Solvay, we've introduced processes to ensure recruitment happens fairly and free of bias. But to ensure female talent finds its way into the pipeline, we have to start work even earlier.

Globally, only [30% of female students](#) select STEM-related fields in higher education, something An has first-hand experience with: "When I was studying to become an engineer, only 15% of women made up my class." And today, she sees how the issue persists as her daughter's class – also an aspirational engineer- only comprises 18% of women.

To encourage young female students to consider a career in STEM, Solvay has partnered with several organizations, including the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology ([AIST](#)), [greenlight for girls](#) (g4g) and [Girls Leading in Science](#) (GirLS) as an important first step to expanding the talent pipeline.

Diversifying the talent pipeline

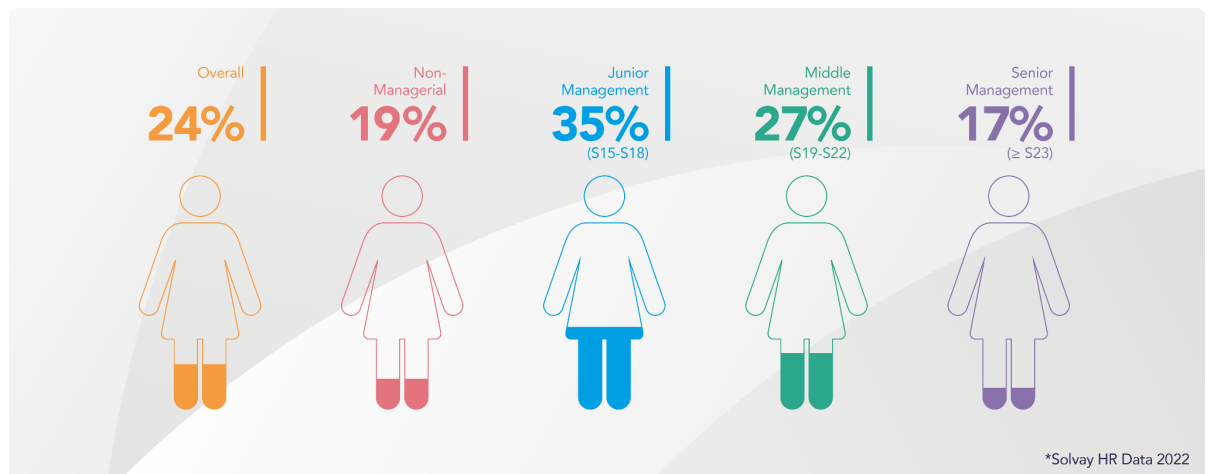
Of course, inspiring women to take up a career in STEM is not enough, especially when you know that globally, only [27% of women](#) work in STEM.



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“Each year, we recruit a number of level entry process engineers around the world. In 2022, the candidate pool was overwhelmingly male,” Peter explains. “We need to reflect on why this is and how we can modify our talent attraction process to make it more relevant and appealing to young female engineers.”

A crucial next step is getting women into the room. As part of our inclusive hiring processes, the Group is committed to composing a balanced shortlist of male and female candidates. With research showing that increasing the hiring pool from just [1 to 2 women](#) already counters unconscious bias and increases a woman’s chance of getting hired, this commitment can make a huge difference. We’ve recently seen an increase in the hiring of junior management positions, as the hire rates currently sit between 30% to 55% depending on the business.



“Of course, a candidate’s profile is important but what matters even more to me is their potential,” An explains. “Giving women the opportunity to access our pipeline and present themselves, allows them and us the chance to grow.”

Solvay is a performance-based company. We hire and promote based on merit. But often highly-qualified women don’t get access to the talent pipeline due to different barriers, such as unconscious bias, stereotyping and a lack of support. “Gender parity should be seen as a reflection of true meritocracy,” [Juan Carlos Fuenmayor](#), Chief Procurement Officer, believes. “It enables positive interactions within and across teams, which translates into higher engagement and better results.”

Breaking bias

Attraction is one part of the equation. Another one is retention. Solvay has taken several steps to implement gender equity and promote parity with great results. It has introduced [Employee Resource Group](#) and mentorship programs for female managers, adjusted its [parental leave policy](#), and doubled down on closing [gender pay gaps](#), just to name a few.



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A key step is the engagement of all employees, something Solvay invests in strongly. For Silica & Aroma, An involves everyone in her team in honest conversations about diversity. “When it’s about safety matters, everyone has an opinion but when it comes to gender parity, people still get uncomfortable. I want my teams to be able to speak about diversity as they do about safety. No concerns voiced are wrong, as long as we listen and learn from each other.”

For her, she found opening up the topic of diversity to include all aspects such as age and region significantly increased engagement: “Everyone experiences diversity differently. Broadening the topic doesn’t mean you lose focus on gender parity, it means you increase awareness by making the topic relatable.”

DEI should not be a top-down initiative, which is why Solvay businesses have also implemented DEI committees. Run by volunteers from all levels, the committees promote DEI objectives on all levels of Solvay by raising awareness with leadership. Just look at the Soda Ash & Derivatives business, which is sparking conversations on the shop floor, encouraging female shift leaders to different sites and testing the suitability of equipment for women. Or in the Procurement team which includes diversity KPIs in monthly reports and ensures the representation of female talent in all programs and recognition moments.



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Solvay's Key Gender Equity Initiatives



Nothing is impossible

Ensuring gender equity is a never-ending journey but engaging everyone to take action does pay off. “Speak up, share your views, push to make it happen, focus on solutions and engage everyone,” Olivier agrees.

The Peroxides business, for example, has introduced its first female shift operators at manufacturing plants that have predominantly staffed male workers in the past. And its leadership is close to hitting gender parity, in part thanks to a very strong talent pool of female managers. “Everything is impossible until it’s done,” Peter concludes.

The fact is that gender parity benefits all of us. It’s about maximizing talent and inspiring everyone to be their best, authentic selves. Solvay is living proof of this.



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About Solvay

Solvay is a science company whose technologies bring benefits to many aspects of daily life. With more than 22,000 employees in 61 countries, Solvay bonds people, ideas and elements to reinvent progress. The Group seeks to create sustainable shared value for all, notably through its Solvay One Planet roadmap crafted around three pillars: protecting the climate, preserving resources and fostering a better life. The Group's innovative solutions contribute to safer, cleaner, and more sustainable products found in homes, food and consumer goods, planes, cars, batteries, smart devices, health care applications, water and air purification systems. Founded in 1863, Solvay today ranks among the world's top three companies for the vast majority of its activities and delivered net sales of €13.4 billion in 2022. Solvay is listed on Euronext Brussels and Paris (SOLB). Learn more at www.solvay.com.



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