

## **amfori & UN Women: we need women's leadership to steer businesses through recovery from the pandemic**

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**Date:** Friday, March 5, 2021 [Joint Press Release]

**Brussels, Belgium** – Businesses must put more women in managerial and technical leadership posts if they want to boost working conditions as well as the productivity of global supply chains during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

amfori and UN Women made the recommendation today in marking International Women's Day and one year of their joint advocacy, a year that began with COVID-19 being declared a global public health emergency.

Across Asia and Europe, a high percentage of labour-intensive manufacturing jobs are done by women. But women also continue to be underrepresented in management, and many endure poor working conditions and gender discrimination. On top of that, female workers have been particularly hit hard as the pandemic has significantly impacted livelihoods.

When recovering from the pandemic, businesses must build a pipeline of female leaders and in order to rebuild economies with a more gender-sensitive perspective. In 2020, the number of female chief executives in the [Fortune 500's list](#) of the world's largest companies has hit an all-time record: 37 of the companies are led by female CEOs, rising from the previous record of 33 in 2019. Despite an upward trajectory over recent years, the gains are still a small fraction. Yet, there is more [evidence](#) that putting women into top leadership roles is good for business. A [study](#) from S&P Global Market Intelligence in 2019 found that public companies with female CEOs or CFOs often were more profitable and had better stock price performance.

UN Women and amfori are now halfway into their 10-month joint Women's Empowerment Principles Activator (WEPs) programme, which encourages amfori member businesses in Europe to sign onto the Principles and make step-by-step plans to carry them out in their offices and factory floors.

Under the programme, both small to medium-sized and multinational companies have been taking a series of trainings on how to identify their gaps in gender equality, develop an action plan and to build capacity on implementing more gender-sensitive operations. This includes attracting more talented women, increasing the number of women in leadership roles, as well as identifying the guidance required from amfori and UN Women to implement their gender action plans.

To date, amfori members have begun their journey towards greater gender equality and participation, for example:

- 1) 100% of participating members plan to sign the WEPs, with a majority already signing
- 2) 100% of members have committed to develop a Gender Action Plan for their organization.
- 3) 6 members have carried out a Gender Gap Analysis (GAT), while the majority of other members intend to implement a GAT too.

The UN Women programme working with amfori, WeEmpowerAsia, is funded by the European Union.

Christian Ewert, president of Brussels-based amfori, commended the importance of current collaborations: *“International Women’s day is once again a stark reminder for all of us how important it is to continue working towards achieving gender equality globally. The challenging COVID-19 situation has and continues to impact this important objective but through tools like the amfori-UN Women WEPs Activator and the continued support of our amfori members, I remain confident that we will succeed in achieving lasting change.”*

Irena Moozova, Director of Directorate D – Equality, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers, European Commission, highlighted the importance of gender equality as a priority for the European Union, both at home and across the globe. *“It is crucial that the progress made so far is not lost due to the economic impact of the pandemic. This is why supporting women to access leadership positions in the private sector is more important than ever before, to continue advancing gender equality and ensure the recovery from the pandemic is gender-responsive and inclusive.”*

Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, added: *“The future is better with women at the table, and businesses have a critical responsibility to bring about such transformation. As laid out by the Women’s Empowerment Principles, gender-responsive workplace practices can create a significant spur in decent jobs and leadership prospects for women. Together with the EU, UN Women works with amfori to leverage the private sector potential by helping companies tailor their policies to realize this, while at the same time, promoting inclusive growth.”*

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**About amfori**

amfori is the leading global business association for open and sustainable trade. Our vision is of a world where all trade delivers social, environmental and economic benefits for everyone.

**About WeEmpowerAsia**

WeEmpowerAsia is a UN Women programme, through which the European Union is a partner and donor, that seeks to increase the number of women who lead and participate in business by mobilizing private sector companies to become gender-responsive, along with strengthening links between supply chains in Asia and Europe. For more information, visit <http://weempowerasia.org>.