

Hospitality, Travel & Leisure sector makes progress on gender diversity but faces setback on ethnic representation, according to new report

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The latest [WIHTL](#) & Diversity in Retail (DiR) annual report, launched at the recent WIHTL & [DiR Inclusion](#) Summit, shows continued progress on gender representation across the Hospitality, Travel and Leisure (HTL) sector – but also warns of a decline in ethnic minority representation at senior levels.

The data, compiled by The MBS Group through interviews with Chairs, CEOs and Chief People Officers, confirms that the HTL sector continues to outperform the wider FTSE 350 on gender diversity across Boards, Executive Committees and Direct Reports. However, ethnic minority representation has slipped, and a concerning number of Boards remain entirely all-white.

At the very top – Chair, CEO and CFO roles – women remain significantly underrepresented, signalling that further structural and cultural change is needed to achieve balance at the most strategic levels.

This year's WIHTL & DiR Inclusion Maturity Curve, which benchmarks companies' progress towards inclusion excellence, includes 92 participating organisations, up from 76 in 2024.

The HTL sector's inclusion maturity score has risen from 66% to 72.4%, marking tangible progress in how businesses approach diversity, equity and belonging. Results are validated by the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice, Oxford Brookes Business School

Tea Colaianni, founder and chair, WIHTL & DiR, said: "As an industry, we know that inclusion is vital to

building stronger, more successful organisations. When people from different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences have a seat at the table, businesses make better decisions and deliver better results.

We've made encouraging progress, but there's still much more to do. Creating truly inclusive workplaces requires continued focus and intent ensuring that everyone, regardless of their starting point, has the opportunity to contribute, grow, and thrive."

More positively, 61% of companies now identify inclusion as a strategic priority for their CEO and Executive Committee, and 69% report leaders actively promoting a culture of belonging within their organisations.

The report also highlights a clear commercial upside as analysis of the Inclusion Maturity Curve results by global consultancy firm, AlixPartners, shows:

- Companies reducing their gender pay gap achieved 5.5% higher average revenue growth and 2.1% higher profit margins than those that have remained the same or decreased.
- A strong positive correlation was found between inclusion maturity and financial performance.
- Organisations where leaders fully champion inclusion reported the highest average revenue growth at 5.1% and 0.8% profit margin change
- Those actively tailoring products and services for diverse customers saw the highest average revenue growth (4.5%) and profit margin change (1.0%).

The report was launched at the annual WIHTL & DiR Summit, held at the London Hilton Park Lane, where more than 650 senior leaders from across the sector came to share thoughts and insights on inclusion in the workplace.

Speaking at the summit, Sophie Smith, chief people officer, Compass UK & Ireland, offered her insights on inclusion in the workplace. She said: "The hospitality sector has always been the engine room of the UK's social and economic progression. It's one of the few industries where you don't need a qualification to get started - you just need the opportunity. That's something incredibly powerful, because it means we have the collective ability to open doors for people who might otherwise be left behind.

"At Compass, and across the wider hospitality industry, we can use that collective power for real impact. We can intentionally target communities and neighbourhoods that have historically been excluded from opportunity, and give people the chance to build skills, confidence, and careers they might never have imagined possible."

"Hospitality can genuinely change lives - it offers a pathway to progression that's open to everyone, regardless of background or education. But for that to truly resonate, visible recognition matters. We need to shine a light on the people, the stories, and the businesses that are driving diversity and inclusion every day.

Ben Bunker, regional managing director, Nando's, added: "I think the report shows that measurement is a great starting point - but measuring alone doesn't solve the challenges. Data is useful to help drive real, positive change. We have come a long way but there is so much more to be done.

"We've seen progress in so many areas but the reality is inclusion is ongoing work that requires

continuous focus and action.

“Creating psychological safety is critical. When we make our environments psychologically safe for everyone, we make them more inclusive for everyone at every level. This has to be a focus for all organisations and individuals.”