



# The role of benchmarking in improving the inclusion of women and girls in Tech

## Case Study

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# Executive Summary

Bridging the digital divide is essential towards building a more sustainable world for all. Companies in the tech industry have a key role to play to achieve this goal. Through the Digital Inclusion Benchmark (DIB), WBA has measured the sector in its three iterations, 2020, 2021 and in 2023. This report aims to provide further depth to this progress, including examples of actual behaviour changes by companies, and outlines World benchmarking Alliance (WBA) and influence.

Benchmarking initiatives help companies to structure their sustainability strategies, such as digital inclusion of women and girls. Benchmarks translate stakeholders' expectations into actionable methodologies and insights, while providing companies with a tool to assess their 'met' and 'not met' practices and behaviours. This encourages companies to design and implement new policies and programs in their actual gaps and improve their monitoring and disclosure efforts. WBA has collected stories and data from companies on how the benchmark has supported them with implementing more sustainable business practices in this space. However, there remains a gap in evidence in how this works in practice and the exact influence World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) has in changing company behaviour.

This report presents the findings of how tech companies have been influenced by WBA's Digital Inclusion Benchmark and are implementing more sustainable business practices in the space of gender digital inclusion as a result. The analysis focused on companies who had improved on their score across iterations of DIB as well as conducting in-depth interviews with these companies.

This resulted in three overarching findings:

1. The DIB has incentivised companies to improve their disclosure and business practices regarding digital inclusion of women and girls.
2. The DIB methodology provides companies with a roadmap to prepare for upcoming regulation.
3. Tech companies want WBA to take a stronger leadership role in the sustainability ecosystem.

The findings of the case study increase our understanding of the mechanisms through which WBA's outputs, including the publication and socialisation of our methodologies and results, have contributed to companies changing behaviour and improving sustainable business practices related to the digital inclusion of women and girls, i.e., the outcome level of WBA's theory of change. Nonetheless, the interviews and benchmark data have also highlighted the limits of measuring the impact of changes WBA contributes to, with less evidence on how changes in behaviours have benefitted human rights stakeholders, including workers and communities. Going forward, WBA hopes the key findings from this report can support companies, both in the tech industry and elsewhere, to improve their own business practices and ensure these are aligned with international standards and guidelines in the digital space.



# Introduction

## Digital Inclusion of Women and Girls

Digital inclusion supports the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. When women and girls equally access and skilfully use digital technologies, a new world of opportunities opens for learning and livelihood. With access to the internet and technological skills, women “gain opportunities to start new business, sell products in new markets, find better-paid jobs, pursue education and obtain health and financial services, while participating more fully in public life” (ITU, 2022). Digital companies play a key role in providing these opportunities through the employment they provide, the research and development they undertake and the products and services they deliver globally. Such initiatives contribute towards bridging the gender digital divide.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 9c and 5B call for universal and affordable access to the internet and to enhance the use of technology, in particular information and communications technology to promote the empowerment of women. Yet, the world remains far from achieving this target. In 2022, the “proportion of women using the internet globally was 57%, compared to 62% of men. Moreover, in 2019, only 19% of women in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) used the internet compared to 86% in the developed world (ITU, 2022). Inability to access digital technologies is exacerbating inequalities as more activities move online, increasing the gender divide. COVID-19 pandemic showed us “a future where jobs, education, health, government services and even social interaction may be more dependent on digital technologies than ever before” (OECD, 2020). Moreover, women are underrepresented in tech roles. The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2021 reports that women make up only 14% of the workforce in cloud computing, 20% in engineering, and 32% in data and AI (WEF, 2023).

In addition, the lack of diversity in tech companies can perpetuate bias and exacerbate ethical issues. Algorithms and technologies developed predominantly by men may reflect unconscious biases, leading to discriminatory outcomes which deepen gender inequalities. AI applications run via algorithms, which are a set of instructions, “where if the input data originally contains gender biases, this can get replicated by the algorithms when used for prolonged periods of time. This can reinforce these biases in decision-making” (Manasi et al, 2023). Subjective choices made during the selection, collection, or preparation of datasets can play a role in determining potential biases, which, if written by a very homogenous group of people, can only lead to a specific set of stereotypical gender-constructed answers (Polli, 2019). Digital companies can play a role in changing this in four meaningful ways:

1. *Enhancing universal access to digital technologies*: Increasing digital inclusion by ensuring their products and services are accessible to everyone, irrespective of their location or economic status. This involves working on infrastructure development, making digital tools affordable and expanding connectivity to underserved areas.
2. *Improving all levels of digital inclusion*: Digital companies should invest in educational programs that provide opportunities for women and girls to acquire digital skills that empowers them to access technology to better their livelihoods, for example through entrepreneurship or employment. This includes creating training initiatives and mentorship programs that focus on building digital literacy and technical capabilities.



3. *Fostering trustworthy use:* Building trust is critical for women and girls to feel safe and empowered in the digital world. Companies can enhance digital inclusion by prioritising cybersecurity, data privacy and online safety, to avoid discouraging internet users by women and girls from engaging in digital activities because of fears of online safety, harassment or discrimination.
4. *Innovation openly, inclusively and ethically:* By fostering a culture of diversity and ensuring equal opportunities, digital companies can harness a wide range of perspectives and experiences to drive innovation to the level of systemic change. Ethical tech practices, such as avoiding bias in algorithms and ensuring fairness in AI, are essential to make the tech industry more inclusive for women and girls.

At WBA, we strive to contribute to digital companies' role in bridging the gender digital divide through our Digital Inclusion Benchmark.



## The Digital Inclusion Benchmark

WBA's Digital Inclusion Benchmark has been assessing how companies are helping to advance a more inclusive digital economy and society since 2020. By ranking companies on their publicly disclosed policies, practices, and civil society programs, the DIB aims to urgently chart the digital space to make technology safer, more inclusive, and more trustworthy. The 2023 iteration assessed 200 keystone companies that are part of WBA's [SDG2000 list](#), with consideration given to ensuring geographical and sector balance. They include publicly listed, privately held and state-owned companies. The benchmark assesses companies on sixteen indicators across four measurement areas explained above:

1. Enhancing universal access to digital technologies;
2. Improving all levels of digital skills;
3. Fostering trustworthy use;
4. Innovation openly, inclusively, and ethically.

These indicators map to one or several of the 17 SDGs. Digital companies span across three industries: Hardware, IT software and Services, and Telecommunications. In cases where companies provide diverse products and/or services, they are categorised based on revenues.

**Table 1: Digital Inclusion Indicators**

Measurement area	Indicator code	Indicator
Access	A1	The company contributes to digital technology access
	A2	The company supports digital inclusivity for women and girls
	A3	The company facilitates digital access for diverse users
	A4	The company discloses its direct economic contribution
Skills	S1	The company supports basic digital skills development
	S2	The company supports intermediate digital skills development
	S3	The company supports technical digital skills development
	S4	The company supports school connectivity
Use	U1	The company assigns accountability for cybersecurity at a senior level
	U2	The company monitors, remedies and reports cybersecurity incidents
	U3	The company applies responsible practices for personal data
	U4	The company mitigates digital risks and harms
Innovation	I1	The company practices open innovation
	I2	The company supports technology innovation ecosystems
	I3	The company supports sustainable development
	I4	The company practices inclusive and ethical research and development

The DIB indicators consider the extent to which companies put their commitments, policies, and strategies into practice. This offers companies a comparable framework to standardise their existing reporting on digital inclusion, by providing a yardstick for measuring their performance. A detailed description of the DIB methodology and indicators for the technology sector can be found on [WBA's website](#).

WBA assessed tech companies across three iterations of the DIB and benchmarks were published in 2020, 2021 and 2023. Between these iterations, we have observed the growing influence and credibility of WBA and the DIB within the industry. In 2020, 47 of the 100 companies (47%) engaged, increasing to 76 companies out of 150 (51%) in 2021, and in 2023, 74 companies out of 200 (37%) engaged. The dropped in 2023 can be attributed to, first, the lack of predictability of the DIB timeline and this clashing with companies end of year reporting which makes feedback more difficult. Second,

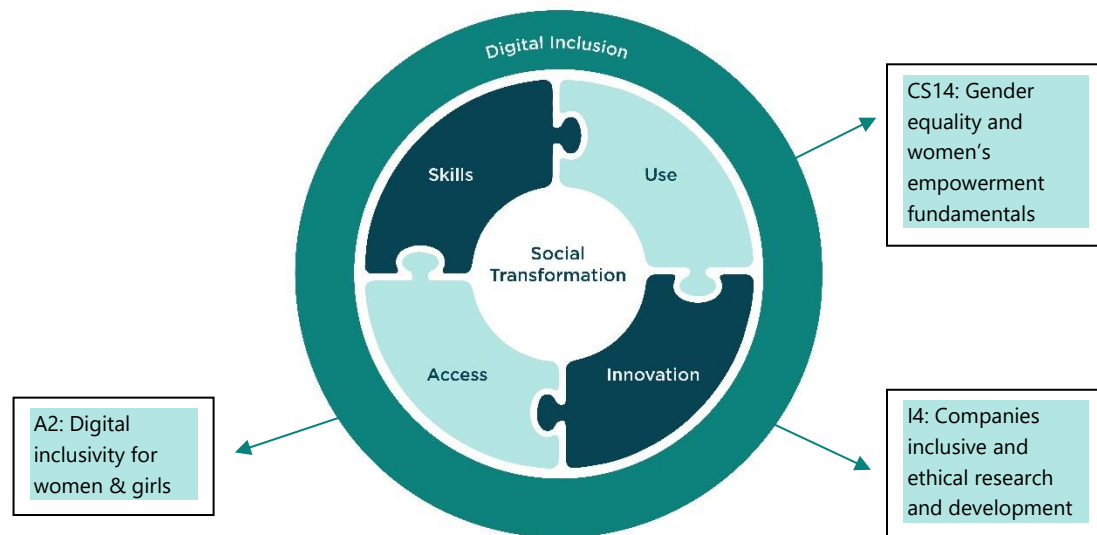


the loss of key points of contact for the DIB due to the big round of layoffs in the tech industries from 2022 to 2023, with sustainability, impact for good and policy teams being the first teams to be let go.

## WBA and Digital Inclusion of Women and Girls

At a more granular level, at WBA we assesses how tech companies contribute to the digital inclusion of women and girls through gender related indicators in the Core Social Indicators Benchmark (CSI) – part of the social transformation system which sits at the heart of all transformation at WBA - and through the Access and Innovation measurement areas within the DIB methodology. These are all used to assess women under the DIB. The CSI methodology focuses on human rights and was developed to assess companies on three main categories: human rights, decent work, and ethical conduct. Within the decent work section, indicator CSI14 tackles gender equality and women’s empowerment. This assesses company’s public commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment and discloses quantitative information on topics including; equal pay, diversity and balance, healthy and safe workplace and worker empowerment. Within the DIB methodology, the Access measurement area under indicator A2, assesses whether companies support digital inclusion of women and girls through the provision of digital opportunities. This includes assessing programs focus on access to digital products that improve women and girls’ well-being and digital skill, as well as the tracking of the impact of these programs. This helps companies understand why they are running the programmes they do and if these are actually making impact and should be continued. Moreover, the DIB Innovation measurement area through its I4 indicator, evaluates company’s inclusive and ethical research and development. Figure 1 show WBA’s gender-related indicators through which tech companies are assess in the DIB.

**Figure 1: DIB measurement areas and indicator A2**

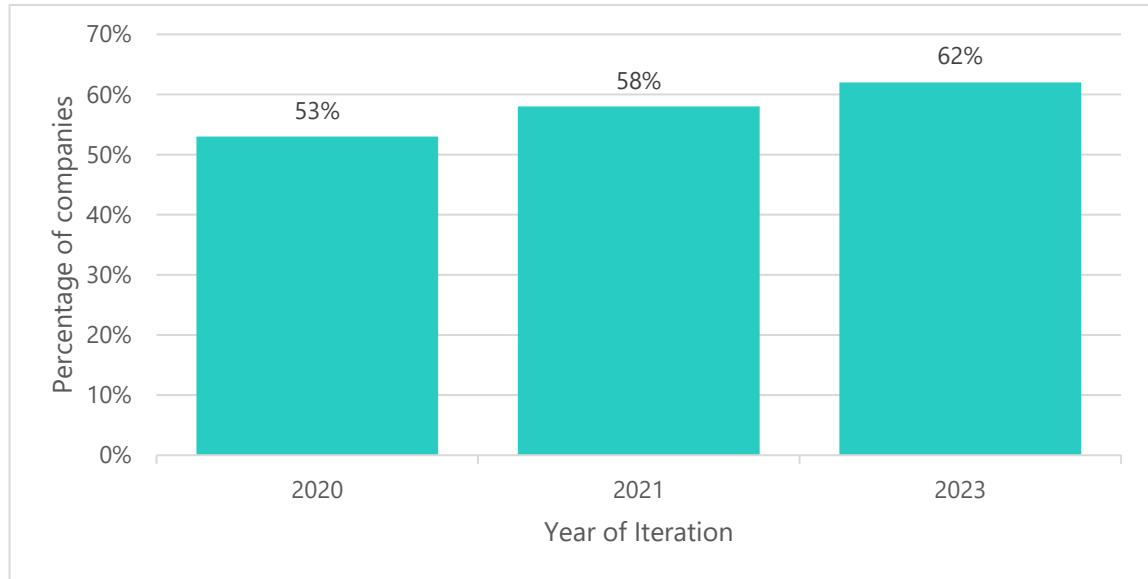


Since the first iteration of the DIB in 2020, companies have progressively improved in the area of digital inclusion of women and girls. Figure 2 shows the percentage of companies that have at least one initiative for women and girls (indicator A2). This has increased from 53% in 2020 to 58% in 2021 to 62% in 2023, suggesting that the topic is a growing priority across companies. However, initiatives

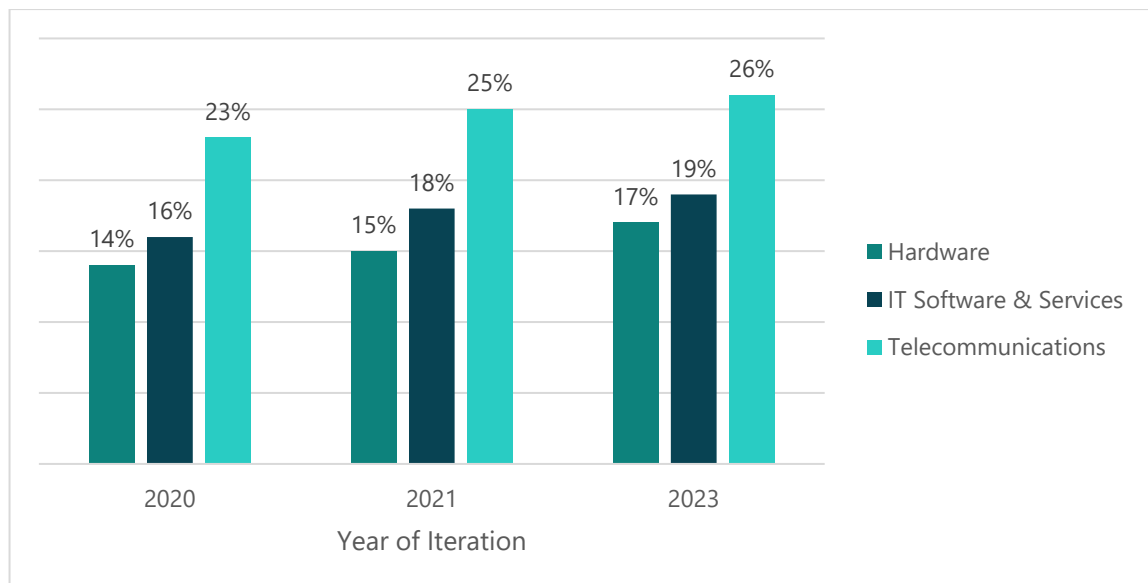


for digital inclusion of women and girls are largely more common in the telecommunications sector which has been leading over the three iterations, compared to the IT Software & Services and Hardware sectors. Nonetheless, all three industries continuously improving their percentage over the three iterations, as figure 3 demonstrates.

**Figure 2: % of original 100 DIB companies with at least one initiative for women and girls**



**Figure 3: % of original 100 DIB companies with at least one initiative for women and girls across DIB industries**



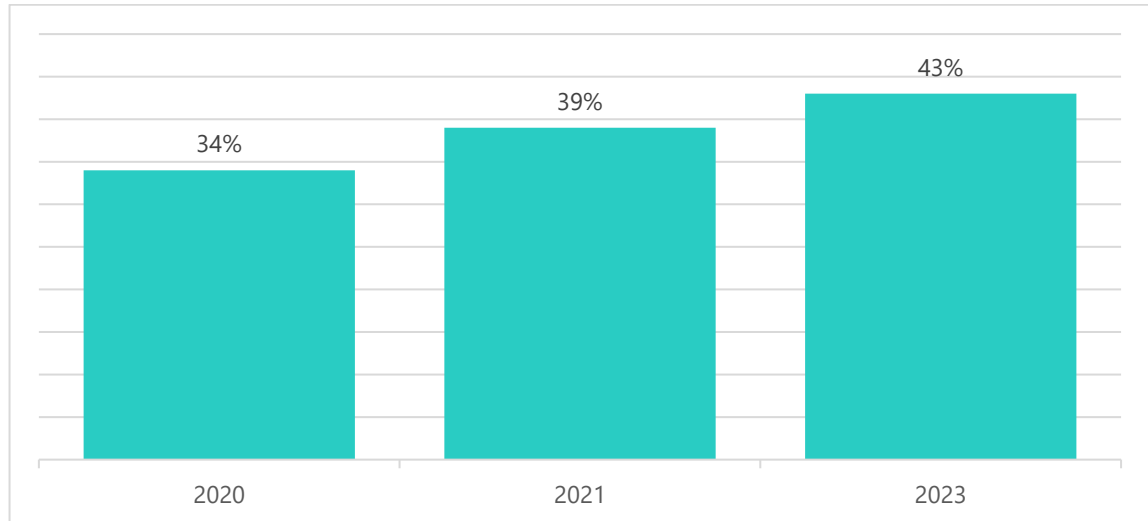
Although the provision of programs targeting women and girls’ digital inclusion is an important step in helping them to transition into a career in tech, it is only the first. The benchmark also tracks companies’ disclosure on the number of women in their tech teams. By increasing the number of women working in a company, particularly in senior roles, companies can increase women retention, and promote a more a diverse and inclusive workplace environment. This can also lead to more





innovation in the design of products and services through diversity of thought (Srivastava 2019 & Manjoo, 2014). Figure 4 shows the percentage of the original 100 DIB companies reporting women in tech. Disclosure on the number of women employees in tech roles has increased among the original 100 companies that were benchmarked. While only 34 of the 100 companies in 2020 reported the number of women in tech role, in 2021, this number increased to 39 of the 100 companies, with 43 companies out of the original 100 in 2023.

**Figure 4: % of the original 100 DIB companies reporting women in tech**



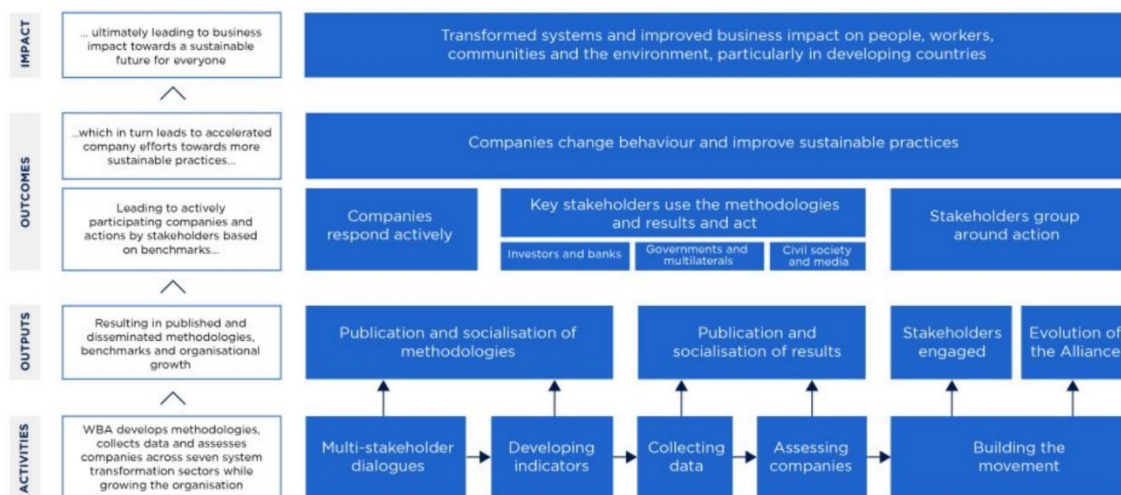
Despite some progress, the underlying theme from the DIB is that women continue to be underrepresented in tech. Nonetheless, the benchmarks results are optimistic in showing that more companies have programmes to make digital technologies more accessible to women and girls today than they did three years ago. Similarly, over the three years more companies have disclosed the number of women in their technical teams. This suggests that technology companies are stepping up in their efforts to address the digital gender divide. Therefore, the aim of this case study is to understand better how companies have used WBA's benchmarks and methodologies to further digital inclusion and what best practice looks like across the industry.

## Case study design

While WBA has measured improvement across companies' scores on women & girls in tech in the benchmark, there remains a gap in understanding the exact drivers by which benchmarks influence a company to address these topics. This includes understanding how the DIB has contributed to behavioural change and improved business practices by digital companies and how this improves the lives of people. Therefore, this case study intends to assess how WBA's methodologies, benchmarks, and insights, i.e., our outputs, influences companies to change their behaviour, i.e. our outcomes, as reflected in WBA's [Theory of Change](#), and to reflect on WBA's added value for companies in this process (see figure 7).



**Figure 7: WBA'S THEORY OF CHANGE**



The theme of digital inclusion of women and girls was selected due to gender being a catalytic topic to address social issues in the tech industry, as argued by the “[Global Gender Gap Report 2020](#)”, the “[Women and the Web](#)” and by the ITU study on “[Digital Inclusion of all](#)”. These studies emphasise the need to acknowledge ongoing gender disparities in the tech industry’s digital divide and the role companies have in narrowing this gap by ensuring fair access to technology for all. Companies interest in gender as a catalytic cross-culturally relevant topic, was also reflected in the Community of Practice(CoP) ran by WBA in 2022 which zoomed in on the topic of Digital Inclusion of Women and Girls. CoPs are spaces for multistakeholder dialogue among engaged companies on a topic that companies identified as relevant, based on the results of the DIB in 2021 and by WBA’s assessment of the general trends in the sustainability ecosystem. Moreover, the Gender Benchmark will undergo an assessment in the apparel and food & agricultural sector and an evaluation of a subset of indicators across different industries, where it will assess DIB companies. This case study aims to build up on this previous work, and interest by companies themselves, by exploring in greater depth how companies use WBA’s benchmarks to change their behaviour and policies regarding digital inclusion of women and girls.

### Sample selection

Our selection of companies was guided by companies recorded improvement in their business practices. This was measured both through improvement on companies’ scores and rankings across the different iterations. The sampled companies were, [Telefonica](#), [Orange](#), [Dell Technologies](#) and [Globe](#). Notably, three of these companies are in the telecommunications, showing how this industry is more engaged and tends to perform better in comparison to the hardware and IT & Services industries. The full ranking for the 2023 DIB can be found [here](#).

Two of the companies, Telefonica, and Orange, have emerged and maintained their position as top performers in the field and provide leading practices on the theme of this report. These companies serve as examples of best practice, occupying leading positions due to their commitment to inclusivity, supportive workplace culture, gender-sensitive policies, and effective strategies for empowering women and girls in the digital landscape. Furthermore, Dell Technologies and Globe are examples of companies who have benefitted from engaging with WBA during its benchmarking cycle and have actively work to improve their performance in this space. In addition, we interviewed two key



stakeholders in this domain: UN Women and Women at the Table, the lead civil society organisation running our Community of Practice on Digital Inclusion of women and girls.

**Table 2: Change in Total Score Among Selected Technology Case Studies, 2020 – 2023**

Companies	DIB ranking 2023 (/200)	DIB ranking 2021	DIB ranking 2020	DIB total score, 2023 (/100)	DIB total score, 2021 (/100)	DIB total score, 2020 (/100) **	Score Change 2023-2021
Telefonica	1	1	2	85.2	89.5	81	-4.3
Orange	2	2	3	71.3	79.5	79.5	-8.2
Dell Technologies	8	37	22	61.2	45.5	53	15.7
Globe	43	45	*	45.9	42.5	n/a	3.4

\*\*The total scoring for 2020 has been scaled up from (total score/2) to being out 100 for easier comparison

\*Globe was not assessed in 2020.

Beyond analysing the company's performance in the benchmark across different indicators, we conducted interviews with the four companies in July and August 2023. The interviews offered the opportunity for companies to explain further how the benchmark has influenced their practices and to provide context to the measured increase in scores between iterations, as well as explain WBA's added value.



# Key findings

The underlying theme for this report has been to answer the following research statement: How has the DIB contributed to the implementation of better practices and disclosure for women and girls regarding digital inclusion? Following our discussion with tech companies and civil society organisations, we have identified three ways in which the benchmark has supported, contributed and incentivised company transformation.

## **The DIB provides a framework for companies' strategy for advancing women & girls' digital inclusion**

A key finding resulting from the interviews is that the DIB provides a robust framework for companies to improve their disclosure practices. The DIB helps companies to identify gaps, either in lack of data collection or on the existence of corporate policies on indicators measured in the benchmark which influence their decision-making. This supports companies with structuring policies and with strategising on how to scale current ones, in line with global benchmarks and guidelines. This can mean training programs, access to technology, supportive workplace environment and data collection methods. The framework provided by the DIB, allows companies to have a measure of success, while ensuring that efforts are well-coordinated, goals are defined, and actions are aligned with the desired outcome of bridging the gender digital divide.

**“In sustainability, success is reflected in the data; what is not measured is not known. Global benchmarks developed by organisations such as WBA request for specific data across different sustainability issues. This prompts companies not only to evaluate their strategies, policies and programs, but also reinforces the need for high-quality and comparable information”.**

### **-Globe**

The identification of practical and data gaps, prompted companies to address critical areas where data had not been previously monitored nor disclosed publicly, resulting in practical steps being taken.

**“We are now making decisions based on these frameworks which means, for example, that we are making existing KPIs transparent to the market while integrating new ones which will help us become a more inclusive company.**

**For example, we identified that it would be a great step forward in transparency to report women in STEM and we began doing that in 2021. We have always been committed women in STEM and launch many initiatives every year, however measuring against an indicator makes us more accountable.**

**Another example is that we have set a North Star ambition to close the gross gender pay gap before 2050. While we need to point out that the gross pay gap is highly influenced by structural conditions of the societies in the countries in which we operate, we are doing as much as we can in our capacity as a major employer:**

- **We are ensuring equal pay for positions of equal value. In order to move forward, we have set a target of reaching an adjusted gender pay gap of +/-1% by 2024. We achieved this target ahead of schedule, in 2022.**



- **We work to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions through programs such as ‘Empowering Women’, which aims to promote female leadership among women at the company. In this vein, we are committed to attaining 33% of women directives.**
- **We are committed to promote gender parity in the Company’s highest governing bodies by 2030.**
- **We have strengthened our commitment to work-life balance and co-responsibility by carrying out an internal diagnosis which has helped us to understand the barriers that both our male and female employees encounter in their day-to-day work.**
- **And, of course, we are committed to increasing the weight and prominence of women in digital and STEM environments.**

**This whole process is facilitated by having the DIB as a trusted global yardstick”.**

#### **-Telefonica**

The DIB also influences companies’ decision-making when closing these gaps by pushing companies to think about how to structure current programs in line with stakeholder expectations and market needs. This included companies’ practical action to monitor more closely issues related to digital inclusion, to develop new and more specific KPIs and to think about ways in which they could step up in their responsibility to contribute towards closing the gender digital divide.

**“We have been refining our strategy to evolve the design of our programs and the DIB has helped us in this process. For example, following WBA recommendations that Dell Technologies could do more on child safety, we explored how we could incorporate a focus on online safety as it pertains to digital literacy in our digital skill building programs. The DIB has helped us to critically think about what kind of impact is needed around the world, and how we can improve the tools we have to make an impact”.**

#### **-Dell Technologies**

Moreover, the fact that the DIB’s assessment draws exclusively from publicly accessible information, means that companies that score lower, can learn from their higher-ranking counterparts, and identify practical steps that propel their role in bridging the gender digital divide. This process of knowledge exchange by companies, through publicly available information, can also instigate a compelling race to the top among companies. This healthy competition acts as a catalyst, driving organisations to critically assess and reflect on their existing strategies and initiate a process of introspection. This process of introspection stimulates learning in itself. Companies, spurred by the desire to climb higher on the benchmark’s ranking, channel their creativity and resources into designing novel, comprehensive programs and indicators that redefine their sustainability approach.

**“Once this process of awareness raising has been completed and implemented across the Telefonica group – which involves its subsidiaries – teams even propose to create new indicators or programs that they feel would contribute to the company’s goal of digital inclusion. At this point, the race to the top because of the benchmark is a side benefit of employees’ own interest in pushing the company itself to commit to higher standards of sustainability. This is reflected on new indicators being agreed to be measured and innovative programs created that also fit what the ecosystem is needing. For example, regarding the promotion of the presence of women in digital and STEM careers, we have a**



**total of 102 programmes and initiatives worldwide in place. Many of them were initiatives driven by employees who were committed to gender equality and digital inclusion, that later got the support of Telefónica. In this way, we are fostering work as an opportunity among our teams to be innovate and involved in a topic they are passionate about”.**

### **-Telefonica**

Here, the dissemination of best practices by companies and laggards within the industry, in part due to WBA’s push for transparency, works to catalyse broader adoption across tech companies in the industry. This critical scrutiny of companies’ disclosures facilitated by benchmarks, establishes a mechanism for continuous improvement and promotes a culture of sustained advancement in sustainability practices more generally.

### **DIB methodology is a library in the context of Women and Girls in Digital Inclusion in Tech**

Companies view DIB’s methodology as an invaluable reservoir of resources and contemporary libraries that distil complex global issues such as gender inequality, human rights, and the UNSDs, into manageable and comprehensive fragments. Companies mentioned that WBA’s publicly available methodologies work as navigation tools, helping them to structure and design companies’ strategic priorities related to digital inclusion. Moreover, in their eyes, WBA’s methodologies followed a rigorous research process and multi-stakeholder consultations phases with the Alliance members, civil society organisations and investors, making it a global trusted advisor in their eyes. As a result, DIB’s reports and insights published are seen as living repositories of information that provides companies with simple yet clear insights from a diverse array of voices and experts, which companies use to drive decision-making and priority setting. For example, Orange mentioned how useful was it for them that in the third iteration of the DIB, the results were not only analyse through the DIB itself, but also through the CSI. This allowed companies to have a more comprehensive view of their current behaviour and gaps, by overlapping digital inclusion with core human rights issues.

**“We recognise that o make an impact, our work needs to cut across different aspects of digital inclusion and come human rights. The DIB methodology demonstrates how companies can have a broad positive impact while also informing concrete steps and action organisations can take to improve”.**

### **-Dell Technologies**

The existence of publicly available methodologies, reports and insights, is an easy and comprehensive set of resources that gives companies, investors and consumers a tool to be more aware of their decision-making. From where to invest to what provider to choose from a consumer perspective, by explaining why these issues matter, how and in which areas are companies failing to rank high.

**“We are constantly receiving questions by other businesses, investors and consumers on what Orange is doing in CSR issues and gender equality. This is because they want to make an ethical informed decision, understand where we are in the overall rankings, why and what is the research backing this up”.**

### **-Orange**

The DIB also keeps companies informed about evolving policies, regulations, and societal expectations. Its forward-thinking methodology prompts companies to anticipate market demands regarding the gendered digital divide and encourages reflection on impact materiality. This broader



perspective moves beyond traditional financial materiality, which focuses on risk and shareholder value, and embraces double materiality, acknowledging a company's impact on both societal well-being and the environment. For example, Telefonica notes that often conventional indicators fail to showcase their societal impact to investors, making the DIB a platform to demonstrate this and stay ahead. This transformative perspective, aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), which recognises the interdependence between a company's economic performance and its contributions to the welfare of people and the planet, is one key added value the DIB has for digital companies. In fact, the DIB directly references the GRI and SASB in its methodology.

**“The practice of sustainability has transcended mere compliance. In Globe, sustainability is our Purpose in Action, that is “in everything we do, we treat people right to create a Globe of Good”. We go beyond conventional metrics and explore unique yet pertinent indicators like those from WBA to effectively convey how we are narrowing the digital divide and delivering greater positive societal and environmental impact in comparison to other companies”.**

### **-Globe**

In all these diverse ways, the DIB methodology, help to “marry” all key players, from consumers, to civil society organisations, to companies, employees, investors and governments, across key sustainability issues, such as digital inclusion of women and girls.

### **Call for WBA to position itself in a stronger leadership role in the sustainability space**

Companies also called for WBA to take on a stronger leadership position as a global trusted leader and subject expert in the sustainability environment. This involves having a more proactive position in shaping public policy and supporting advocacy efforts. Telefonica mentioned how WBA is in a privilege positioned between civil society, investors, and companies, which creates the opportunity for WBA to be a platform of cooperation, dialogue, and innovation. For example, the Alliance is seen as a key strength of WBA, but underutilised, as it can bring together different voices to address topics, from on-the-ground civil society organisations, to keystone companies and financial institutions. Learning from these collaborations can be reflected in WBA's methodologies and subsequent benchmark demands.

Through comprehensive and transparent assessments of corporate performance across various sustainability themes, WBA can equip policymakers and stakeholders with invaluable data to make better informed decisions. This could include sharing trends on company performance, identifying what the weakest areas are and which areas of policy, policy makers should press on, and how this aligns with governments priorities. WBA has already started doing this through our Collective Impact Coalitions (CICs), by partnering with other international organisations such as ITU in the research of the [Greening Companies report](#)

Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, CEO/Founder of Women at the Table, also encouraged WBA to explore its role as an international platform that can jointly work with local civil society organisations - in the geographies where these companies operate or have subsidiaries - in amplifying their advocacy efforts. By working in partnership with local civil societies, WBA can leverage its standing with companies, investors and as an international platform to move civil society advocacy efforts in a more muscular form. This could include collaborating in the research and exchange of data collection to augment qualitative and quantitative data given the many missing datasets we know exist, support



advocacy and awareness building sessions, facilitate stakeholder engagement and collaborations and drive collective action towards achieving the UNSDGs. This will be facilitated as WBA takes on a more assertive position as a global trusted leader through key intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations, where, as Helene Molinier from the UN Women mentioned, “we are looking for WBA to spearhead this shift as a global leader, being the voice not for risk but for impact”. This means that in relation to WBA’s ToC, we still need to work on how we build the Alliance Terms of Reference. This includes how we engage with different stakeholders, how we use the Alliance and how this relates back to the publication and socialisation of our methodologies and results. Working on our activities and output level, can result in WBA playing a more assertive role, by making itself a useful player for all key stakeholders. Collaboration with other research organisations and researchers in developing countries has already been identified a priority for WBA, and has been implemented in WBA’s and DIB research strategy.

## Concluding remarks

### Results in relation to WBA’s Theory of Change

The case studies have highlighted the relevance of benchmarking initiatives in influencing tech companies to change their business practices in the topic of digital inclusion of women and girls. The findings provide examples of how WBA’s outputs, i.e. the publication and socialisation of methodologies and results (including the benchmark’s datasets, insights reports and methodologies) has contributed to companies changing behaviour and improving sustainable business practices to close the digital gender divide, i.e. the outcome level of WBA’s theory of change. The transparent comparability between companies and the granularity of WBA’s indicators is of significant value for companies. The granularity supports companies with identifying data and actual gaps, which influence the design and implementation of policies and educational awareness raising sessions related to gender equality and digital inclusion. In comparison to other organisations in the sustainability ecosystem, WBA’s transparency with which it discloses its rationale, processes, and the comparable performance between companies, as well as its push for companies to go beyond international guidelines, such as impact materiality, is a significant added value.

Nonetheless, this report has also highlighted the limitations of WBA’s influence. There remains a gap between how we measure the impact on how changes in policies result in improving business practice on workers, communities, and the environment, i.e., the impact level of WBA’s Theory of Change. Across the interviews, it became clear that the implementation of policies and disclosure of KPIs regarding digital inclusion of women and girls, alongside educational awareness raising workshops are key first steps for companies. This should be accompanied by effective monitoring and evaluation processes to measure the resulting impact due to the updated policy and implemented programs. Time, financial resources, and lack of collaboration among companies on what best practice looks like in impact assessment, whether to implement external third-party evaluations or to continue funding social programs despite not having assessments on its impact, are contributing factors for companies struggling to identify their impact.

This corresponds with conversations WBA has with companies in other benchmarks, whereby it often takes multiple iterations of the benchmark to measure change at the impact level of WBA’s theory of change. Although the tech industry has been benchmarked three times, companies are still implementing changes based on their first iteration ranking. In addition, it takes time for companies





to get internal buy-in from different teams to integrate women and girls' inclusion policies into their practices and to ensure the policy is implemented properly, particularly from senior management and across their different subsidiaries. Moreover, WBA has only existed for five years and is still establishing itself to influence companies and their stakeholders to use our data and methodologies. Therefore, WBA is continuing to establish its relevance for companies in a crowded benchmarking sustainability ecosystem.

Nonetheless, the results from the interviews are overall encouraging. The interviewees highlighted improved business practices and changes in behaviour influenced due to the DIB. These changes will contribute to improved business practices in gender digital inclusion in the upcoming years. Bridging the digital gender divide issues is increasingly becoming an important theme for different departments within the companies and is a successful outcome of the DIB. This includes increased disclosure of the number of women in technical roles across the tech industry, creating more granular KPIs, increased reporting on key topics and processes, developing more social initiatives targeting women and girls, and implementing educational workshops. Further iterations of the DIB will highlight tech companies' progress on these topics and will ensure that the sector is held accountable to meet the SDGs.

## Call to action

### Towards further company change

While the cases presented in this report highlight improve practices since the first iteration in 2020, the sector can improve regarding its women and girls related disclosure and business practices. We hope the publication of this report can act as a guidance to support tech companies with tangible examples of how they can use the DIB to improve digital inclusion. Companies should look to implement educational initiatives using the DIB methodology as an up-to-date library to raise awareness of digital inclusion across different teams. The implementation of new policies or programs, are more easily justified to the executive and CEO teams, once this educational element has been implemented, even before ideas were discussed at a top management level. Companies can also improve by creating points of contacts across their teams, as this enables the creation of an internal stakeholder map which in turn promotes effective communication, while being a source of internal motivation for teams, who saw the value of their job and their job as an opportunity to push for human rights, across the company's.

Moreover, ensuring a diverse and inclusive workforce by actively recruiting, retaining, and promoting women in technology and leadership roles was also highlighted as best practice among the companies interviewed. Promoting mentorship, training, and career development opportunities specifically tailored to women and girls in organisations encourages the development of accessible and tailored technology, services, and facilitates the creation of safe and inclusive spaces. Inclusion of these policies within internal assessment reviews for the executive team regarding digital inclusion within survey satisfaction interviews were identified as best practice. Partnering with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community groups focused on women's empowerment to co-design and implement digital inclusion programs should be the basis for programs, leveraging their expertise and local knowledge to ensure programs are cultural relevant and effective. Through long term, broader reach, evidence-based experiments through partnerships with academic institutions, can facilitate future strategic funding by providing insights on programs that can reflect impact and change.



## Lessons learned and next steps for World Benchmarking Alliance

The interviews with companies have also provided lessons for WBA on where we can improve to better support companies with improved business practices related to digital inclusion of women and girls. Companies felt that there was an opportunity for the DIB to provide more examples of what leading practices from other companies in the sector look like. While an insight reports follow the benchmark which provides key findings on the sector, companies felt there was an opportunity for the DIB to publish more materials which highlight specific best practices on different indicators by companies and/or to actively be a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement. As an independent and neutral organisation, companies feel that WBA is well positioned to bring together companies under the scope to discuss and provide examples with one another on how they approach different topics. WBA already has experience of this through its Communities of Practice (CoPs).

Following requests from a number of digital technology companies assessed in 2020, the DIB has been organising CoPs workshops, where companies discuss digital inclusion and their experience as changemakers. This is a peer learning opportunity on best practice and helps companies strategise on how to use DIB finding to drive change in their organisations. Constant development and monitoring the impact of the CoPs, is one way on which WBA has encouraged a positive change in industry business practices, enhancing business responsibility for an inclusive and trustworthy digital transformation.

**“We quickly notice that different countries have different definition on digital inclusion, so having spaces for dialogue such as the CoP, means that we can discuss and design common definitions, having WBA as the global yardstick, making comparison between companies more understandable and inclusive, making sure we are comparing apples and apples”.**

### -Orange

The findings highlight the importance of contextualising benchmarks to consider the different challenges and priorities of companies in different region, especially in the global south. Having an indicator such as A2, which affects a company's total score and ranking, can overlook inclusivity mechanisms developed by companies as part of their digital inclusion strategy, where women and girls are ultimately benefited. Companies provided feedback that WBA's methodologies are not always context sensitive. In response, WBA has started to build this need into our activities through research and engagement as well as through monitoring and evaluation activities in order to better understand the impact of companies in developing countries and how our benchmarks play a role, in bringing positive change. Our methodologies and scoring systems are reviewed frequently, considering companies headquarters and subsidiaries context, so that their initiatives are not undervalued as part of companies' digital inclusion journey. In this way, we are working to be global not only in reach of companies benchmarked, but also in terms of inclusivity, making sure all voices and impacts made by companies are heard and recognised.

**“Advanced economies emphasise the importance of achieving gender balance as a key aspect to diversity. However, for developing countries like the Philippines, another equally critical focus is enhancing the socio-economic well-being of their citizens. Poverty, irrespective of gender, remains a pressing concern that both the private and public sectors are actively engaged in addressing. Hence, it is imperative for the metrics of the Digital Inclusion Benchmark to extend their scope beyond gender, ensuring a more comprehensive evaluation”.**

### -Globe



# Acknowledgements

The World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) is a non-profit organisation that develops free and publicly available benchmarks to hold 2,000 of the world's most influential companies accountable for their part in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our benchmarks are grounded in the seven transformations needed to put our society, planet and economy on a more sustainable and resilient path. At WBA, we are building a movement to measure and incentivise business impact towards a sustainable future that works for everyone. On that journey, we are learning and developing, to ensure we improve our work and our impact. At every step, we are proud to collaborate with Allies and strategic partners who continue to support and shape our work. This project is a great example of such collaboration, enabling us to learn more about the sustainability practices of digital companies regarding the topic of digital inclusion of women and girls in tech as well as the sector's many challenges. We will take these learnings with us in our work across the seven transformations and benchmarks.

WBA would like to thank the digital companies who participated in this project and provided the time for an interview to share their reflections. WBA would also like to thank our funders (see final section) who push us to raise our ambitions and dig deeper regarding our impact and influence.

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