

International Women's Day Reflections: The Untold Stories of GRC and Tech Leaders

The Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) industry stands at a critical juncture, grappling with a persistent gender gap that limits the career potential of talented women, particularly in the GRC technology sector.

As of 2018, women [occupied](#) one in four of all technology sector positions, even though they constitute nearly half of the overall workforce. Alarming, this figure is less than the proportion of tech roles women held in the 1980s.

In 2020, [only 5%](#) of CEOs in the FTSE 100 were women, while the figure was even lower in the FTSE 250 at just 2%. Additionally, women represented only 7% of CEOs in the Fortune 500.

Women [constitute](#) 45% of the global workforce, yet this representation drops to 25% within the tech sector and declines further to between 15-20% in the fields of governance, risk, and compliance.

Conversations With Leaders

To learn more, we interviewed several women working in GRC and tech to share their experiences and insights and shed light on the workplace challenges faced by women and how to best address them.

Their stories underscore a pressing need for meaningful change, highlighting the complexities of achieving gender parity.

The Stark Reality: Organizations Need to Walk the Talk

Christine Adeline, Chief Product Officer at SAI360, has more than a decade of experience at SAI360. She believes not enough is being done to keep talented women on board, a sentiment that underscores a broader industry failing.



“Diversity and inclusion programs are crucial...but organizations need to walk the talk,” Adeline explains, suggesting the existence of conventional diversity and inclusion programs isn’t enough without genuine implementation.

In addition to developing innovative strategies to attract and retain women in tech, Adeline believes addressing microaggression aimed towards women in the industry is also critical, revealing the subtle yet profound ways in which workplace cultures sideline women.

“The biggest challenge I have faced throughout my career is microaggression, and therefore I have sometimes felt I have to change to behave like men,” she explains.

There has been positive movement in workplace culture. Robbi-Lynn Watnik, Senior Consultant at Strategic Management Services, emphasizes the evolution of workplace culture towards inclusivity, citing her experiences as a single adoptive mother in the late ‘90s and the shift towards more family-friendly policies and practices in recent years.

“Leadership is more understanding if a child is ill; with the increased acceptance of working remotely, women can fulfill their professional responsibilities at home while caring for a child or other sick relative,” Watnik reflects, illustrating the positive changes that have made the workplace more accommodating for women.

Mentorship and Leadership: Keys to Unlocking Potential

According to Adeline, a key strategy for boosting women’s careers in tech is offering women mentoring support, especially for those returning to work after a break. “Having women in leadership demonstrates an organization’s commitment to career progression,” Adeline continues, underscoring the importance of visible female role models in inspiring and guiding the next generation.

Natalie Lesnick, JD, CHC, CHPC, a consultant at Strategic Management Services, LLC, concurs, adding that she has “seen more mentoring in the compliance space, which has been great as a younger professional.”

Diana Drobysevskaja, Director of GRC Technology at SAI360, brings this concept to life with her own mentoring efforts. “I hired a very young, exceptionally bright woman straight out of university,” shares Drobysevskaja. “Initially brought on as a manual tester, her curiosity and skill led her to delve into more technical areas.”

According to Drobysevskaja, her mentee’s story is a testament to the transformative impact of nurturing talent, showcasing how mentorship can catalyze personal and professional growth.

Taguma Nicholas, Director of Data, Entegrata, discusses the importance of leadership opportunities and active sponsorship for women.

“Encouraging women to lead high-visibility projects and participate in key decision-making processes not only boosts their career trajectories but also enriches the organizational perspective,” Nicholas points out, underlining the essential steps towards creating an environment where women’s contributions are valued and recognized.

Generational Change and the Future Horizon

“While women are still very much under-represented in IT, a lot is being done to encourage women to take roles in this field,” Adeline observes, marking a positive trend towards inclusivity. She reflects on the generational shift: “This makes it a lot easier for women wishing to take up IT roles or for their career,” signaling a brighter future for women in tech.

Drobysevskaja’s journey from a non-technical background to a leadership role in tech underscores the changing tides, “However, now I see that younger individuals, especially women, are more tech-savvy.” Her transition reflects a broader trend where women are increasingly equipped with the tools and knowledge to navigate and excel in the tech industry.

“Learning the software, regardless of its business use case, was part of the challenge, but it wasn’t significantly different whether you were a developer or a tester,” she adds, emphasizing the universal nature of tech skill across genders.

Addressing Career Gaps for Women: Maternity Leave Concerns

In the professional realm, the challenge of retaining talented women during and after maternity leave is a concern shared globally, albeit with varying degrees of support from different countries.

Diana Drobysevskaja, speaking from her experience in Lithuania, sheds light on the double-edged sword of generous maternity leaves in her country.

“In Lithuania, we have very generous maternity leaves, up to two years. So, for me as an employer, there are mixed feelings. On one hand, I really support people starting families, as our population is declining. However, as an employer, it means I might hire someone and then need to manage without them for two years when they go on maternity leave,” said Drobysevskaja.

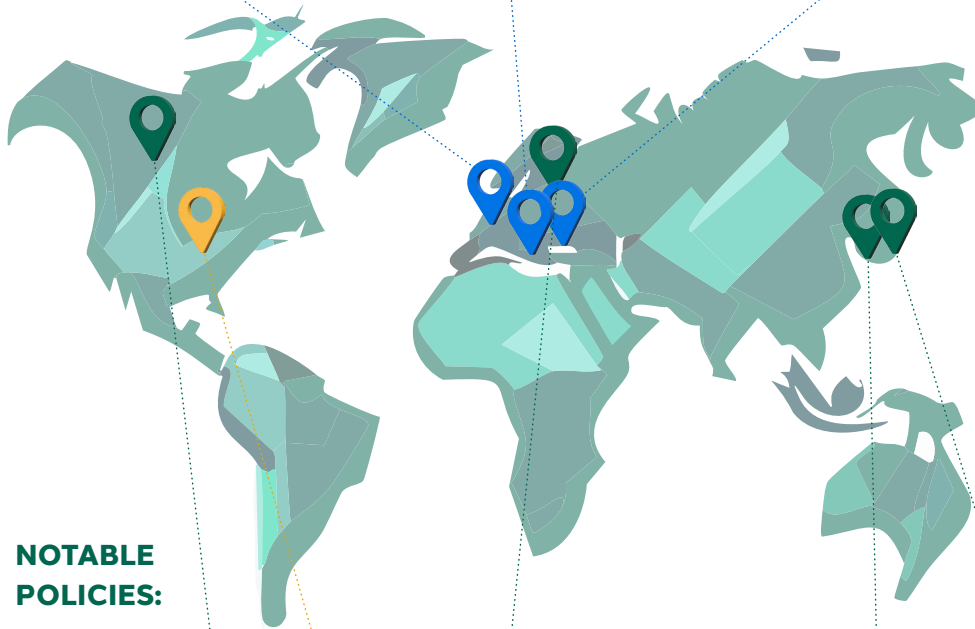
What Does Paid Maternity Leave Look Like Around the World?

GENEROUS POLICIES:

UK: Up to a year off, with the first **39** weeks paid

Croatia: Offers **30** weeks at full pay

Bulgaria: Leads with **1+** year of paid leave



NOTABLE POLICIES:

Canada: **17** weeks at ~40% pay

Germany: **14** weeks at full pay

South Korea & Japan: **13 & 14** weeks, respectively, with significant pay percentages

MINIMUM TO NO LEAVE:

United States:

The only developed country with no national paid maternity leave policy.

Vanessa Childs, Chief Product Officer at SAI360, adds a critical perspective on maternity leave policies in the U.S., emphasizing the positive impact of extended maternity leave on retention rates.

“The sad reality is the average amount of maternity leave companies give in the US is 29 days which is just four weeks. Companies that provide extended maternity leave attract and retain talented women. When Google, for example, increased its paid maternity leave program from 12 to 18 weeks, the rate of female turnover after maternity leave was reduced by 50%,” Childs notes, highlighting the direct correlation between supportive policies and employee retention.

Your Organizational Action Plan

Here are suggested steps organizations can take to drive gender-based equality, according to our interviewees. By implementing these actions, companies can move towards creating a more inclusive, supportive, and dynamic workplace where women not only succeed but flourish:

- **Strengthen Mentorship Programs:** Emphasize mentorship as a key strategy for career development, as highlighted by both Christine Adeline and Diana Drobysevskaja. Create opportunities for women to learn from seasoned professionals within the organization.
- **Ensure Leadership Representation:** Reflecting Christine Adeline's point on the importance of having women in leadership positions to inspire and guide the next generation, actively work to increase female representation in executive roles.
- **Adopt Flexible Work Arrangements:** Address the concerns raised by Diana Drobysevskaja regarding maternity leave and work-life balance by offering flexible working hours, remote work options, and generous maternity leave policies to support women's needs.
- **Implement Transparent Career Pathways:** Vanessa Childs emphasized the importance of transparency in compensation and promotion criteria to eliminate gender biases. Establish clear, transparent criteria for career advancement and communicate these openly to all employees.
- **Foster a Culture of Inclusion and Respect:** Address the issue of microaggressions mentioned by Christine Adeline by cultivating a workplace culture that respects diversity and actively combats bias and discrimination.
- **Provide Skills Development Opportunities:** Echoing Taguma Nicholas's insights on continuous learning and empowerment, offer professional development programs that equip women with the skills needed for advancement in tech and GRC fields.
- **Promote Work-Life Integration:** Inspired by Robbi-Lynn Watnik's experiences, support work-life integration through policies that acknowledge the caregiving responsibilities many women hold, such as on-site daycare facilities or subsidies for childcare.
- **Encourage Active Sponsorship:** As Taguma Nicholas suggested, beyond mentorship, implement sponsorship programs where leaders actively advocate for the promotion and advancement of women within the company.
- **Regularly Review and Adjust Policies:** In line with Diana Drobysevskaja's observations on maternity leave and workplace flexibility, regularly review company policies to ensure they meet the evolving needs of the workforce and support gender diversity.
- **Create Platforms for Women's Voices:** Establish forums or councils within the organization where women can share their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improving gender parity, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

Visit our [web page](#) to learn more about our new initiative in honor of International Women's Day 2024.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Empowerment through mentorship and leadership opportunities emerges as a central theme in creating pathways for women to ascend within their careers. Ultimately, this whitepaper therefore underscores the importance of visibility and support at all stages of career development. Furthermore, addressing systemic issues such as maternity leave policies and workplace culture is critical for retaining talented women and ensuring they do not have to choose between career progression and personal milestones.

Another key takeaway is that younger generations of women, who are entering the workforce with a new set of skills and expectations, represent a significant opportunity for the industry to redefine itself.

Companies that are proactive in creating environments that support women's career advancement, work-life balance, and leadership development are not only doing what is morally right but are also investing in their own long-term success.

Let's start a conversation. SAI360 offers training courses designed to foster a more inclusive workplace.

[Schedule a virtual coffee with a team member to learn more.](#)

Our unified approach to risk sets us apart

Today's complex risk landscape demands more. SAI360 leads the way with an integrated GRC platform and Learning solution that spans the entire risk spectrum.

Risk Management Solutions

- Enterprise & Operational Risk Management
- Regulatory Change Management
- Policy Management
- Third-Party Risk Management
- Internal Control
- Internal Audit
- Incident Management
- Conflicts of Interest (COI) Disclosure Management
- IT & Cybersecurity
- Business Continuity Management

Ethics & Compliance Learning Solutions

- Anti-Bribery & Anti-Corruption
- Competition & Anti-Trust
- Conflicts of Interest
- Data Protection & Privacy
- Information Security
- Exports, Imports & Trade Compliance
- Harassment & Discrimination