

WOMEN IN SECURITY SURVEY

State of Women in Enterprise Resilience



730
Respondents



FOREWORD



Sagarika Chakraborty
CEO
IIRIS Consulting Pvt. Ltd.

There is a question I have carried through every edition of the Women in Security Survey. Not the questions that we ask in the survey itself; those are important questions, and we have asked them carefully across three years. But beneath all of them sits a quieter, more uncomfortable question: are we really honest about what we are measuring?

In 2026, I find myself asking a harder question still. We know the gap exists. We know why it persists. The policy frameworks are in place. The awareness has arrived. The intentions, by every measure in this dataset, are genuine. 96% of respondents believe more opportunities should be created for women in security. 88% support an industry-wide gender parity pledge. More than 87% report the existence of formal DEI frameworks within their organisations. And yet, women remain under represented. Not marginally. Significantly.

What this report finds is that India's security sector has completed the awareness phase of its diversity journey and has not yet entered the accountability phase. There is no shortage of intent. There is a shortage of measurement, of outcome tracking, of the kind of institutional honesty that says: we have had these policies for three years, and here is what has changed, and here is what has not.

The next generation of security leaders is already in this workforce. More than 90% of our respondents are within the first decade of their security careers. They are watching what the generation above them does with the evidence in this report. They are watching whether the commitments made on public platforms translate into the decisions made in performance reviews and promotion cycles. This report is for them. The question is no longer whether change is necessary.

The question is whether the people with the authority to create it are prepared to be held accountable for delivering it. I believe they are. This report is our part of that accountability.



»»» FOREWORD



Shivani Kumar
Executive Director
CII Centre for Women
Leadership

India is at an inflection point in its relationship with work, with leadership, and with the question of who gets to shape both. This is not rhetorical. The evidence before us is structural.

The Women in Security Survey 2026 arrives at this moment with particular significance. Security, in all its contemporary dimensions, sits at the intersection of everything India is trying to build.

Across India, there is growing recognition that gender equality cannot be achieved simply by asking women to adapt to systems that were never designed with them in mind. Real progress requires institutions themselves to change. Whether through constitutional reservation for women in legislatures, expanding women's participation in security services, or growing efforts by companies to build inclusive leadership pipelines, we are seeing structures slowly being readjusted to make greater space for women to participate, grow, and lead. This is an important lesson: the barriers women face are not inevitable. They are often built into the way systems function. And systems can be redesigned.

The CII Centre for Women Leadership exists because we believe that the economic and social case for women's leadership is inseparable from the institutional case. Today, security functions across sectors have that data before them. WISS 2026 shows us a sector marked by high policy adoption, yet persistent representation gaps. It reveals a workforce with strong entry pipelines, but weak leadership pipelines.

These are solvable problems. But the data makes one thing clear: they will not be solved through awareness alone. Progress requires measurement, accountability, structured investment in leadership development, and the kind of institutional courage that is willing to ask difficult but necessary questions: What do our numbers actually show? And what are we willing to do about them?

I am proud that the CII Centre for Women Leadership is associated with this report as its strategic partner. I commend its findings to organisations, policymakers, educators, and professionals who recognise that the strength and resilience of India's institutions will increasingly depend on whether we are willing to build systems that enable the full participation of all available talent. The evidence is before us. The time to act is now.



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ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

»» Women in Security Survey (WISS)

The Women in Security Survey (WISS) is India's first dedicated research initiative to measure women's participation, leadership progression, workplace experiences, and representation across the security ecosystem.

Launched in 2022, WISS was created to address a critical gap in industry data. While conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion have expanded across sectors, the security profession has historically lacked credible, India-specific research to measure the realities faced by women working in security, risk, resilience, intelligence, investigations, cybersecurity, compliance, and related functions.

Over three editions, WISS has evolved from a baseline study into a national benchmarking exercise for industry leaders, policymakers, employers, academia, and practitioners seeking to better understand the state of women in security.

Evolution of WISS

»» WISS 2022

Establishing the Baseline

The inaugural edition established the first evidence base for women in security in India. It highlighted significant representation gaps and demonstrated the need for deeper industry attention.

»» WISS 2025

Understanding the Causes

The second edition expanded the research scope, introduced year-on-year analysis, identified structural barriers, and highlighted key paradoxes affecting participation and advancement.

The report demonstrated that while awareness increased, many challenges remained unresolved.

»» WISS 2026

The Accountability Gap: Commitments Were Made. Progress Was Not

The third edition represents the next stage of the journey. Rather than asking whether a problem exists, WISS 2026 seeks to measure whether meaningful progress has occurred.

The report focuses on accountability, implementation, leadership progression, workplace culture, policy effectiveness, and measurable outcomes.

Its objective is to identify what has changed, what remains unchanged, and what actions are required to accelerate progress across the security ecosystem.

Scope of Security

WISS adopts a broad and contemporary definition of security.

The study encompasses professionals working across:

- ◆ Physical Security
- ◆ Corporate Security
- ◆ Cybersecurity
- ◆ Risk Management
- ◆ Business Continuity
- ◆ Resilience
- ◆ Intelligence & Investigations
- ◆ Fraud & Financial Crime
- ◆ Compliance & Governance
- ◆ Forensics
- ◆ Crisis Management
- ◆ Public Safety
- ◆ Law Enforcement
- ◆ Defence and National Security



By adopting a wider lens, the survey reflects the reality that security is no longer confined to traditional functions but increasingly intersects with technology, intelligence, governance, resilience, and organisational leadership.

Report Objective

The purpose of WISS 2026 is not merely to document representation. Its purpose is to measure progress, identify implementation gaps, spotlight effective practices, and provide a practical roadmap for organisations committed to building a stronger and more inclusive security profession.

The findings contained within this report are intended to inform decision-making, support policy development, strengthen organisational strategy, and contribute to a more resilient future for the security sector.

SECTION 1

»» CHAPTER 1

Executive Insight Dashboard

WISS 2026: The Accountability Gap

The Women in Security Survey (WISS) has evolved significantly over the past three editions.

WISS 2022 established the baseline. It demonstrated that women remained significantly underrepresented across security functions and highlighted the need for greater visibility, participation, and leadership opportunities.

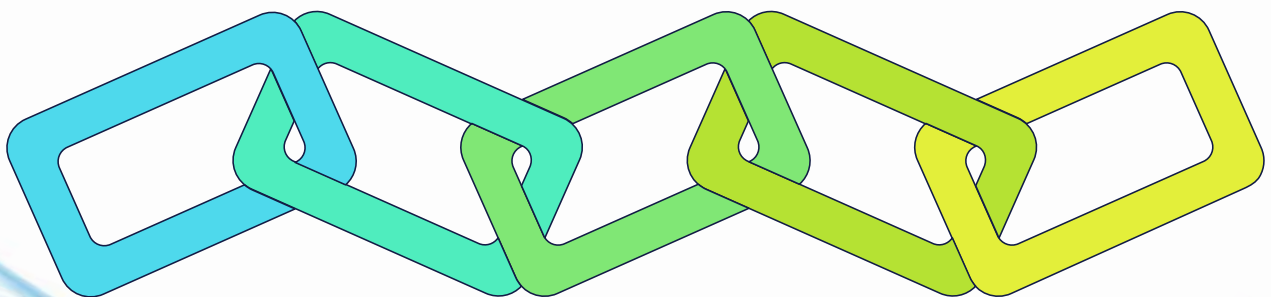
WISS 2025 deepened the conversation. It moved beyond representation to identify the structural barriers holding women back. The report highlighted persistent leadership gaps, the cybersecurity paradox, and the disconnect between organisational intent and measurable outcomes.

WISS 2026 takes the next step. It seeks to understand whether awareness has been translated into action, whether recommendations have led to measurable progress, and whether organisations are moving beyond policy statements toward meaningful change.

The findings emerging from the current dataset suggest that the industry has largely accepted the need for greater gender diversity. The challenge is no longer convincing organisations that a gap exists. The challenge is ensuring that the actions required to close that gap are being implemented consistently and effectively.

WISS 2026: Bridging the Accountability Gap

WISS 2022	WISS 2025	WISS 2026	Industry Acceptance	Implementation Challenge
Established baseline of underrepresentation	Identified structural barriers and leadership gaps	Focuses on translating awareness into action	Acknowledges the need for gender diversity	Ensures consistent and effective action



Three Numbers That Tell a Story

Before any other finding, three data points from WISS 2026 must be read together, because together, they define the accountability gap that sits at the heart of this report.

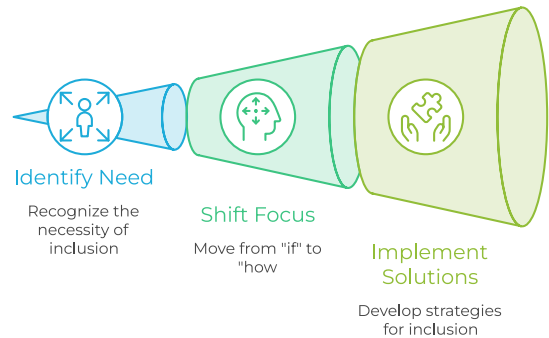
- **92.7%** of organisations report **having formal inclusion policies, flexible work arrangements, or DEI frameworks** in place.

- **74% of security professionals** have personally experienced or witnessed **gender-based discrimination** in a security workplace. That is **3 in 4 professionals**, not a marginal finding, but a majority experience.
- **84.5% of respondents (617 of 730)** still believe women remain underrepresented across security functions.

2. Support For Greater Inclusion Is Near Universal

Respondents overwhelmingly support creating more opportunities for women in security.

Achieving Gender Inclusion in Security



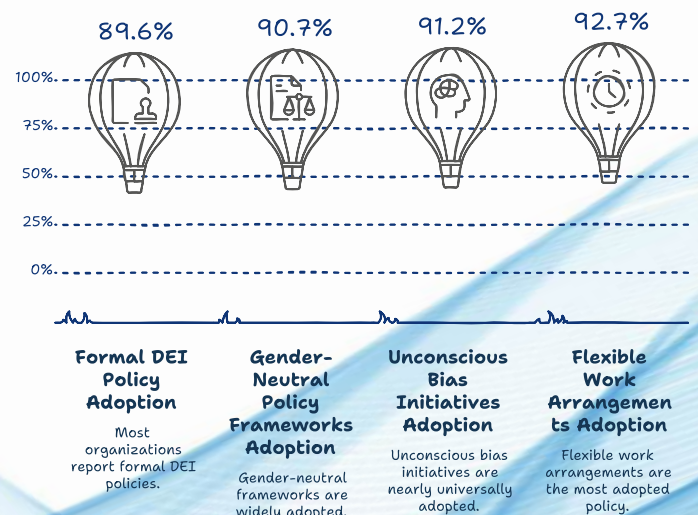
- **96.8% of respondents (707 of 730)** believe more opportunities should be created for women within security functions.

The conversation has therefore shifted from whether inclusion is necessary to how it can be achieved.

3. Policy Adoption Has Increased Significantly

Most organisations now report on the existence of formal diversity and inclusion measures.

Policy Adoption Rates



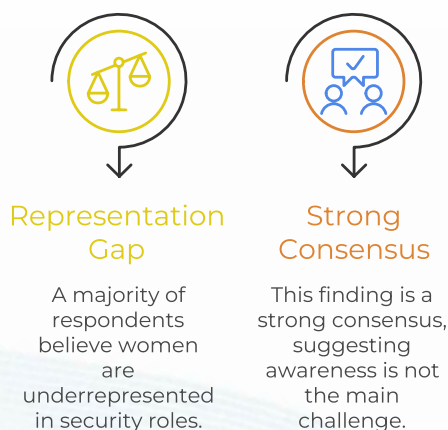
Six Key Insights

1. The Industry Recognises the Representation Gap

A clear majority of respondents continue to believe that women remain underrepresented in security roles.

- **84.5% of respondents (617 of 730)** stated that women remain underrepresented across security functions.

Security Industry Insights



This represents one of the strongest consensus findings in the survey and suggests that awareness of the issue is no longer the sector's primary challenge.

4. Mentorship Has Emerged as the Sector's Strongest Demand

When asked which intervention would most improve women's participation and advancement in security, mentorship emerged as the most frequently selected response.

- 45.2% of respondents identified mentorship as the single most important intervention. (330 of 730 responses)

This finding reinforces a recurring theme from previous editions of WISS: representation alone is insufficient without structured pathways for advancement.

5. Workplace Culture Remains The Largest Barrier

Despite progress in policy adoption, respondents continue to identify cultural barriers as the most significant obstacle to participation.

- **39.7% of respondents cited stereotypes and male-dominated workplace cultures as the primary deterrent to women entering security careers.**

This suggests that organisational culture remains one of the most important areas requiring attention.

6. The Sector Is Ready For Collective Action

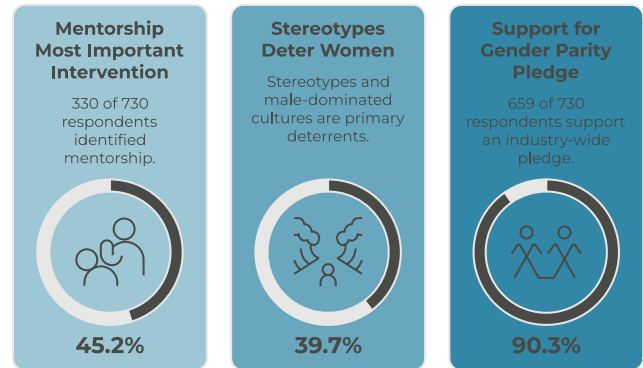
Support for broader industry commitments remains exceptionally strong.

- **90.3% of respondents (659 of 730) expressed support for an industry-wide gender parity pledge.**

The appetite for collaboration, accountability, and measurable progress appears stronger than at any point since the survey was first

launched.

Women in Security: Key Findings



Mentorship is the strongest demand, workplace culture is the largest barrier, and the sector is ready for collective action.

Three Critical Risks -

Risk 1

The Leadership Pipeline Remains Fragile

While women continue to enter security-related functions, advancement into leadership positions remains inconsistent. Current responses indicate that the lack of mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership opportunities continues to act as a significant barrier to progression.

Risk 2

Policy Is Advancing Faster Than Outcomes

Policy adoption rates exceed 87% across multiple indicators. However, concerns around underrepresentation remain equally high.

This suggests a growing implementation gap between organisational commitments and measurable outcomes.

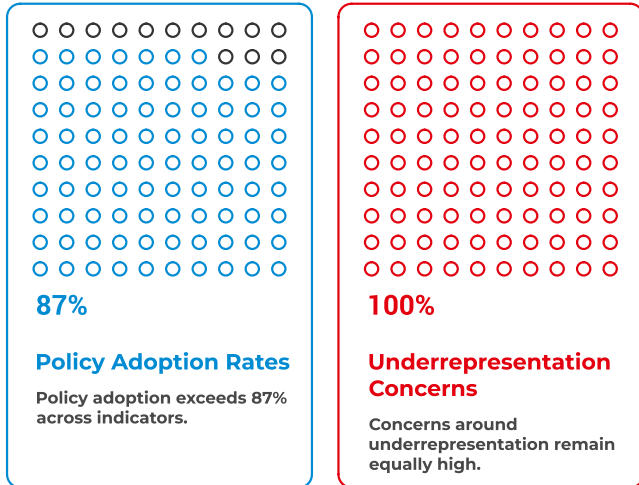
Risk 3

Cultural Barriers Continue To Limit Participation

Workplace culture, stereotypes, and perceptions remain among the most frequently cited barriers across the dataset. Unless these barriers are addressed, improvements in policy may continue to

deliver limited impact.

Critical Risks in Security Leadership



Policy adoption is high, but cultural barriers and leadership pipeline issues hinder progress.

Three Strategic Actions -

1. Build Sponsorship Pathways

Organisations must move beyond mentoring and establish structured sponsorship mechanisms that actively support women's progression into leadership roles.

2. Measure Outcomes, Not Intent

Future progress should be evaluated through representation, retention, promotion, and leadership metrics rather than policy adoption alone.

3. Create Industry-Wide Accountability

The sector should establish shared benchmarks, reporting frameworks, and voluntary commitments that enable measurable progress to be tracked over time.

Conclusion

WISS 2026 arrives at a decisive inflection point for the security profession in India. Three editions in, the data no longer leaves room for ambiguity. 84.5% of respondents continue to

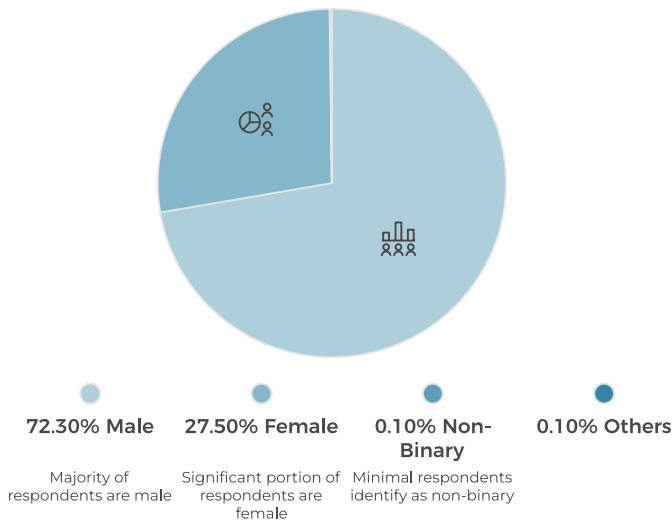
affirm that women remain underrepresented across security functions. 74% — three in four professionals — have personally experienced or witnessed gender-based discrimination in a security workplace. And yet, 92.7% of organisations report having formal inclusion policies, flexible work arrangements or DEI frameworks in place. That gap — between what is formally adopted and what is actually experienced — is the accountability gap. It is what WISS 2026 was designed to measure, and it is what the findings have confirmed. The profession has, to its credit, moved decisively beyond denial. With 96.8% of respondents affirming that more opportunities must be created for women, and 90.3% expressing support for an industry-wide gender parity pledge, the consensus for change has never been stronger. Policy adoption, at above 89% across all measured indicators, demonstrates that the language of inclusion has entered the mainstream of organisational practice. What has not kept pace is implementation. Mentorship — identified by 45.2% of respondents as the single most important intervention — remains structured in aspiration more than in practice. Workplace culture and gender stereotypes continue to be named as the primary barrier to entry. And the leadership pipeline, despite incremental movement, has not yet produced the representation at senior and executive levels that three editions of WISS have called for. The conclusion WISS 2026 draws is not one of failure — it is one of unfinished work. The industry has built the frameworks. The intent is documented. The support is overwhelming. What is now required is the discipline to measure outcomes rather than commitments, to hold organisations accountable not for the policies they have adopted but for the change those policies have produced, and to shift the sector's definition of progress from awareness to advancement. The next phase of WISS will measure exactly that.

»»» CHAPTER 2

Key Highlights at a Glance

Survey Participation

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Gender



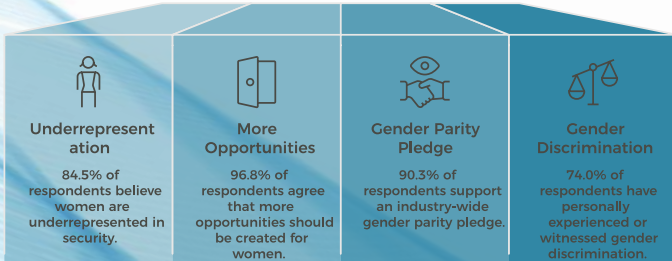
Career Level Distribution

Career Progression in an Organization

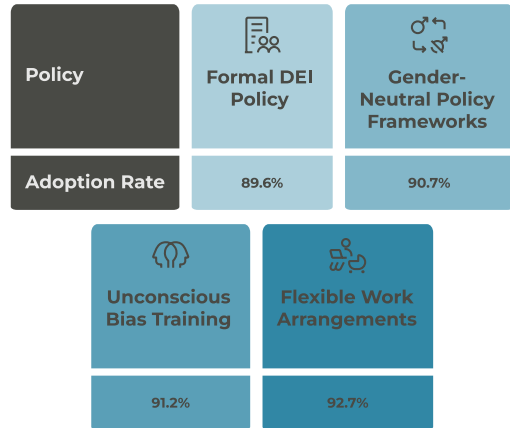


Industry Consensus

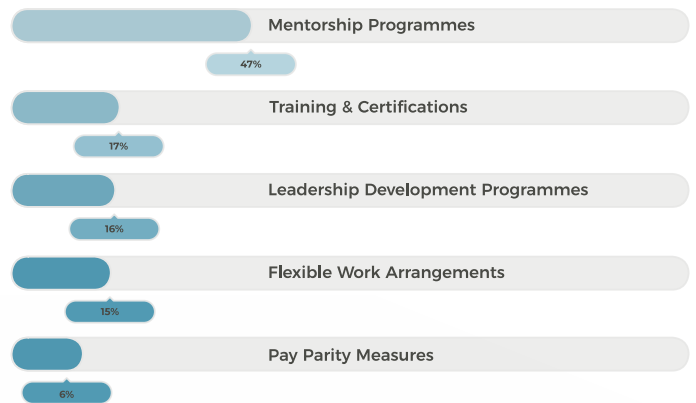
Industry Consensus on Gender Parity



Policy Adoption Snapshot



Most Desired Intervention



Areas Where Women Are Perceived to Add the Strongest Value



Women's Value in the Workplace

The findings suggest that the industry has largely moved beyond awareness. The challenge now lies in implementation, leadership progression, and accountability. WISS 2026 marks a shift from measuring participation to measuring progress.

SECTION 2

»» CHAPTER 3

Women In Security - India Overview

From Representation To Accountability

The conversation around women in security has evolved significantly over the past decade.

What was once viewed primarily as a diversity issue is increasingly recognised as a workforce, leadership, and organisational resilience issue. As security functions expand beyond traditional operational roles into areas such as cybersecurity, intelligence, investigations, risk management, resilience, and governance, the need for diverse talent has become more pronounced.

The evolution of WISS reflects this broader shift.

The Journey So Far

WISS 2022 - Establishing The Baseline

The inaugural edition of WISS sought to answer a fundamental question:

Do representation gaps exist within the security profession?

The findings established the first dedicated benchmark for women in security in India and confirmed that participation remained limited across many parts of the profession.

The report successfully moved the discussion from anecdotal observations to measurable evidence.

WISS 2025 - Understanding The Causes

Having established the baseline, the second edition focused on identifying the structural and cultural factors contributing to underrepresentation.

The report highlighted several recurring themes:



Leadership Visibility Gaps



Workplace Culture Challenges



Limited Mentorship Opportunities



Career Progression Barriers



Representation Paradoxes

The findings demonstrated that awareness alone was not sufficient to drive meaningful change.

WISS 2026 - The Accountability Edition

The third edition marks an important shift. Rather than asking whether challenges exist, WISS 2026 examines whether actions taken in response to previous findings are producing measurable outcomes.

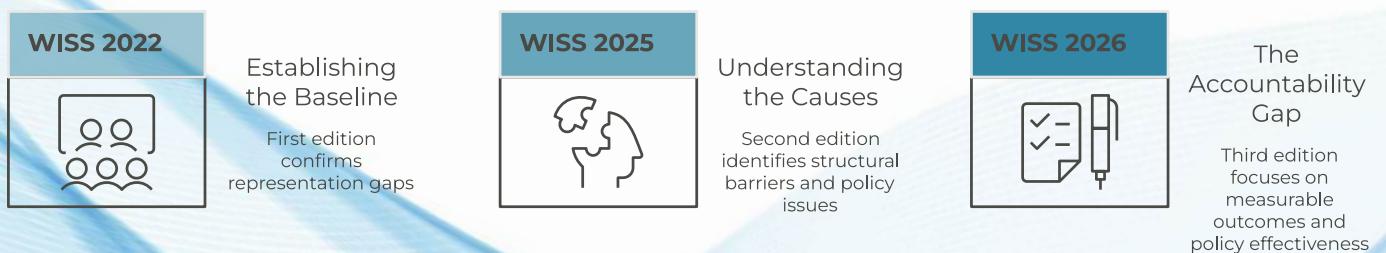
The focus, therefore, moves from awareness to accountability. The central question is no longer:

"What is the problem?" It is: "What is changing, and what remains unchanged?"

Indicator	WISS 2022	WISS 2025	WISS 2026
Edition Theme	Establishing the Baseline	Understanding the Causes	The Accountability Gap
Core Narrative	Representation gaps confirmed	Structural barriers identified	Policy ≠ Outcomes
Total Respondents	—	601	730
Women Underrepresented (Perception)	93.00%	98.00%	84.50%
More Opportunities Should Be Created	97.00%	—	96.20%
Organisations Supporting Expanded Women's Roles	82.39%	81.62%	96.2%
Organisations Increasing Female Hiring	79.40%	78.91%	96.2%
Organisations With Gender-Neutral Policies	73.09%	72.35%	89.60%
Experienced/Witnessed Discrimination	44.00%	40.00%	74.00%
Women Approached for Harassment Cases	—	30.85%	25.5%
Support for Industry-Wide Parity Pledge	—	—	90.30%
Mentorship as Preferred Intervention	—	—	45.2%
Formal DEI Policy Adoption	—	—	89.60%
Flexible Work Arrangements	—	—	91.20%
Unconscious Bias Training	—	—	89.30%
Leadership Bottleneck (C-Suite Representation)	4.44% CSO roles	4.89% CSO roles	9 C-Suite respondents
Women in Director Roles	15.28%	16.02%	18.25%
Women in President Roles	8.06%	7.92%	10.5%
Women in Middle Management	22.50%	21.80%	23.80%

The 2026 dataset presents a profession in transition. Support for inclusion is widespread. Policy adoption is high. Awareness of representation challenges is stronger than at any point since WISS began.

WISS Evolution Tracker: From Baseline to Accountability



Yet respondents continue to identify persistent concerns around:

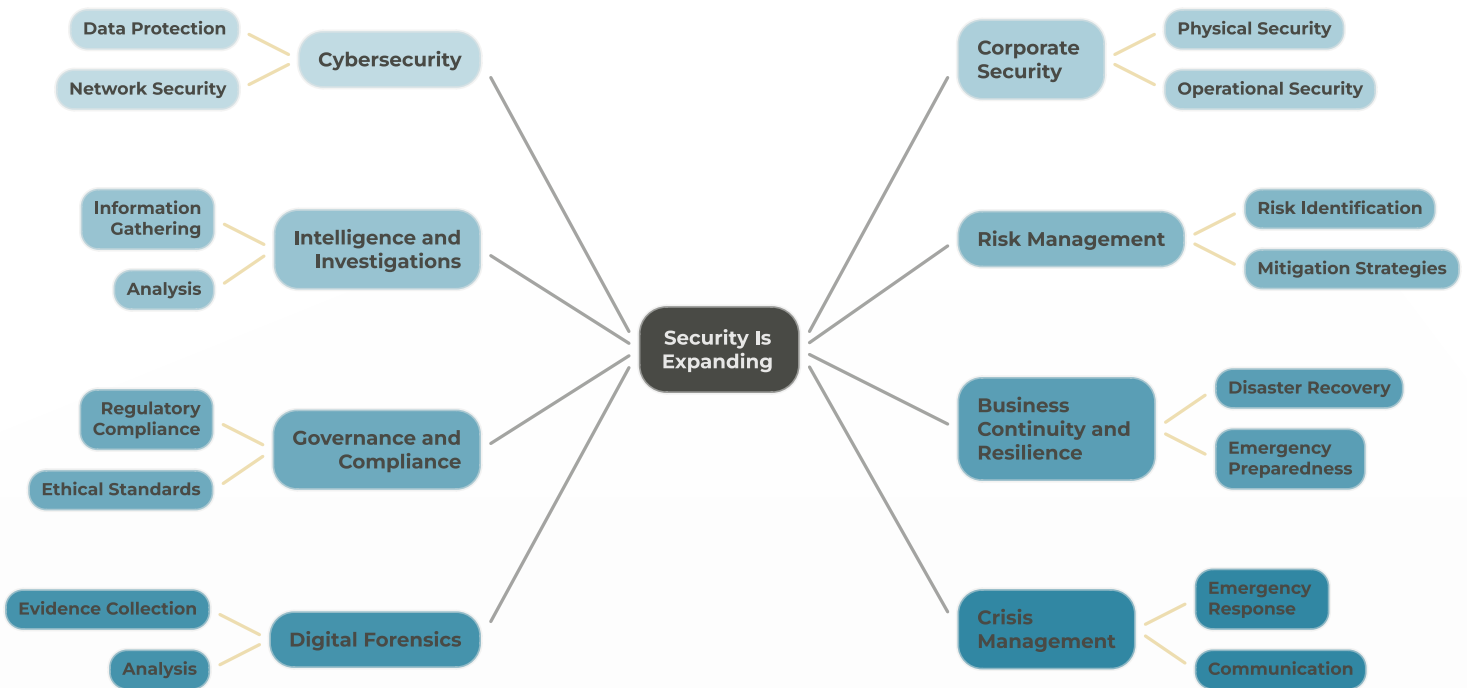
- Leadership representation
- Career progression
- Workplace culture
- Sponsorship opportunities
- Long-term retention

The findings suggest that the profession has successfully acknowledged the issue but is still working towards sustainable solutions.

Security Is Expanding

One of the most important developments shaping the Indian landscape is the expanding definition of security itself.

Expanding Definition of Security in India



This expansion creates new pathways for participation while also redefining the skills required for future leadership.

Looking Ahead

India stands at a unique moment. Government initiatives, corporate commitments, technological transformation, and changing workforce expectations are creating opportunities that did not exist a decade ago. At the same time, the pace of change remains uneven.

The findings of WISS 2026 suggest that the next phase of progress will depend less on recognising the need for representation and more on ensuring that representation translates into advancement, influence, and leadership.

»» CHAPTER 4

Global Benchmarking

How India Compares, And What The World Can Teach Us

One of the objectives of WISS 2026 is to place India's progress within a broader international context.

Women in security continue to face representation challenges across the world. However, the most successful global initiatives have demonstrated that meaningful progress is possible when organisations move beyond awareness campaigns and focus on measurable outcomes, leadership development, mentorship, and accountability.

The findings of WISS 2026 reveal that India is confronting many of the same challenges observed internationally. The difference lies in the opportunity: India is building future security ecosystems while many mature markets are attempting to reform existing ones.

Global Benchmark 1: Underrepresentation Remains A Global Challenge

WISS 2026 Finding

Respondents believe women are underrepresented in India (WISS 2026)	84.5%
Women in the global cybersecurity workforce (as per ISC ² , 2024)	~22%
Women in the UK in cybersecurity roles (LinkedIn Analysis)	~17.9%
Women in the US in cybersecurity occupations	~20%

The perception of underrepresentation identified in WISS 2026 is consistent with international workforce data.

Globally, women account for approximately **24% of the cybersecurity workforce**, according to ISC²'s 2025 Cybersecurity

Workforce Study. Despite gradual improvements over the past decade, women remain significantly underrepresented across technical and leadership roles.

LinkedIn workforce analysis further highlights the challenge. Women represent approximately **17.9% of cybersecurity professionals in the United Kingdom and less than 20% in cybersecurity occupations across the United States.**

What This Means For India

The findings demonstrate that India's challenge is not unique. The issue is not whether women can succeed in security-related professions. Rather, it is whether organisations have developed systems capable of attracting, retaining, and advancing talent on a scale.

WISS 2026 suggests that India now faces the same progression challenge confronting mature security markets.

Global Benchmark 2: Visibility Drives Representation

WISS 2026 Finding

Many respondents identified the lack of visible role models and leadership visibility as barriers to progression. International experience suggests that visibility matters.

One of the most successful examples is the **Women in Security Awards (United Kingdom)**, established in 2014. The initiative recognises women across security leadership, cybersecurity, frontline operations, investigations, and technology.

The programme was not designed as a recruitment initiative. It was designed as a visibility initiative. Over the past decade, it has helped create a larger ecosystem of recognised women leaders, role models, and industry

advocates.

Lesson For India

Representation improves when professionals can see realistic leadership pathways.

Recognition programmes, speaking opportunities, industry awards, and public visibility are not symbolic interventions. They are talent-retention mechanisms that help create aspiration and leadership confidence.

Global Benchmark 3: Mentorship Consistently Delivers Results

WISS 2026 Finding

Intervention	Responses	% of Total
Mentorship	330	45.2%
Training & Certifications	120	16.4%
Leadership Programmes	116	15.9%
Flexible Work Arrangements	108	14.8%
Pay Parity Measures	44	6.0%

Mentorship emerged as the most significant intervention identified by respondents. This finding closely mirrors international experience.

The **Security Industry Association (SIA) Women in Security Forum (United States)** has built its leadership development strategy around mentorship, scholarships, networking opportunities, and executive sponsorship. Similar approaches are increasingly being adopted by professional bodies across Europe and North America.

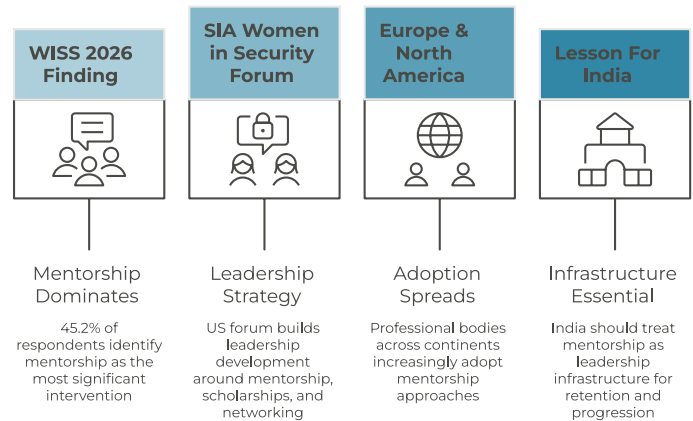
Lesson For India

The consistency of this finding across geographies suggests that mentorship should not be viewed as an optional programme. It should be treated as leadership infrastructure.

Organisations seeking measurable

improvements in retention and progression are likely to achieve greater impact through mentorship and sponsorship than through standalone awareness campaigns.

Global Mentorship Trends in Security Industry



Global Benchmark 4: The Leadership Bottleneck Is Universal

WISS 2026 Finding

Career Stage	Count	% of Respondents
Junior Level	175	24.0%
Mid-Level Management	317	43.4%
Senior Management	228	31.2%
C-Suite / Executive Leadership	10	1.4%

The WISS dataset reveals a strong workforce pipeline but limited executive representation. This pattern is not unique to India.

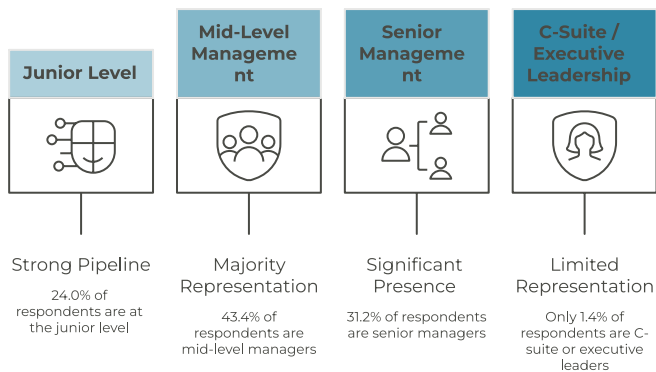
Across cybersecurity, corporate security, law enforcement, and risk management functions globally, organisations report stronger representation at entry and middle-management levels than at executive levels. The challenge, therefore, shifts from participation to progression.

Lesson For India

Future success should be measured not by the number of women entering security careers, but by the number reaching positions of

influence, decision-making authority, and leadership. The true measure of representation is leadership representation.

Global Leadership Bottleneck in Security Careers



Global Benchmark 5: Accountability Is Replacing Awareness

WISS 2026 Finding

Global Benchmark: Accountability Is Replacing Awareness

Indicator	Formal DEI Policies	Unconscious Bias Training	Flexible Work Arrangements	Women Still Perceived as Underrepresented
Result	89.6%	91.2%	92.7%	84.5%

The strongest lesson from mature markets is that policy adoption alone does not guarantee workforce outcomes. Many organisations now publish representation metrics, promotion rates, retention indicators, and leadership benchmarks rather than relying solely on programme participation data.

The emphasis has shifted from:

"What initiatives do we have?" to "What results have we achieved?"

Lesson For India

WISS 2026 identifies the same transition. The profession has largely moved beyond awareness-building. The next phase of progress will depend on accountability, measurement, and outcome tracking.

India's Unique Opportunity

Unlike many mature markets, India is simultaneously experiencing:

- Rapid cybersecurity growth
- Expansion of digital infrastructure
- Increasing investment in resilience and risk management
- Growth in intelligence-led security functions
- Policy reforms supporting women's participation

Several national initiatives create additional momentum.

Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023

The Women's Reservation Act reserves **33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies** for women, creating one of the largest representation reforms in India's history. While WISS 2026 found that **84.5% of respondents still perceive women as underrepresented in security**, the Act introduces an accountability framework that could influence leadership expectations across sectors. The key question for the next decade is whether increased political representation translates into stronger representation within security leadership and governance structures.

Mission Shakti

Mission Shakti has become one of India's largest women's safety and empowerment programmes. As of December 2025, **926 One Stop Centres had supported over 13.37 lakh women nationwide** through integrated legal, medical, and psychosocial assistance. WISS 2026 found that **74.0% of respondents reported experiencing or witnessing discrimination**, highlighting the continued importance of institutional support systems that enable participation, retention, and progression in the workforce.

Digital India & Cyber Surakshit Bharat

Cybersecurity is among the fastest-growing segments of the security profession globally. WISS 2026 identifies future skills and leadership development as critical priorities, while global studies estimate women constitute only about **22-24% of the cybersecurity workforce**. Government-led digital skilling initiatives therefore represent an important opportunity to expand participation in one of the few security domains experiencing sustained workforce growth.

CAPF Reservation Targets

The Government of India has committed to increasing women's representation in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), with a target of **33% reservation in constable-level recruitment** in several forces. WISS 2026 shows strong support for greater opportunities for women and continued concern around leadership progression. The next phase of accountability is not recruitment alone, but whether these entrants progress into specialised, operational, and leadership roles over time.

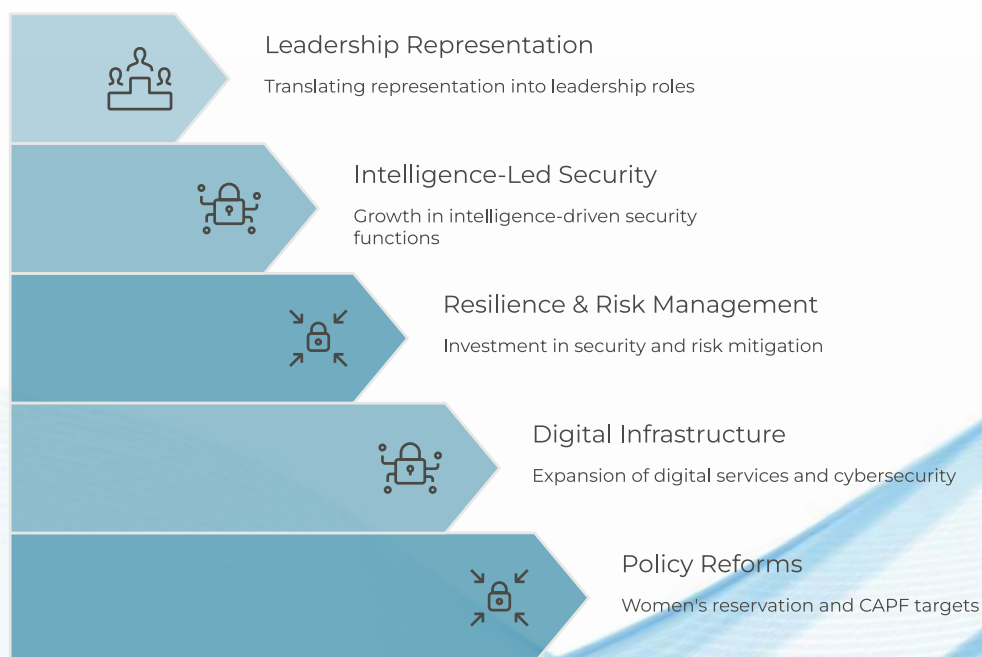
WISS 2026 Finding

Global experience demonstrates that meaningful progress is rarely achieved through awareness alone. The strongest results emerge when organisations focus on leadership development, mentorship, sponsorship, visibility, and measurable accountability.

India enters this conversation from a position of strength. Support for inclusion is widespread, policy adoption is high, and new opportunities continue to emerge across cybersecurity, intelligence, resilience, and risk management.

The challenge for the next decade is not convincing organisations that representation matters. The challenge is ensuring that representation translates into leadership.

India's Security Leadership Pyramid



SECTION 3

»» CHAPTER 5

Methodology & Sample Profile

Understanding The WISS 2026 Dataset

The Women in Security Survey (WISS) 2026 was conducted to examine the state of women's participation, progression, leadership representation, and workplace experiences across the security ecosystem. The study combines quantitative and qualitative responses to provide a comprehensive view of the opportunities, barriers, and emerging trends shaping the profession.

As the third edition of WISS, the 2026 survey moves beyond establishing the existence of representation gaps and focuses on accountability, implementation effectiveness, and future workforce readiness.

Research Design

WISS 2026 adopted a structured survey methodology combining closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The survey explored five broad dimensions:

- Workforce representation
- Leadership progression
- Workplace experiences
- Organisational policies and support mechanisms
- Future outlook for women in security

The inclusion of qualitative questions allowed respondents to share experiences and perspectives that may not be captured through numerical indicators alone

Survey Participation

The 2026 edition received 730 responses, making it the largest WISS dataset to date.

Gender Distribution

The respondent profile reflects participation

Survey Participation by Gender

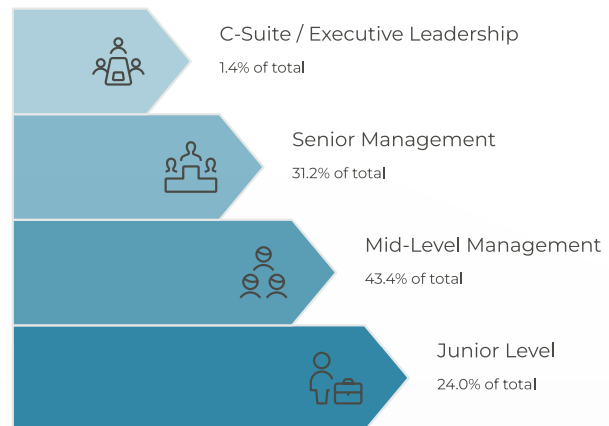
Gender	Male	Female	Non-Binary
Number of Respondents	528	201	1
Percentage	72.3%	27.5%	0.1%

from both men and women across the profession. This is significant because the findings represent perspectives from the broader security ecosystem rather than from a single demographic group.

Career Stage Distribution

Respondents represented a range of professional experience levels.

Career Stage Distribution



The dataset is heavily weighted towards professionals within their first decade of experience, providing valuable insight into the expectations, aspirations, and challenges of the next generation of security leaders.

Industry Representation

Participants represented a broad cross-section of industries where security functions play a critical role.

These included:

-

Diverse Industry Representation in Security Leadership



This diversity allows the report to examine representation and leadership challenges across multiple organisational contexts rather than a single sector.

Geographic Reach

Responses were received from professionals across India, including participation from metropolitan centres, emerging business hubs, and regional locations. The geographic spread of responses reflects the growing national relevance of conversations around women in security and leadership.

Analytical Approach

The analysis combines:

Quantitative Analysis

Used for:

- Demographic trends
- Representation patterns
- Policy adoption rates
- Leadership indicators
- Workforce development metrics

Qualitative Analysis

Used for:

- Workplace experiences
- Career barriers
- Leadership challenges
- Future outlook
- Industry perspectives

Open-ended responses were reviewed and grouped into recurring themes to identify common experiences and emerging narratives.

Scope And Limitations

As with any perception-based survey, findings should be interpreted as indicators of industry sentiment and experience rather than as a complete census of the security profession.

The survey is intended to identify patterns, challenges, opportunities, and emerging trends that can inform organisational strategy, industry initiatives, policy discussions, and future research.

While the respondent base continues to grow with each edition, representation levels may vary across industries, regions, and professional functions.

Why This Edition Matters -

The first edition of WISS established the baseline. The second edition identified key barriers and structural challenges. The third edition shifts the conversation toward accountability.

Rather than asking whether the problem exists, WISS 2026 asks a different question: **What has changed, what has not changed, and what must happen next?**

That question forms the foundation for the analysis presented throughout this report.

»» CHAPTER 6

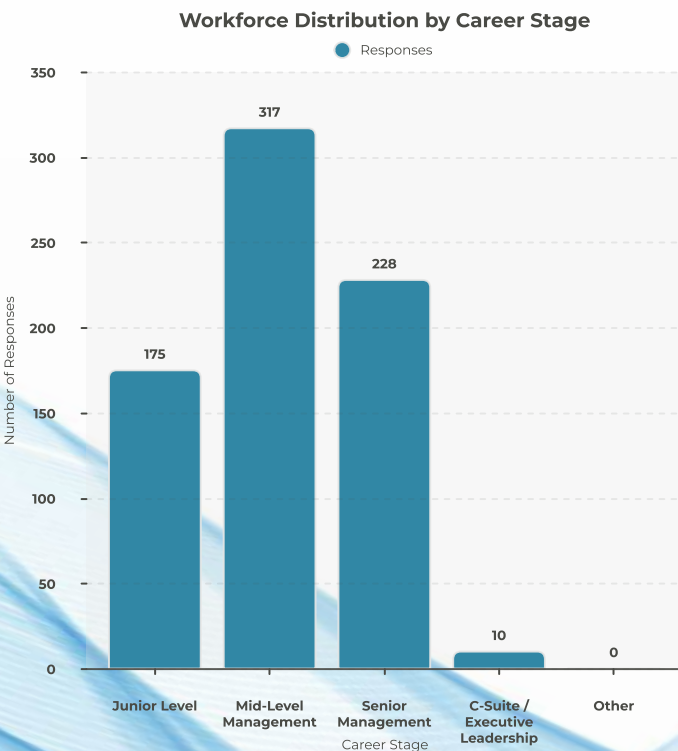
Workforce Pipeline Analysis Where Are Women Leaving the Security Profession?

The Security Pipeline Challenge

The conversation around women in security is often framed as a recruitment challenge. The data suggests otherwise.

Across sectors, organisations increasingly acknowledge the need for greater gender diversity, report the existence of formal inclusion policies, and express support for expanding opportunities for women. Yet women continue to remain significantly underrepresented across security functions and leadership roles.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply attracting women into the profession. The challenge is ensuring they remain, progress, and ultimately lead.



WISS 2026 examines the security workforce as a leadership pipeline rather than a hiring pipeline. This distinction is important. A profession can recruit women successfully and still fail to build women leaders.

Current Workforce Profile

The survey attracted responses from professionals across multiple career stages.

The Funnel Effect

When visualised as a workforce pipeline, a clear pattern emerges. The survey demonstrates healthy participation at junior, mid-level, and senior management stages. However, representation drops sharply at executive leadership levels. Only 1.7% of respondents identified themselves as C-suite leaders.

While the survey sample itself is not intended to represent national workforce composition, the pattern reflects a concern consistently raised throughout the research.

Women are entering the profession. Women are progressing into management. Women are not reaching leadership positions at the same rate. This remains one of the most significant structural challenges facing the sector.

Beyond Recruitment

For many years, conversations around women in security focused heavily on attracting candidates into the profession. The findings suggest that the issue is no longer confined to recruitment. Respondents identified barriers that occur after women enter the workforce.

The most frequently cited challenges include:

Women's Advancement Challenges in Security



Mentorship accounted for 42% of all responses. No other intervention came close.

This suggests that respondents view advancement support as more valuable than policy declarations alone. The message from the dataset is clear. Women do not merely need access to security careers. They need visible pathways through them.

The pattern is noteworthy. The highest-ranked barriers are not technical. They are organisational. This indicates that advancement, rather than capability, remains the dominant challenge.

The Mentorship Deficit

One finding appears repeatedly throughout the survey. When respondents were asked which intervention would most improve women's participation and progression, mentorship emerged as the clear leader.

Most Desired Interventions -

Mentorship's Impact on Women's Participation



The Sponsorship Gap

Mentorship and sponsorship are often discussed together, but they serve different purposes. Mentorship provides guidance. Sponsorship provides opportunity.

Throughout the survey, respondents consistently identified leadership access and progression as major concerns. This suggests that organisations may be investing in awareness and development while still underinvesting in sponsorship mechanisms capable of accelerating leadership progression.

The difference matters. A mentor helps individuals navigate a system. A sponsor helps individuals advance within it.

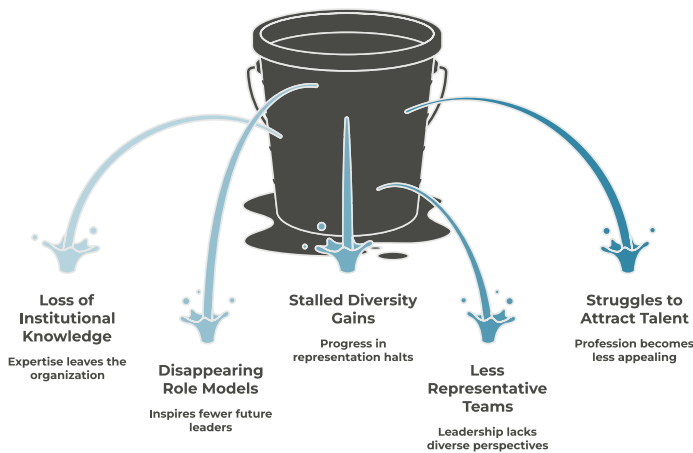
The Leadership Conversion Challenge

One of the central questions of WISS 2026 is whether the sector is successfully converting participation into leadership. The findings suggest that this remains an unresolved challenge. Respondents continue to identify:

Overcoming Leadership Conversion Barriers



Pipeline Failure Hinders Diversity



Taken together, these findings point toward a leadership conversion problem rather than a recruitment problem.

The Cost of Pipeline Failure

A weak leadership pipeline creates consequences beyond representation. When women leave the profession before reaching leadership positions:

- Organisations lose institutional knowledge.
- Future role models disappear.
- Diversity gains stall.
- Leadership teams become less representative.
- The profession struggles to attract future talent.

Pipeline failure, therefore, affects both current and future workforce diversity.

WISS 2026 Workforce Pipeline Finding

The security sector has made meaningful progress in recognising the need for greater gender diversity. However, the strongest challenge emerging from the current dataset is not attracting women into security. It is ensuring that women who enter the profession remain, progress, and reach positions of

influence.

The evidence suggests that the next phase of progress will depend less on recruitment campaigns and more on leadership pathways, sponsorship structures, and measurable advancement opportunities. The future of women in security will be determined not by who enters the pipeline. It will be determined by who successfully moves through it.

»» **CHAPTER 7**
Representation & Role Distribution

Understanding Where Women Are, And Where They Are Not

Representation remains the most visible measure of diversity within any profession. It provides an immediate indication of who participates, who progresses, and ultimately who influences decision-making.

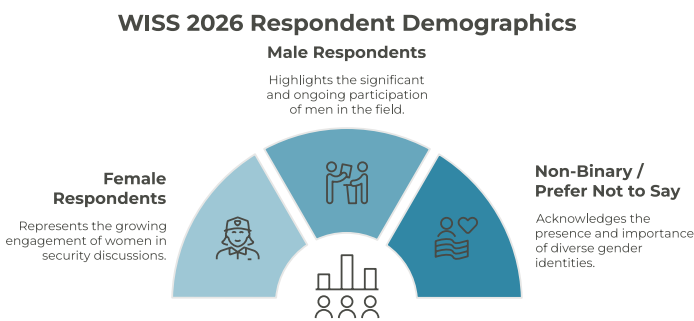
For the security profession, representation is particularly important because the sector increasingly operates at the intersection of technology, governance, resilience, risk management, intelligence, and human safety. The diversity of perspectives within these functions directly impacts organisational effectiveness.

The findings of WISS 2026 indicate that while women are present across an increasingly broad range of security-related roles, representation remains uneven across industries, functions, and leadership levels. The challenge is therefore no longer whether women participate in security. The challenge is where they participate, how they progress, and whether representation translates into leadership influence.

Profile of Survey Respondents

The WISS 2026 dataset reflects participation from professionals across multiple security-related disciplines.

Respondent Gender

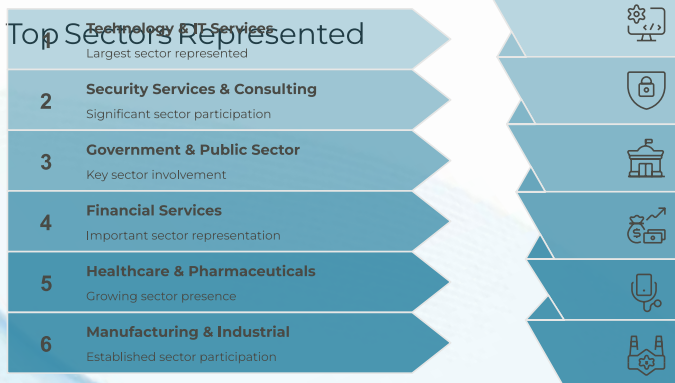


The strong participation of women respondents reflects the growing engagement of women professionals with conversations around security, resilience, and leadership.

At the same time, the participation of male respondents remains significant and reinforces that gender diversity is increasingly viewed as an industry-wide issue rather than a women-only issue.

Industry Representation

Respondents represented a diverse range of industries and organisational environments.



The distribution demonstrates that conversations around women in security are no longer confined to traditional physical security environments. Increasingly, security leadership is emerging across:

- Technology
- Cybersecurity
- Governance
- Risk
- Compliance
- Resilience

This broadening definition of security is one of the most important developments shaping the profession.

Functional Representation

Security today encompasses far more than guarding assets or responding to incidents. Respondents identified themselves across a broad range of functions.

Key Functional Areas Represented

- Corporate Security
- Cybersecurity
- Risk Management
- Intelligence & Investigations
- Governance, Risk & Compliance
- Physical Security
- Business Continuity & Resilience
- Safety & Emergency Response
- Legal & Regulatory Functions
- Consulting & Advisory

This reflects the continued evolution of security into a multidisciplinary profession requiring technical, operational, analytical, and leadership capabilities.

Technical vs Non-Technical Participation

One of the longstanding assumptions within the industry has been that technical security functions create additional barriers for women.

The WISS dataset suggests a more nuanced reality. Women are represented across both technical and non-technical functions. However, participation remains concentrated within selected disciplines, while leadership representation remains limited across both categories. The findings suggest that the challenge is not simply access to technical roles. The challenge is to ensure progression opportunities across all security disciplines.

As organisations increasingly integrate cybersecurity, intelligence, resilience, compliance, and physical security under unified leadership structures, opportunities for broader participation are likely to expand.

Geographic Distribution

Responses were received from professionals across India as well as international locations.

Participation was strongest from major metropolitan centres and established business hubs, including:

- Delhi NCR
- Mumbai
- Bengaluru
- Hyderabad
- Chennai
- Pune
- Kolkata

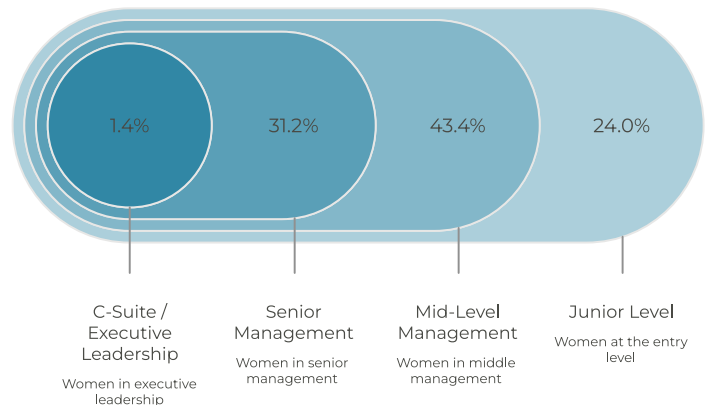
The survey also recorded participation from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, indicating that conversations around women in security are no longer restricted to major corporate centres. This expanding geographic footprint is an encouraging indicator for the future talent pipeline.

Representation Across Career Stages

The survey reveals a relatively balanced distribution across career levels, except for executive leadership.

Career Stage Distribution

Women's Representation in Security Career Stages



The data suggests that women are successfully entering and sustaining careers within security-related functions. However, representation narrows significantly at executive levels. This finding reinforces the leadership conversion challenge identified elsewhere in the report.

A Broader Definition of Security

A significant finding emerging from WISS 2026 is that women are increasingly participating in areas that traditional security surveys often overlook.

These include:

- Intelligence analysis
- OSINT and investigations
- Cyber forensics
- Legal and compliance functions
- Disaster response
- Risk consulting
- Business resilience
- Governance functions

The findings suggest that future discussions about representation must account for the full security ecosystem rather than focusing exclusively on traditional security roles.

WISS 2026 Finding

Women are participating across a broader range of security disciplines than ever before. The profession has evolved beyond its traditional boundaries and increasingly encompasses technology, intelligence, resilience, governance, and risk management functions.

However, representation remains uneven. While participation is growing across industries and functions, leadership representation continues to lag. The findings suggest that future progress will depend not only on attracting women into security careers but also on ensuring that participation translates into influence, visibility, and leadership.

»» **CHAPTER 8**

Leadership Gap & Advancement Barriers

Why Representation Does Not Automatically Create Leaders

The security profession has made measurable progress in recognising the importance of diversity. Yet recognition alone does not create leadership.

One of the clearest findings emerging from WISS 2026 is that the industry's challenge is no longer solely about attracting women into security careers. Increasingly, it is about ensuring that women who enter the profession can advance, influence decision-making, and ultimately occupy leadership positions. The findings suggest that while participation is gradually expanding, leadership representation continues to lag.

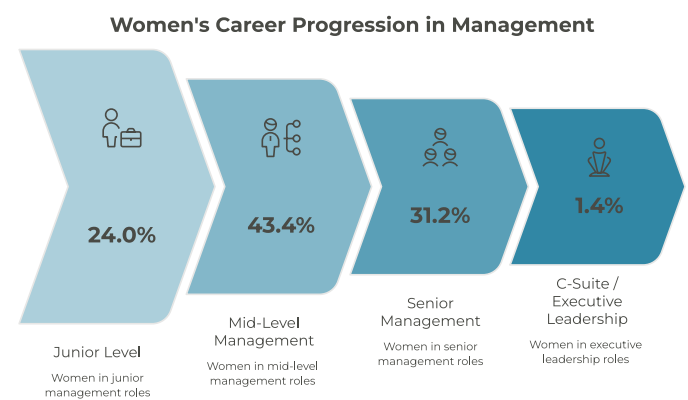
This distinction matters because representation and leadership are not the same thing. A profession can improve participation rates while continuing to

struggle with leadership diversity.

The Leadership Conversion Problem

The workforce pipeline analysis revealed healthy representation across junior, mid-level, and senior management categories. However, the transition into executive leadership remains limited.

Respondent Distribution by Career Stage



The data points to a leadership conversion challenge. Women are entering the profession. Women are building careers. Women are reaching management positions. Yet significantly fewer are progressing into executive leadership roles.

The consequence is a narrowing pipeline precisely at the stage where influence, visibility, and organisational decision-making become most important.

The Missing Middle

One of the strongest themes emerging from the survey concerns career progression. Historically, conversations around diversity have focused heavily on recruitment. The findings suggest that retention and advancement deserve equal attention.

Respondents repeatedly identified barriers that emerge during the mid-career stage, where professionals are expected to transition

from operational contributors into strategic leaders. This stage often determines whether future leadership pipelines expand or contract. When organisations lose experienced women at this point, they do not simply lose employees.

They lose future directors, future CISOs, future heads of security, future risk leaders, and future mentors.

Advancement Barriers Identified

Respondents were asked to identify the most significant barriers limiting women's progression within security careers.

Mentorship Is Not Sponsorship

A particularly important finding concerns the distinction between mentorship and sponsorship. Throughout the security profession, mentorship initiatives have become increasingly common.

Many organisations now provide formal or informal mentoring opportunities designed to support career development. Yet respondents continue to identify progression challenges. This suggests that mentorship alone may not be sufficient.

Mentorship helps individuals navigate a system. Sponsorship helps individuals advance within it. Sponsors provide visibility, advocate for opportunities, recommend individuals for leadership roles, and use their influence to accelerate career progression.

The survey findings suggest that while mentorship is becoming more common, sponsorship remains significantly underdeveloped. This gap may represent one of the most important leadership challenges facing the sector.

Leadership Visibility Matters

Representation at leadership levels influences

more than organisational decision-making. It influences perception. When aspiring professionals see women occupying leadership roles, advancement becomes tangible.

When leadership remains overwhelmingly male, advancement can appear exceptional rather than achievable. This visibility effect has implications far beyond individual organisations.

It influences recruitment, retention, confidence, and long-term participation across the profession. The absence of visible leadership, therefore, becomes a pipeline issue.

Beyond Diversity Targets

Many organisations have focused their efforts on hiring and representation targets.

While these remain important, the findings suggest that leadership progression deserves equal attention. Future success should increasingly be measured through:

Leadership Progression Indicators



Without these indicators, organisations risk improving workforce diversity without improving leadership diversity.

WISS 2026 Finding

The security sector's greatest diversity challenge may no longer be recruitment. It may be a leadership conversion.

Women are entering the profession, building careers, and contributing across security, risk, resilience, intelligence, and cybersecurity functions. Yet advancement into positions of influence remains uneven.

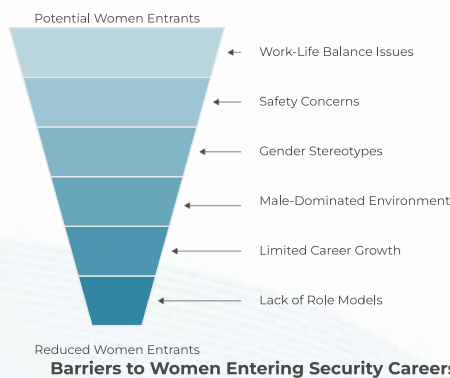
The findings suggest that the future of gender diversity in security will depend less on attracting talent and more on developing pathways that convert participation into leadership.

Until that transition improves, representation gains will remain vulnerable, and leadership diversity will continue to lag behind workforce diversity.

»» **Chapter 9**
Barriers & Workplace Challenges

Entry Barriers: What Keeps Women Out

Respondents identified a range of deterrents preventing women from entering security careers. The most frequently cited categories include:



Workplace Discrimination

A significant **74.0% of respondents (540 of 730)** reported personally experiencing or

witnessing gender-based discrimination in a security workplace. This figure underlines that representation challenges are not merely statistical; they reflect real, lived experiences within the profession.

Policy Gap vs Experience Gap

Despite high policy adoption rates (DEI policy 89.6%, bias training 91.2%, flexible work 92.7%), 74% of respondents have experienced or witnessed gender discrimination.

This gap between stated policy and lived experience is one of the defining challenges of WISS 2026.

»» **CHAPTER 10**
Perception vs Reality Gap

What Organisations Believe vs What Professionals Experience

One of the most revealing findings of WISS 2026 is not statistics on representation, leadership, or policy adoption. It is the growing gap between perception and reality.

Across industries, organisations increasingly believe they are becoming more inclusive. Diversity initiatives have expanded, gender-neutral policies have become more common, and conversations around inclusion are far more visible than they were a decade ago.

Yet many of the outcomes these initiatives were designed to achieve remain elusive.

Women continue to be viewed as underrepresented. Leadership pipelines remain uneven. Advancement barriers persist. Workplace culture continues to emerge as one of the most significant challenges identified by respondents.

The result is a paradox that sits at the centre of this year's findings:

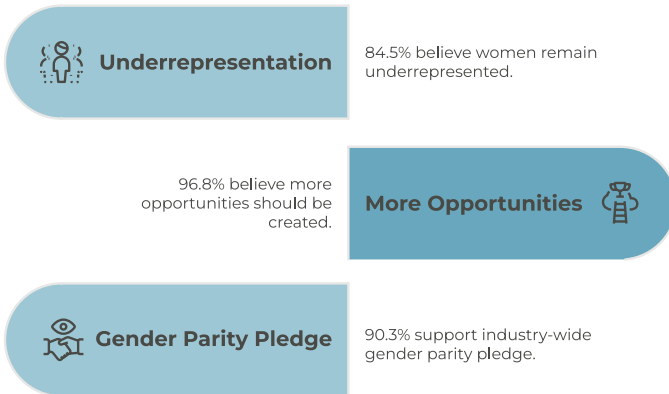
Organisations increasingly believe they are creating inclusive environments, while professionals continue to experience the effects of underrepresentation.

The Inclusion Perception

The survey reveals overwhelming support for gender diversity across the security profession.

Industry Perception Snapshot

Inclusion Perception



These figures suggest that the industry is no longer debating whether a representation gap exists. There is broad agreement that greater participation, visibility, and advancement are necessary.

In many respects, the security sector has already won the awareness argument. The challenge now lies in translating awareness into lived experience.

The Representation Paradox

One of the clearest examples of the perception-reality gap emerges when inclusion commitments are compared with workforce outcomes.

As for the survey:

- More than 90% report formal inclusion measures.

- More than 90% of support increased opportunities.
- More than 89% support collective action.

Yet:

- 90% still believe women remain underrepresented.

These findings suggest that awareness and action are not progressing at the same pace. The profession increasingly recognises the issue. The profession has not yet solved it.

The Approachability Paradox

One of the most unique findings emerging from WISS 2026 concerns trust. Respondents were asked in which situations they would be most comfortable approaching a woman security professional.

The results reveal a striking pattern.

Situations Where Respondents Prefer Female Security Professionals



The findings demonstrate that women security

professionals are often perceived as particularly effective in situations requiring trust, empathy, discretion, communication, and emotional intelligence.

This creates what WISS 2026 identifies as the **Approachability Paradox**.

Women are frequently considered the preferred point of contact in some of the most sensitive situations organisations encounter, yet they remain underrepresented within the very functions responsible for handling them.

In other words, the sector acknowledges the value women bring while simultaneously failing to achieve proportional representation.

Trust Without Representation

The implications of this finding extend beyond diversity.

Security functions increasingly operate in environments where communication, employee engagement, crisis management, and trust are as important as traditional enforcement responsibilities.

Modern security leaders are expected to:

- Manage workplace incidents.
- Handle employee concerns.
- Support crisis response.
- Build stakeholder confidence.
- Lead diverse teams.

Many of these responsibilities rely heavily on interpersonal effectiveness rather than technical capability alone.

The survey findings suggest that women are widely recognised for their strong contributions in these areas.

Yet this recognition has not been translated into proportional workforce participation.

This disconnect represents a missed opportunity not only for diversity, but for organisational effectiveness.

The Leadership Visibility Gap

Another dimension of the perception-reality gap concerns leadership visibility. Respondents consistently identified mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership opportunities as areas requiring improvement.

The issue is not simply whether women are entering the profession. The question is whether women can see realistic pathways to advancement once they do.

When leadership remains disproportionately male, perceptions about who belongs in security leadership roles can become self-reinforcing. The result is a cycle in which organisations support inclusion in principle but continue to reproduce existing leadership structures in practice.

Why Perception Matters

Perception is often dismissed as a softer measure than representation or policy adoption. Perception is one of the strongest indicators of organisational culture. Employees make decisions based on what they see.

They assess:

- Who receives opportunities?
- Who receives visibility?
- Who receives sponsorship?
- Who reaches leadership?

When these signals appear inconsistent with organisational commitments, confidence in inclusion efforts weakens. Perception, therefore, becomes an early warning indicator of implementation gaps.

Closing The Gap

The findings suggest that organisations should begin measuring success not only through policy adoption but also through employee experience.

Questions that matter include:

- Do employees believe advancement opportunities are equitable?
- Do women see visible role models within leadership?
- Do employees trust reporting mechanisms?
- Do professionals believe inclusion efforts are producing results?

Without addressing these perceptions, even well-designed initiatives may struggle to achieve their intended impact.

WISS 2026 Finding

The security sector has made significant progress in recognising the importance of diversity and inclusion. Awareness is high, support is widespread, and respondents overwhelmingly acknowledge the need for greater representation. Yet the findings reveal a persistent gap between intention and experience.

Security Sector Challenges



Women are trusted in some of the profession's

most sensitive and people-centric responsibilities. They are widely viewed as adding value across critical security functions. Organisations increasingly support inclusion in principle.

The challenge is ensuring that these perceptions are reflected in workforce composition, leadership representation, and career progression.

Until then, the gap between what the sector believes and what professionals experience will remain one of the defining challenges facing women in security.

»» CHAPTER 11

Policy vs Implementation Effectiveness

The Accountability Gap

For years, organisations across industries have invested significant time and resources in building diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks. Hiring policies have been revised, awareness programmes have expanded, bias training has become commonplace, and flexibility initiatives have increasingly been positioned as indicators of organisational progress.

The assumption underlying these efforts is straightforward: stronger policies should lead to stronger outcomes. The findings of WISS 2026 suggest a more complex reality.

While policy adoption appears widespread across the security ecosystem, concerns regarding representation, leadership progression, and workplace inclusion remain remarkably persistent. The data reveals a growing gap between organisational intent

and measurable outcomes, a gap that sits at the heart of this year's report. This is not a policy gap. It is an implementation gap.

The Rise of Formal Inclusion Frameworks

Respondents were asked about the existence of various organisational policies and initiatives intended to support gender inclusion within security functions.

The results indicate widespread adoption.

Organisational Inclusion Measures Reported

Policy / Initiative	Adoption Rate
Flexible Work Arrangements	92.7%
Formal DEI Policy	89.6%
Gender-Neutral Policy Frameworks	90.7%
Unconscious Bias Training	91.2%
Hiring Targets / Goals for Women	81.2%

At first glance, these numbers present an encouraging picture. Across nearly every indicator, more than nine out of ten respondents report the existence of formal mechanisms intended to support inclusion.

Compared with conversations that dominated the security sector a decade ago, this represents a meaningful shift. The issue is no longer whether organisations acknowledge the importance of diversity. The issue is whether these policies produce measurable results.

Representation Reality

To understand effectiveness, policy adoption must be examined alongside outcomes. When respondents were asked whether women remain underrepresented in security roles, the answer was overwhelmingly clear.

Perception of Representation

84.5% of respondents believe women remain underrepresented across security functions.

At the same time:

96.8% believe more opportunities should be created for women within the profession.

These findings reveal a striking contradiction. If policy adoption exceeds 90% across multiple indicators, why does underrepresentation continue to be recognised so broadly?

The answer appears to lie not in policy design, but in policy execution.

From Policy Presence to Policy Performance

The existence of a policy does not automatically translate into organisational change. A gender-neutral hiring policy may remove formal barriers to entry, but it does not necessarily address informal networks, visibility challenges, leadership access, sponsorship opportunities, or cultural expectations.

Similarly, bias training may improve awareness, but awareness alone does not guarantee promotion, retention, or leadership progression. The data suggests that many organisations have successfully implemented the mechanisms of inclusion without yet achieving the outcomes of inclusion.

In other words, the sector has become increasingly effective at creating policies. It has been less effective at converting those policies into measurable change.

The Accountability Gap

One of the most important findings emerging from WISS 2026 is the presence of what may be described as an Accountability Gap.

The Accountability Gap represents the difference between:

What organisations say they are doing

and

What employees and professionals continue to experience.

This gap is visible across multiple indicators:

- High policy adoption alongside continued perceptions of underrepresentation.
- Diversity commitments alongside limited leadership representation.
- Training initiatives alongside persistent cultural barriers.
- Recruitment efforts alongside advancement challenges.

The issue, therefore, is not whether organisations have acted.

Many clearly have.

The question is whether those actions are sufficient to alter outcomes.

Beyond Compliance

A recurring theme throughout the survey is that inclusion cannot be sustained through compliance alone.

Many respondents continue to identify:

- Workplace stereotypes
- Male-dominated cultures
- Limited mentorship
- Sponsorship gaps
- Leadership visibility challenges

as barriers to advancement.

Notably, these issues exist largely beyond the

scope of traditional policy frameworks. They are cultural and structural rather than procedural. This distinction matters.

Policies can mandate equal opportunity. They cannot automatically create equal access to influence, visibility, credibility, or leadership. Those outcomes require active organisational commitment beyond compliance requirements.

POSH As an Inclusion Indicator

While the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) framework was introduced as a compliance mechanism, its broader significance extends beyond legal requirements.

A strong POSH culture often signals something deeper:

- Trust in reporting mechanisms
- Psychological safety
- Leadership accountability
- Organisational responsiveness

Inclusion is difficult to achieve when employees do not feel safe raising concerns.

Although POSH compliance alone does not guarantee diversity outcomes, organisations that foster transparent reporting environments often create stronger foundations for inclusion overall.

WISS 2026, therefore, views workplace safety and workplace inclusion as interconnected indicators rather than separate organisational priorities.

Measuring Success Differently

Historically, many organisations have measured progress through activity metrics.

Examples include:

- Number of training programmes

conducted

- Number of awareness sessions delivered
- Number of policies introduced

These metrics demonstrate effort. They do not necessarily demonstrate impact. The next phase of progress requires a shift toward outcome-based measurement.

Examples include:

- Representation by level
- Promotion rates
- Retention rates
- Leadership participation
- Sponsorship access
- Career progression

These indicators provide a more accurate assessment of whether inclusion initiatives are working.

WISS 2026 Finding

The security sector has made significant progress in recognising the importance of diversity and inclusion. Formal frameworks, policies, and awareness initiatives are now widespread across participating organisations. However, the findings suggest that implementation has not yet caught up with ambition. The challenge facing the sector is no longer policy adoption. The challenge is policy effectiveness.

WISS 2026 finds that organisations are increasingly being judged not by the policies they publish, but by the outcomes they produce.

The future of inclusion in security will depend less on what organisations promise and more on what they can demonstrate.

»» CHAPTER 12

Pipeline & Growth

Building The Next Generation of Security Leaders

The long-term strength of any profession depends not only on who enters it, but also on how effectively it develops talent over time. For the security sector, this question has become increasingly important as organisations face growing demands across cybersecurity, physical security, intelligence, resilience, investigations, compliance, and risk management.

The findings of WISS 2026 suggest that the future talent pipeline is expanding. However, sustaining that momentum will require continued investment in professional development, leadership readiness, and career progression.

Experience Profile of Respondents

The survey attracted participation from professionals across different stages of their careers.

Years of Experience in Security	Responses
0-5 Years	26
16-10 Years	391
11-15 Years	13
15+ Years	10

The data reveal that the profession's future is increasingly being shaped by early-career and mid-career professionals.

More than 89% of respondents fall within the first ten years of their security careers.

The opportunity lies in the emergence of a sizeable next-generation workforce. The challenge lies in ensuring that this workforce develops into future managers, executives, and

industry leaders.

Training And Professional Development

Security has evolved into a multidisciplinary profession requiring technical expertise, operational knowledge, analytical capability, and leadership skills.

Respondents reported a wide range of professional training experiences, including:

- Cybersecurity certifications
- Security operations training
- Fire and life safety programmes
- CCTV and surveillance management
- Emergency response training
- Risk management certifications
- ISO and compliance-related qualifications

The breadth of training reported suggests that professional development is increasingly recognised as a critical component of career growth.

As the profession expands into areas such as cyber resilience, intelligence analysis, digital risk, and enterprise security, continuous learning is likely to become even more important.

What Professionals Need Most

When respondents were asked what support mechanism would most help women advance within security careers, one finding stood out clearly.

Mentorship	330 responses
Training & Certifications	120 responses
Leadership Programmes ¹	16 responses
Flexible Work Arrangements	108 responses
Pay Parity Measures	44 responses

Mentorship received more than twice as many responses as any other intervention.

This finding reinforces a broader theme emerging throughout WISS 2026. The challenge facing many professionals is not simply access to opportunities. It is access to guidance, networks, sponsorship, and career navigation support.

The industry appears to be signalling that leadership development begins with visibility and support long before formal promotions occur.

The Leadership Readiness Challenge

The concentration of respondents within the first ten years of experience suggests that organisations have an opportunity to shape the future leadership landscape of the profession.

However, leadership readiness does not occur automatically.

It requires:

- Structured development pathways
- Leadership exposure
- Sponsorship opportunities
- Professional networks
- High-visibility assignments

Without these interventions, organisations risk creating strong entry pipelines while weakening future leadership pipelines.

Looking Ahead

Respondents were overwhelmingly optimistic about the future. A significant majority expect women's representation within security functions to increase over the next three years, driven by diversity initiatives, inclusive hiring practices, leadership development programmes, and changing workplace expectations.

SECTION 4

»» CHAPTER 13

Key Themes & Strategic Insights

The Trends Shaping Women's Participation, Leadership, and Progression in Security

The third edition of the Women in Security Survey marks a transition. The first edition established the baseline. The second edition identified structural barriers and persistent representation challenges. The third edition asks a different question: **What has changed, and why are outcomes still lagging despite growing awareness and policy adoption?**

The answer lies in five findings that emerge consistently across the WISS 2026 dataset.

1. Awareness Is No Longer the Problem

One of the clearest messages from WISS 2026 is that the industry has largely moved beyond debating whether greater representation is necessary.

Indicator	Responses
More opportunities should be created for women in security	96.8% (707 of 730)
Industry should adopt a gender parity pledge	90.3% (659 of 730)

These figures indicate an overwhelming consensus across respondents.

The industry no longer appears divided on the importance of representation. Instead, respondents demonstrate broad support for proactive measures designed to improve participation, progression, and leadership outcomes.

This represents a significant shift from earlier years when discussions around diversity often

centred on justification. The conversation has evolved from "Why?" to "How?"

2. The Accountability Gap Is the Defining Challenge

Perhaps the most important finding of WISS 2026 emerges from the relationship between policy adoption and perceived outcomes.

Indicator	Responses
Formal DEI policy exists	89.6% (654 of 730)
Flexible work arrangements available	92.7% (677 of 730)
Unconscious bias training conducted	91.2% (666 of 730)
Women are still perceived as underrepresented	84.5% (617 of 730)

These figures reveal a clear contradiction. Organisations are increasingly implementing diversity-related initiatives. Yet respondents continue to perceive a significant representation gap.

This suggests that the profession has entered an accountability phase. Future success will be judged not by the existence of programmes but by their measurable impact on recruitment, retention, advancement, and leadership representation.

The challenge is no longer policy creation. The challenge is outcome delivery.

3. Leadership Remains the Sector's Weakest Link

The respondent profile highlights a workforce with strong participation at junior, mid-level, and senior levels.

The findings indicate that participation exists throughout the workforce pipeline.

However, the transition into executive leadership remains limited. This is not a

recruitment problem. It is a leadership conversion problem.

Career Stage	Count
Junior	175
Mid-Level	317
Senior	228
C-Suite	10

Organisations appear increasingly capable of attracting and retaining talent. The challenge lies in ensuring that talent progresses into positions of influence and decision-making authority.

The future of representation will ultimately be determined by leadership outcomes rather than workforce participation alone.

4. Mentorship Matters More Than Any Other Intervention

When respondents were asked what would most effectively support women advancing within security careers, one response stood out decisively.

Intervention	Responses
Mentorship	330
Training & Certifications	120
Leadership Programmes	116
Flexible Work Arrangements	108
Pay Parity Measures	44

Mentorship received more than twice the number of responses as the next highest intervention.

The finding suggests that professionals are not simply seeking additional policies or training opportunities. They are seeking guidance, visibility, sponsorship, and access to networks that support long-term career progression. For organisations seeking high-impact interventions, mentorship may represent one of the most effective and scalable solutions available.

5. The Industry Is Ready for Collective Action

88.5% of respondents support an industry-wide gender parity pledge. The strong support for collective action indicates that respondents increasingly view representation as a shared responsibility rather than an isolated organisational issue. Many workforce challenges can only be addressed through collaboration between employers, industry associations, educational institutions, policymakers, and professional networks.

What These Findings Mean

Taken together, the findings paint a picture of a profession in transition. Awareness is high. Support is widespread. Policies are increasingly common. Yet outcomes continue to lag intent. The challenge facing the sector is therefore not one of recognition but of execution. The next phase of progress will depend on whether organisations can convert commitment into measurable change, participation into leadership, and policy adoption into tangible outcomes.

»» CHAPTER 14

Industry Deep Dives

One Challenge, Different Realities

Women in security do not operate within a single industry ecosystem. They work across technology companies, financial institutions, government agencies, healthcare organisations, consulting firms, manufacturing environments, critical infrastructure, and public-sector institutions. While the broader challenge of representation remains consistent, the barriers, opportunities, and growth trajectories differ significantly from one sector to another.

The findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to improving representation is unlikely to succeed. Different industries face different challenges and therefore require

different interventions.

Technology & Cybersecurity

The technology sector remains one of the largest contributors to the security talent pipeline. As cybersecurity becomes central to organisational resilience, technology firms increasingly offer opportunities for women to enter security-related roles through technical, governance, compliance, and risk pathways.

However, the cybersecurity findings reveal a contradiction. Despite strong industry demand, growing investment, and extensive government-led skilling programmes, women remain underrepresented in many cybersecurity leadership positions. Respondents continue to identify leadership visibility, sponsorship, and advancement opportunities as key concerns.

This raises an important question for industry: if cybersecurity is widely regarded as a skills-based profession, why has representation not improved at the same pace as demand? The answer appears to lie less in recruitment and more in retention and leadership progression.

Government & Public Sector

The public sector presents a different picture. Over the past decade, government initiatives have increasingly recognised the importance of women's participation in security-related professions. The introduction of reservation targets across Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), the expansion of women-led policing initiatives, and investments through programmes such as Mission Shakti reflect growing policy attention.

Yet implementation remains uneven. While policy commitments have expanded, the long-term impact on leadership representation remains unclear. WISS 2026 highlights the need for closer tracking of recruitment, retention, promotion, and leadership

outcomes within public-sector security institutions. The public sector has often led policy conversations. The next challenge is demonstrating measurable outcomes.

Financial Services

For the financial sector, security increasingly extends beyond physical protection into fraud prevention, cyber resilience, investigations, compliance, and risk management. As financial institutions continue to invest heavily in resilience capabilities, they are creating new pathways into security careers for professionals with diverse backgrounds.

The sector benefits from relatively mature governance structures and strong regulatory oversight. However, respondents continue to report concerns around leadership progression and representation at senior decision-making levels. The challenge is therefore not merely attracting talent but ensuring that leadership pipelines reflect the diversity of the workforce.

Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals

Healthcare has emerged as one of the most complex security environments in the modern economy. The sector now faces challenges ranging from workplace violence and patient safety to cybersecurity, data protection, fraud prevention, and crisis response.

Women already play a significant role across healthcare organisations, creating a potentially stronger foundation for participation in security-related functions. However, respondents indicate that security leadership within healthcare often remains concentrated within traditional organisational structures. Greater integration between healthcare operations, safety, resilience, and security functions may create new opportunities for women to enter and advance within the profession.

Beyond Traditional Security

One of the most significant developments emerging from WISS 2026 is the broadening definition of security itself. The profession increasingly includes individuals working across:

- Intelligence and investigations
- Open-source intelligence (OSINT)
- Risk consulting
- Governance and compliance
- Cyberforensics
- Business continuity and resilience
- Emergency response and disaster management

Many of these pathways remain under-recognised in traditional discussions about security careers. Yet they represent some of the fastest-growing opportunities for future participation.

The findings suggest that expanding the industry's understanding of what constitutes security work may be one of the most effective ways to strengthen future talent pipelines.

WISS 2026 Finding

The security profession is no longer a single industry. It is an interconnected ecosystem spanning technology, government, finance, healthcare, resilience, intelligence, investigations, and risk management.

The findings suggest that while representation challenges remain widespread, the pathways to progress differ by sector. Future interventions will therefore need to be tailored to industry realities rather than applied uniformly across the profession.

The organisations and sectors that successfully align inclusion strategies with their specific workforce challenges are likely to see the strongest long-term outcomes.

»» Chapter 15

Emerging Roles & Future Skills
New Functions, New Opportunities

The security profession is being restructured faster than its workforce is being trained. AI and ML have become the number one skill needed in cybersecurity for 2026, with [41% of security teams](#) citing it as their top requirement. Globally, 4.8 million cybersecurity roles remain unfilled, and [90% of cybersecurity teams](#) report skills gaps, concentrated specifically in AI and cloud security. For women in security, this moment is not merely a challenge. It is a structural opening, one that exists precisely because these roles are being defined now, before hiring hierarchies and gender norms calcify around them.

Established Emerging Roles

Role	Why It Matters for Women's Pipeline
Threat Intelligence Analyst	Draws on research, law, and journalism backgrounds, directly aligned with WISS-identified strengths: Intelligence & Analysis (322 mentions), Risk Assessment (364 mentions)
CISO	No longer purely technical, governance, board communication, and resilience are now core competencies, expanding the viable candidate pool
Risk & Compliance Lead	One of the fastest-growing security-adjacent functions; women are already relatively well-represented, under active threat from GRC job volume contraction (see below)
Business Continuity & Resilience Manager	Least gender-stereotyped security leadership function; strong interdisciplinary entry pathway
OSINT & Investigations Specialist	Draws on analytical, research, and communication skills; accessible from non-traditional security backgrounds

A warning on GRC contraction: The number of governance, risk, and compliance roles, where women have historically been best represented in cybersecurity, is decreasing considerably, and this has materially contributed to the decline in women's percentage representation in the industry ([ITPro 2026](#)). This is not a pipeline problem. It is a sector-shift problem that demands an active response.

The AI Security Frontier - Roles Being Defined Right No

Role	Scale of the Opportunity
AI Risk Auditor	Sits at the intersection of technology, ethics, governance, and security, the exact cross-functional skill profile that WISS respondents identify as women's strongest contribution
Prompt Security Engineer	Prompt injection attacks caused an estimated \$2.3 billion in losses globally in 2025; current detection tools catch only ~23% of sophisticated attempts (Recorded Future, 2025). The demand for this specialism is acute and immediate
Deepfake Detection Specialist	62% of organisations experienced a deepfake incident in 2025 (Gartner, 2025); the deepfake detection market is projected to grow from \$712M in 2026 to \$1.84 billion by 2034, and a dedicated investigative function is now mainstream, not niche
AI Surveillance Operator & Ethics Analyst	Combines technical literacy with ethics, policy, and human rights, one of the most interdisciplinary security roles to emerge in a decade
AI Governance & Compliance Lead	As the EU AI Act and emerging Indian AI policy frameworks take effect, translating regulation into operational security controls is becoming a standalone leadership function

These roles are being written into job descriptions today. Their hiring norms, career pathways, and diversity composition are still open. This is where the next generation of security leadership will be shaped, and where early entry creates lasting structural advantage.

The Gender Gap in AI, and Why It Must Not Replicate in Security

71% of workers who identify as skilled in AI are men; 29% are women. Women hold only 18% of machine learning engineer positions and author only [14% of AI research papers](#). If the security profession allows these patterns to migrate unchallenged into AI security roles, it will replicate, at speed, exactly the representation gap it has spent three editions of WISS documenting.

The data, however, contains a counterweight: women's adoption of generative AI is accelerating, with the proportion of women using GenAI tripling in the past year and outpacing the [2.2x growth](#) rate seen among men. The capability gap is closing. The question is whether the profession creates pathways fast enough to convert that capability into careers.

Future Skills in Demand

The World Economic Forum projects that [39% of workers'](#) key skills will change by 2030, with Security Management Specialists among the top five fastest-growing roles globally. The skills that will define security leadership in that landscape:

- **AI literacy and adversarial AI awareness** - understanding how AI systems fail, are attacked, and must be governed
- **Prompt engineering and LLM security** - defending against injection, jailbreaking, and synthetic media fraud

- **Data analysis and intelligence synthesis** - structuring and interpreting complex, unstructured datasets at scale
- **Ethics, governance, and regulatory navigation** - translating the EU AI Act, India's emerging AI policy, and DPDP Act into operational security controls
- **Board-level risk communication** - converting technical AI risk into organisational decision-making
- **Cross-functional leadership** - connecting security with legal, technology, HR, operations, and governance

Job postings seeking AI skills grew by 81% between 2024 and 2025, while the talent shortage index indicates the gap is widening, not closing ([LinkedIn Talent Insights / Robert Walters, 2025](#)). The 89% of WISS 2026 respondents who are in the first decade of their careers are entering a profession at the exact moment these roles are being filled for the first time. The window to shape who fills them, and to ensure women are in that group, is now.

SECTION 6

»» CHAPTER 19

Best Practices & Case Studies

What Works: Lessons From Organisations Making Progress

One of the central questions behind WISS 2026 is straightforward: **If awareness is high and policy adoption is widespread, why do representation gaps continue to persist?**

The findings suggest that the answer lies not in whether organisations are taking action, but in which actions they prioritise and how consistently those actions are implemented. While no single intervention can address every challenge identified in the survey, the data points towards several practices that appear to have the greatest potential to strengthen participation, retention, and leadership outcomes.

Best Practice 1: Move Beyond Policy Adoption

The survey reveals that policy adoption is no longer the primary challenge facing industry. **Indicator Responses** Formal DEI policy exists 654 (89.6%) Flexible work arrangements available 677 (92.7%) Unconscious bias training conducted 666 (91.2%) Women are still perceived as underrepresented 617 (84.5%) These figures suggest that many organisations have already completed the first phase of inclusion efforts. The organisations most likely to achieve meaningful progress over the next decade will be those that shift focus from policy implementation to outcome measurement.

What Leading Organisations Do

Instead of tracking activities, they track outcomes:

- Promotion rates
- Leadership representation
- Retention rates
- Internal mobility

- Participation in leadership pipelines
- The distinction is critical. Policies create opportunities. Measurement creates accountability.

Best Practice 2: Treat Mentorship As Infrastructure

One finding dominates the WISS 2026 dataset. **Intervention Needed Responses** Mentorship 330 Training & Certifications 120 Leadership Programmes 116 Flexible Work 108 Pay Parity Measures 44 Mentorship was identified more than twice as frequently as any other intervention. This finding suggests that organisations often underestimate the role of professional networks, sponsorship, and career guidance in shaping long-term progression.

What Leading Organisations Do

They formalise mentorship. Rather than relying on informal relationships, they establish:

- Structured mentoring programmes
- Leadership sponsorship initiatives
- Reverse mentoring models
- Executive coaching pathways

These interventions help bridge the gap between participation and advancement.

Best Practice 3: Build Leadership Pipelines Early

The survey reveals strong representation across junior, mid-level, and senior career stages but extremely limited representation at executive levels. **Career Stage Responses** Junior 175 Mid-Level 317 Senior 228 C-Suite 10 The implication is clear. Waiting until employees reach senior management to begin leadership development is too late.

What Leading Organisations Do

Leadership development begins during mid-career stages. They provide:

- Strategic project exposure
- Cross-functional assignments
- Leadership readiness programmes
- Executive sponsorship
- Board and governance exposure

The strongest leadership pipelines are built years before promotion decisions are made.

Best Practice 4: Expand The Talent Pool

Traditional recruitment models often focus on a narrow definition of security talent. WISS 2026 highlights the growing importance of professionals entering security through:

- Cybersecurity
- Intelligence
- Investigations
- Compliance
- Governance
- Risk management
- Resilience functions

What Leading Organisations Do

They recruit for capability rather than job titles. This approach expands access to talent while creating more diverse pathways into leadership. It also reflects the changing nature of the profession itself.

Best Practice 5: Make Inclusion Visible

The survey consistently identifies visibility as a recurring theme. Policies may exist, but employees ultimately assess inclusion through lived experience.

What Leading Organisations Do

They ensure that inclusion is visible through:

- Diverse leadership panels
- Internal role models
- Speaker opportunities
- Recognition programmes
- Industry engagement

Visibility creates aspiration. Aspiration strengthens retention. Retention strengthens leadership pipelines.

Best Practice 6: Create Industry-Level Solutions

Many of the challenges identified through WISS extend beyond individual organisations. Mentorship, awareness, leadership development, and talent attraction are ecosystem challenges rather than company-specific issues.

What Leading Organisations Do

They participate in:

- Industry associations
- Professional networks
- Cross-company mentoring programmes
- Research initiatives
- Leadership forums

Collective action allows organisations to address challenges that are difficult to solve independently.

WISS 2026 Finding

The most successful organisations are not necessarily those with the greatest number of policies. They are the organisations that create measurable pathways from participation to leadership.

The findings suggest that future progress will depend less on introducing new initiatives and more on improving the effectiveness, visibility, and accountability of existing ones.

Inclusion efforts succeed when they move beyond intent and become embedded within how organisations recruit, develop, promote, and retain talent.

CHAPTER 20

Future of Women in Security

A Data-Backed Outlook To 2030

The findings of WISS 2026 suggest that the security profession has reached an inflection point. Unlike earlier stages of diversity conversation, the challenge is no longer centred on awareness. Respondents overwhelmingly recognise the need for greater representation, stronger leadership pipelines, and more opportunities for women across security-related functions.

This shift is reflected in the data.

- 96.8% of respondents believe more opportunities should be created for women in security.
- 90.3% support an industry-wide gender parity pledge.
- 89.6% report the existence of formal DEI policies.
- 92.7% report access to flexible work arrangements.

These figures indicate that support for inclusion has moved into the mainstream. The next phase of progress will therefore depend less on commitment and more on execution.

The Workforce Of 2030 Will Look Different

The respondent profile reveals that the future workforce is already entering the profession. Experience Level Responses 0–5 Years 26 | 6–10 Years 39 |

More than 89% of respondents belong to the first decade of their professional careers.

These include:

- Cybersecurity
- Threat intelligence
- Digital investigations
- Open-source intelligence (OSINT)
- Risk advisory
- Business resilience
- Governance and compliance

As these functions expand, the profession is

likely to become more interdisciplinary, less hierarchical, and more technology driven.

Cybersecurity Will Become the Largest Opportunity

India's continued investment in Digital India and Cyber Surakshit Bharat initiatives is expected to increase the availability of cyber talent across the country. However, the success of these programmes should not be measured solely by training numbers.

The critical metric will be conversion. How many trained women ultimately enter cybersecurity careers? How many remain in the profession? How many progress into leadership roles?

The future of gender representation in cybersecurity will depend on these answers.

Political Representation May Influence Security Representation

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, has created a pathway towards greater representation of women in legislative institutions. The long-term significance of this reform extends beyond politics.

As women assume greater positions of influence within governance structures, questions surrounding public safety, policing, workforce diversity, and institutional accountability are likely to receive increased attention.

The next decade may therefore witness a closer relationship between political representation and security-sector accountability than has historically existed.

The Accountability Era

The first phase of diversity focused on awareness. The second phase focused on policy adoption. The third phase will focus on outcomes.

Organisations will increasingly be evaluated based on:

- Leadership representation
- Promotion rates
- Retention outcomes
- Sponsorship effectiveness
- Workforce progression

The future conversation will no longer centre on what organisations intend to do. It will centre on what they can demonstrate.

WISS 2030 Outlook

If current trends continue, the profession is likely to see:

- Increased participation across cybersecurity and intelligence functions
- Greater representation through non-traditional pathways
- Higher demand for mentorship and sponsorship programmes
- Stronger accountability expectations from employees and stakeholders
- Growing pressure to measure outcomes rather than initiatives

The future of women in security will therefore be determined less by policy creation and more by implementation effectiveness.

CHAPTER 21 Strategic Recommendations

The findings of WISS 2026 suggest that the industry does not suffer from a lack of awareness. The challenge lies in converting awareness into measurable progress.

The following recommendations are intended for organisations, policymakers, industry bodies, educational institutions, and professionals seeking to strengthen representation and leadership outcomes across the security ecosystem.

> For Corporations

Measure Outcomes, Not Activities

Track:

- Leadership representation
- Promotion rates
- Retention rates
- Sponsorship participation

rather than relying solely on policy adoption metrics.

Build Sponsorship Programmes

Mentorship emerged as the most requested intervention in the survey. Organisations should complement mentoring initiatives with structured sponsorship programmes that create visibility and advancement opportunities.

Expand Talent Pathways

Recruit beyond traditional security backgrounds. Opportunities increasingly exist within:

- Intelligence
- Cybersecurity
- Compliance
- Risk management
- Resilience
- Investigations

> For Government

Strengthening Outcome Measurement

Track the effectiveness of initiatives related to women's participation in security functions through measurable workforce indicators.

Monitor CAPF Progress

Move beyond recruitment targets and assess:

- Retention
- Career progression
- Leadership appointments

across CAPFs and related institutions.

Link Skilling to Employment

Future cybersecurity programmes should measure employment and leadership outcomes in addition to training participation.

> For Industry Bodies

Creating A National Mentorship Network

The scale of demand identified through WISS suggests that mentorship cannot remain an organisation-level initiative alone. Industry-wide networks can accelerate leadership development.

Publish Representation Benchmarks

Annual benchmarking would allow organisations to compare progress and identify areas requiring intervention.

> For Academia

Expand Awareness of Security Careers

Many respondents identified limited awareness as a barrier to participation. Educational institutions should actively promote security as a multidisciplinary career pathway.

Strengthening Industry Exposure

Partnerships between academia and industry can help students understand emerging opportunities across cybersecurity, resilience, intelligence, and risk management.

The profession is evolving rapidly. Technical skills, analytical capability, leadership readiness, and interdisciplinary knowledge will become increasingly important over the next decade.

Seek Mentors Early

Career progression is often accelerated through access to networks, guidance, and sponsorship. Professionals should actively pursue mentorship opportunities throughout their careers.

WISS 2026 Recommendation

The most effective interventions are likely to be those that focus on progression rather than participation alone. The future challenge is not simply attracting women into security. It is ensuring they can advance, influence, and lead.

CHAPTER 22

Action Framework & Call to Action

WISS 2026 identifies a profession that is ready for change. The data demonstrates strong support for inclusion, widespread recognition of representation challenges, and broad agreement on the need for action.

The task now is implementation.

Priority Action Matrix

Stakeholder	Priority Action	Success Indicator
Corporates	Establish sponsorship programmes	Increased leadership representation
Government	Measure workforce outcomes	Public reporting of progress
Industry Bodies	Create mentorship networks	Participation and placement rates
Academia	Expand security career awareness	Increased female participation
Individuals	Pursue continuous learning and mentorship	Career progression

outcomes

Five Actions for The Next Three Years

1. Move Beyond Policy Adoption

Organisations should begin measuring outcomes rather than activities.

2. Make Mentorship Scalable

The strongest signal from WISS 2026 is the demand for mentorship. This demand should be addressed through structured programmes at both organisational and industry levels.

3. Track Leadership Representation

Leadership metrics should become a standard indicator of diversity progress.

4. Expand The Definition of Security

Future workforce strategies should include emerging pathways such as intelligence, cyber resilience, investigations, OSINT, governance, and risk management.

5. Create Accountability Mechanisms

Progress must be measurable. Without measurement, commitments remain intentions.

What happens next?

The findings make one conclusion clear. The industry no longer lacks awareness. It no longer lacks intent. It no longer lacks policy. What it needs now is execution.

The future of women in security will be determined not by the commitments organisations make, but by the outcomes they deliver.

SECTION 7 - SUPPORTING SECTIONS
Survey Methodology
Data Collection

Survey responses were collected through an online questionnaire distributed across industry networks, professional associations, corporate security teams, cybersecurity communities, public-sector stakeholders, academia, and partner organisations.

- **Data collection was conducted between April 2026 and June 2026.**
- **Final validated responses: 730**

Data Validation

To ensure data quality and reliability:

- Duplicate responses were removed.
- Incomplete submissions were reviewed and excluded where appropriate.
- Open-ended responses were coded into thematic categories for analysis.
- Quantitative findings were cross-checked against raw response datasets before publication.

Scope & Limitations

The survey is intended to provide directional insights into industry perceptions, experiences, and trends. Findings should not be interpreted as a census of the security profession but as a representative assessment of stakeholder perspectives captured during the survey period.

Full Data Tables

ALL KEY METRICS · WISS 2026 · N = 730

Metric / Survey Question Responses % of Total (N=730) **Category**

A · RESPONDENT PROFILE	Total Validated Responses	730	100.00%	Survey Participation
	Female Respondents (incl. 'Woman')	201	27.50%	Gender
	Male Respondents	528	72.30%	Gender
	Non-Binary Respondents	10	1.10%	Gender
	Junior Level Professionals	175	24.00%	Career Level
	Mid-Level Management	317	43.40%	Career Level
	Senior Management	228	31.20%	Career Level
	C-Suite / Executive			

Leadership101.40%Career Level0–5 Years Industry Experience26436.20%Experience6–10 Years Industry Experience39654.20%Experience11–15 Years Industry Experience141.90%Experience15+ Years Industry Experience101.40%ExperienceGraduate Qualification33846.30%EducationPostgraduate Qualification24233.20%EducationPhD / Doctorate7610.40%EducationProfessional Certification638.60%EducationB · ORGANISATIONAL PROFILEPrivate Sector Organisations40855.90%Org TypePublic Sector Organisations24733.80%Org TypeGovernment Organisations557.50%Org TypeNGO / non-profit202.70%Org TypeTechnology & IT Services (Industry)54174.10%IndustrySecurity Services & Consulting547.40%IndustryConsulting & Advisory304.10%IndustryFinancial Services202.70%IndustryC · REPRESENTATION & PERCEPTIONWomen Remain Underrepresented (Yes)61784.50%PerceptionMore Opportunities Should Be Created (Yes)70796.80%PerceptionIncrease in Women in Security Over 5 Years (Yes)59581.50%TrendWomen Bring a Different & Valuable Approach (Yes)58880.50%PerceptionPersonally Experienced / Witnessed Gender Discrimination (Yes)54074.00%ExperienceTop Performance Area: Risk Assessment364 mentions49.9% of respondentsPerformanceTop Performance Area: Intelligence & Analysis322 mentions44.1% of respondentsPerformanceTop Performance Area: Negotiation & Stakeholder Mgmt293 mentions40.1% of respondentsPerformanceTop Performance Area: Crisis Response184 mentions25.2% of respondentsPerformanceTop Performance Area: Technology & Cybersecurity173 mentions23.7% of respondentsPerformanceAll Areas Equally Strong148 mentions20.3% of respondentsPerformanceD · ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES & INCLUSION MEASURESFormal DEI Policy (Yes)65489.60%PolicyHiring Targets / Quotas for Women (Yes)59381.20%PolicyUnconscious Bias Training (Yes)66691.20%PolicyFlexible Work Arrangements (Yes)67792.70%PolicyGender-Neutral Policy Shift (Yes)66290.70%PolicySpecific Policies Needed for Women (Yes)64187.80%PolicyHiring Targets Under Consideration253.40%PolicyDEI Policy In

Development141.90%PolicyMean Gender Inclusion Culture Rating 4.17 / 5.0 (1= Poor · 5=Excellent)CultureRating 4 (Good)48065.80%Culture RatingRating 5 (Excellent)19927.30%Culture RatingRating 3 (Moderate)354.80%Culture RatingE · INTERVENTIONS, COLLECTIVE ACTION & OUTLOOKTop Intervention: Mentorship Programmes33045.20%Desired InterventionTraining & Certifications12016.40%Desired InterventionLeadership Development Programmes11615.90%Desired InterventionFlexible Work Arrangements10814.80%Desired InterventionPay Parity / Pay Equity Measures446.00%Desired InterventionIndustry Intervention: Regulatory Mandate466 mentions63.8% of respondentsIndustry ActionIndustry Intervention: Mentorship Networks275 mentions37.7% of respondentsIndustry ActionIndustry Intervention: Industry Body Certification269 mentions36.8% of respondentsIndustry ActionIndustry Intervention: Pay Transparency Laws159 mentions21.8% of respondentsIndustry ActionIndustry Intervention: Media Visibility85 mentions11.6% of respondentsIndustry ActionGender Parity Pledge – Yes65990.30%Collective ActionGender Parity Pledge – Maybe435.90%Collective ActionGender Parity Pledge – Need More Information192.60%Collective ActionGender Parity Pledge – No91.20%Collective ActionExpected Increase in Representation (Next 3 Yrs)~640+~87.7%Outlook

Sponsors & Partners

WISS 2026 was made possible through the support of industry partners, knowledge contributors, institutional collaborators, and participating organisations committed to advancing conversations around representation, leadership, and workforce development in the security sector.

Strategic Partner

CII Centre for Women Leadership

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[\(2026\)](#).

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The report draws upon survey findings, publicly available research, government publications, industry reports, and academic sources. Key reference sources include:

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