

THE STRAITS TIMES

Women representation on Singapore corporate boards reaches record high



Women's participation on boards tripled to 23.7 per cent as at end-2023, from 7.5 per cent in 2013, in the top 100 SGX-listed companies by market capitalisation. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



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SINGAPORE - The number of women directorships in Singapore Exchange-listed companies, statutory boards and charities reached a high in 2023, a study found.

More than half of over 1,000 organisations reviewed exceeded voluntary board gender diversity targets, and all-male boards were also on the decline.

Women's participation on boards tripled to 23.7 per cent as at end-2023, from 7.5 per cent in 2013, in the top 100 SGX-listed companies by market capitalisation.

Statutory boards reported a nearly 10 percentage point increase from 2018 in women's participation on boards, reaching 32.7 per cent in 2023.

The top 100 Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) by donation receipts as at end-December 2023 recorded 31 per cent of women's participation on boards in 2023, its highest annual growth, increasing from 29.3 per cent in 2022.

The findings are from the Council for Board Diversity's Singapore Board Diversity Review, its annual study on gender diversity in the boardroom of companies listed on the SGX, at statutory boards and at IPCs, covering more than 1,360 organisations.

The data review, spanning from 2013 to Dec 31, 2023, was conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Finance Innovation at Nanyang Technological University.



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For the top 100 SGX-listed companies with a voluntary 25 per cent target of women's participation on boards by 2025, a record 48 firms had at least 25 per cent of women's directorships in 2023, up from 39 firms in 2022.

Statutory boards with a 30 per cent target saw 35 out of 64 organisations have at least 30 per cent women's participation on boards in 2023, up from 30 firms in 2022.

For IPCs with a target of voluntary 30 per cent women's participation on boards, 56 charities out of the 100 reviewed were found to have either hit or exceeded the target in 2023, up from 51 charities in 2022.

The recent key drivers of the increased female board appointments were likely regulatory in nature, including recent enhancements to regulatory frameworks for SGX-listed companies and charities placing emphasis on director tenures and diversity in board composition.

SGX requires board diversity policy disclosures, which took effect from January 2022 together with the revised Corporate Code of Governance and its Practice Guidance, which highlighted diversity in board composition.

A nine-year hard cap imposed on independent director tenure by the Singapore Exchange Regulation took effect from January 2023.

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Other contributing reasons were intensive encouragement by governance stakeholders and the growing global recognition of the value of board diversity in uncertain times.

First-time director appointments to SGX-listed companies – men and women – grew significantly at the boards of all SGX-listed companies in 2023, increasing diversity in the pool of directors.

Between 2018 and 2023, the top 100 SGX-listed companies appointed a total of 310 first-time directors of both genders, representing 51 per cent of all new board appointments made.

In 2023, first-time directors made up 66 per cent of all new appointments, a noteworthy increase of 19 percentage points from 47 per cent in 2022.

More women were also being appointed as board chairs and committee chairs at listed companies and statutory boards, according to the study.

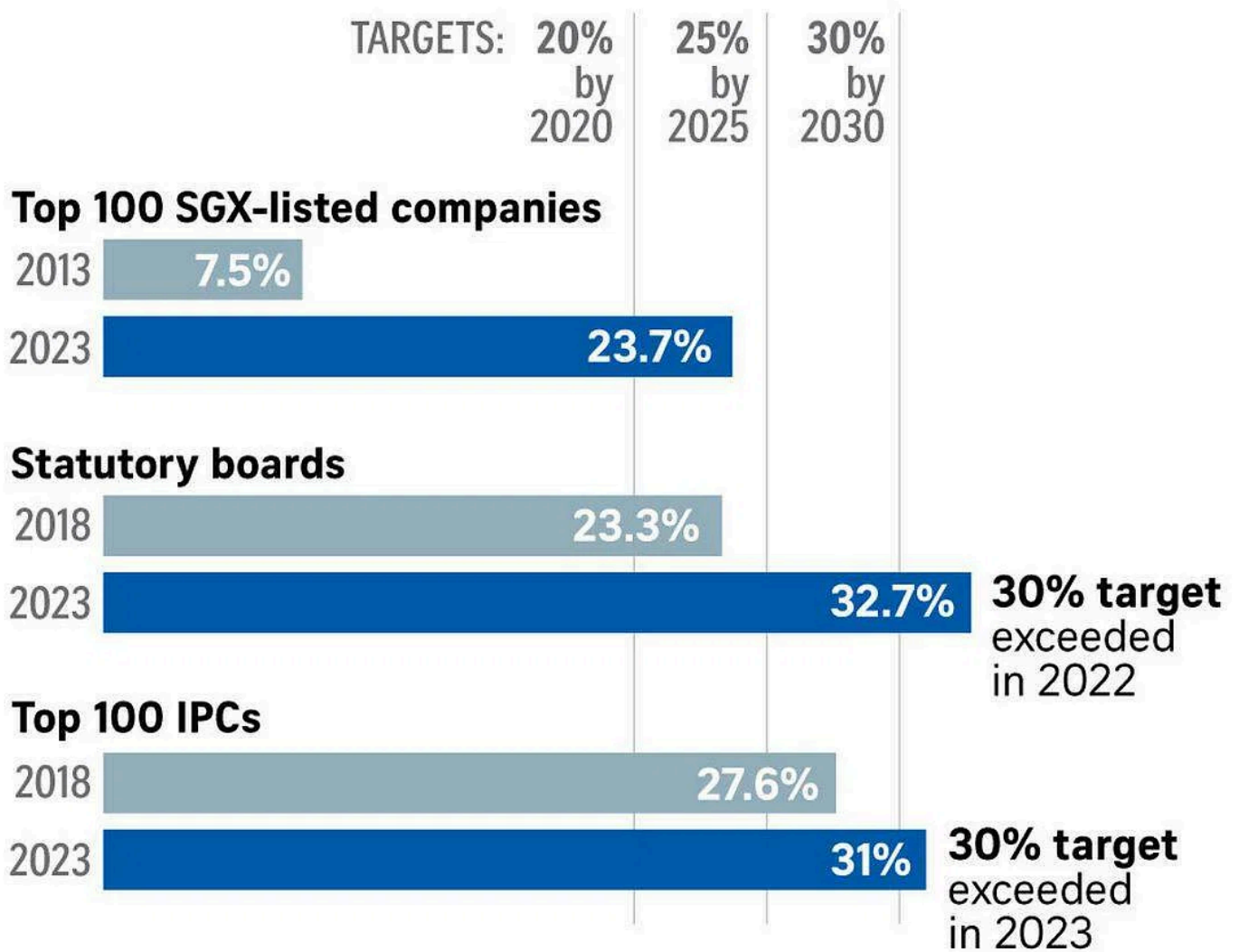
At the top 100 SGX-listed companies in 2023, women directors comprised 17 per cent of all board chair and audit, nominating and remuneration committee chair positions, up from 9 per cent in 2018.

Women directors in statutory boards made up 20 per cent of board chairs in 2023, up from 16 per cent in 2018.

At the top IPCs, women directors made up 19 per cent of board chairs, up from 15 per cent in 2018.

All-male boards among listed companies and IPCs were on a steady decline, according to the report.

Women's participation on boards



NOTE: SGX = Singapore Exchange

IPCs = Institutions of a Public Character

SOURCE: COUNCIL FOR BOARD DIVERSITY

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As at end-2023, 11 per cent of top 100 SGX-listed companies and 38 per cent of all SGX-listed companies continued to maintain all-male boards, a decline from 51 per cent and 57 per cent in 2013, respectively.

In the charity sector, 4 per cent of the top 100 IPC boards and 5 per cent of all IPC boards remained exclusively male.

“The progress in women’s participation on boards across the people, public and private sectors reflects a growing recognition on the importance of having gender diverse boards,” said Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli in a statement released by the council on June 3.

“It is not just a metric of good governance, but of strategic decision-making – giving equal opportunity to all who meet the requisites, and thus tapping a wider talent pool. This is critical as more than ever before, it takes diverse perspectives, skill sets and experience to tackle the complex issues of the future,” he added.

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