

# **SHE IS A KEEPER**

**Retaining and empowering female talent  
in the communications agencies**

**EACA DEI Task Force Playbook**

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## Foreword

Retaining women in the advertising industry is not just about fairness, it's about **business sense**. By creating a culture that values and supports women, we can tap into unique talents and perspectives and **unlock the full potential** of our industry. This playbook is the outcome of a committed Task Force that has addressed the female leavers issue meaningfully. It is a collection of **valuable resources and best practices** that agencies and organisations are implementing to combat the negative impacts of the talent drain in our industry - it's not just a question of not enough women in the most senior roles, but of the number of women leaving our industry behind at different stages in their lives. Without tackling the challenges they face in those moments of stick or twist, we won't address **the very real challenges of more women** at the very top.

We hope you find inspiration, guidance and actionable solutions in it!

## The issue

When it comes to advertising, communication, and marketing-related courses, women are increasingly dominating the classrooms, comprising a significant majority (57%) at the undergraduate level and (63%) in master's programs, as reported by the **3% Movement**. Despite this reassuring presence in academia, a noticeable disparity emerges as women transition from students to entry-level professionals and beyond. Alarming, only a mere 11% of female advertising practitioners manage to ascend to senior positions in creative roles.

This begs the question:

## Where do the women go?



For some time now, the industry has been witnessing an exodus of female advertising professionals. This concerning trend needs to be addressed in order to identify ways of boosting the growth of women's careers in our sector.



## Why is this happening?

1

### Lack of representation

When women leave the industry, it leads to a troubling cycle, discouraging younger women from entering the field as they see less role models in the sector, which further perpetuates gender imbalances and limits diversity within the industry

2

### Inequality in teleworking

Within many households, the partners do not split tasks and domestic responsibilities equally. In parallel, in some countries, the absence of paternity leave makes it more challenging for mothers to return to their professional careers

3

### Pay gap

There is a discrepancy in compensation between women and men, particularly at the management level, creating a persistent environment where women feel compelled to validate their value and contributions within the industry constantly

## A female talent drain

Women have consistently been underrepresented in the advertising industry, particularly at the **highest levels of leadership and seniority**. This imbalance provides the perfect breeding ground for a lack of diversity in decision-making and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Considering that **Covid-19** magnified inequalities in all workplaces, the lack of female role models also had a negative effect on the morale and motivation of women working in our sector. This situation is frustrating, as it makes women feel they have **limited professional growth** and development opportunities, resulting in a loss of talent.

This concern was highlighted in the **2023 Global DEI Census** of the advertising industry, which revealed that **one in seven employees** considered leaving their jobs due to a lack of diversity in the workplace.

## The future generation

Why is it increasingly difficult to make the industry attractive to new talent? To answer this, EACA, with the European Institute for Commercial Communications Education (edcom) and the support of WARC, launched **two European surveys** in 2022 aimed at final-year advertising students and agency recruiters in the advertising sector **to find the mismatch between the talent and the industry**.

Among the students, **more than 70% of the respondents were women**. This is a clear example of one of the big problems in the sector: many more women are educated and interested in entering the industry, but **a large proportion of them will not progress through the hierarchy**, often remaining in the lower ranks or middle management and only join the lower-level workforce.

In the results, **generation Z** made it very clear that a good workplace should respect work-life balance, care for the mental health of its employees and support projects with values similar to their own (equality, environment, social causes, etc.).

## Home... bittersweet home

The **Covid-19 crisis** brought about a complete disruption of the world's prevailing work model to make way for a new reality: remote work. According to data from a **MIT study**, one in two people decided to work entirely from home during the pandemic. This system offers many advantages, mainly flexibility and the ability to better balance family and work life. **But is working from home really a cure-all?**

The answer is a resounding **"no", especially when it comes to women**. According to the **#Inclusive100 study** by She Runs It, the number of women employed in marketing, media and advertising dropped by nearly **10%** (reaching only 46% of the total) after the pandemic.

Data from all companies measured across **different sectors did not reflect a similar decline**, with 50% of employees in the workforce reported to be women compared to 49.5% pre-pandemic. This suggests that the advertising, media and technology sectors were disproportionately impacted.





Teleworking has brought about negative consequences for women:

**Who takes care of...?** Women often bear disproportionate household and caregiving responsibilities. According to the [European Parliament](#), on average, women spent more hours **(11.1 hours) per week** than men **(6.1 hours)** caring for others

**The notorious absentee:** With increased time spent working from home to balance work and family care, **many women have hardly returned to the office**, face-to-face meetings, or work events. As a result, their chances of networking have significantly decreased, consequently impacting their career advancement

**A family/work imbalance:** Domestic work and caregiving are significant responsibilities. As women are more involved in these tasks, **they are more likely to opt for part-time work, remote work-only arrangements or leave their jobs** if the situation requires it. This creates a gap between them and men, not only affecting the presence of women in companies but also resulting in a lack of role models and disparities in the salaries

## Where is my money?

It is no secret that a gender pay gap exists, and, unfortunately, **the advertising industry is not immune** to this issue. If we look at the data, the [2023 Marketing Week Career and Salary Survey](#) reveals that women working in our sector earn 83 cents for every euro men make. This is in line with [the numbers released by the European Union](#), which show that women in Member States earn 16% less than their male counterparts. In other words, **from 4 November every year, women effectively work for free until the end of the year**. It is, therefore, reasonable to ask: where is the money that women should rightfully earn?

These are some of the reasons why the pay gap occurs in advertising:

- **Women tend to be clustered in lower-paid occupations** while men are overrepresented in higher-paid positions
- **Stereotypical gender roles** can discourage women from pursuing specific careers
- **Different experience and qualifications** between men and women in the same job
- **Underrepresentation in senior positions and leadership roles**, typically higher paid. Barriers to career advancement, such as discrimination, bias, and a lack of access to mentoring and networking opportunities, further contribute to this imbalance.

## What we might be overlooking

Feeling like you're spinning in circles discussing this issue? Indeed, **the problem of women leaving the advertising industry creates a vicious circle**.

The good news is that, as a society, **we have been able to identify the barriers that stand in the way of women advancing in their careers**. Erasing these boundaries and giving them the recognition they deserve means promoting diversity and inclusion, addressing social and cultural biases, and developing action plans to enhance professional growth opportunities.

## How female leavers shaped EACA'S DEI agenda

It is impossible to ignore that the industry suffers a severe talent crisis and that women are among the worst affected. This has been the necessary wake-up call for many advertising, marketing and communication professionals to join forces and pool their tools to fight this situation. In the case of EACA, the **DEI Task Force** was established in 2021, **bringing together DEI experts from different backgrounds within EACA's membership**. They aim to exchange ideas and work together on initiatives that make a difference in the industry, leveraging their role as European representatives of communication agencies.

With many issues to address within the broad spectrum of diversity and inclusion, the EACA DEI Task Force has decided to make a **solid commitment** to tackling the talent drain and has set ambitious goals to help the industry implement successful initiatives.

This is why we are building a **diverse pool of DEI experts** with segment-specific backgrounds, as their firsthand experiences will serve as powerful examples to train and inspire others. We also ensured **the participation of agencies in the Global DEI Census 2023**, which has provided valuable insights into the perspectives of individuals working in advertising and communications. Being aware of this reality is vital for employee retention.

Furthermore, we are part of the [Ad Access Alliance](#), an industry accessibility group led by P&G, leveraging shared knowledge to implement action plans across the spectrum of agencies and marketers.



## Draw inspiration from our initiatives

Addressing systemic disparities within the sector is essential to delivering forward-looking and inclusive change. We want to be part of this transformative effort, so after analysing the factors that interfere with women's career development, we have identified **several work streams that can effectively address the challenge of retaining female talent in the industry**. Based on these findings, we have put together programmes and proposals that EACA DEI Task Force member organisations are implementing to boost women's careers.

Depending on the specific issues your organisation faces, you can find **tailored solutions through the case studies from our group** that helped our teams make meaningful progress.

### 1. Remove unequal barriers for talent to enter the industry



#### **Diversifying Recruitment** Adam&EveDDB

The agency has adopted a new, centralised, bias-free recruitment process. It is supported by allocating 50% of funds towards creating diverse platforms that target underrepresented groups in advertising.

#### **First Bite** Adam&EveDDB

A six-month paid placement scheme designed to attract underrepresented talent across creative, planning, and account management. Newcomers with no previous experience in advertising are encouraged to join.

#### **The Code dentsu**

A global schools and early careers program aimed at diversifying the agency's talent pipeline. It focuses on sharing skills and capabilities with the next generation of talent, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds. "The Code" achieves this by offering immersive workshops, work experience opportunities, and apprenticeships, effectively opening doors to the advertising industry for these students.

#### **Free Entry Level Recruitment** Omnicom Media Group UK

The group offers a range of apprentice and assistant level roles in different departments across the group that require no previous experience in the industry.

#### **World to Work Programme** IAPI (Ireland)

IAPI teamed up with Business in The Community to encourage students to consider our industry a viable career option. The program comprises six separate school engagements themed around creativity, sustainability, career paths, site visits and soft skills for a successful career path.

#### **Creative Bursary** IAPI (Ireland)

In partnership with Griffith College, a fund provider institution, IAPI launched the €10,000 Creative Bursary aimed at disadvantaged schools across Ireland. Winning students receive opportunities such as additional training, workshops and on-site events facilitated by member agencies of IAPI.

#### **Open Doors** IAPI (Ireland)

Together with The Open Doors Initiative, IAPI runs a mentoring programme that helps marginalised groups access training, work experience, mentoring and employment. Following the training, students and agencies are paired for a paid internship experience.

#### **Advertising Unlocked** IPA (UK)

The world of advertising invites schools and colleges across the UK to participate in the largest industry-wide Open Day to introduce new, potentially unconsidered career options to students and provides agencies with an audience of diverse talent.

### 2. Accelerate women's career growth through training, policy implementation and mentoring

#### **Global Launch of #SheTakesOver** Adam&EveDDB

An industry-wide initiative running through the month of March. It celebrates, elevates, and advocates for established and emerging women and non-binary talent in filmmaking, illustrations, photography, animation and music.

#### **New Performance Development Process** Adam&EveDDB

This new process aims to provide better sponsorship to talent across all levels of the business and promote transparency of development opportunities.

#### **New Suite of Masterclasses** Adam&EveDDB

The agency offers a new suite of masterclasses, including 'Pitch Perfect'. This program ensures a fair and level playing field for employees to develop key craft skills.





### **Creative Equals Returner Programme Adam&EveDDB**

This project specifically aims to support women to return to creative roles after taking time out of the industry for family responsibilities. This partnership enables them to recruit senior female creatives.

### **Female Foundry dentsu**

This global mentorship programme supports female leaders to build successful digital economy businesses and helps diversify the global business community.

### **Path of Tabei dentsu**

Path of Tabei is dentsu's career development program, which accelerates the development of game-changing talent and senior women leaders.

### **Femmes Forward Havas**

This initiative is a career acceleration programme for female Havas employees to help advance the careers of senior manager/director-level women through leadership coaching and networking sessions. It also includes presentations and discussions with other Havas employees, thought leaders, experts and inspiring entrepreneurs.

### **Femmes Forward Academy Havas**

A digital adaptation of the "Femmes Forward" programme for junior-level women with between 1 and 4 years of professional experience to sessions to help them plan their careers and guide their development.

### **Ambition Collective McCann Worldgroup**

Ambition Collective is a talent accelerator platform designed to address and close the gender gap within the network and the creative leadership ranks of the advertising industry. The initiative offers participants mentorship and opportunities for career advancement.

### **Margot Collective McCann Central**

Female-led consulting team established to ensure the involvement of female voices in creating work that speaks to all women. Since launching the Margot Collective within McCann last year, the team has grown to include more than 30 people from across its six offices and works to support teams on existing briefs, new business opportunities and creative development.

### **30for30 Ogilvy**

This leadership program for senior women in leadership positions aims to empower them both personally and within their leadership roles at Ogilvy. It focuses on deepening self-awareness, identifying strengths and values, addressing self-limiting beliefs, cultivating an authentic leadership style and personal brand, and building strong relationships among participants, coaches, sponsors, alumni, and others.



### **Omniwomen Omnicom Media Group**

This project brings together employees who identify as women, and their allies, in an open and supportive environment for networking and learning. Throughout the world Omniwomen Chapters engage in training, education and empowerment activities, the latest of which is a global mentoring scheme.

### **Circle of Women TBWA\Chiat\Day New York**

Circle of Women is a leadership development program for women designed to increase gender representation in leadership. As a result of this program, the agency has achieved 50% gender diversity in its executive leadership team.

### **Colectiva TBWA\Chiat\Day New York**

"Colectiva" —the female adjective for collective in Spanish— is a leadership program that seeks to strengthen the pipeline of women leaders in our Latin America region through coaching and leadership training. Unlike similar programs, Colectiva is designed to be self-governed by its members. They lead the charge on coaching each other, hosting the monthly leadership sessions and, at the end of the year, rethinking the program for the following year.

### **Stella WPP**

"Stella" is a vibrant community within WPP, uniting senior women to collaboratively address industry challenges, share knowledge, and drive initiatives focused on the development and advancement of women leaders. Comprising mentors, mentees, and the Stella Council, this engaged network prioritizes experiential learning, offering coaching, mentoring, events, and networking opportunities.

### **Visible Start WPP**

"Visible Start" is an employability program for midlife women (45+) interested in digital media careers. It offers online courses through "Visible Society" and engages 200+ volunteers from GroupM and Hogarth for mentoring, networking, and expert sessions. The program aims to empower women, including returners, and connects them with opportunities within WPP agencies like Ogilvy and VMLY&R, providing training and support for success in digital media careers.

### **Walk to Talk WPP**

Aimed at addressing the gender diversity gap within senior positions, this program is designed to unlock the leadership potential of the group's female senior leaders through intensive training and development opportunities.

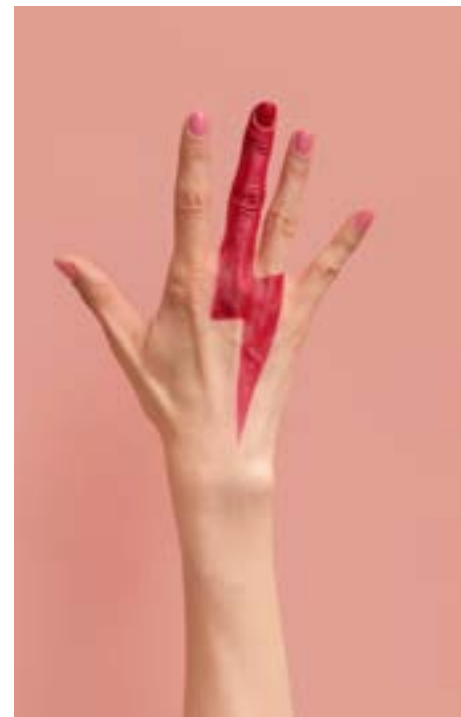
### **Female Futures Fund Initiative IAPI (Ireland)**

Sponsored by Diageo, the initiative is designed to accelerate women into senior roles ensuring that the best female talent is retained and promoted by enabling them to realise their potential whilst also achieving a life balance that may include family and/or other lifestyle priorities.

### 3. Ensure a supportive environment for women's health

#### Bi-annual Review of the Women's Health Policies Adam&EveDDB

The review, which seeks to update policies in line with workers' changing circumstances, includes (but is not limited to) various aspects such as menopause, reproductive health, miscarriage, fertility, premenstrual disorders, gynaecological conditions, hormone therapy and hormonal changes during gender transition.



#### Family Forming Policy Adam&EveDDB

This policy extends the leave from 2 to 4 weeks for non-birth parents, a flexible return period and a coaching allowance to facilitate a smooth transition before, during and after the leave.

#### #HotResignation TBWA\Chiat\Day New York

The 'Hot Resignation' is a campaign launched by MIPO (Menopause Information Pack for Organizations) in partnership with TBWA\Chiat\Day New York's Health Collective. It aims to raise awareness and provide resources for companies in the US to create supportive work environments and inclusive policies for women going through the menopausal transition.

#### Menopause Policy IPA (UK)

An example template menopause policy for their members, setting out an employer's approach to supporting employees who are impacted by menopause.

### 4. Provide a safe space for mental health

#### Culture of Positive Challenge Policy Adam&EveDDB

This policy supports people in calling out problematic language and behaviours regardless of their role level in the agency.

#### Flexible Working Policy Adam&EveDDB

The policy allows employees to request contract changes, such as part-time or job share options. This initiative has been benchmarked against the WACL 'Flexible First' checklist.

#### Havas Equalise Wellness Programme Havas UK

This health and wellness initiative is designed to support employee well-being. It takes a preventive approach to mental health and well-being, offering a wide range of wellness interventions, from group activities and weekly sessions to 'Wellness Wednesday' events, webinars, coaching, and resources covering sleep, nutrition, emotional intelligence, finance, fitness, and mindset. It's open to all Havas staff, promoting a holistic approach to well-being and encouraging everyone to participate in prioritizing their health.

#### Open-sourced "Press Pause" Policy Havas

This policy is a commitment by Havas to create a safe, diverse, and inclusive environment for both their employees and clients. "Press Pause" aims to people to speak out when an incident occurs. This process is also part of the agency's induction programme and their 'All In' Diversity and Inclusion workshops, so people new to Havas are made aware of this zero-tolerance policy.

#### Smash - Employee Assistance Programme IAPI (Ireland)

Thanks to the patronage of TABS (The Advertising Benevolent Society), all IAPI members and their agency staff are automatically entitled to access the EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) smash. Support and counselling by experienced experts are available 24/7 through phone and video consultation. The smash programme focuses on mental well-being but can also offer financial and legal advice and parenting support services.

#### Stay Interviews IPA (UK)

These interviews are a proactive deep-dive via one-to-ones to explore how staff are currently feeling and doing to help them thrive. As an association, the IPA provides guidance for those members who want to put this initiative into practice.





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## About EACA

The **European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA)** represents more than 2 500 communications agencies and agency associations from nearly 30 European countries directly employing more than 120 000 people. EACA members include **advertising, media, digital, branding and PR agencies**. EACA promotes honest, effective advertising, high professional standards and awareness of the contribution of advertising in a free-market economy and **encourages close cooperation** between agencies, advertisers and media in European advertising bodies. EACA works closely with **EU institutions** to ensure the freedom to advertise responsibly and creatively.

For more information, visit [www.eaca.eu](http://www.eaca.eu). Connect with us on **X** & **LinkedIn**.



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