

THE GENDER INDEX REPORT 2026

New data. Same outcome.
Time is running out.



WALES NARRATIVE

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Economic conditions in Wales have remained challenging throughout 2025. Wales continues to remain around the bottom of the productivity league table for the UK nations and regions. Economic growth is currently sluggish. Exports from Wales by value have fallen significantly between 2024 and 2025 according to analysis by Economic Intelligence Wales of the Development Bank of Wales.

Consequently, indicators of small business confidence have remained poor. Business dissolutions in Wales have slightly exceeded incorporations. Despite this, a sizeable minority of companies report business growth and lending to companies have improved. Some shift in the Welsh government towards greater focus on the drivers of business productivity and investment is discernible, although this is yet to emerge in terms of concrete policy. Discretionary resources at the disposal of the Welsh government to support company start-up and growth are very stretched because European structural funds are no longer available and public sector budgets tight.

Policy continues to be closely informed by the Wales Well-being of Future Generations Act, which over the last decade or so has sought to balance inclusive and sustainable economic outcomes with productivity growth and innovation. Welsh government economic strategy, refreshed in late 2023, reinforces this. Aspirations for greater gender equality and inclusion remain an element of the overall policy framework.

Wales has enjoyed long-term public support for promoting business start-up especially among young people. Whether this currently impacts female-led business incorporations is unclear. The number of newly incorporated companies in Wales has fallen from 2024 to 2025, although there has been a slight improvement in the proportion of female-led business incorporations, consistent with the wider UK picture.

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Wales has seen a significant improvement in the proportion of companies securing external finance which were female-led, up to 11.1% in 2025.

WALES

KEY FINDINGS

- The Gender Index data for 2025 shows that for Wales the percentage of newly incorporated companies which are female-led was 17% in 2025, some way behind the UK proportion. A total of 27% of active incorporated Welsh companies in 2025 were led either entirely by women or by mixed-gender teams, and 34.1% of all Welsh companies were women- or mixed-led.
- In Wales, 34.1% of active companies were either female-led or led by mixed-gender teams. A total of 59,026 companies were solely or partly led by women. The 2025 rate for Wales is below the overall UK combined rate of 35.2% but this is a significant improvement on the equivalent 2024 rate for Wales of 30.6%.
- Female-led companies appear better placed to survive. 16.8% of company dissolutions in Wales in 2025 were female-led. This rate is well below the overall UK rate and by some margin is the lowest across all UK nations and regions. (Figure 9)
- In 2024, Wales, along with the North East, had the equal highest proportion of female-led high-growth companies across all the ITL1 regions and devolved nations at 16.9%. Rates of female-led high-growth companies have fallen across several devolved nations and regions from 2024 to 2025, and Wales's ranking has fallen to the third highest. However, the 2025 rate remains well above the overall UK rate of 13.2%.

Figure 9: Incorporation vs dissolution rates by female-led companies in 2025

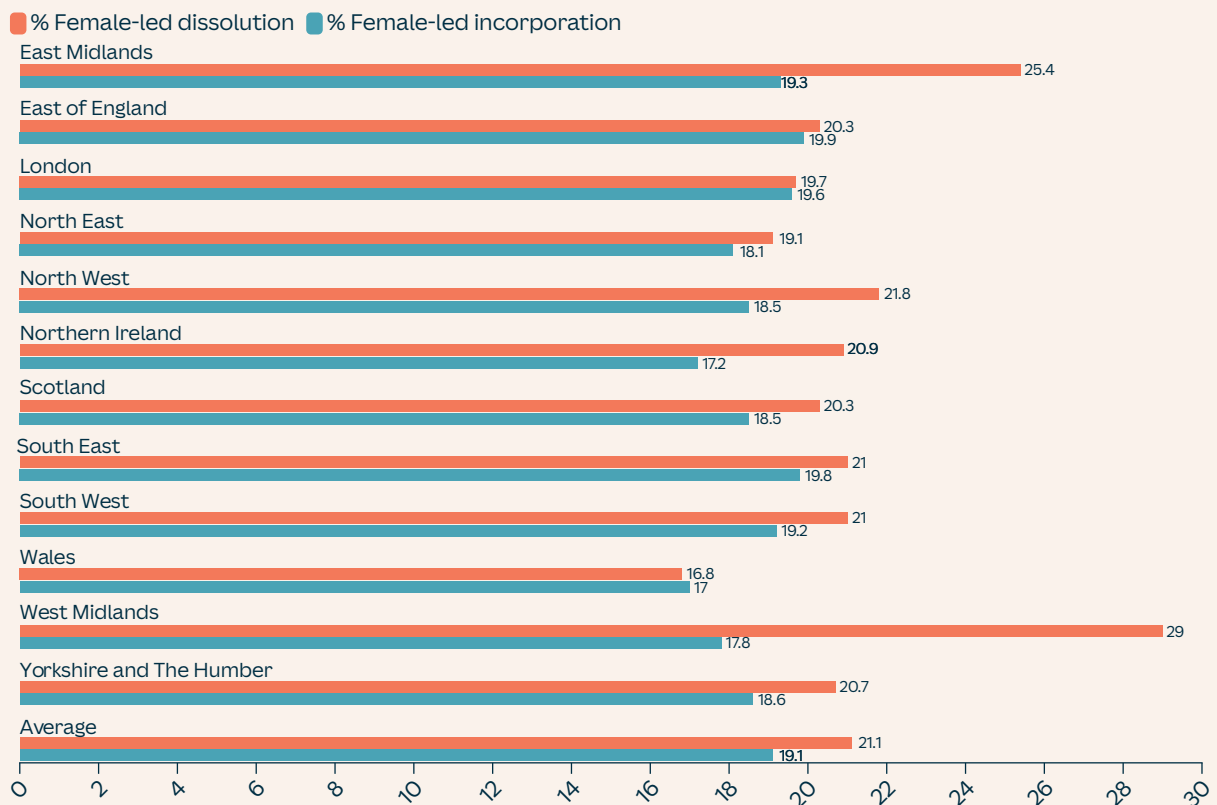
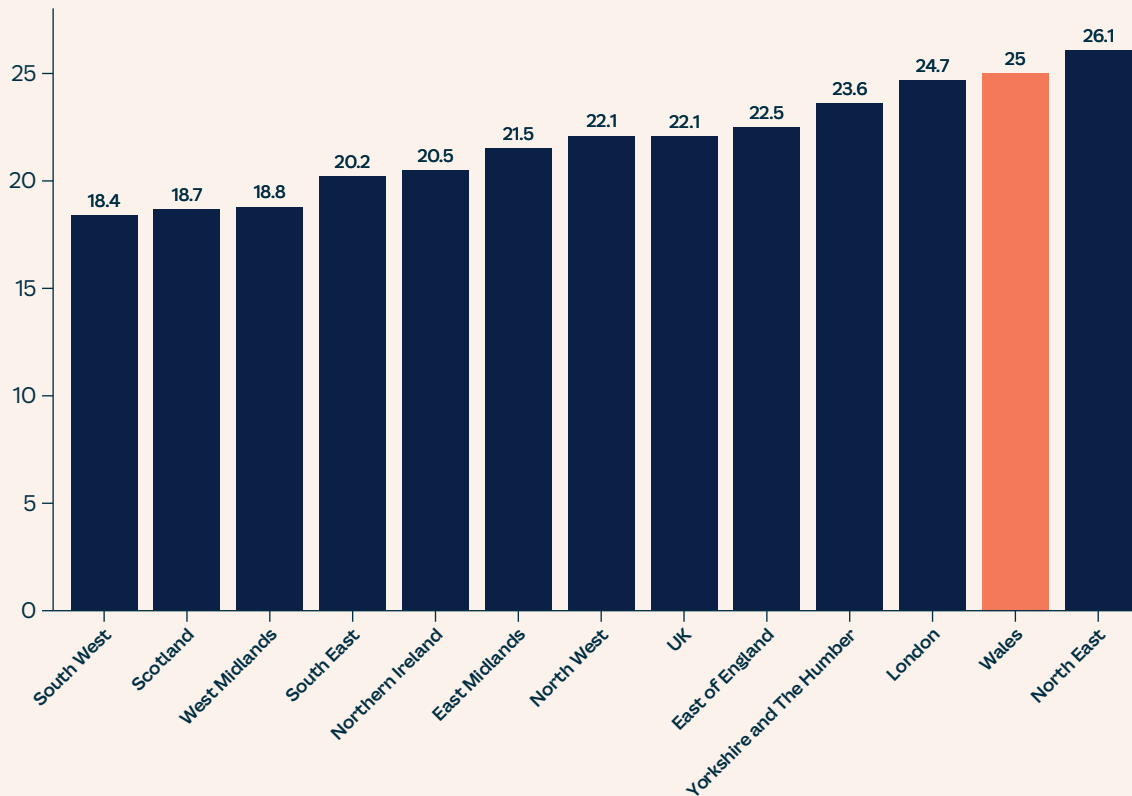


Figure 10: Percentage turnover growth by ITL1 Region



- The proportion of female-led companies securing external finance has improved significantly, up to 11.1% in 2025. Although improving, this figure is below the UK average, with most other English regions, along with Scotland and Northern Ireland, recording a higher proportion.
- 14.6% of EIS-qualifying companies who secured external finance in Wales were female-led. This proportion is below the UK average.
- 9.9% of companies in Wales who relied on corporate venture capital investment only were female-led. Only the South East, North East and South West had a higher percentage, and East Midlands the same percentage.
- Wales has the highest proportion of female-led EIS-qualifying companies that rely solely on family finance, even though the most popular form of finance overall is angel investment.



In 2025, Wales had the lowest female-led rate for Generation Z founders across the home nations and ITL1 regions.

- Female-led companies in Wales achieved a good level of turnover growth in 2025. Average growth amongst female-led companies in Wales in 2025 was 25.0%. Only the North-East of England recorded a high-growth rate. This average growth rate is well above that in Wales but below that for mixed-led (18.1%) and male-led companies (16.7%). (Figure 10)
- 32.7% of all angel investors were women, around the same as the UK rate. Although much smaller in number, Wales had a very high proportion of female love investors, with only two other ITL1 regions recording a higher proportion. (Figure 8)



Wales had the highest proportion of high-growth companies that were female-led (16.3%) and the lowest dissolution rate.

- Wales is ranked equal second in terms of the love investor percentage, with the South West higher and East Midlands the same.
- In Wales in 2025 a significant proportion of female-led companies were led by those in the generation older than state pension age. However, among the Millennial generation (27 to 42 years old), Wales has the third lowest proportion of female-led companies. Only the North East of England and Northern Ireland recorded lower proportions.
- In 2025, Wales had the lowest female-led rate for Generation Z founders across the home nations and ITL1 regions.
- Wales retained the position of having a high female-led proportion of companies with secured external debt, with only the South West recording a very slightly higher proportion. In 2025, 3,762 of 24,953 companies with secured debt were female-led, or 15.1%, compared

to the UK rate of 13.4%. The total in Wales in 2025 remains close to the 3,652 total for 2024, although the percentage declined from 15.6% in 2023. In 2025, 38.4% of companies with secured debt in Wales were either female-led or led by mixed teams, above the overall UK rate of 36.2%. (Figure 13)

- Average turnover growth amongst female-led companies in Wales in 2025 was 25%. Only the North East recorded a higher growth rate. The 2025 average growth for female-led companies is well above those for mixed-led (18.1%) and male-led companies (16.7%). It is also well above the UK average for female-led companies in 2025 of 22.1%. (Figure 10)

