

CSO NETWORK
SURVEY 2025
**BRIEFING REPORT
AND KEY FINDINGS**

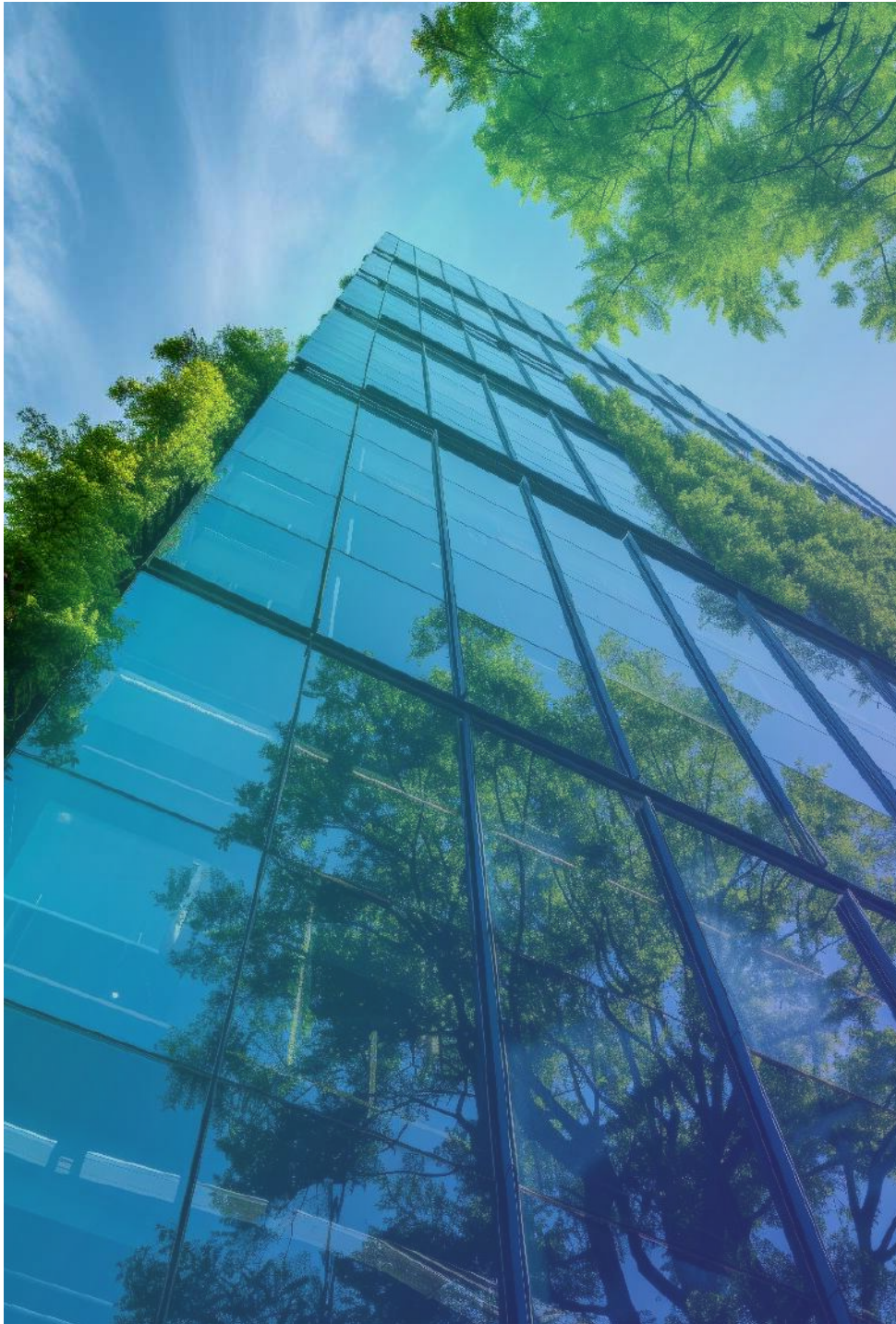


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FUTURE PROOFING SUSTAINABILITY

The 2025

CSO Survey Report



The Chief Sustainability Officers (CSO) Network, operating under The Posteriety Institute, presents the 2024-2025 report, Future Proofing Sustainability, addressing the critical need for organizations to embed sustainability within their operational frameworks. It captures insights from sustainability leaders across diverse sectors in our region, examining the trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping the sustainability landscape.



As global organizations strive to integrate sustainability into their core business models, the report identifies both notable progress and persistent obstacles. It highlights a pivotal shift toward institutionalizing sustainable practices, leveraging emerging technologies to drive environmental and social impact. However, significant challenges remain, including issues of data accuracy, the slow pace of technological adoption, and the absence of robust market incentives to catalyze further advancements.

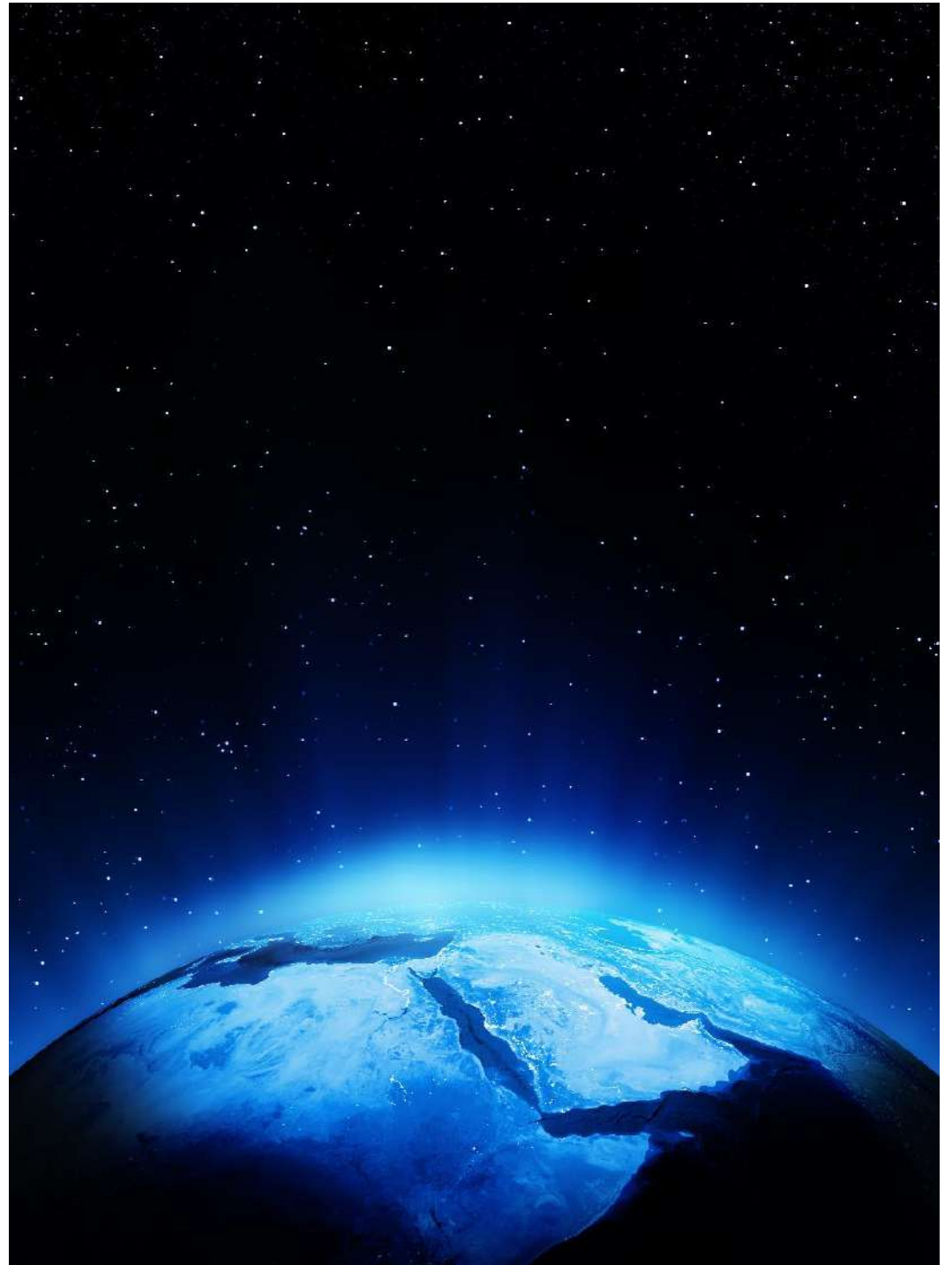


The report also explores the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing sustainability efforts. It delves into how AI can foster innovation, streamline operations, and address longstanding challenges, positioning AI as a critical enabler of sustainable development. Additionally, the report examines emergent fields such as green finance and climate adaptation technologies, offering insights into their capacity to reshape investment strategies and deliver scalable, sustainable solutions for the future.

This report is designed to serve as a strategic resource for organizations navigating the complexities of sustainability. It provides actionable insights and a forward-looking roadmap to help leaders harness opportunities, overcome challenges, and drive meaningful impact in an ever-evolving global landscape.

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

KEY MESSAGES FROM
THE MEA REGION



In the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region, the intersection of global sustainability imperatives with unique regional dynamics offers both significant opportunities and challenges for achieving long-term sustainable development. Characterized by some of the world's fastest-growing economies, the region stands at the forefront of global sustainability efforts, driven by transformative national strategies such as the UAE's commitment to Net Zero by 2050 and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

These initiatives reflect a profound regional shift toward economic diversification and reduced reliance on fossil fuels, signaling a collective commitment to environmental and economic resilience.



2025 KEY THEMES

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

As sustainability increasingly becomes a critical component of business strategy, Chief Sustainability Officers (CSOs) are at the forefront of addressing complex challenges and driving transformational change. The 2025 survey from the CSO Network highlights key themes that reflect the evolving priorities, opportunities, and hurdles in sustainability leadership. Below are the core insights shaping the future of sustainability across organizations globally.





01

Elevating Sustainability Leadership

Sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern—it is a strategic priority. The survey revealed that CSOs are reporting directly to top executives, ensuring that sustainability is fully integrated into overarching business strategies. This shift underscores a growing recognition of sustainability’s role in achieving long-term business goals and fostering resilience in a rapidly changing global landscape.

02

Tackling Data Management and Reporting Challenges

Efficient management and reporting of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) data remain significant challenges for organizations. Many still rely on manual processes, which hinder accuracy and scalability. However, there is an increasing interest in adopting automated systems and leveraging AI technologies to streamline data collection, improve reporting accuracy, and enhance decision-making.





03

Overcoming Barriers to Progress

Despite the growing momentum for sustainability, organizations face internal and external obstacles. Challenges include difficulties in regional data collection, limited financial resources, and complex regulatory landscapes. Overcoming these barriers is essential to meet global sustainability expectations and maintain competitiveness in a world that prioritizes ESG performance.



04

Technological Innovation as a Game Changer

Emerging technologies such as IoT, AI, and advanced analytics are revolutionizing sustainability efforts. These tools enable smarter resource management, reduce emissions, and enhance energy efficiency. Survey respondents identified technology as a key enabler in driving innovation and achieving ambitious sustainability goals.



05

The Need for Greater Financial Investment

While the business case for sustainability is clear, many organizations report budget constraints that prevent them from scaling sustainability initiatives. Greater financial prioritization and innovative funding mechanisms, such as green finance, are necessary to support impactful, long-term sustainability strategies.



06

Addressing Gender Diversity in Leadership

While women are represented in sustainability leadership roles, the survey identified a need for greater gender diversity at senior levels. Expanding the representation of women in these roles can enhance decision-making and foster more inclusive perspectives, driving better outcomes in sustainability strategies.





07

Stakeholder Collaboration as a Success Factor

Sustainability is inherently collaborative, requiring partnerships across sectors. Successful initiatives increasingly rely on engagement with NGOs, governments, and private entities. Cross-sector collaboration is essential for addressing complex challenges, such as climate adaptation and social equity, and achieving broader sustainability goals.



08

Navigating Regulatory Compliance and Standards

ESG regulations are evolving rapidly, with increasingly stringent global standards shaping corporate strategies. Organizations must align their practices with these frameworks to mitigate risks, including fines and reputational damage. Regulatory compliance has become a cornerstone of effective sustainability governance.



 09

Engaging Employees in Sustainability

Employee engagement is a critical driver of sustainability success. However, the survey highlighted gaps in how companies involve their workforce. Targeted training, incentives, and communication are essential to empower employees and promote long-term commitment to sustainability goals at all organizational levels.

 10

Emerging Trends in Sustainability

Innovative trends such as green finance, climate adaptation technologies, and AI are transforming the sustainability landscape. Green finance, in particular, is gaining traction as a tool to fund environmental initiatives and reduce carbon footprints. These trends highlight the evolving nature of sustainability and the opportunities they bring for forward-thinking organizations.





11

Leveraging Sustainability Reporting Systems

Companies that utilize dedicated sustainability reporting systems benefit from greater accuracy, scalability, and actionable insights. These systems enable organizations to track sustainability metrics more effectively, helping them stay on course to meet their long-term goals while improving transparency and accountability.



12

Bridging the Skills Gap with Training and Development

A recurring theme in the survey was the lack of formal sustainability training programs. To build capacity and foster innovation, organizations need to invest in skills development and offer structured training for employees. Empowering teams with the knowledge and tools to contribute effectively is critical for embedding sustainability at all levels.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND LEADING THE REGION

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

The Middle East and Africa (MEA) region stands at a critical juncture in its sustainability journey. While challenges such as economic diversification, energy transition, and resource management loom large, the region is uniquely positioned to leverage innovation and leadership to redefine its future. By addressing obstacles head-on and harnessing opportunities, the MEA region can become a global sustainability leader.



Key Challenges to Sustainability

Economic Diversification

The MEA region’s reliance on oil and gas revenues remains a significant hurdle to sustainability. Transitioning to a diversified economy built on green technologies and sustainable industries involves overcoming complex socio-political and economic dynamics. This transition demands careful planning to balance immediate economic needs with long-term sustainability goals.



Energy Transition

Balancing the surging demand for energy with the global shift toward renewable energy sources poses a significant challenge. Substantial investments in infrastructure, technology, and regulatory frameworks are required to support this transition. At the same time, the region must navigate the inherent dependency on fossil fuel revenues, ensuring a just and equitable shift to a low-carbon energy mix.



Natural Resource Management

Water scarcity is one of the region’s most pressing issues. Sustainable water management practices, coupled with advancements in water-use efficiency, are critical to addressing this challenge. With climate change exacerbating resource stress, innovative solutions are needed to ensure the region can sustainably meet its growing needs.



Opportunities Through Innovation

Advanced Technologies

Emerging technologies are providing the tools needed to bridge the gap between sustainability ambitions and operational realities. AI-driven energy management systems, for instance, are optimizing energy usage, reducing waste, and significantly enhancing efficiency. These advancements demonstrate how innovation can turn challenges into opportunities.



Smart City Projects

Urban sustainability is being redefined through initiatives that leverage IoT, data analytics, and AI. These projects are helping cities reduce their carbon footprints, enhance mobility, and improve the quality of urban life. Examples from the region, such as Dubai's Smart City initiatives, highlight the transformative potential of technology in achieving sustainability goals.



Sustainable Agriculture Platforms

Digital platforms are revolutionizing agriculture by promoting sustainable practices that enhance food production efficiency and minimize environmental impact. These innovations are bolstering food security in a region where arid conditions and resource scarcity pose significant challenges.



Leading the Region and Making a Global Impact

The MEA region's increasing adoption of innovative technologies and commitment to integrating sustainability with growth showcases its potential for leadership. By addressing key challenges and investing in advanced solutions, the region can transform these obstacles into opportunities for global influence.

Building a Model for Regional Leadership



Fostering partnerships across public, private, and academic sectors to tackle complex sustainability challenges.



Prioritizing funding for renewable energy, AI-driven solutions, and water management technologies to drive transformative change.



Adopting robust policies and practices to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

Positioning the MEA Region as a Global Leader

By embracing sustainability as a strategic imperative, the MEA region can not only address its most urgent environmental challenges but also position itself as a leader on the global stage.



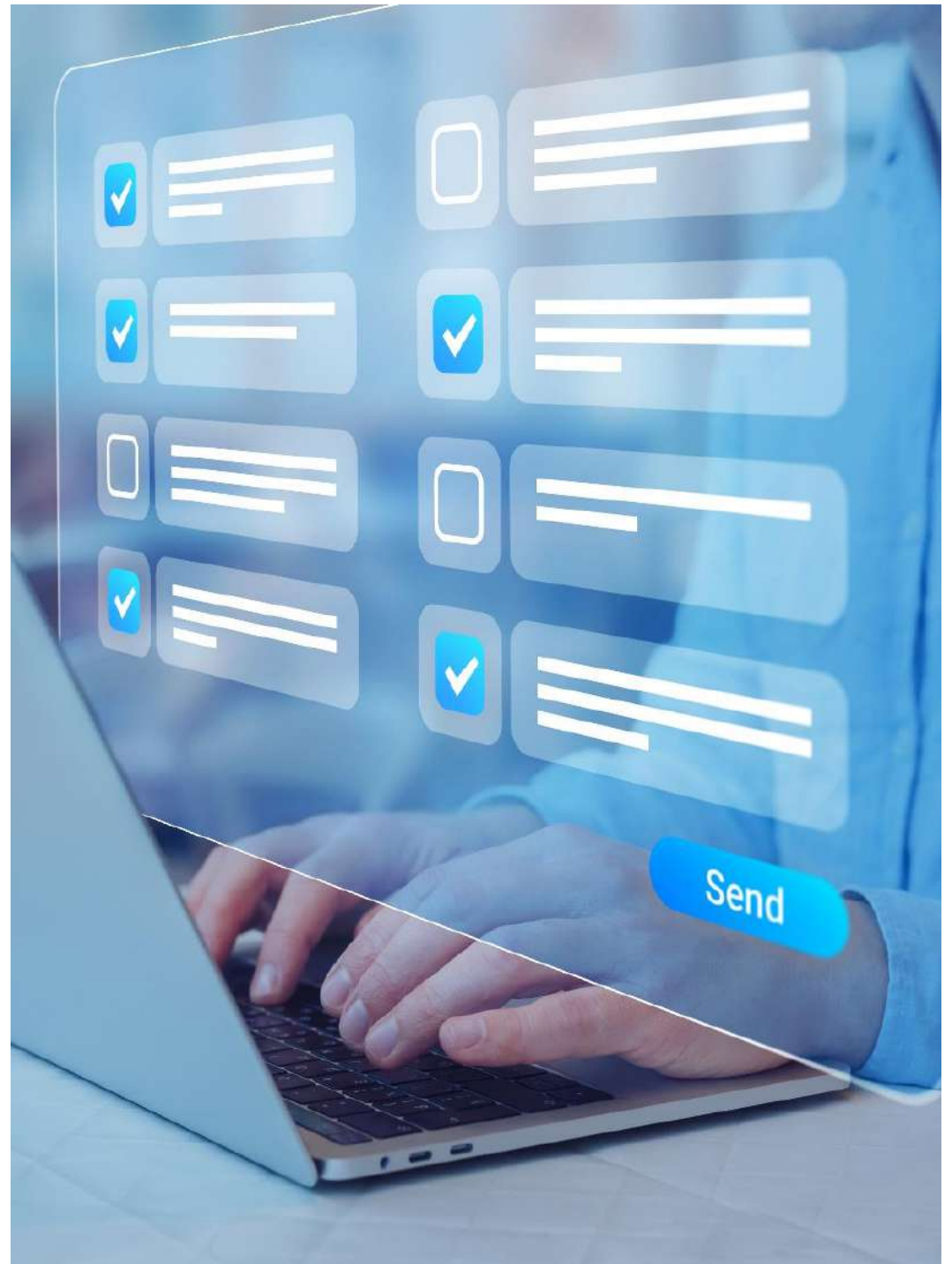
Initiatives such as the UAE's Net Zero 2050 strategy and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 exemplify the region's potential to set new benchmarks in sustainability leadership.

15 INSIGHTS

FROM THE CSO SURVEY 2024-2025

This section delves into the survey findings, offering a nuanced view of the progress, challenges, and opportunities faced by CSOs in the region.

It reflects a collective understanding of how organizations are shaping their sustainability journeys, balancing global ambitions with regional realities.



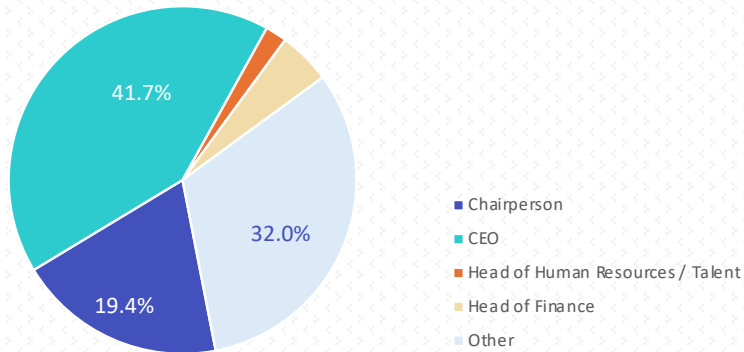


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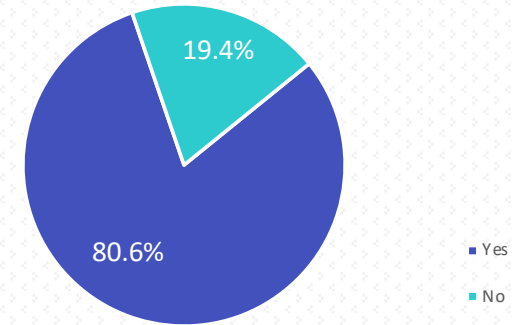
Sustainability Leadership at the Forefront

The increasing strategic importance of sustainability within organizations is evident, with over 61% of sustainability leaders reporting directly to the CEO or Chairperson. This reflects a shift in business priorities, where sustainability is no longer viewed as a secondary concern but as a core issue requiring top-level leadership involvement. The direct reporting structure allows for more integrated decision-making and alignment of sustainability goals with overall corporate strategies, enabling more effective action in addressing environmental and social challenges.

To whom does the CSO / head of sustainability / ESG in your firm report to?



Does your firm have a dedicated sustainability team?



02

The Growing Institutionalization of Sustainability

Almost 81% of organizations have established dedicated sustainability teams. This demonstrates the institutionalization of sustainability within corporate structures, highlighting its increasing role as a central function. The establishment of these teams not only ensures that sustainability goals are integrated into the overall business strategy but also underscores the commitment to managing sustainability as a formal, specialized area. It reflects a broader recognition that sustainability efforts need structured oversight to drive meaningful impact.

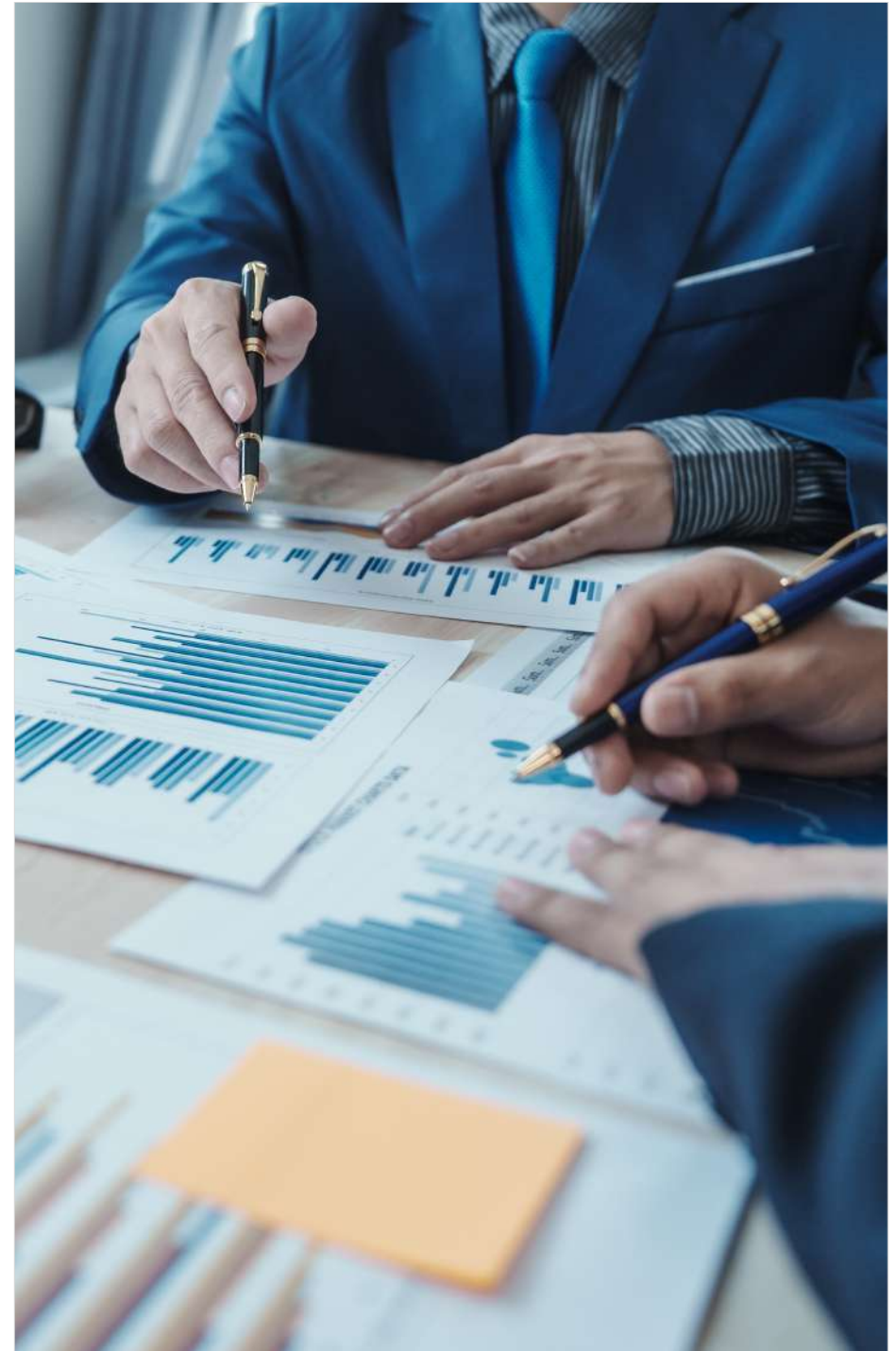
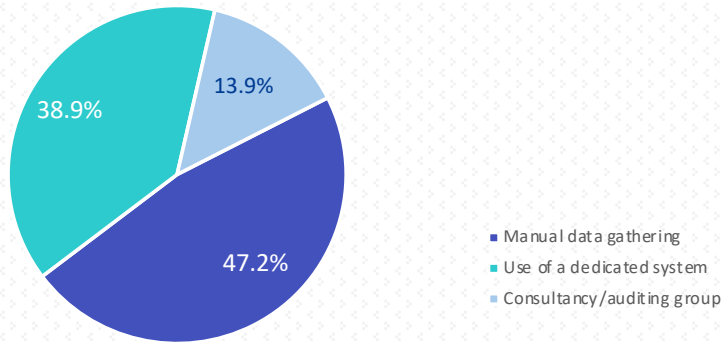


03

Manual Data Management Remains a Challenge

Despite advancements in technology, 47% of organizations still rely on manual data collection for sustainability reporting. This traditional approach is often inefficient and prone to errors, which can compromise the accuracy of sustainability metrics. The need for automated systems is becoming more critical, as it can improve the reliability of reporting, reduce manual labor, and allow for the scalability of data management processes. Organizations that transition to automated systems can enhance their data accuracy and reporting efficiency, meeting growing sustainability compliance demands.

How do you collect the data for measuring your company's sustainability performance?

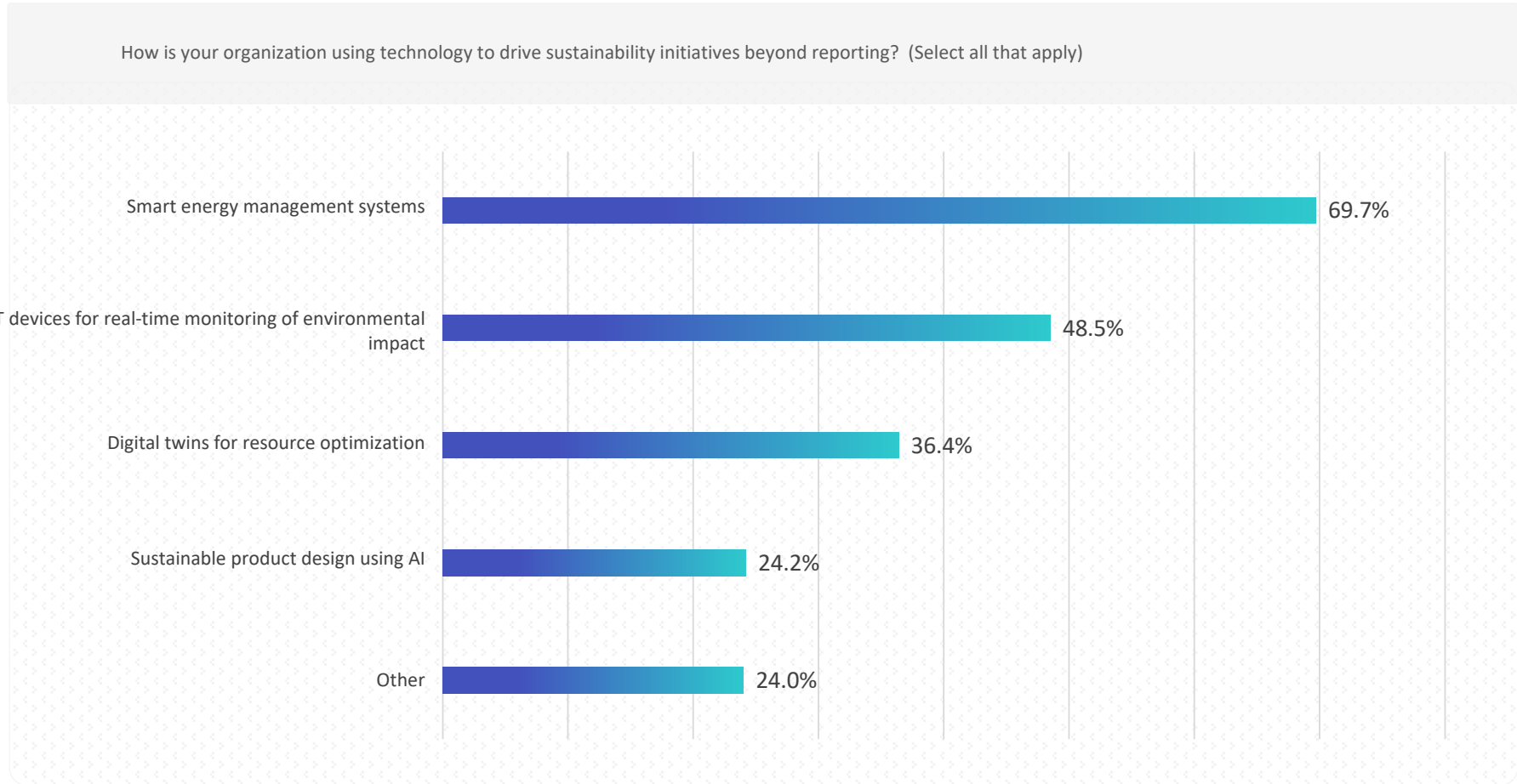




04

Advanced Technology Adoption on the Rise

The adoption of advanced technologies is increasingly being leveraged to drive sustainability goals. Around 48.5% of organizations are using Internet of Things (IoT) solutions, 36.4% have implemented digital twin technologies, and 69.7% are utilizing smart energy management systems. These technologies are helping businesses optimize resource use, reduce emissions, and monitor their environmental footprint in real-time. As these technologies become more integrated into business operations, they offer new ways to address sustainability challenges and accelerate progress toward environmental goals.





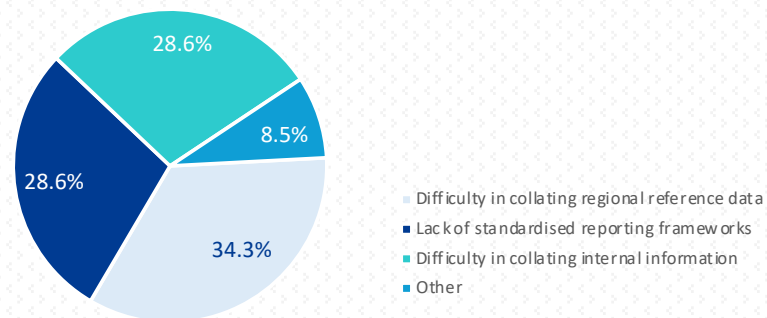
05

Significant Barriers in Regional and Internal Data Collection

Over 34% of organizations report challenges in collecting regional sustainability data, while 28.6% face difficulties with integrating internal data. These barriers highlight the complexities of managing and consolidating sustainability data from various sources.

Organizations often struggle with disparate data systems, regional variations, and inconsistent reporting frameworks. To address these issues, companies need to invest in more robust data systems and frameworks that can integrate data seamlessly and provide actionable insights for better decision-making.

What are the biggest challenges to ESG data collection and reporting?

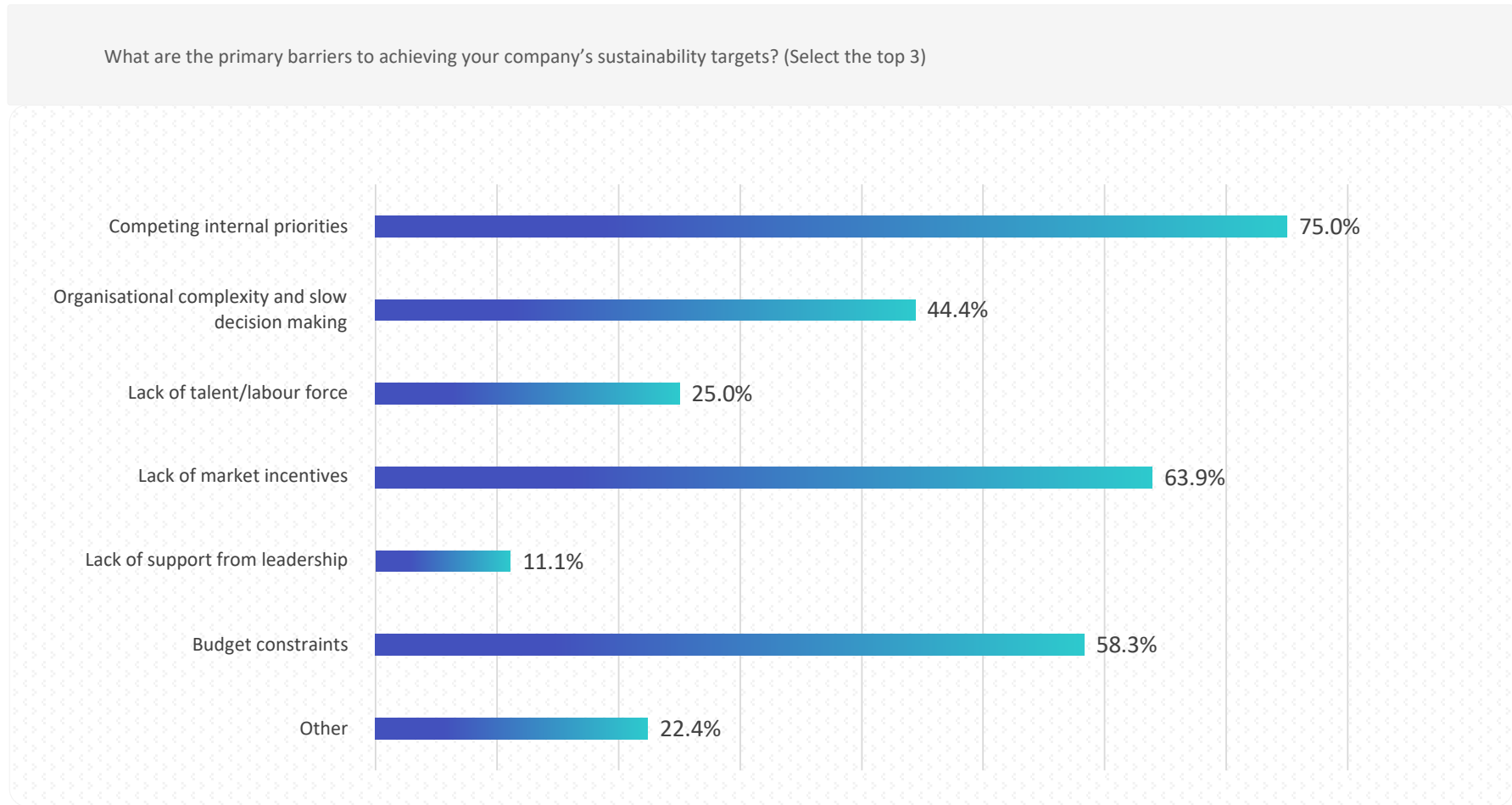




06

Budget Constraints Continue to Hinder Progress

Around 58% of organizations report insufficient budgets allocated to sustainability initiatives. Financial constraints are a significant barrier to scaling sustainability efforts, limiting organizations' ability to invest in the necessary technologies, staff, and resources required to drive meaningful change. This finding underscores the need for businesses to prioritize sustainability in their financial planning, ensuring that it is adequately funded to meet long-term goals and regulatory expectations. Companies may need to seek external funding sources or create internal incentives to increase investment in sustainability.



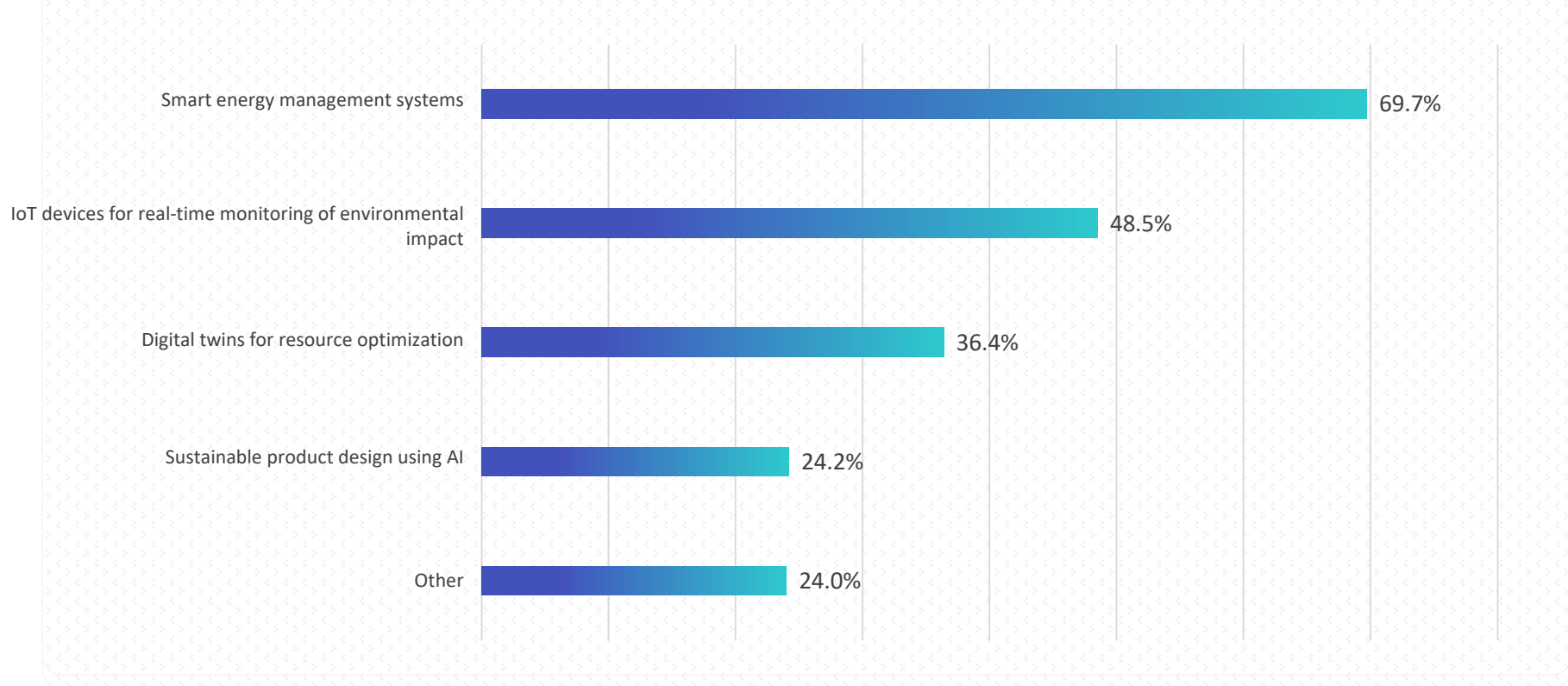


AI Offers Opportunities but Remains Very Underutilized

While artificial intelligence (AI) holds considerable potential for improving sustainability reporting and decision-making, it remains underutilized in many organizations. AI tools can help optimize processes, identify efficiencies, and improve the accuracy of sustainability metrics.

However, the integration of AI technologies in sustainability strategies is still in its early stages. As organizations become more familiar with AI's capabilities, there will likely be increased investment in AI solutions to enhance sustainability reporting and innovation.

How is your organization using technology to drive sustainability initiatives beyond reporting? (Select all that apply)



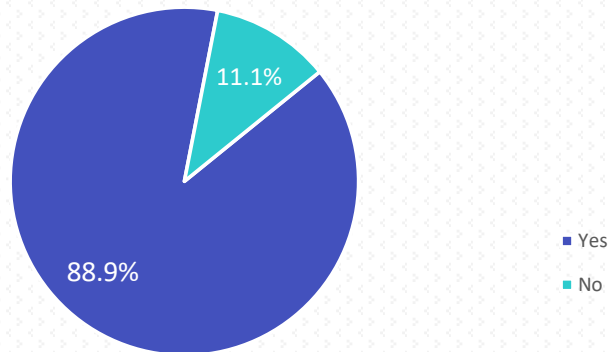


08 Gender Diversity in Leadership Shows Progress but Room for Growth

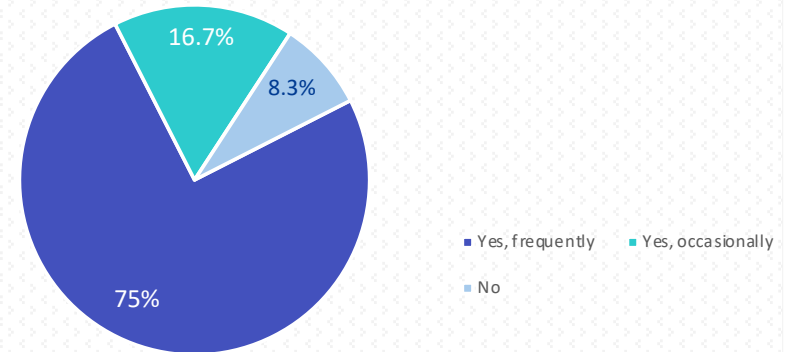
While 89% of organizations report having women in leadership roles, less than 30% achieve significant female representation at senior levels. This indicates progress in the inclusion of women in leadership but also highlights the challenges that remain in achieving gender equity.

To drive meaningful change, organizations must implement stronger diversity and inclusion policies, ensure equal opportunities for career advancement, and create supportive environments that allow women to thrive in senior leadership roles.

Does your company have women represented on the board or in key sustainability leadership roles?



Are you involved in partnerships with external stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, governments, private sector) to drive sustainability?



09 Stakeholder Collaboration Drives Broader Impact

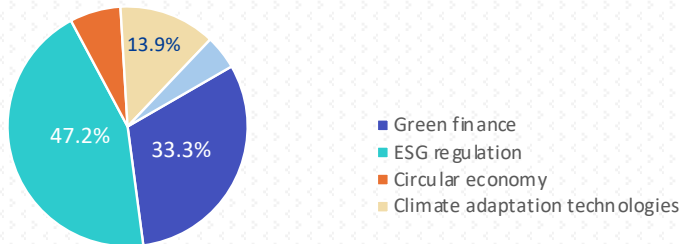
Nearly 75% of organizations emphasize the importance of collaborating with external stakeholders, including NGOs, governments, and private sector partners, to address regional sustainability challenges. This finding underscores the growing importance of cross-sector collaboration in achieving larger sustainability goals. Partnerships with external entities can help businesses access new resources, expertise, and networks, enabling them to tackle complex environmental and social challenges more effectively. This collaborative approach is essential for creating collective impact and driving systemic change.



10 ESG Regulations as a Primary Driver

Nearly half (47.2%) of organizations see ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) regulations as the primary driver shaping their sustainability strategies. As regulatory frameworks become stricter and more standardized, organizations are increasingly aligning their operations with ESG criteria to ensure compliance and mitigate risks. This shift reflects the growing recognition that sustainable business practices are not just ethical imperatives but also critical to long-term business success and competitiveness in the global market.

What emerging trends do you believe will have the most significant impact on sustainability in the Middle East over the next decade?



11 Emerging Trends Highlight Technology and Green Finance

Emerging trends such as climate adaptation technologies, green finance, and AI integration are becoming increasingly important in advancing sustainability goals. Green finance, in particular, is seen as a key enabler of sustainability, with 33.3% of organizations viewing it as integral to securing funding for sustainability initiatives. The growing emphasis on green finance demonstrates how financial markets are aligning with environmental goals, offering businesses access to capital that supports sustainable investments and practices.



12 The Data-Driven Imperative

Organizations that use dedicated systems for sustainability reporting are seeing higher accuracy and scalability in their sustainability metrics.

Companies using specialized systems for reporting can track, measure, and report on sustainability metrics more efficiently, leading to better decision-making and improved long-term sustainability outcomes.

The trend towards data-driven approaches in sustainability reporting is critical as businesses move towards more transparent, verifiable, and actionable sustainability strategies.



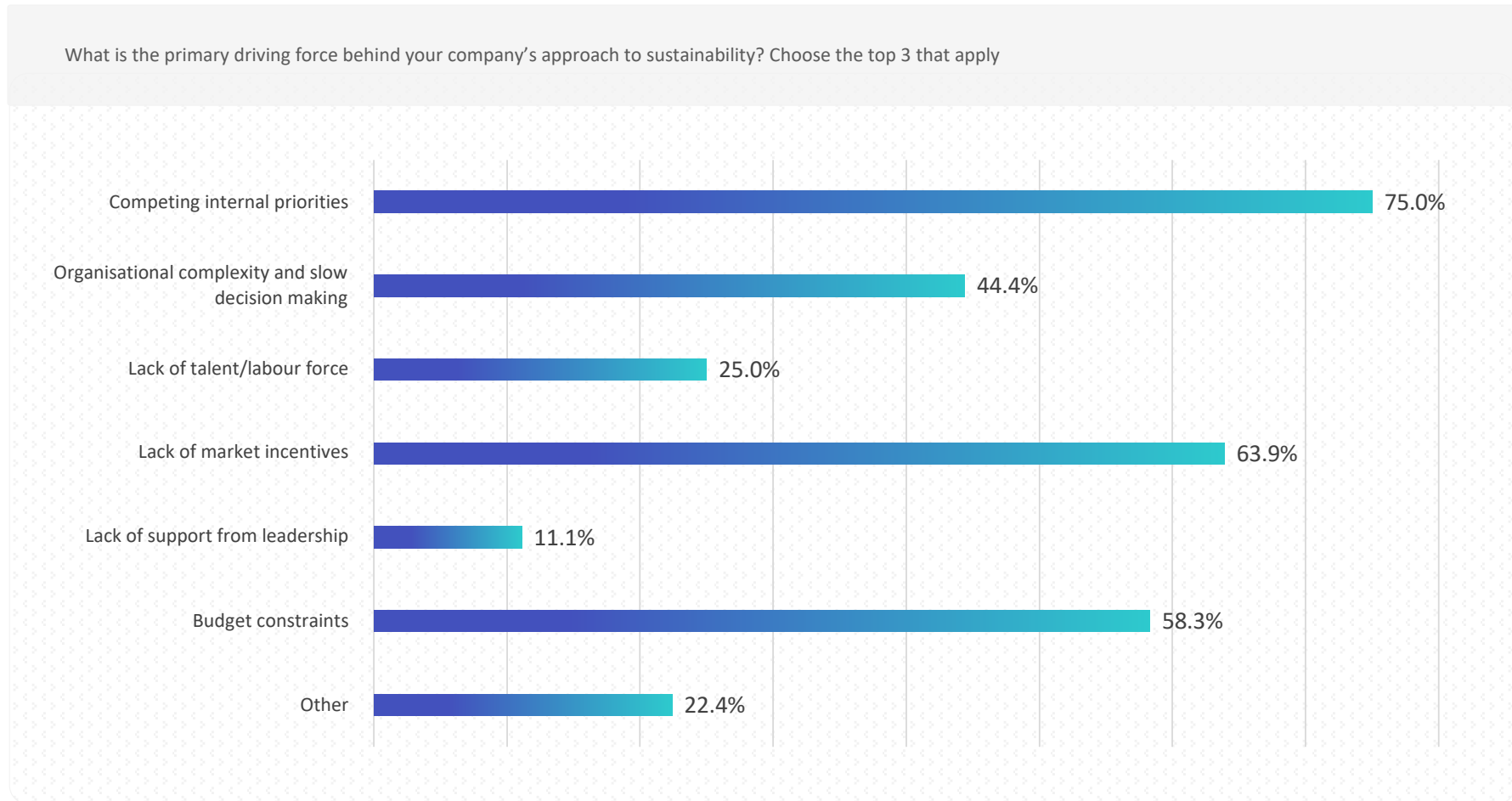


13

Lack of Market Incentives Slows Adoption

Approximately 64% of organizations report that the absence of strong market incentives is a significant barrier to accelerating sustainability efforts. Without clear financial or regulatory incentives, businesses may be reluctant to invest in sustainability initiatives.

This finding highlights the need for stronger policy measures, subsidies, or market-driven incentives that encourage businesses to prioritize sustainability and take more aggressive steps toward achieving their sustainability targets.

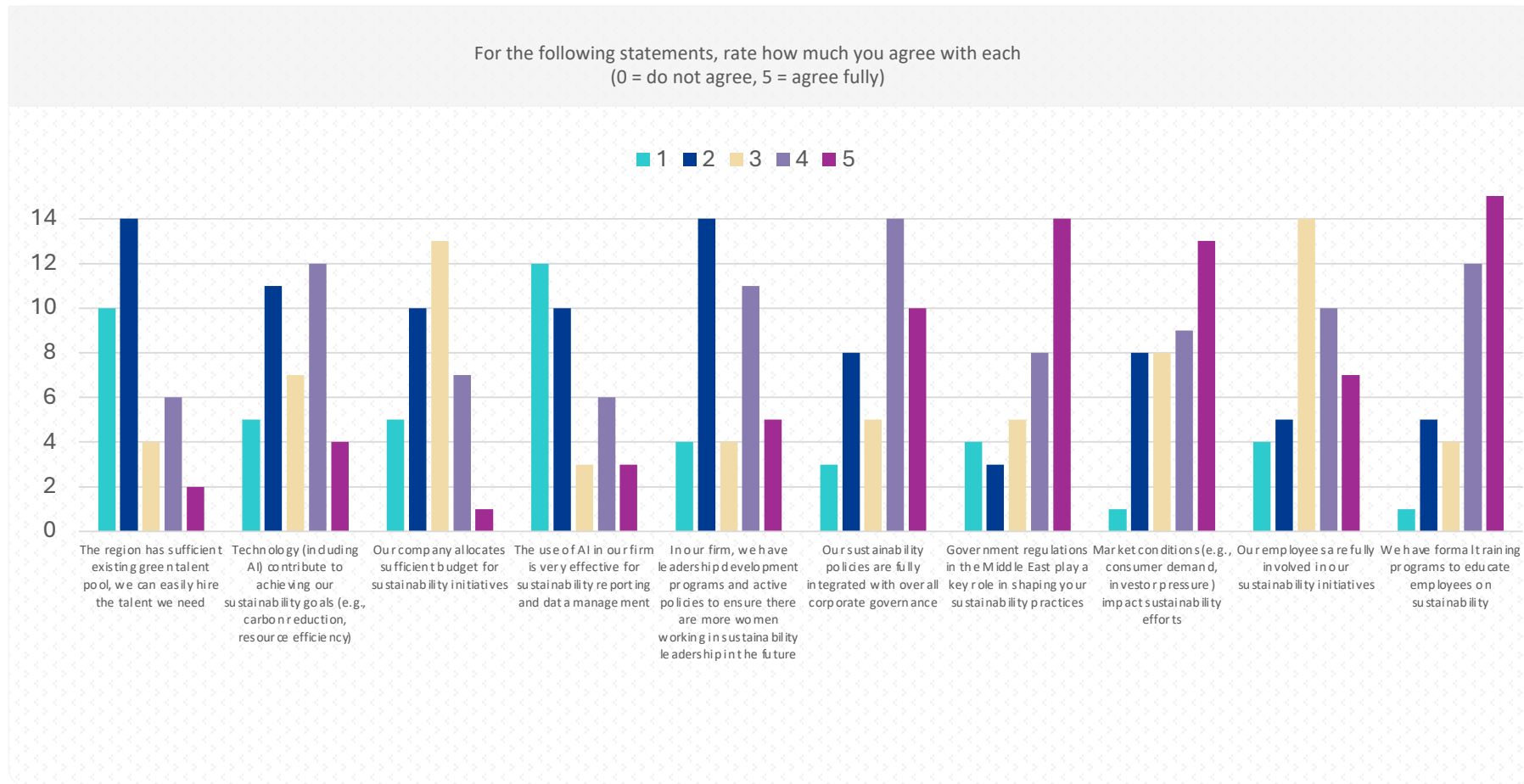




14

Employee Engagement in Sustainability Needs Strengthening

The level of employee engagement in sustainability initiatives is moderate, with many organizations scoring between 3 and 4 on a 5-point scale. This suggests that there is significant room for improvement in involving employees in sustainability efforts. By fostering a culture of sustainability through training, awareness programs, and employee incentives, organizations can enhance engagement and ensure that sustainability is embedded throughout the workforce, driving broader impact and accountability.





15

Formal Training for Sustainability Lags Behind

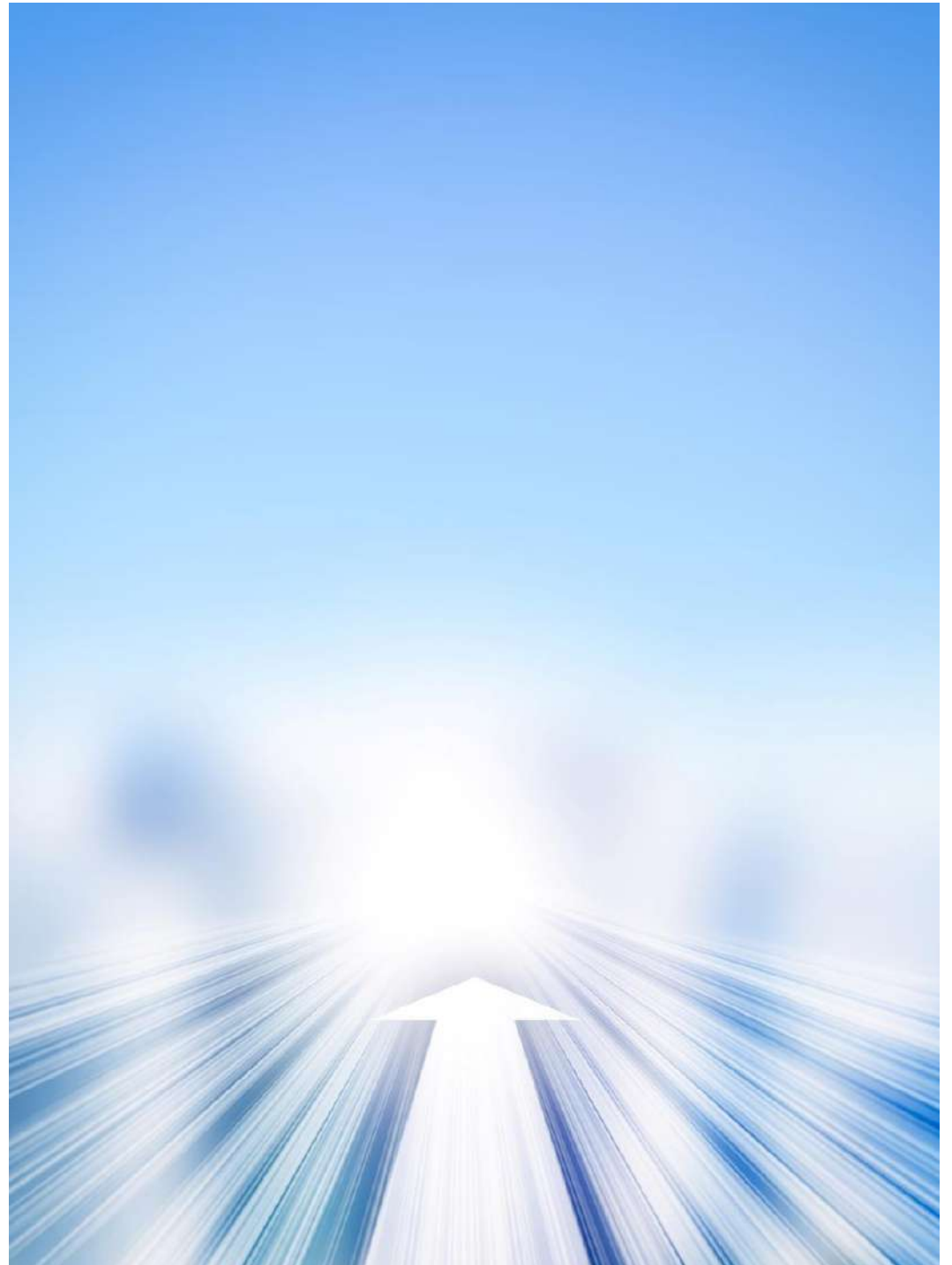
There are significant gaps in the availability of formal sustainability training programs within organizations.

Many employees lack the necessary skills to effectively support sustainability initiatives, which can limit the organization's ability to implement sustainable practices.

Addressing this gap by providing structured training and development programs will be essential in building a workforce that is capable of driving sustainability efforts and supporting long-term environmental goals.



THE ROAD AHEAD



The 2025 survey underscores the critical role of CSOs and sustainability leaders in navigating the complexities of sustainability while driving innovation and progress. By addressing challenges, leveraging emerging technologies, and fostering collaboration, organizations can transform sustainability from an obligation into a strategic advantage. These insights provide a roadmap for achieving impactful, scalable, and future-ready sustainability outcomes.

This year's findings emphasize that sustainability is not just a trend but a necessary foundation for success in a rapidly changing world. Through bold leadership, strategic investments, and inclusive engagement, organizations can rise to the challenge and lead the way toward a more sustainable future.

The journey toward sustainability in the MEA region is as challenging as it is promising. Overcoming obstacles such as economic dependence on fossil fuels, water scarcity, and the complexities of energy transition requires bold action, innovative thinking, and unwavering commitment.

By leveraging advanced technologies, fostering collaboration, and investing strategically, the region can redefine its trajectory. The MEA region is uniquely positioned to lead not just its own transformation but also inspire global progress, shaping a sustainable and resilient future for all.



THE REPORT TEAM



This report was developed by a dedicated team of sustainability experts from The Posterity Institute and the CSO Network:



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The Posterity Institute (PI) is a leading think tank dedicated to advancing sustainability and development through actionable research, policy recommendations, and strategic collaboration.

PI works with global and regional stakeholders to address complex challenges and shape a more sustainable future.

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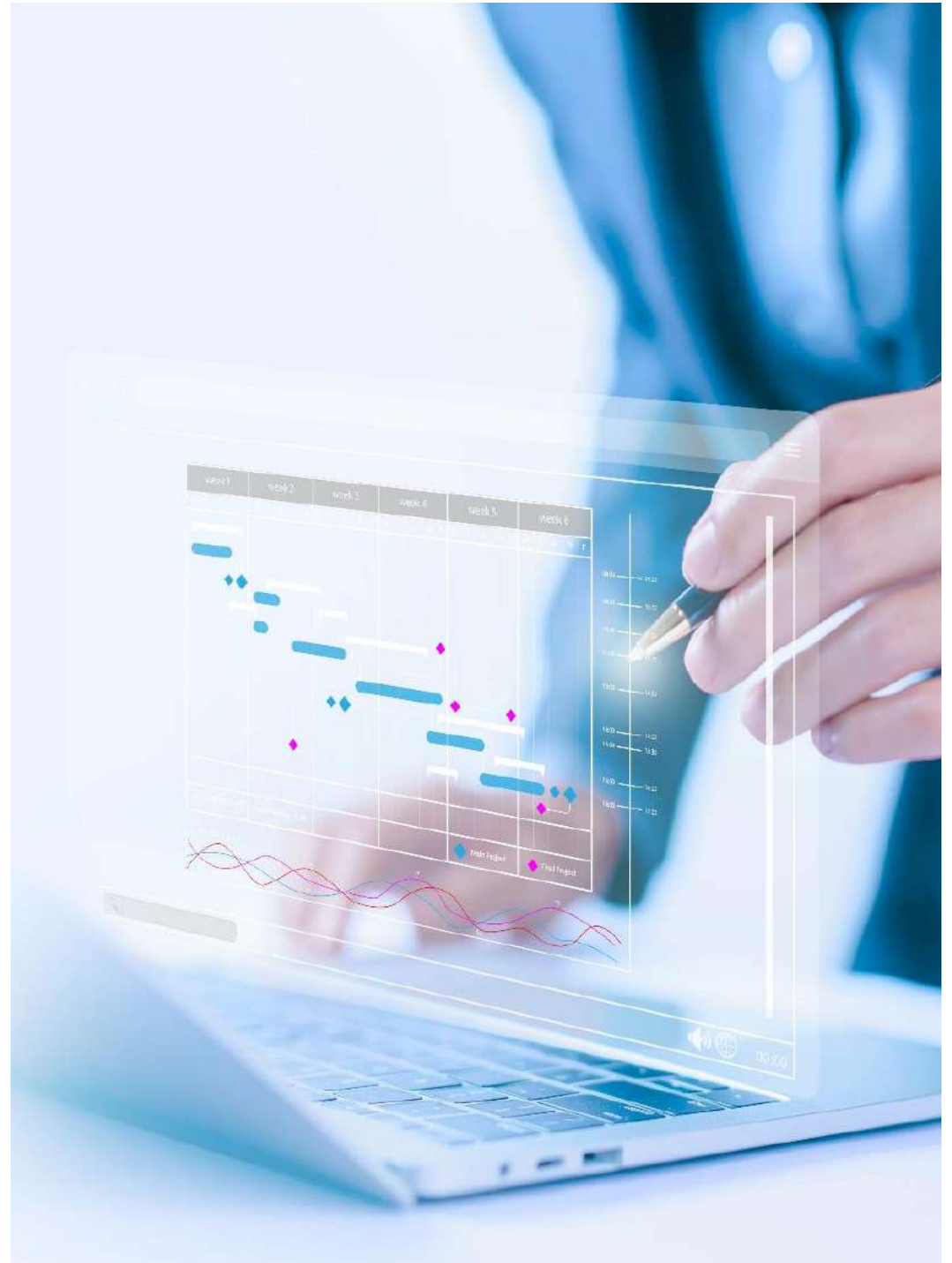


Operating under The Posterity Institute, the Chief Sustainability Officers (CSO) Network serves as a platform for sustainability leaders to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and drive innovation.

With a focus on the Middle East and Africa, the Network empowers organizations to integrate sustainability into their core strategies and achieve transformative results.

www.csonetwork.org

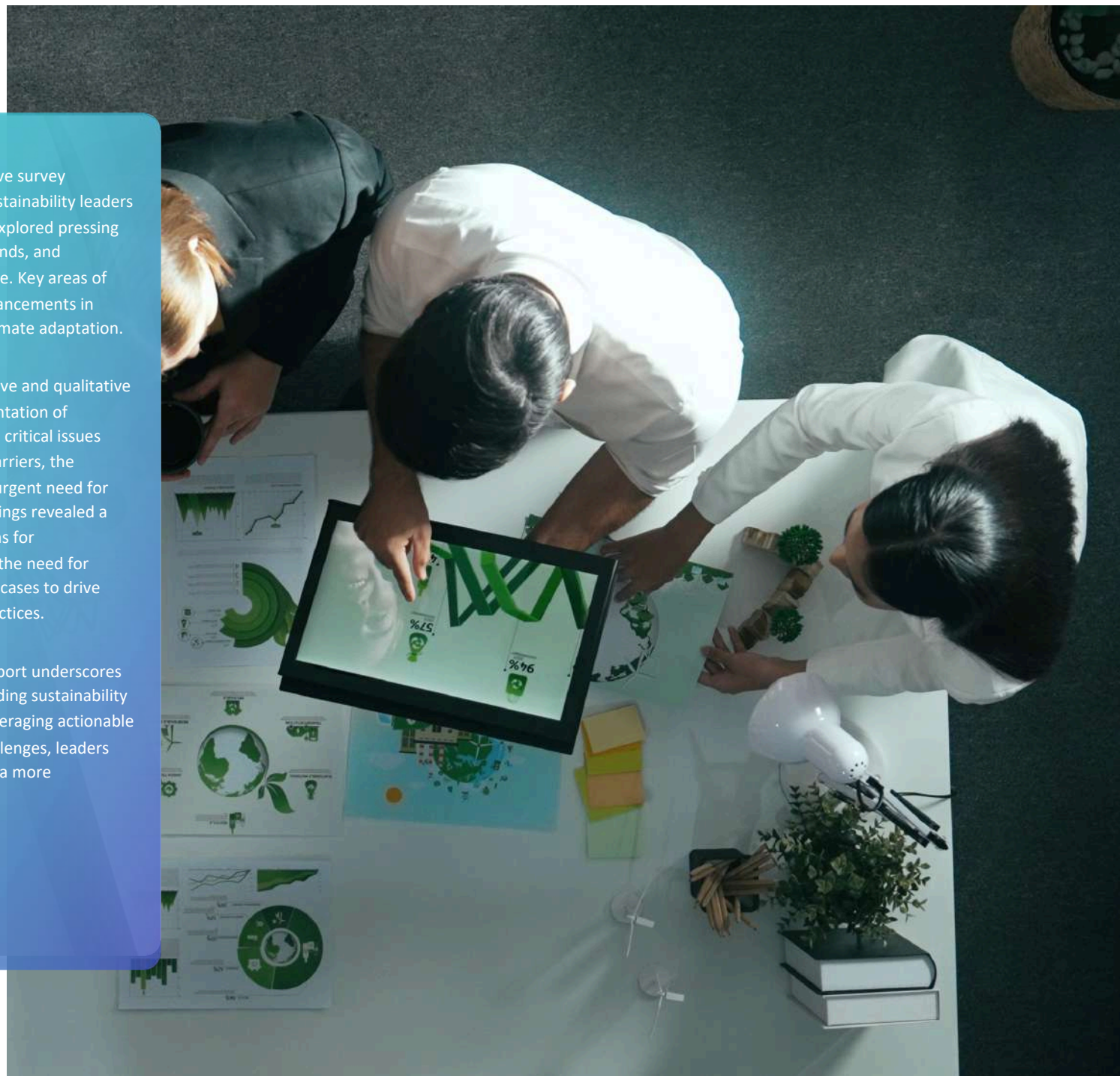
REPORT METHODOLOGY



This report is based on a comprehensive survey conducted to capture insights from sustainability leaders across diverse industries. The survey explored pressing sustainability challenges, emerging trends, and strategies driving organizational change. Key areas of focus included the adoption of AI, advancements in green finance, and technologies for climate adaptation.

The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, ensuring a broad representation of perspectives. Respondents highlighted critical issues such as economic and technological barriers, the prevalence of greenwashing, and the urgent need for workforce upskilling. Additionally, findings revealed a concerning gap in budgetary allocations for sustainability initiatives, underscoring the need for stronger incentives and clear business cases to drive greater investments in sustainable practices.

The "Futureproofing Sustainability" report underscores the urgency and complexity of embedding sustainability into organizational frameworks. By leveraging actionable insights and addressing persistent challenges, leaders can drive meaningful progress toward a more sustainable and resilient future.





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