

## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Gender Equality in Sustainability Reporting: A Systematic Literature Review

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## ABSTRACT

Gender equality is one of the Sustainable Development Goals and companies are key actors that need to disclose any progress made towards this goal. But we lack a clear understanding of the specifics of gender equality reporting in previous empirical research. We conducted a systematic literature review of empirical articles until year 2022 in the Web of Science and Scopus databases following the PRISMA guidelines. We found that most studies that examine gender equality reporting in companies usually do not follow a specific set of reporting guidelines and that the indicators employed are often limited to diversity in the highest governance body and committees, women in leadership and workforce gender representation. Also, we observed a lack of methodological diversity in previous studies. As a result, we have identified several gaps and propose various research lines to further advance research in the field. Additionally, we suggest policy and managerial implications to accelerate the growth of gender-sensitive reporting.

## 1 | Introduction

The growing push for gender equality has prompted global organisations and entities to demand greater transparency in companies' practises related to this issue. In particular, the United Nations has urged businesses to play a key role in achieving gender equality by establishing the SDG 5 and by emphasising the importance of disclosing any relevant information about it (Buallay et al. 2022). In this context, there has also been significant growth in non-financial reporting, supported by frameworks such as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) disclosure, SDG-related reports and the recent Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) which is the EU directive on sustainability reporting (Arayssi, Dah, and Jizi 2016; Buallay et al. 2022). Yet insights into how companies report their progress on gender equality—particularly in terms of specific

reporting guidelines, indicators and targets—remain limited and underexplored (Low, Abdullah, and Khatib 2023). To fill this gap, we carry out a systematic literature review (SLR) to delve into the specifics of gender equality reporting in previous empirical research using the PRISMA guidelines.

By specifics of gender equality reporting we refer to the reporting guidelines, systems, indicators and gender equality targets that have been employed by companies in previous empirical research. We only focus on empirical research instead of theoretical papers to see what information is indeed disclosed and how. We have established three research questions that guide our analysis:

RQ1. What methodologies have been employed in previous research to examine companies' reporting on gender equality?

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RQ2. What reporting guidelines, systems and indicators have been used in previous empirical studies to examine gender equality?

RQ3. What gender equality targets have been established by companies according to previous empirical research?

Therefore, our main contribution is to provide a more fine-grained understanding of gender equality reporting by looking at what companies do. An additional contribution is to critically examine the kind of methodological lenses previously employed, as the methodological design conditions the type of information that can be gathered. By analysing these methodologies alongside reporting frameworks and equality targets, this review not only highlights current practises but also identifies gaps in the literature. This, in turn, allows us to propose key recommendations that could enhance the state of the art in the gender equality reporting literature. The motivation for this review is the pressing need for greater transparency and consistency in corporate reporting on gender equality, as well as the broader global movement towards gender equality in the workplace. Through this analysis, we aim to provide valuable insights to academics, policy makers and practitioners, contributing to both academic and practitioner discourse in this critical field.

The remainder of this paper has been organised as follows. We first look at the relevant literature to construct the theoretical background of this study. We organise it in three subsections which provide the theoretical foundations for this study. The first subsection acknowledges how patriarchal epistemological assumptions have been traditionally adopted in the accounting discipline which, in turn, generate reporting guidelines and practises. The second subsection informs on the sustainability reporting initiatives that have been launched and the extent of attention they have placed on gender equality. The third subsection presents previous corporate practise on gender equality reporting. These three subsections allow us to frame the specific Research Questions (RQ) that this literature review sets out to answer. Next, we present the methodology used for the SLR. We then outline our main results and discuss them. Finally, we offer conclusions based on our research, present the limitations of the paper and suggest future research avenues and policy and managerial implications.

## 2 | Theoretical Background

### 2.1 | Patriarchy and Epistemology in Accounting and Sustainability Reporting

In the 1960s, accounting was considered a ‘male preserve’ and when women entered the profession, they were often denied access to professional accounting work (Duff 2011; Haynes 2017). Although this is not entirely resolved to this day (Khalifa 2013), accounting as a discipline has been claimed to be gender neutral (Broadbent 1998; Khalifa and Scarparo 2021). Accounting practises and reporting, such as budgeting, are usually not linked to gender issues in any way (Renzetti, Edleson, and Bergen 2012).

This superficial view does not acknowledge that accounting practises go beyond numbers and accounts. Accounting

practises are the result of negotiations and power dynamics within governments and companies (Oliveira et al. 2018). They have real effects such as to how public resources should be used (Ferry, Ahrens, and Khalifa 2018) and they construct a tangible economic reality by making economic agents transparent and, thus, more accountable for what they do (Adams and Harte 1998; Owen 2003). For example, a traditional claim of feminist accounting was the lack of representation of women’s domestic work and child raising in national accounts which ignored how women created value and contributed to the economy (Khalifa and Scarparo 2021). In other words, accounting practises are predefined by existing social structures and conceptions and they are performative. Thus, gender equality in accounting is principally about reevaluating the patriarchal epistemological foundations and core values of the accounting discipline (Haynes 2017).

Epistemology in conjunction with methodology enables the generation of knowledge and the understanding of social reality in specific contexts. Methodology is crucial in academic research as it determines how knowledge is produced, how the research process is conducted and how valid conclusions are drawn (Haynes 2008). For the specific purpose of this study, an initial research question is related to the methodological design of previous research to understand what their adopted methodological lens allowed to explore in relation to gender equality reporting. To give an example, content analysis provides a snapshot of companies’ engagement with gender issues (Haynes and Murray 2017). However, they do not allow to understand why companies employ certain indicators and disclose certain information instead of other data (Adams and Harte 1998). Thus, we propose the following research question:

RQ1. What methodologies have been employed in previous research to examine companies’ reporting on gender equality?

### 2.2 | From Social Accounting to Gender-Related Accounting Tools and Guidelines

Over the past 20 years, sustainability reporting standards and frameworks have been developed and proliferated (Arianpoor, Salehi, and Daroudi 2023). From a stakeholder theory perspective (Freeman 2010), this can be understood as companies’ gradual compliance with different stakeholders’ claims for greater transparency and accountability (García-Meca, Martínez-Ferrero, and Sánchez-Ballesta 2021; Oliveira et al. 2018) claims made by governments and regulators, consumers, employees, investors, among others.

At the moment, there are no universal global guidelines for companies to report on their sustainability performance. There are several standardisation initiatives around the world, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the AccountAbility AA1000 standards, the United Nations Global Compact Communication of Progress (CoP) and the ISO 26000 standard, but these are all voluntary for companies (Galant and Cadez 2017). Companies may use national, European or international guidelines when preparing their accounting statements. An important advance was when, in 2022, the European Commission approved the Corporate Sustainability

Reporting Directive (CSRD—Directive (EU) 2022/2464), which extends reporting information on gender equality and the number and type of companies obliged to present reports. The ESRS is a reporting standard used to fulfil the requirements of the EU CSRD. This standard requires many EU based companies to disclose information on gender equality, some of which is mandatory, although the rest is reported depending on its relevance for the company (materiality analysis). Other popular, but voluntary, guidelines are provided by corporate SDGs reporting, which has emerged as a more focused alternative to examine corporate progress on the 17 SDGs (Calabrese et al. 2021; Low, Abdullah, and Khatib 2023). In 2022, the GRI and the UN Global Compact developed guidance for companies on how to effectively integrate the SDGs into their reporting including tools such as the SDGs compass (GRI and UN Global Compact 2022).

Within existing non-financial and sustainability reporting systems, gender equality has traditionally received little attention (Haynes and Murray 2017; Velasco-Balmaseda, de Celis, and Izaguirre 2024). While the GRI is the most widely used sustainability reporting framework in the world, the original 2002 GRI guidelines contained limited reference to gender. It was not until the publication of the GRI G3 Guidelines in 2006 that three indicators related to gender equality were included: the gender composition of the governance body and of the workforce, and the ratio of men's to women's basic salary by employee category (Miles 2011). In 2009, the GRI and the International Finance Corporation published 'Embedding Gender in Sustainability Reporting. A Practitioner's Guide' proposing gender-specific corporate indicators in the following areas: gender equality in organisational governance and values, gender equality in workplace, gender equality in supply chain, gender equality and consumers, gender equality and the community and gender equality and investment (Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Miles 2011). Many of these indicators are also contemplated in the CSRD.

Haynes and Murray (2017) emphasised the need to consider the impact of corporate policies on gender equality outside the company and on women who are not formal sector workers. An interesting reporting approach in the public sector is Gender Responsive Budgeting which proposes several tools and techniques that structure public budgets and policies to reduce gender inequality of women as citizens (Khalifa and Scarparo 2021). Some of these are gender disaggregated analyses of taxes, public expenditure and beneficiary assessment, among others. These initiatives can inspire alternative indicators to measure gender equality by companies.

Also, in the SDGs framework, SDG 5 is specifically focused on gender equality covering different gender issues and establishing various targets (see Figure 1). But, although all these advances are laudable, reporting on gender equality remains heterogeneous and incomplete on a global level. This might have to do with gender equality being a 'wicked problem' that is complex 'due its multiple causes, lack of a dominant solution and complex linkages with other societal issues' (Eden and Wagstaff 2021, 31). The authors compare different indexes on gender equality to conclude that differences are found and no single index is sufficient. But, if the definition of gender equality

is a work-in-progress, so will be reporting on it. At the same time, reporting is crucial to attain the SDG 5 because it forms part of the 'evidence collection' stage and the materiality of corporate compliance (Eden and Wagstaff 2021).

Given this diversity and heterogeneity on reporting systems, one of the objectives of this review is to provide holistic insights regarding the guidelines, systems and indicators that have been previously and, most commonly, used to report on gender equality by companies. The following research question is proposed:

RQ2. What reporting guidelines, systems and indicators have been used in previous empirical studies to examine gender equality?

### 2.3 | Corporate Reporting on Gender Equality

In 2022, the GRI and the UN Global Compact developed guidance for companies on how to effectively integrate the SDGs into their reporting (GRI and UN Global Compact 2022). In Figure 1, we have adapted the information on the targets of Goal 5 to use them as parameters for presenting part of the results in this review. The gender issues have been grouped according to the indicators described in the document. Where the gender issue was mentioned in more than one target (e.g., equal pay, parental leave, among others), we have placed it in the goal that is most appropriate for the area in question.

Despite being part of international treaties, United Nations declarations, the SDGs framework and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions against discrimination in the workplace, gender equality reporting seems to be still in its infancy in most countries (Tietz Cazeri et al. 2021). Low, Abdullah, and Khatib (2023) show that, overall, SDGs disclosure is still broad and generic.

Companies do not address gender issues in detail in their reports and only disclose a combination of statistics on the breakdown of workforce and management by gender (Grosser and Moon 2008; Miles 2011). Although some companies publish some gender equality results, information is often limited (Adams and Harte 1998; Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez 2020; Singh and Pandey 2019) and generally difficult to verify (Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Lauwo 2018), although it may be readily available internally (Grosser and Moon 2005, 2008). Early on, Adams and Harte (1998) had pointed towards the importance of understanding not only what information was disclosed by companies, but also what information remained undisclosed and why. This is not surprising since companies generally aim for their reports to have a positive impact and enhance their image or reputation (Grosser and Moon 2008; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016). From a legitimacy theory perspective, gender disclosures aim to have a legitimising function for companies' actions (Adams and Harte 1998; Blanco-González et al. 2020).

This also has brought up questions regarding firms actually committing to gender equality or engaging in some type of gender equality-washing (Walters 2021). Sterbenk, Champlin,

Gender issue	Source
<b>Target 5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</b>	
Employee hires and turnover	WEF Toward Common Metrics and Consistent Reporting of Sustainable Value Creation (based on GRI Standard 401-1)
Equal pay	The Women's Empowerment Principles (aligned with GRI G4)
Inequality, discrimination and diversity, including disability	Culture of Health for Business (COH4B); UN Global Compact - 2022; GRI 406-1
Inclusive supply chain	Behind the Brands scorecard; GRI 414-2
Recruitment	SASB 330a; GRI 401-1
Training and Education	GRI 404-1-a; GRI 404-3-a
<b>Target 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</b>	
Child Labour	GRI 408-1-a; UN Global Compact - 2022
Forced or Compulsory Labour	GRI 409-1-a; UN Global Compact - 2022
Workplace violence and harassment	The Women's Empowerment Principles (aligned with GRI G4); UN Global Compact - 2022; UN Global Compact-Oxfam Poverty Footprint
<b>Target 5.4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate</b>	
Childcare	UN Global Compact-Oxfam Poverty Footprint; The Women's Empowerment Principles (aligned with GRI G4)
Employee's health care	GRI 401-2
Flexible work option	The Women's Empowerment Principles (aligned with GRI G4)
Indirect Economic Impacts	GRI 203-1
Parental leave	GRI 401-3; Culture of Health for Business (COH4B) framework by GRI and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Temporary or part-time employees	GRI 401-2
<b>Target 5.5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</b>	
Diversity in the highest governance body and its committees	UN Global Compact - 2022; GRI 102-22-a; GRI 102-24; GRI 2-9-c
Female participation in ownership	World Bank WDI; GRI 2-9-c
Women in leadership positions	UN Global Compact-Oxfam Poverty Footprint; UNCTAD core SDGs reporting indicators; World Bank WDI; GRI 2-9-c
Workforce gender representation	GRI 405-1
<b>Target 5.6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences</b>	
Stakeholders and community	UN Global Compact - 2022
Universal access to sexual and reproductive health	UN Global Compact - 2022

**FIGURE 1** | Gender issues addressed in the targets of SDG 5 based on GRI and UN Global Compact (2022).

and Windels (2022) found that companies that have won awards with female empowerment advertisements could not really claim to be pioneers in gender equality; 81% of the award-winning companies engaged in less than ten activities out of 23 gender-equality CSR activities, or else less than half. Similarly, Ferrero-Ferrero et al. (2023) found that although the companies of their study declared commitment to gender equality, none of them established a SDG 5 related target. This brings to the following research question:

RQ3. What gender equality targets have been established by companies according to previous empirical research?

### 3 | Methodology

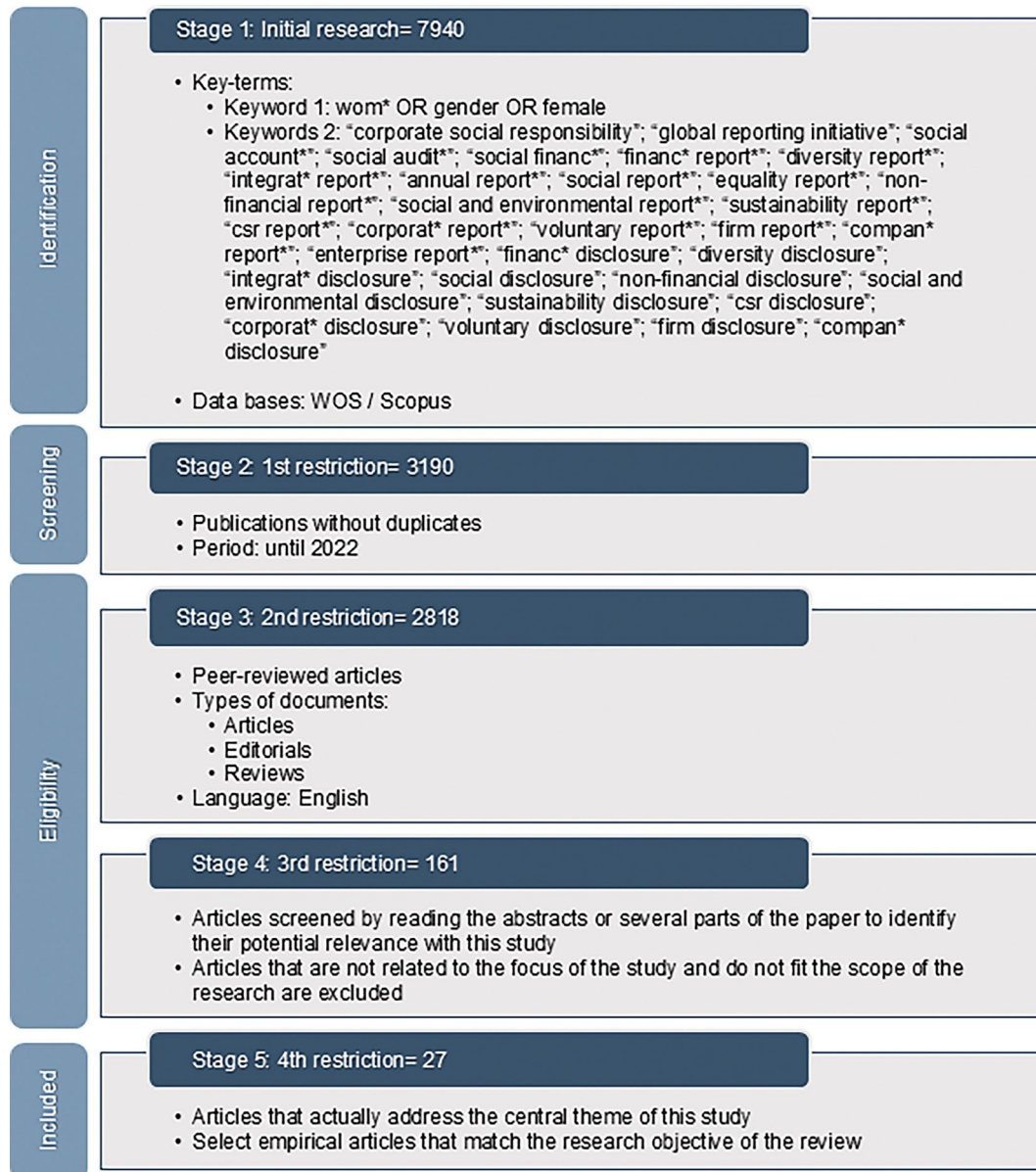
In this manuscript, we conducted a SLR to identify and analyse selected studies using explicit and reproducible criteria (Hägg and Gabrielsson 2019) and following a similar logic to the review stages and protocols proposed by different authors (Bonatto et al. 2015; Massaro, Dumay, and Guthrie 2016; Moustaghfir 2008; Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart 2003). This procedure aims to reduce bias due to subjectivity as well as random errors (Cook, Sackett, and Spitzer 1995). In adopting the SLR framework proposed by Aluchna et al. (2023), we followed the PRISMA guidelines. The PRISMA protocol is a widely

accepted and recognised framework designed to enhance the transparency, consistency and comprehensiveness of systematic reviews (Son et al. 2023). We present the five stages followed to carry out the SLR, which are detailed in the following sections (Figure 2).

- Stage 1. The search was conducted using a large number of keyword combinations to ensure that virtually all the literature on the subject was covered from the outset. We searched both Thomson Reuters' Web of Science database (WOS) and Elsevier's Scopus database. These databases provide a wide coverage of areas within this discipline and offer different search, navigation and filtering options (Domingo-Posada, González-Torre, and Vidal-Suárez 2024; Ginieis, Sánchez-Rebull, and Campa-Planas 2012; López-Illescas, de Moya-Anegón, and Moed 2008). We performed an initial search with 35 keywords in WOS ('Topic') and Scopus ('TITLE-ABS-KEY'), to ensure that we compiled all the publications that contained any of the previously

selected keywords in the papers. To find results on gender equality, the principal keywords related to women were: 'wom\*' OR 'gender' OR 'female' combined with 32 terms used to refer to SR (see Figure 2). In conclusion, 35 keywords were analysed, resulting in a combination of 96 search terms, both in WOS and Scopus.

In addition, the search was limited until year 2022, and it was also restricted to the area of social sciences. For this purpose, the search in Scopus was limited to the Social Science subject area, and in WOS we only included the Social Science Index (SSCI) and the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). The reason of this limitation is because the term 'social accounting' can be used to describe different concepts in different fields. In medicine, for example, the term social accountability refers to the responsibility of health professionals and organisations to align their activities with the health needs and priorities of the communities they serve (Ritz, Beatty, and Ellaway 2014).



**FIGURE 2** | Step-by-step process for sample selection.

- Stage 2. The last stage produced 7940 results, which were filtered using the exclusion criteria set out in the research protocol (Coelho, Jayantilal, and Ferreira 2023; Jones and Gatrell 2014). We removed duplicate papers halving the number of results down to 3190. This was due to the large number of keyword combinations originally identified.
- Stage 3. At this stage, we screened out publications in conferences, book chapters, books, etc., so that only peer-reviewed research papers and papers written in English (2818 papers) were considered.
- Stage 4. Following similar steps used in previous SLRs (Bonatto et al. 2015; Sánchez-Vergara, Ginieis, and Papaioikonomou 2021), in this stage we wanted to identify the articles that are relevant to the scope of the study. We read the title, abstract and, in case of ambiguity, the full paper of all 161 articles.

During this stage, most of the studies that were excluded were related to public health. They appeared in the search because of the use of the term of social accountability in medicine (as explained in the first stage). Other studies were also found that had nothing to do with the research scope, for example, studies about (CSR), but not corporate disclosure. Also,

we discarded papers that used the Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) tool to measure and analyse economic flows between sectors of an economy and economic agents such as families, businesses, government and the rest of the world (Pyatt and Round 1979).

Table 1 presents the journals that have published the most articles, arranged in chronological order. The number of publications in this area has increased over the years, with the exception of 2020, which may be related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The journals that published the most articles are CSR and environmental management and sustainability with 12 articles each, followed by gender in management and Journal of Business Ethics with 7 articles each.

- Stage 5. In this stage we got the final dataset for analysis that consists of articles whose main objective is to examine gender equality reporting. The final dataset is composed by 27 empirical papers. We decided to select only empirical articles which have carried out fieldwork, as opposed to theoretical papers. Our scope was on understanding the current state of the actual use of reporting on gender equality (reporting guidelines, systems and indicators, targets) by companies instead of theoretical discussions and suggestions about it.

**TABLE 1** | Evolution of the number of publications in journals WOS and Scopus.

Journal	< 2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020	2021	2022	Total
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	—	1	—	—	1	—	3	3	—	1	3	12
Sustainability (Switzerland)	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	5	3	12
Gender in Management	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	2	7
Journal of Business Ethics	2	—	2	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	7
Accounting, Organizations and Society	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	4
Business Strategy and the Environment	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	1	—	4
Corporate Governance: An International Review	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	1	3
Critical Perspectives on Accounting	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	3
Journal of Management and Governance	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	3
Management Research Review	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3
Social Responsibility Journal	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	3
Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	3
Other journals	12	—	2	6	2	9	7	14	3	16	26	97
Total	23	1	5	7	5	10	16	23	3	29	39	161

Source: Elaborated by the author using data from WOS and Scopus databases.

Category	Inclusion	Exclusion	Justification
Keywords	Papers using selected keywords	Other keywords	The search was conducted using a large number of keyword combinations to ensure that virtually all of the literature on the subject was covered from the start
Databases	Thomson Reuters' Web of Science database (WOS) and Elsevier's Scopus database	Google Scholar and others	These databases cover a wide range of fields and have different search, navigation and filtering options
Language	English	Other languages	English is the most widely used and accepted language in high quality academic journals
Type of publication	Peer-reviewed research papers	Conferences publications, book chapters, books, etc.	The peer-reviewed academic publications guarantee the quality of the research
Area	Social Science	Medicine and health care areas, among others	The research was focused in business, accounting and management sub-areas
Primary aim	Papers that approach gender issues as a primary aim of research	Papers that treat gender as a cause or effect of other scopes	When research treats gender as an additional characteristic the analysis of gender issues could lose the importance
Scope	Gender and SR	Other scopes	The terms associated with SR can be used in different fields not related with this review
Research type	Empirical papers	Conceptual and experimental papers	We focus only on empirical articles whose observations are based on practise
Review question	Papers on gender equality reporting in SR	Papers with other purposes	Only articles whose purpose matched the research questions of this study were considered

FIGURE 3 | Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Figure 3 shows all the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the five steps to get to this point. Once we got the final dataset of articles, we jointly analysed them manually multiple times.

The 27 articles date from 1998 to 2022 and were published in various journals. Particularly noteworthy are the journal of CSR and Environmental Management with three articles, followed by equality, diversity and inclusion and sustainability (Switzerland) with two articles each (for further information, see Table A1).

## 4 | Results

Following the methodology presented in the previous section, we have selected empirical research specifically related to SR and gender. This section presents the results of the review of the 27 articles, the analysis of the study methods and the approach adopted in the reports analysed in the studies.

### 4.1 | Methods of Selected Studies

The 27 articles analysed were classified according to the methodology and research techniques used. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method designs were used, although quantitative research clearly predominates (see Table 2). According to Yilmaz (2013), quantitative research's aim to generalise, predict and test cause-effect relationships, while qualitative research aims to understand and interpret using inductive reasoning.

Our analysis shows that most studies do not generate primary data, but instead they analyse already published secondary information in the form of annual reports, sustainability reports, integrated reports, websites etc. (García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi 2022; Mogaji et al. 2021; Motel 2016; Oliveira et al. 2018; Singh and Pandey 2019). The most common data analysis technique employed is content analysis (Adams and Harte 1998; Furlotti et al. 2019; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Singh and Pandey 2019). This was an expected

**TABLE 2** | Sustainability reporting and gender: theory and practise.

Method	Papers
Qualitative	Lauwo (2018), Mogaji et al. (2021), Oruc (2015)
Quantitative	Ali, Grabarski, and Konrad (2022), Ben-Amar et al. (2022), Blanco-González et al. (2020), Campos-García (2021), García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi (2022), Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020), Furlotti et al. (2019), Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey (2021), Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt (2021), Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), Kato and Kodama (2018), Lazzaretti et al. (2013), Motel (2016), Oldford (2022), Oliveira et al. (2018), Ravi and Sudarsanam (2019), Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu (2022), Singh and Pandey (2019), Sojo et al. (2016), Tietz Cazeri et al. (2021).
Mixed	Adams and Harte (1998), Ben-Amar et al. (2021), Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez (2020), Grosser and Moon (2008).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

outcome, since content analysis is usually employed for the study of published reports and documentation (Prior 2014). For some authors, like Bryman (2008), content analysis is a hybrid of qualitative and quantitative research. However, others like Prior (2014) distinguish between quantitative and qualitative understandings of content analysis where quantitative content analyses are more deductive in nature aiming to quantify data.

Quantitative content analyses predominate in our sample. Some studies deductively codified data with predefined categories, for example, if and how often certain gender indicators are mentioned (Tietz Cazeri et al. 2021). In quantitative content analyses, results may be descriptive and answer questions of 'how much' or 'how often' regarding the state of disclosure of information about gender equality (Oliveira et al. 2018) or measure increase or decrease of gender representation and diversity (Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez 2020; Motel 2016). Also, textual and content analysis has been used as the first step to form variables and later carry out multivariate and regression analyses (Ben-Amar et al. 2022; Furlotti et al. 2019).

Panel data were also used for historical analysis after the introduction of legislation in relation to gender equality (Oldford 2022), to analyse gender diversity effects on CSR (Kato and Kodama 2018) or to examine the effects of pay gap on firm's reputation (Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu 2022). In one case, a survey was carried out to CSR experts to measure the relationship between gender equality policies and moral legitimacy (Blanco-González et al. 2020).

In turn, qualitative studies (11.1%) and mixed designs (14.8%) are much scarcer. Again, we find examples of qualitative content and text analyses (Adams and Harte 1998; Conde-Ruiz, García,

and Yáñez 2020; Grosser and Moon 2008; Mogaji et al. 2021; Oruc 2015). Oruc (2015) clarifies that content analysis can be more than a simple word-frequency count and they qualitatively explore reports to see how Turkish companies involve women as stakeholders in CSR activities. Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez (2020) in their mixed design study examine women representation in boards and then carry out textual analysis to see how companies justify the lack of women in their boards.

Only two studies were found that adopted other research techniques. First, Grosser and Moon (2008) started with content analysis to track the performance indicators in gender related issues and continued with 11 interviews to representatives of companies with best practises in terms of reporting. The objective of interviews was to understand the reasoning behind the decisions of what was being reported and what not, incentives for greater disclosure and feedback from reporting. Second, Lauwo (2018) carried out an interpretative ethnographic case study including interviews, group discussions with employees, community members and trade union representatives to analyse women's experiences of exclusion and oppression in the mining sector.

## 4.2 | Reporting Guidelines

Although Table 3 only shows three studies that have adopted the indicators proposed by the GRI, they are the most popular set of indicators because other studies took them into account when creating their own indicator sets. This is further explained in this section.

### 4.2.1 | GRI Standard

Three of the selected articles use the indicators included in various editions of the GRI Standards to address gender equality in corporate social practises. Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016) use the gender disclosure checklist proposed in GRI and IFC (2009) to analyse the results of 40 Fortune 500 companies with SR that have started to disclose their results mainly due to stakeholder demands for more transparency and accountability.

In addition, Oliveira et al. (2018) and García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi (2022) aligned the WEPs with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) indicators of the GRI guidelines to analyse the impact of characteristics of the national business system (Oliveira et al. 2018), peer behaviour and the company's gender equality policy (García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi 2022) on the disclosure of gender-related information.

### 4.2.2 | Own Set of Indicators

Some of the studies claim to combine different reporting guidelines with previous literature on gender equality to create their own set of indicators. Grosser and Moon (2008), for example, combined existing gender reporting regulations from different countries, previous versions of the GRI reporting guidelines, academic literature, etc. among other sources to create a

**TABLE 3** | Reporting guidelines used by the papers selected.

Reporting guidelines	Papers
GRI standard	García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi (2022), Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), Oliveira et al. (2018).
Own set of indicators	Adams and Harte (1998), Blanco-González et al. (2020), Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020), Furlotti et al. (2019), Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey (2021), Grosser and Moon (2008), Kato and Kodama (2018), Lauwo (2018), Mogaji et al. (2021), Motel (2016), Oruc (2015), Singh and Pandey (2019).
No set of indicators: single focus	Ali, Grabarski, and Konrad (2022), Ben-Amar et al. (2021), Ben-Amar et al. (2022), Campos-García (2021), Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez (2020), Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt (2021), Lazzaretti et al. (2013), Oldford (2022), Ravi and Sudarsanam (2019), Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu (2022), Sojo et al. (2016), Tietz Cazeri et al. (2021).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

different set of indicators. They defined different indicators such as women as percentage of workforce, women as percentage of management, women as part-time workers, observed trends and set targets on gender diversity etc.

The main perspectives addressed by the constructed indicators are equal opportunities (Adams and Harte 1998), gender mainstreaming (Grosser and Moon 2008), legitimacy (Blanco-González et al. 2020), women in STEM organisations (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2020), diversity (Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021) and the CSR practises (Furlotti et al. 2019; Kato and Kodama 2018; Lauwo 2018; Motel 2016). Other studies (Mogaji et al. 2021; Oruc 2015; Singh and Pandey 2019) used an inductive method and created their set of indicators by analysing and coding previously published business reports. Unlike authors (e.g., Grosser and Moon 2008) who first drew on institutional and academic proposals for gender equality reporting and then compared these with company reports, these authors defined their indicators based on what companies have reported in the past. These studies mainly focused on women-friendly policies and practises.

#### 4.2.3 | No Set of Indicators: Single Focus

Other studies included in this review do not follow any reporting guidelines. These empirical articles did not specify any

indicators but focused their analysis on specific issues they wanted to address and their relationship to gender equality within the company. Among these issues we can find: gender diversity in boards (Ben-Amar et al. 2021, 2022; Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez 2020; Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt 2021; Lazzaretti et al. 2013; Oldford 2022; Ravi and Sudarsanam 2019; Sojo et al. 2016), women as stakeholders (Lauwo 2018), women's representation at different levels (Ali, Grabarski, and Konrad 2022; Campos-García 2021) and gender pay gap (Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu 2022; Tietz Cazeri et al. 2021). Nevertheless, most of these studies have a rather limited focus that does not offer a more holistic understanding of the reality of women in the workplace. Campos-García (2021) concluded that women's representation has not changed significantly after COVID-19, but she does not consider new problems in the post pandemic era such as changes in female employees' pay, work-life balance during and after COVID-19, etc.

#### 4.3 | Targets of SDG 5 Addressed in the SR

In this section, the articles analysed are grouped according to the gender issues and target associated with reporting on gender equality (see Table 4 for an overview). Some of the studies address numerous gender equality issues (e.g., García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi 2022; Oliveira et al. 2018), but some of them do not examine them in depth (e.g., Blanco-González et al. 2020; Singh and Pandey 2019). For this reason, their contribution to specific SDG 5 targets is limited. It is important to note that certain studies in Table 4 might correspond to more than one of the six targets analysed in the paper.

##### 4.3.1 | Target 5.1. Gender Discrimination

Overall, there is limited disclosure of information about the recruitment and retention of women, and the companies that provide information, they report it without much detail (Adams and Harte 1998; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016). Singh and Pandey (2019) point out that very few Indian companies report on their women's networking policies. Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016) found that some companies in their sample disclosed information about potential opportunities for women's career advancement and recruitment. However, only a handful of companies provided data on employee turnover, retention of women and gender-sensitive compensation and benefits systems, and there is a lack of data on employee engagement in gender awareness, recruitment and financial resources for women's equality, as well as very limited reporting on equipment and infrastructure for women. It is also not common for companies to report on gender inequalities in the supply chain or the percentage of female employees involved in trade unions (Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Oliveira et al. 2018).

Another important finding is the lack of information on the hiring of part-time employees by gender, as any improvement in this regard would be an important indicator of work-life balance (Grosser and Moon 2008). Also, in male-dominated industries such as mining, it is common for

**TABLE 4** | Targets of SDG 5 addressed in the papers.

Target	Papers	No
5.1	Adams and Harte (1998), Blanco-González et al. (2020), Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020), Furlotti et al. (2019), García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi (2022), Grosser and Moon (2008), Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), Kato and Kodama (2018), Lauwo (2018), Mogaji et al. (2021), Motel (2016), Oliveira et al. (2018), Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu (2022), Singh and Pandey (2019), Tietz Cazeri et al. (2021).	15
5.2	Adams and Harte (1998), Singh and Pandey (2019).	2
5.4	Adams and Harte (1998), Blanco-González et al. (2020), Grosser and Moon (2008), Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), Lauwo (2018), Oliveira et al. (2018), Oruc (2015), Singh and Pandey (2019).	8
5.5	Ali, Grabarski, and Konrad (2022), Ben-Amar et al. (2021), Ben-Amar et al. (2022), Blanco-González et al. (2020), Campos-García (2021), Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez (2020), Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020), Furlotti et al. (2019), Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey (2021), Grosser and Moon (2008), Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt (2021), Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), Kato and Kodama (2018), Lazzaretti et al. (2013), Motel (2016), Oldford (2022), Oliveira et al. (2018), Oruc (2015), Ravi and Sudarsanam (2019), Sojo et al. (2016).	20
5.6	Blanco-González et al. (2020), Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), Lauwo (2018), Mogaji et al. (2021), Oliveira et al. (2018), Oruc (2015).	6

Source: Prepared by the authors.

women to be hired in low-skilled jobs that are lower paid and offer fewer opportunities for promotion and further training (Lauwo 2018).

Several studies indicated that it is beneficial for companies to publish their plans for internal gender diversity programmes to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality (Blanco-González et al. 2020; Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2020); however, if the communicated intention does not include a detailed strategy to address gender imbalances, it is unlikely to happen (Lauwo 2018). In this context, women in the role of CEO are more likely to implement gender-specific policies (Furlotti et al. 2019) and companies with higher levels of gender equality disclosed more information in their SR (García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi 2022).

Overall, very few companies disclose information on gender pay gap monitoring programmes (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2020; Singh and Pandey 2019). Some companies reported difficulties in calculating and reporting pay gaps (Grosser and Moon 2008). In Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016), none of the companies in their research facilitated information on the highest paid employees by gender. Instead, Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu (2022) found improvements in employees' evaluations of organisations reporting pay parity, consistent with a reputational boost.

#### 4.3.2 | Target 5.2. Violence Against Women

The earlier research by Adams and Harte (1998) demonstrated that the existence of anti-harassment policies was very poorly communicated in reports. However, with the recent advances in legislation on these issues, Singh and Pandey (2019) find that an increasing number of companies disclose the measures implemented by the company to prevent and sanction harassment.

#### 4.3.3 | Target 5.4. Family and Parental Support Programs

Among the most commonly reported programmes are those related to health (Grosser and Moon 2008; Oruc 2015; Singh and Pandey 2019) and, especially, maternity (Adams and Harte 1998; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016). Previous research also suggests that more importance should be given to the measures that the company can implement to support childcare (Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Lauwo 2018). In their dataset, Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016) and Oliveira et al. (2018) highlight the lack of data on parental leave. It is a common observation in previous research that although the GRI guidelines have been published since 2009, many companies still disclose very little and aggregate information on these issues (Blanco-González et al. 2020; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016).

#### 4.3.4 | Target 5.5. Women Representation and Leadership

The distribution of the workforce by sex is mentioned and reported in different studies (Blanco-González et al. 2020; Campos-García 2021; Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Kato and Kodama 2018; Motel 2016; Oruc 2015). However, it is also worth mentioning that some authors (Blanco-González et al. 2020; Motel 2016) consider gender representation in aggregate terms (e.g., total percentage of women and men in the workforce), while others (Grosser and Moon 2008; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Kato and Kodama 2018) provide more detailed insights and explain gender representation at different employment levels and under different conditions. Board renewal policies (e.g., board seat term limits), and board diversity policies are barely reported (Oldford 2022). Moreover, minority gender representation is rarely reported (Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021; Grosser and Moon 2008). Motel (2016) concluded that companies, that have set specific targets related to gender

equality in their CSR programmes, have improved the quality and quantity of information on women's representation in their reporting. Regarding the results of reporting on female representation, Blanco-González et al. (2020) found that the higher the representation of women in the workplace, the higher the legitimacy of the company. Reporting on women representation is said to be facilitated by a favourable legal framework (Grosser and Moon 2008; Oruc 2015) and it was found to mitigate disruptions at the employment level that occurred during the pandemic (Campos-García 2021).

Furthermore, many studies (Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021; Grosser and Moon 2008; Sojo et al. 2016) indicate that women representation in higher management positions and boards is increasing and so is corporate disclosure and reporting in their annual reports. However, there is still a significant gap between men and women on corporate boards (Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Lazzaretti et al. 2013; Ravi and Sudarsanam 2019; Oliveira et al. 2018). In some cases, companies justify their lack of women directors using meritocracy arguments (Ben-Amar et al. 2021, 2022).

The content of the CSR agenda can have a significant direct impact on gender diversity at the executive level (Blanco-González et al. 2020; Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2020; Kato and Kodama 2018; Motel 2016;), which is also positively influenced by the overall number of women in the corporate workforce (Campos-García 2021; Furlotti et al. 2019), women in management (Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt 2021; Oldford 2022), the implementation of mandatory reporting (Oldford 2022), the national context for gender equality (Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt 2021; Oliveira et al. 2018; Sojo et al. 2016) and the legally binding quota law (Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez 2020; Furlotti et al. 2019; Oldford 2022).

#### 4.3.5 | Target 5.6. Community and Sexual and Reproductive Health

Overall, there is lack of disclosure of information on companies' engagement with women in the community (Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Oliveira et al. 2018). Lauwo (2018) reveal that despite mining companies' commitment to communities, their reports did not outline specific strategies to promote the welfare of vulnerable people, especially women. Blanco-González et al. (2020) add that social actions that benefit women in communities do not influence perceptions of legitimacy, which discourages reporting.

A few examples of reported information can be found. Mogaji et al. (2021) and Oruc (2015) highlight specific corporate initiatives undertaken, such as hosting gatherings and participating in charitable activities for disadvantaged women. Mogaji et al. (2021) also inform that Nigerian banks report financial assistance programmes in the form of loans and grants for women operating in the informal sector, as well as special training for women entrepreneurs. Oruc (2015) discuss Turkish companies' disclosure on supporting for the education of women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as part of their CSR. Furthermore, both Mogaji et al. (2021) and Oruc (2015) explain how Nigerian and Turkish companies

recognise the inadequacies of the country's health centres and especially the difficulties faced by pregnant women. As a result, they provide health care support services, especially obstetric and maternity support.

## 5 | Discussion

Information on gender equality disclosure has increased in CSR and annual reports, although our review shows that it remains limited on many fronts.

Regarding RQ1, one of the main observations was a methodological uniformity of previous research that can only provide limited insights about the field of study. First, except three studies, most studies carried out secondary data analysis and did not generate primary data. This means that questions regarding the presence or absence of certain information can be examined, but the reasons of its inclusion/exclusion cannot be fully understood. According to Adams and Harte (1998), understanding what information is being included and what is being excluded are equally important and it is conditioned by the belief systems of decision makers and power dynamics within organisations. Second, most designs were quantitative in nature, so more qualitative insights and in-depth understanding of gender equality reporting are lacking. Third, content analysis was the most common data analysis technique which is probably linked to that the unit of observation are, often, corporate published reports.

In terms of RQ2, although efforts are being made in some countries to standardise the basic information that should be included in SR, they are currently voluntary in most countries and there are no universal indicators and guidelines of what should be published. More than 300 ethics codes, standards and tools have been developed (McKague and Cragg 2007) to guide companies in this regard, but because there are so many, there is often overlap and difficulty in implementing and distinguishing between them (Jain, Ripa, and Torres 2024). We acknowledge the recently approved CSDR that obliges large companies and publicly listed SMEs to report certain information on gender equality and suggests them to disclose other, but first, this is limited to the EU and second, we still lack evidence on its exact adoption by companies given that the first reports are due in 2024.

In our sample, only a minority of studies used GRI standards. Other studies were inspired by GRI standards and combined them with other indicators such as equal opportunities (Adams and Harte 1998), gender mainstreaming (Grosser and Moon 2008), women in STEM organisations (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2020), gender diversity (Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021) among others. However, once again, a great diversity in terms of employed indicators and guidelines was observed. Our findings agree with the work by Velasco-Balmaseda, de Celis, and Izaguirre (2024) who studied gender equality certification systems to find that gender equality definitions often varied, or missing and their measurement was not uniform.

The greater the diversity of guidelines and indicators on a global level, the more difficult it becomes to compare and evaluate companies on their gender equality performance. Reporting

on these issues could have a positive bandwagon effect (Eden and Wagstaff 2021), but if there are various reference systems to look at, then this might create confusion for the companies wishing to report on gender equality but not knowing how exactly to do it.

In terms of RQ3, gender equality reporting research has largely focussed on issues of women representation in the workforce and leadership positions, which are important areas of work (associated with target 5.5). However, other workplace issues (e.g., employee turnover, work-life balance), the impact on the marketplace (e.g., supply chain and consumers) and on the communities in which companies operate are rarely addressed in the examined studies, either because it is difficult to obtain information or because a holistic view of the impact of companies in relation to gender equality is lacking.

In addition, the lack of information on forced labour (target 5.2) could be due to strict regulation in the countries where the studies were conducted, though this situation could also be present in their globalised supply chain (Butler and Hoskyns 2016). Many companies deny the existence of homeworkers in their supply chain and little has been done to address their precarious conditions (Delaney, Burchielli, and Tate 2016). Furthermore, it is not common for companies to act against intimate partner violence as part of their CSR measures. There is a collective perception that the public and private spheres in society are different domains and that companies have no social responsibility in this matter. However, companies could also address the taboo of domestic violence (Harwin 2016).

All these probably relate to what Velasco-Balmaseda, de Celis, and Izaguirre (2024) refer as the lack of gender mainstreaming in gender equality standards. According to them, ‘there is no recognition of gender inequalities and power relations, and the institutional or regulatory texts do not even highlight the origin and maintenance of inequalities’ (p. 13). Gender equality related information is targeted particularly towards stakeholders (Grosser and Moon 2005, 2008; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016; Oruc 2015) and investors (Austin, Bobek, and Harris 2021; Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021; Miles 2011; Singh and Pandey 2019), so many companies do not go deeper into gender equality issues. This also brings up questions regarding the use of gender equality reporting for gender equality washing (Sterbenk, Champlin, and Windels 2022). Moreover, we lack insights regarding the number and type of gender equality targets set by companies under the light of ‘do no harm or do good’ (Van Zanten and van Tulder 2018), keeping in mind that the former is probably easier to attain.

## 6 | Conclusions, Policy Implications and Limitations

This review shows that practically the only reporting guideline that was used or repeatedly mentioned in the studies was the GRI guideline, thanks to its joint work with other institutions to include gender indicators in the guideline’s framework. It has been observed that, although companies comply with some requirements, many of them include some dispersed information throughout their extensive annual consolidated accounts and

management reports. At the same time, there is a lack of integration of the type of information that is being reported on gender equality in companies’ non-financial reports. This is due to a limited and superficial scope and definition of gender equality that leads to reporting only on a few topics, such as representation in the workforce and the number of women in positions of power, reducing gender equality to only these issues.

This study analysed data up to 2022, the same year in which the CSRD Directive (EU) 2022/2464 was published. This directive is expected to enhance and standardise sustainability reporting, at least in the EU region and for those companies that are required to present reports (in 2024 large listed companies, in 2025 other large companies and in 2026 listed SME). In terms of information on gender equality, the ESRS cover topics such as representation, gender-related policies, leadership, work-life balance and career development. However, the information that must be reported on is largely quantitative or relates to the presence or absence of a gender-related policy and incidents, for example ‘percentage of entitled employees that took family-related leaves, and a breakdown by gender’ (EFRAG 2022, 18) and ‘total number of incidents of discrimination, including harassment, reported in the reporting period’ (EFRAG 2022, 19). For instance, in relation to the latter example, companies can decide whether not to provide contextual information about incidents of harassment in the workplace. Information such as actions on inclusion, the promotion of work-life balance or measures against violence and harassment in the workplace are also subject to a materiality analysis, as is the information relating to female workers in the supply chain.

The materiality analysis allows companies to decide whether they will disclose some information especially if it negatively depicts them. So, although an advance, the CSRD is focused in the EU and still allows room to avoid disclosing certain information. The materiality self-assessment allowed by the ESRS framework may be an insufficient tool to ensure real transparency in gender-related issues, as companies might choose to omit certain negative impacts. Gradually, companies should become liable to disclose not only their quantitative gender equality outcomes, but also broaden the definition and scope of the impact that they could have on the realisation of gender equality. We suggest that minimising gender equality specifics to a few quantitative indicators and topics can facilitate gender washing in companies, hinder transparency, make scrutiny and monitoring by stakeholders and investors more difficult and negatively impact progress on women’s labour conditions.

Our study has systematised information about the specifics of gender reporting in previous empirical research. In addition, this systematic review has highlighted academic gaps in research on gender equality and sustainability reporting, so we make some suggestions for future studies in the following section. Furthermore, this study adds to the international debate on gender reporting a reflection on the need for a more comprehensive and demanding framework that not only focuses on numbers and general policies but on a deeper analysis covering all aspects of gender equality. This is especially significant in the context of the implementation of the CSRD and ESRS, highlighting that, while they are important advances, they present gaps that could hinder real progress in gender equality within companies.

Certainly, the study presents certain limitations: our scope of study is specifically on empirical studies on gender equality reporting, so theoretical discussions have not been included (see Figure 3). Furthermore, information on WOS and Scopus may fluctuate as it is daily updated (Di Vaio, Hassan, and Palladino 2023). Finally, as suggested by Massaro, Dumay, and Guthrie (2016), SLRs, like the present study, can be the first step of research synthesis but they can be complemented with other literature review types such as traditional authorship and narrative reviews.

## 7 | Avenues for Future Research

Research on gender equality in sustainability reporting is still in its early stages. Furthermore, most sustainability reports are only published by large companies (largely due to legislation) and the information reported is not standardised in most countries, despite exceptions like the CSDR in the EU. In light of the aforementioned, we propose several directions for future research in corporate reporting, with a focus on gender equality. These directions can be categorised into the following main areas:

### 7.1 | Scope and Definition of Gender Equality Reporting

Further work is necessary to understand how gender equality is defined in the workplace and how it translates into reporting. Most studies in this field focus on the final outcome of reporting, for example, the annual reports, the CSR reports etc., but the process of 'making the report and deciding on what should be included' is often ignored (Adams and Harte 1998). This reveals the need for further research on (i) the organisational decision processes that determine what is being reported about gender equality, (ii) the incentives and reasons that drive this process. In line with Low, Abdullah, and Khatib (2023), this calls for more qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnography and the employment of alternative theoretical lenses that can vary from agency theory, actor network theory to institutional theory. We also concur with Colignon and Covaeski (1993), 299 who suggest focusing 'on debates and proceedings of the board of directors as an overlooked source of data on decision making and organisational practises'.

### 7.2 | Inclusion of More Stakeholders and Cross-Cultural Perspectives

The perspectives of different actors would be useful in determining whether different guidelines constitute satisfactory frameworks or if further developments are necessary. Another fundamental challenge of gender policies in companies is to increase design and implement equality measures based on the knowledge of the needs and demands of women within companies themselves. Future research can use stakeholder theory to explore how different stakeholders problematize the scope and definition of gender equality reporting following the steps suggested by Hörisch, Schaltegger, and Freeman (2020). For example, only one study in this SLR (Lauwo 2018) has considered the

insights from different stakeholders including employees, community members and trade union representatives in the mining sector. We suggest that it is timely and important to include more stakeholders' views to define gender equality reporting.

Moreover, research can be extended to different cultural contexts. A cross-cultural perspective can account for differences in terms of defining gender equality reporting despite the standardisation efforts of global social reporting guidelines. An exploratory approach may even provide insights on why single worldwide reporting schemes have not prevailed (Velasco-Balmaseda, de Celis, and Izaguirre 2024).

In this review, only four of the studies extended their focus beyond one particular country (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2020; García-Sánchez, Suárez-Fernández, and Martínez-Ferrero 2019; Oliveira et al. 2018; Sojo et al. 2016) and in most cases this had to do with their sampling decision of obtaining data from international organisations such as Catalyst (Sojo et al. 2016) and Thompson Reuters EIKON (García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi 2022). Only Oliveira et al. (2018) included culture-related variables in their analysis. Previous research (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Teigen and Wängnerud 2009) suggests that gender equality discourse is performative and affect women's lives in various settings. From the performativity lens, future research can explore how the scope and extent of gender equality reporting is affected by cultural values of gender equality. Furthermore, these insights would be particularly useful to multinational organisations which operate in diverse cultural settings.

### 7.3 | Expand Research in Diverse Organisational Settings

In terms of sampling, most of the studies have used publicly listed companies (Ben-Amar et al. 2021, 2022; Campos-García 2021; Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez 2020; Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey 2021; Grosser and Moon 2008; Kato and Kodama 2018; Lazzaretti et al. 2013; Singh and Pandey 2019; Tietz Cazeri et al. 2021), often because they tend to publish CSR and annual reports. However, there is a burgeoning stream of research on SMEs and reporting that link SME sustainability disclosure to legitimacy theory (Scagnelli, Corazza, and Cisi 2013) and the institutional context (Permatasari and Gunawan 2023). So, more research on SME and gender equality reporting could further advance this research stream. Given that, at least in the EU, publicly listed SME will present sustainability reports from 2026, further research can explore what they report on gender equality beyond their obligations and how it impacts them financially and in terms of reputation.

Furthermore, some studies have focused on traditionally masculinized sectors (Blanco-González et al. 2020) while others have chosen companies who have publicly committed somehow to gender quality, for example, Oliveira et al. (2018) chose companies that have signed the Women's Empowerment Principles Support statement. Future research could place emphasis on the role of the organisational culture (masculinized vs. feminised cultures) regarding the use of gender equality reporting for gender washing (Sterbenk, Champlin, and Windels 2022). Also,

taxonomies of different organisations could be proposed based on their reporting practises on gender equality.

## 7.4 | Exploring Factors Influencing Gender Equality Reporting

Research here should classify factors at different levels: company-related and environment-related. For instance, at the company level, previous research has identified that women in leadership positions and boards or a strong CSR agenda positively affect reporting (Arayssi, Dah, and Jizi 2016; Buallay et al. 2022; Kato and Kodama 2018). At the environmental level, a strong regulatory framework also encourages gender equality reporting (Grosser and Moon 2008; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016). The lack of regulation creates a significant legal loophole that may be exploited by companies according to their own interests. We need more insights into both the factors that could positively and negatively influence gender equality reporting and the market dynamics at play. Market systems theory and institutional theory may prove useful theoretical lenses to construct holistic models of the factors affecting gender equality reporting. Furthermore, in-depth exploratory designs can inform us on the specifics of any positive effect observed in previous research.

## 7.5 | Explore Different Outcomes of Gender Equality Reporting

While existing research suggests that gender equality reporting can enhance corporate reputation (Grosser and Moon 2008; Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj 2016), more investigation is required to understand the mechanisms and impacts of such reporting comprehensively. Future studies could explore its implications for corporate economic performance and relationships with various stakeholders such as governments, institutions, NGOs, and other companies. Also, the outcomes of reporting on two particular stakeholders merit special attention; the consumers and the employees. Future research can explore how gender equality reporting may affect consumer attraction and loyalty, and employee attraction, retention, and satisfaction. Other potentially interesting routes would be: (i) how can gender equality reporting contribute to the construction of an organisational identity? and (ii) from an emotions theory perspective (Valor, Antonetti, and Crisafulli 2022), gender equality reporting triggers any positive or negative emotions to different stakeholders and what are the implications?

In relation to the aforementioned, we believe that by addressing these research directions, scholars can contribute to advancing our understanding of gender equality reporting in corporate contexts. Companies should establish clear definitions of gender equality and they should set specific targets and performance metrics, alone or in partnership with other firms. We have pinpointed the need to further understand the organisational dynamics and power structures that produce reports and set targets of gender equality. Both internal and external reporting could take place, whereas interdepartmental projects on gender equality, benchmarking, etc., could be also used. Nevertheless, attention should be also given to

non-corporate environments such as public organisations, non-for-profit organisations, cooperatives etc. After all, reporting on gender equality can make inequality more visible. Increasing awareness and visibility would be necessary conditions for improvements in this area.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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**Appendix A**

**TABLE A1** | Articles included in the study.

<b>Key publication</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Reporting guidelines</b>	<b>Targets ofSDG 5</b>
Adams and Harte (1998)	Accounting, Organizations and Society	Qualitative	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.2; 5.4
Ali, Grabarski, and Konrad (2022)	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Quantitative	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Ben-Amar et al. (2021)	Critical Perspectives on Accounting	Mixed	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Ben-Amar et al. (2022)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Mixed	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Blanco-González et al. (2020)	Tripodos	Mixed	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6
Campos-García (2021)	Sustainability (Switzerland)	Quantitative	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Conde-Ruiz, García, and Yáñez (2020)	Applied Economic Analysis	Mixed	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020)	Information Technology and Tourism	Mixed	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.5
Furlotti et al. (2019)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Mixed	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.5
García-Sánchez, Minutiello, and Tettamanzi (2022)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Mixed	GRI standard	5.1
Ghauri, Mansi, and Pandey (2021)	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Mixed	Own set of indicators	5.5
Grosser and Moon (2008)	Accounting Forum	Mixed	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.4; 5.5
Halliday, Paustian-Underdahl, and Fainshmidt (2021)	Journal of Business and Psychology	Mixed	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Hossain, Ahmad, and Siraj (2016)	Asian Journal of Accounting and Governance	Mixed	GRI standard	5.1; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6
Kato and Kodama (2018)	British Journal of Industrial Relations	Quantitative	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.5
Lauwo (2018)	Journal of Business Ethics	Qualitative	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.4; 5.6
Lazzaretti et al. (2013)	Gender in Management	Quantitative	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Mogaji et al. (2020)	International Journal of Bank Marketing	Qualitative	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.6
Motel (2016)	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Quantitative	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.5
Oldford (2022)	Business and Society Review	Mixed	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Oliveira et al. (2018)	Administrative Sciences	Mixed	GRI standard	5.1; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6
Oruc (2015)	Social Responsibility Journal	Qualitative	Own set of indicators	5.4; 5.5; 5.6
Ravi and Sudarsanam (2019)	International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering	Quantitative	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Sharkey, Pontikes, and Hsu (2022)	Administrative Science Quarterly	Mixed	No set of indicators: single focus	5.1
Singh and Pandey (2019)	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Mixed	Own set of indicators	5.1; 5.2; 5.4
Sojo et al. (2016)	Leadership Quarterly	Quantitative	No set of indicators: single focus	5.5
Tietz et al. (2021)	Sustainability (Switzerland)	Qualitative	No set of indicators: single focus	5.1

Source: Prepared by the authors.