

SOCIAL MOBILITY: AN UNTAPPED OPPORTUNITY

**THE POTENTIAL FOR BETTER INVESTMENT AND TALENT
OUTCOMES IN EUROPEAN ASSET MANAGEMENT**

Research report by Inclusion in Finance Europe



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FOREWORD

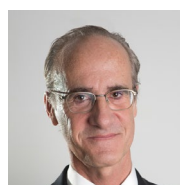
The European asset management industry stands at a turning point. Rapid advances in technology, the democratisation of savings, and rising societal expectations are redefining what it means to create long-term value. As products evolve and client needs diversify, firms face a fundamental question: how can they remain relevant, resilient, and trusted in a world that prizes both performance and purpose?

This report demonstrates that strengthening social mobility is central to that answer. Talent is the industry's most critical differentiator, yet opportunity remains unevenly distributed. When individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds can contribute and thrive, the result is not only fairer but also smarter business: more innovative teams, deeper client understanding, and sharper investment judgement. In a sector built on intellectual capital, social mobility is not a charitable aspiration but a source of enduring competitive advantage – fuel for better decisions in a complex and constantly evolving marketplace.

The case is both commercial and societal. As Europe seeks to build a more dynamic and inclusive economy, asset managers have a unique role to play in aligning capital with progress and purpose.

Strengthening social mobility enables the industry to draw from the widest possible pool of talent, insight, and experience – qualities essential to navigating disruption and sustaining excellence over the long term.

The call to action is clear. Asset management has long been an engine of capital allocation and stewardship; it can now become a driver of opportunity and inclusion. By embedding social mobility into their strategies, firms will not only enhance their adaptability in times of change – they will help build a more resilient Europe, where everyone with talent and determination has a perspective, a stake, and a future. The leaders who act on this opportunity will define the next chapter of sustainable success for our industry.



Ric Van Weelden
Chair, Inclusion in Finance
Europe



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European asset management industry is undergoing structural realignment, driven by advances in technology, changing client expectations, and industry consolidation. To thrive, firms must identify sustainable advantages. Strengthening social mobility is an underutilized but powerful strategy.

This report by Inclusion in Finance Europe explores how social mobility can drive commercial success: what it means in a business context, where the asset management sector stands today, and the practical steps that firms can take to realise its benefits.

Social mobility refers to the extent to which employees can progress and thrive, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or immigration history

The business case for social mobility

Social mobility offers compelling business benefits for the asset management sector:

1. Stronger investment performance:

Cognitive diversity – shaped by varied life experiences – enhances decision-making and reduces groupthink, both critical to investment success. Fund managers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (SEBs) can outperform their peers from more privileged backgrounds.

2. Improved client understanding:

Teams with broader life experiences can access more diverse networks, offer unique insights into consumer behaviour, better identify differentiated investment opportunities and serve a wider range of client portfolios.

3. Better talent and people outcomes:

With three-quarters of European organisations reporting skill shortages (Manpower Group, 2025), tapping into underutilised talent pools is a strategic imperative. Furthermore, inclusive practices foster loyalty and improve talent retention.

More broadly, McKinsey estimates that improving social mobility across the EU could boost GDP by €1.3 trillion. For asset management firms, this translates into a more resilient and competitive industry aligned with social progress.

Current state of social mobility in European asset management

Despite growing awareness, social mobility remains only a nascent priority in the European asset management sector. Key findings include:

- **Willingness to improve:** Nearly half of surveyed firms expressed support for fostering social mobility. However, 37% remain neutral, reflecting a lack of urgency or understanding of the issue.
- **Limited data collection:** Only 20% of firms actively collect data on socioeconomic background, citing regulatory constraints, cultural barriers, and a lack of prioritisation.
- **Slow progress:** Compared to sectors like law and professional services, asset management lags in addressing barriers to entry and progression for individuals from lower SEBs.

Recommended approaches to promote social mobility

- **Balance alignment and local relevance:** Combine a clear strategic direction with flexibility for national and cultural contexts.
- **Start focused, then scale:** Pilot initiatives that generate measurable results and build internal momentum.
- **Build a data foundation:** Establish reliable ways to capture socioeconomic information while respecting local sensitivities.
- **Adopt skills-based approaches:** Look beyond credentials to the real capabilities and potential that drive performance.
- **Collaborate to accelerate:** Work collectively across the industry to address systemic barriers and strengthen the overall talent pipeline.
- **Lead from the top:** Show visible commitment from senior executives to make social mobility a sustained business priority.



Conclusion

The European asset management industry has an opportunity to enhance social mobility as a key strategy for growth, resilience, and adaptability. By broadening access to opportunities, firms can strengthen their social fabric and commercial edge, aligning more closely with clients' evolving expectations and boosting investment performance. This strategic focus on nurturing talent from underrepresented backgrounds not only ensures future competitiveness but also contributes to a dynamic and equitable European economy. The imperative is to compete smarter by recognizing broader potential, positioning the industry for the next generation of growth.



RESEARCH APPROACH

The work conducted for this report ran from July to October 2025 and included the following research:

Desktop research

A comprehensive desktop study was conducted focusing on social mobility within the European context. This involved an in-depth examination of current practice, policies, and regulations affecting social mobility across Europe and a specific focus on selected European countries.

Interviews and case studies

Interviews were conducted with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I), HR and executive leaders from asset management and other sectors to explore perspectives, opportunities and challenges around social mobility. They formed the basis of case studies included throughout the report to provide examples of how firms are currently addressing social mobility.

The case studies include a relatively high proportion of examples from the UK, reflecting the fact that multinational firms are more advanced in their UK social mobility practices than is the case elsewhere in Europe. However, as the report will demonstrate, what matters for social mobility varies between countries, and firms

should not assume that approaches from the UK can simply be transposed to other European countries – the local context is critical.

Survey

A survey of heads of HR and senior DE&I executives from asset management firms was conducted in 2024 for a IIFE and PwC report on DE&I in the European asset management industry. The questions on social mobility have informed this report.

The survey received 30 responses, reflecting a broad and representative cross-section of the industry in Europe:

- Participants came from medium-sized and large asset management organisations operating across Europe, with headquarters both within Europe and internationally.
- Ten respondents represented firms managing over EUR 500 billion in assets under management (AuM) globally, while eight came from organisations with AuM between EUR 100 billion and EUR 500 billion.
- Collectively, the organisations represented by respondents manage more than EUR 12.4 trillion in AuM worldwide.

The survey findings presented in this report are not weighted by organisation size.

Definitions

Social mobility

Social mobility is defined as the extent to which employees can progress and thrive, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or immigration history.

Socioeconomic background (SEB)

Socioeconomic background refers to the social and economic circumstances into which an individual is born and raised. It encompasses factors such as family income, parental education levels, occupation, wealth, and access to resources, as well as broader aspects like neighbourhood environment and community networks. It is a key determinant of an individual's starting point and prospects in society.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)

Diversity refers to the wide range of human differences present within an organisation or society. Equity focuses on ensuring fairness and justice by actively addressing systemic barriers. Inclusion fosters an environment where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute. Together, these principles cultivate a culture of respect, fairness, and belonging for all individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds or identities.



HOW TO DEFINE SOCIAL MOBILITY

Introduction to social mobility

Social mobility refers to people's ability to move upwards in society through improvements in for example income, education, or occupational status. This "climbing of the social ladder" can be seen in figures who rose to fame despite humble beginnings. For instance, Jan Koum, the co-founder of WhatsApp, immigrated from Ukraine to the U.S. as a teenager and lived on welfare while working as a janitor before creating the popular messaging app.

However, such anecdotes are more the exception rather than the rule; our opportunities in life remain heavily influenced by the socioeconomic circumstances into which we are born (d'Hombres & Neher, 2020). At present, high-skill positions and senior-level roles in business are disproportionately occupied by those from more advantaged backgrounds.

89% of senior employees in financial services in the UK come from high SEBs (Anderton, 2023).

62% of French executives have parents who were themselves executives or professionals. (Anderton, 2023).

In Germany, only **0.4%** of people whose parents are in the lowest status occupational quartile make the leap to the top quartile. (Legewie & Bohmann, 2018).

People from low SEBs are less likely to hold high-skill positions compared to those from high SEBs, with gaps in EU-27 countries ranging from 1.4 to 3.4 times for those with tertiary education and nontertiary

education, respectively (McKinsey, 2025). The pervasive underutilisation of talent from lower SEBs is a clear opportunity for business.

Definitions in a European context

Social mobility takes various forms, including changes across individuals' lifetimes (intragenerational), between generations (intergenerational), professional, geographical, and educational mobility.

For this report, we define social mobility as "**the extent to which employees can progress and thrive, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity or immigration history**". This highlights the movement within an individual's lifetime, allowing a focus on career advancement and making the topic more actionable for organisations.

Within Europe, interpretations of social mobility vary between countries, due to different socioeconomic and cultural contexts. For example:

- **France** considers social mobility primarily in terms of educational mobility, particularly regarding access to elite institutions that traditionally dictate career opportunities.
- **Germany** emphasises educational and occupational mobility, with a focus on its robust vocational training system as a pathway for social advancement.
- **Italy** links social mobility closely to regional and economic disparities, particularly the divide between the industrialised North and the less developed South.
- **The Netherlands** frames social mobility within the context of meritocracy, attributing a central role to education as a critical mechanism for upward mobility.
- **The United Kingdom** often discusses social mobility through the lens of class, highlighting efforts to dismantle occupational barriers that separate the working class from the middle class.

These differences are explored in more detail in the Appendix.

Commitment to disadvantaged groups

At Natixis Investment Managers (Natixis IM), social mobility is addressed partly in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The commitment to individuals in underserved groups is demonstrated through the community involvement programme "Together for Better". As part of this programme, Scholarships were launched four years ago and are currently rolled out in France, the UK, and the US. They aim to enable access to higher education and to provide useful resources for growth and success. In France, for instance, Natixis IM supports students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to enter the scholarship programme for Sciences Po Paris, one of the Grandes Écoles, combined with mentoring and internship opportunities.

Internally, Natixis IM tracks social mobility data in the UK through a biennial inclusion survey. Participation is voluntary, and employees are asked whether either parent completed higher education. The results show that employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are underrepresented. Replicating this approach is challenging elsewhere. Barriers include cultural reluctance to discuss socioeconomic background and heightened caution – under EU GDPR and national regulations – about collecting and processing personal data.



Beyond philanthropy, the scholarships introduce us to bright, innovative minds from diverse backgrounds who can help us challenge conventional thinking and develop more effective solutions"

Christelle Faussurier, International Head Corporate Social Responsibility, Natixis Investment Managers

Natixis IM's focus on social mobility is driven by both strategic and cultural considerations. Engaging with young people from diverse backgrounds brings an outside perspective that challenges entrenched habits and fuels innovation. These relationships also help build a pipeline of future talent, while exposing current employees to different life experiences that broaden mindsets and strengthen inclusion.

In addition, large institutional clients increasingly seek asset managers that take CSR and ESG seriously; some have reallocated mandates from US firms to European managers with stronger ESG credentials. Investing in social mobility signals credibility and differentiates Natixis IM in a competitive market, while aligning with the firm's long-standing commitment to equality.

How to measure social mobility at a societal level

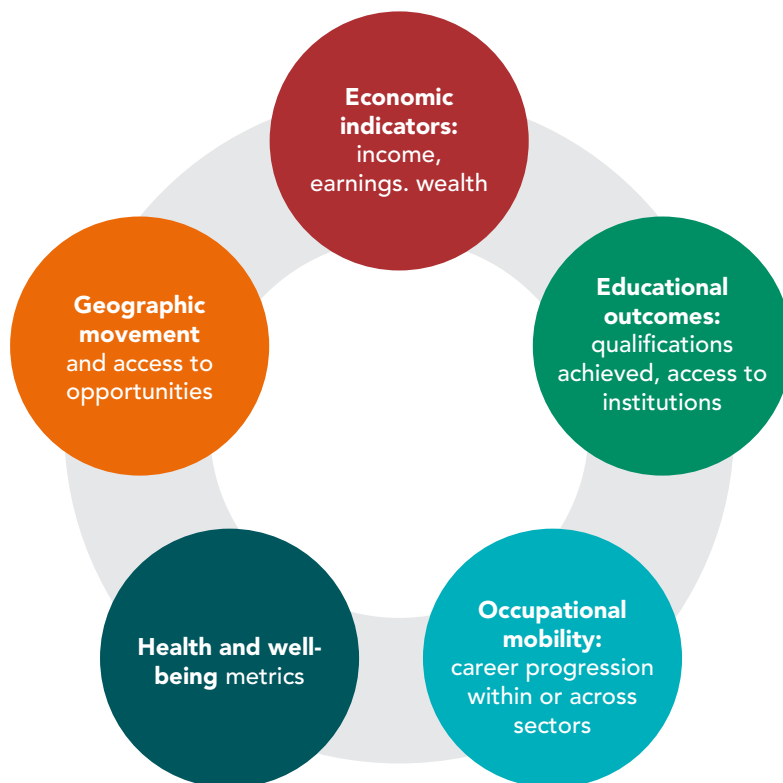
Social mobility is traditionally quantified using **economic indicators** such as earnings and wealth, but broader indicators also matter:

- **Professional mobility** – movement within occupational hierarchies. This typically involves analysing career progression, including promotions or shifts to higher-status roles.
- **Geographical mobility**, as moving to different regions or countries often relates to access to better employment or educational opportunities.

The OECD (2022) advocates a **multidimensional approach** that includes health outcomes (e.g. life expectancy), educational attainment, and other social factors. This acknowledges that social mobility is not solely about financial progress but also about improved life opportunities and social inclusion.

Social mobility is usually measured at a societal level based on longitudinal surveys, income tax records, educational attainment databases, and labour market statistics.

Figure 1: Social mobility framework



Source: PwC Switzerland



How to measure social mobility at a company level

Measuring social mobility within a company involves assessing how employees from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds advance professionally and economically over time. This requires tracking multiple indicators on progression, opportunity, and equitable treatment. Key approaches include:



Employee socioeconomic background data

Gather baseline information on employees' socioeconomic background before joining the company, which may include parental occupation, education level, or first-generation university attendance. This helps identify representation and sets a starting point to compare progress. Further practical guidance can be found in chapter 5 of this report, including sample text to explain the purpose of the data collection as well as example questions and responses.



Tracking career progression

Analyse promotion rates, lateral moves, and role changes over time, disaggregated by socioeconomic background. Comparing these trajectories reveals whether employees from lower SEBs advance at similar rates to their peers from more affluent backgrounds.



Educational and skill development participation

Measure access to and completion of training programmes, apprenticeships, mentoring, and professional development opportunities, disaggregated by SEB. This helps not only assessing whether programmes are equitably accessed, but also if there is an impact on progression.



Pay and compensation growth

Monitor salary levels and increases over time across different socioeconomic groups to detect and address wage gaps.



Retention and turnover analysis

Evaluate retention rates among employees from varying socioeconomic backgrounds, as disproportionate turnover may show insufficient support for mobility or challenges around inclusion.



Employee feedback and experience surveys

Collect qualitative and quantitative data on perceptions of opportunity, workplace culture, and barriers to advancement to better understand the lived experiences of employees.

A multifaceted approach to measurement is therefore critical to accurately understand social mobility within an organisation and identify both successes and areas for improvement. By first collecting data on employees' socioeconomic backgrounds and then using this information to continuously monitor the experiences and perspectives of employees from different SEBs throughout the employee lifecycle – from recruitment to departure – organisations can drive meaningful progress.

Developing awareness

Nordea Asset Management operates mainly within the Nordics context of relatively equal opportunities and so social mobility is not yet seen as a top priority when addressing DE&I. Insufficient data surrounding this area and limitations to what data can actually be captured is also a big reason why this hasn't been prioritized before. However, there is a growing recognition that developing quantitative measures around social mobility could challenge current assumptions, support informed decision-making and strengthen the business case for DE&I initiatives.



If we get the right quantitative measurements on social mobility, it could be an eye opener."

Asmus Tvede Madsen, Head of People Office,
Nordea Asset Management

Nordea Asset Management's current diversity efforts primarily focus on gender balance and building an inclusive culture where psychological safety enables all employees to feel a sense of belonging and contribute fully. While socioeconomic status is not explicitly targeted in recruitment, there is awareness that networks and educational backgrounds could play a role, and ongoing efforts to encourage leaders to broaden their recruitment horizons beyond traditional universities and educational profiles.

The organisation is also engaged with the community through initiatives like "money week", where employees provide financial literacy education to young students, aiming to address socioeconomic disparities by equipping youth with essential financial knowledge. Nordea Asset Management previously ran school visits to introduce young students to the corporate world and asset management careers, giving first impressions and making it more accessible to the general public.

Overall, Nordea Asset Management recognises that while in theory equal opportunity exists at entry-level positions, practical barriers linked to SEB, such as access to education and familial support, may influence career pathways.





THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY

Socioeconomic diversity as a strategic advantage

Businesses do not exist in vacuum and have much to gain from increased social mobility in societies. McKinsey estimates that improved social mobility could increase the consolidated GDP of EU countries by 9%, or €1.3 trillion, due to greater worker participation, more efficient deployment of talent, and faster career advancement for employees from low SEB (McKinsey, 2025, p. 16).

In other words, improving social mobility is an opportunity to substantially boost Europe's economic growth and enhance its competitiveness.

€1.3 trillion:
the estimated gain for the EU from higher social mobility

Further elements of the business case for the asset management sector are detailed below.

Stronger investment performance

A couple of key studies show how greater social mobility can boost investment performance:

Outperformance by fund managers from lower SEBs. Mutual fund managers from lower SEBs consistently outperform peers from more privileged backgrounds, according to a study on performance of US mutual fund managers by Chuprinin and Sosyura. In this seminal study, the first and so far only of its kind, SEB is defined

based on family wealth, derived from data on parental income, education, and home value of managers during their childhood. Using this measure, they analyse the relation between SEB and investment performance, finding that lower-SEB managers deliver higher risk-adjusted returns than those from wealthier families (Chuprinin & Sosyura, 2018).

They attribute this finding to the higher barrier to entry into asset management for people from lower SEBs; as a result, those who do enter the profession tend to have exceptionally high levels of skill and competence. Moreover, they assert that "managers from poor families are promoted when they outperform, whereas those born rich are more likely to be promoted for reasons unrelated to performance". This study clearly demonstrates the potential social mobility holds for enhancing investment performance.

Benefits of cognitive diversity.

Edmans (2025) indicates that cognitive diversity in asset management, "when properly implemented, can have a significantly positive effect on investment performance". Asset valuation relies on analysing and synthesising a wide array of information, which can be interpreted in various ways. Success often hinges on taking contrarian positions.

Life background, which is heavily influenced by SEB, is an important element of cognitive diversity. Examples of life background include experiences of adversity and informal education from family members, mentors, and friends. A team with wider life experiences can draw on a variety of perspectives on a given set of information, contributing to better risk detection and avoiding groupthink – both key to investment performance (ibid.).



Building an inclusive workplace

BNP Paribas Asset Management emphasises inclusion for everyone as the foundation supporting a diverse workforce.

The company includes social mobility in its DE&I framework and allows employees globally to self-identify if they come from lower SEBs as part of their annual inclusion survey. To better understand challenges for employees from lower SEBs, BNP Paribas Asset Management conducts confidential focus groups.

BNP Paribas Asset Management has also implemented programmes focusing on early careers and social mobility. These include partnerships with organisations such as Culture Priorité in France, JCCA in the US, and Investment 2020 in the UK. The company also collaborates with schools and universities to offer internships, leadership training, and educational programmes, and encourages participation of people from lower SEBs in practices such as job shadowing.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) play a critical role in internal and external engagements. Reverse mentoring programmes are also in place, including for social mobility.

Social mobility is considered important at BNP Paribas Asset Management primarily from the perspective of talent acquisition and maintaining competitiveness. BNP Paribas Asset Management recognises the need to challenge established career path models and to take bolder hiring decisions, particularly beyond its early career programmes.

Supportive managers and inclusive leadership are critical to fostering a sense of belonging, especially for employees from lower SEBs. Senior leadership accountability is demonstrated through the assignment of global management board sponsors to focus on topics such as social mobility.



Now is the time. Technology is playing a leading role, and the skills we look for might not be captured by a simple university degree anymore."

Amit Singh Head of Inclusion, Diversity and Engagement, BNP Paribas Asset Management

Improved ability to understand client needs

Social mobility can also strengthen the asset management industry's ability to engage with an increasingly diverse client base:

The Great Wealth Transfer

The largest ever intergenerational transfer of wealth will occur over the next two decades as part of the so-called "great wealth transfer". Vanguard, for instance, estimates that over \$18 trillion in wealth will be transferred globally by 2030, \$3.5 trillion of which will be within Europe (Bloore, 2024). The inheritors will be more diverse than ever before; for instance, in the US, 70% is projected to be inherited by women (Dickler, 2025). Female investors are particularly likely to seek new wealth-management services and relationships (ibid).

More diverse networks. Evidence from private equity and venture capital firms in the United States suggests that those owned by women or by racial and ethnic minorities build more diverse portfolios, and that diverse teams are an important factor in pursuing better risk-adjusted returns. Research by BCG and Cambridge Associates found that around "30% of transactions completed exclusively by diverse-owned firms are not accessed by nondiverse firms" (Newsom Reeves, et al., 2024). This is in part because managers from more diverse backgrounds tend to have different personal networks. As deals are often sourced through these networks, a team with a wider range of experiences and connections can help firms access opportunities beyond traditional investment circles. Although this analysis focused on gender, racial, and ethnic diversity due to data availability, the authors indicate that socioeconomic diversity can also provide more differentiated investment opportunities (ibid.).

30% of transactions completed by diverse-owned firms are not accessed by nondiverse firms

Distinctive insights from lived experience.

In addition, Edmans (2025) argues that people from less affluent backgrounds can bring distinctive insights derived from lived experience, which can help to understand consumer behaviour and the use of products and services. Although asset managers hire demographic minorities as well as cognitively diverse people, the recruitment of "double minorities" (people with multiple intersecting underrepresented identities) remains uncommon (ibid.). Focusing on social mobility provides an opportunity to address these gaps, while also supporting firms in serving a wider range of client portfolios.

Better talent and people outcomes

Talent gaps addressed

European companies face acute skills shortages. In 2025, 76% of organisations in Europe reported

difficulties in finding suitably qualified candidates, according to Manpower Group's global talent shortage survey (Manpower Group, 2025). Demand for highly skilled workers will only grow. An additional 10 million high-skill positions are forecast to be created in Europe alone by 2030, while demand for low-skill roles is expected to fall by six million in the same period (McKinsey, 2025). Initiatives promoting social mobility can help to mitigate the impacts of these shifts.

3/4 of organisations in Europe have difficulties finding suitably qualified candidates

Tapping into the underutilised potential of people from less advantaged SEBs can enable companies to not only address immediate talent gaps but also build a more resilient and inclusive pipeline for longer-term growth. Additionally, as competition between companies for high-skilled talent intensifies, casting a wider net is a clear competitive advantage.





Better matching of people and jobs

Social mobility has been positively linked to productivity. In their study on social mobility and economic success, Jenkins et al. argue that better "matching" of individuals to jobs is a factor (Jenkins, et al., 2017). Social mobility improves matching for two main reasons:

- a. In a more mobile society, the talents of all young people are not only recognised but encouraged to develop.
- b. Reduced barriers due to factors such as biases in recruitment and unequal access to educational opportunity. This makes a position more likely to be filled by a person with the highest potential for success, rather than by someone who is better connected but perhaps less qualified (ibid). This is particularly relevant for people from lower SEBs, who tend to have less robust networks for high-skill jobs (McKinsey, 2025).

Investing in social mobility provides an invaluable opportunity to boost productivity and increase value.

Strengthened retention and loyalty

DE&I programmes positively influence worker engagement and retention. A recent survey of 2,500 US employees found that 76% reported being more likely to remain with their employer long-term if their organisation continued to support DE&I initiatives, while 43% indicated they would consider leaving if such support was withdrawn (Pollack, et al., 2025). Leaders are aware of the impact: 84% of C-suite leaders surveyed saw that their DE&I programmes increased employee attraction and retention (ibid).

57% of workers in Germany, Italy, and the UK witnessed non-inclusive behaviours linked to socioeconomic background.

Socioeconomic inclusion presents an important opportunity. Discrimination on the basis of SEB is widespread and harmful: according to a McKinsey survey of workers in Germany, Italy, and the UK, 57% of employees reported witnessing non-inclusive behaviours explicitly tied to SEB, such as mocking someone's accent or commenting on their lifestyle, in the previous three months (McKinsey, 2025).

This undermines workplace belonging and retention. More than half of lower-SEB employees surveyed indicated they would consider leaving their current role for an organisation perceived to be more socioeconomically inclusive, compared with only 31% of their higher-SEB peers (McKinsey, 2025).

Organisations that invest in inclusive practices and proactively address biases linked to SEB can therefore strengthen loyalty and engagement.



Taking a skills-first approach

PwC has integrated social mobility into its network Inclusion First and talent management strategies. Social mobility is defined in PwC as enhancing opportunities for individuals from underprivileged or less advantaged backgrounds to thrive within PwC's global network of firms.

Data collection methods vary across regions; for example, in the UK, information includes parents' occupations among others. PwC is experimenting with data to identify traits linked to certain social backgrounds and to explore attributes like resilience. There is a notable shift towards recognising and valuing skills over solely background characteristics.



We recognise and value skills and resilience over traditional markers of privilege such as socioeconomic status."

Marc Borggreven, Global Human Capital Leader, PwC

PwC participates in various initiatives to bolster social mobility, such as at university career events in the UK, aiming to attract diverse talent early. Human Capital teams design training programmes that raise awareness and build inclusive leadership capabilities within the firm. These efforts are part of a broader talent management strategy designed to foster inclusive behaviours.

The business case for social mobility is built around the value that diverse perspectives bring in delivering high quality work to clients. There is also a clear client demand for diversity, especially in the public sector. Lastly, evolving reporting standards are prompting companies to rethink what DE&I data they have and how to position it.

Leadership commitment is evident, and a global inclusion team drives strategy and assists territories with their execution. The cultural mindset promoted within PwC centres on integrating diverse viewpoints into decision-making and work processes. This inclusive leadership culture is seen as pivotal to sustaining meaningful social mobility progress.



SOCIAL MOBILITY IN EUROPEAN ASSET MANAGEMENT

Both the interviews conducted for this report with DE&I leaders from asset management companies in Europe and quantitative data, some of it previously unpublished, from the 2024 survey of leaders in European asset management conducted by IIFE and PwC show a willingness within the European asset management sector to engage with social mobility.

However, the topic has not yet become a priority across the industry in Europe. This is reflected in limited data collection – only one in five organisations actively gather information on factors influencing social mobility. It is also shown by the absence of strategic social mobility approaches in European asset management.

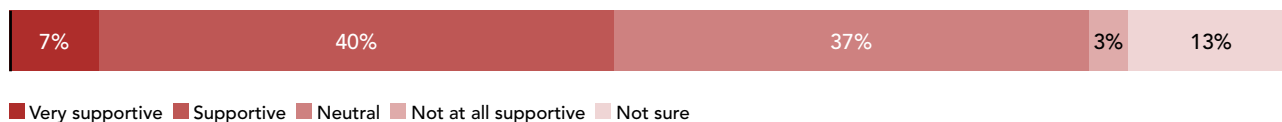
There is also a gap in understanding and addressing social mobility. Overall, the findings suggest that while a willingness to improve social mobility exists, better understanding, clear strategies and concrete actions are needed to translate this intent into meaningful progress within the sector.

There is willingness to improve social mobility

There is willingness to address the topic of social mobility within the asset management industry in Europe, with almost half of companies surveyed described as supportive or very supportive of the topic. However, 37% of respondents assessed their organisation to be neutral in fostering social mobility.

Interviewees highlighted a growing awareness around social mobility and its potential to benefit the business, yet only limited practical understanding and action. There is considerable variation across firms. Some companies have started to incorporate social mobility into their broader DE&I strategies, while others remain at the exploratory stage. Interviewees noted that while senior leadership often voiced support for social mobility, this had not always translated into concrete policies or systematic data collection.

Figure 2: Companies' support for social mobility
"How would you assess your organisation as fostering upward social mobility for employees?"



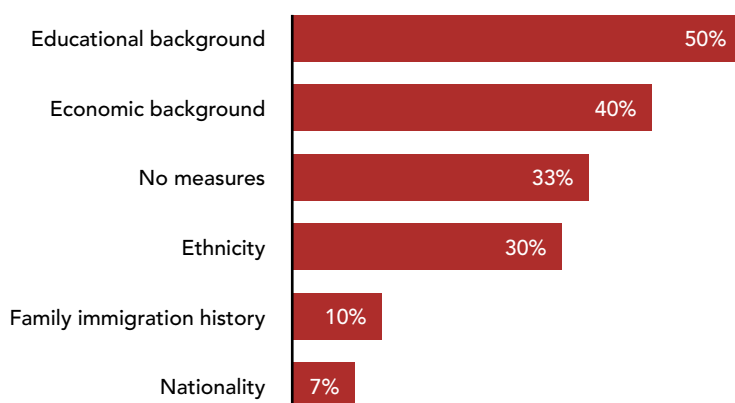
Source: Survey of DE&I in European asset management companies, PwC and IIFE, March–April 2024

Understanding of social mobility is mixed and data collection is limited

As many organisations are only starting to explore the topic of social mobility, there is a large gap to bridge in terms of understanding and data collection. Educational background and economic background were the most common ways to understand social mobility in organisations in IIFE and PwC's 2024 survey, followed by ethnicity, and to a lesser extent family immigration history and nationality.

Measuring social mobility presents significant challenges, particularly in Europe, given data protection regulations and limitations on the type of personal information organisations can collect (see box: Regulatory challenges to data collection are not insurmountable). Unlike gender diversity, which is easier to quantify and track, socioeconomic background is more challenging to capture through data, making it harder to establish a clear picture. Indeed, only 1 in 5 survey respondents said that their organisation collected data on social mobility.

Figure 3: Social mobility topics
"What topics do you use to understand social mobility within your organisation?"



Multiple answers were possible, so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: Survey of DE&I in European asset management companies, PwC and IIFE, March–April 2024

Figure 4: Collection of social mobility data
"Do you collect data on the factors that define and may impact social mobility?"



Source: Survey of DE&I in European asset management companies, PwC and IIFE, March–April 2024

Regulatory challenges to data collection are not insurmountable

Certain categories of diversity data pertaining to social mobility, such as racial or ethnic origin, are deemed sensitive under the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018).

Despite this, collecting such data is permissible under specific conditions, such as explicit consent from employees or if individuals have made the

information public. Anonymous data can be collected and used without constraints imposed by data protection principles.

However, companies should also consider the legal restrictions in local countries when selecting which questions to include in capturing social mobility data.

The main reason for organisations to collect social mobility data, according to the survey, is to inform their DE&I initiatives. Internal reporting and compliance with legal requirements are also mentioned as drivers for data collection on this topic.

Reasons for companies not systematically tracking data on social mobility include regulatory constraints, challenges around systems and definitions, the nascent stage or absence of DE&I initiatives, and lack of prioritisation.

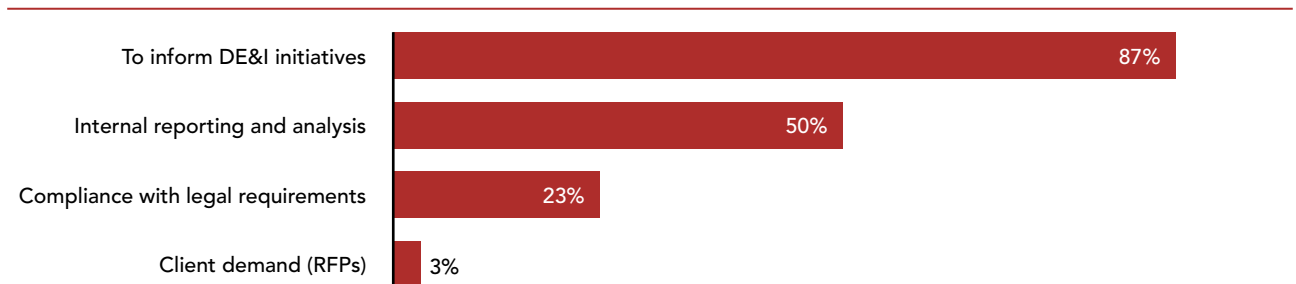
Cultural barriers around openly discussing personal backgrounds are another obstacle. Willingness to discuss SEB openly is often blocked by stigma, shame, or the sense that talking about private life is improper, so people carefully curate what they disclose and to

whom. This silence can perpetuate disadvantage by hiding problems, but when communities feel safe to talk about these realities – with respect for privacy and nuance – more targeted support and new mentoring opportunities can emerge.

Other challenges highlighted by interviewees in addressing social mobility in the sector included:

- **Long-term commitment.** Relevant initiatives often require a significant time commitment to engage with stakeholders, including universities, students, and community partners, and a considerable lag before they show results.
- **Limited resources.** For smaller businesses with limited resources where DE&I is already in some case an "add-on" to other responsibilities, there may not be the capacity to address the topic.

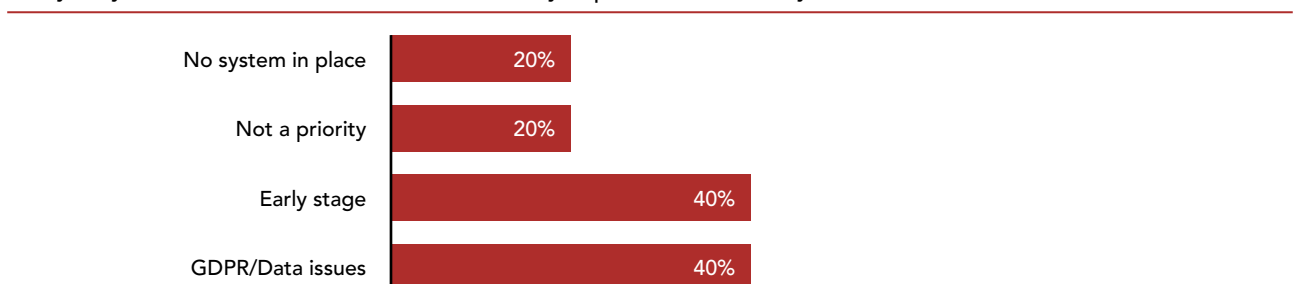
Figure 5: Purposes of data collection
"What is the purpose behind collecting social mobility data?"



Multiple answers were possible, so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: Survey of DE&I in European asset management companies, PwC and IIFE, March–April 2024

Figure 6: Reasons for not collecting data
"Why do you not collect data that define and may impact social mobility?"



Multiple answers were possible, so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: Survey of DE&I in European asset management companies, PwC and IIFE, March–April 2024

There has been relatively little progress on addressing social mobility in the sector

Progress on improving social mobility within asset management has been limited, especially compared to sectors like law and professional services, which have made greater progress in removing bottlenecks, for example in recruitment criteria. Many asset management firms continue to favour graduates from top universities and emphasise educational qualifications, making entry difficult for candidates from modest backgrounds.

Where companies in the sector are addressing social mobility, it is often in the following ways:

Opening early-career opportunities, for example through partnering with a broader range of higher education institutions to raise awareness of asset management as a career option, or opening internships to people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Industry practices such as job-shadowing, as currently practiced, tend to favour individuals from privileged backgrounds.

Improving inclusion, which makes the industry more attractive to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and improves their prospects for advancement. Approaches include mentoring and employee resource groups.

Encouraging self-identification. Encouraging employees to self-identify their socioeconomic backgrounds in surveys in order to identify gaps in opportunity and fairness.

The case studies in this report provide more detailed examples of approaches, within the sector and beyond. Overall, the interviews underscored that while there is momentum building in the sector, there is a need for a clearer conceptualisation of the topic, more data, and a broader set of approaches.





PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PROMOTING SOCIAL MOBILITY

The following key measures have been identified through a comprehensive review of best practices in promoting social mobility, from within the sector and beyond. By adopting these approaches, organisations can drive lasting change in social mobility.

Global strategy, local execution

Position social mobility as part of your wider DE&I strategy. It directly impacts and is influenced by various DE&I areas, and should be acted on in alignment. By promoting social mobility, you dismantle systemic barriers related to socioeconomic background, which

often overlap with challenges faced by other underrepresented groups.

Simultaneously, empower local teams to design and implement initiatives reflecting the unique socioeconomic realities, cultural contexts, and regulatory environments they operate in. Social mobility manifests itself in different ways across Europe, so targeted approaches with specific interventions are crucial.





Creating pathways for mobility

Sanofi adopts a comprehensive, whole-of-business approach to inclusion, embedding it systemically across all business and organizational processes through three core pillars: Patients, People, and Places.

- Patients: Ensuring diverse patient populations are represented in R&D and market outreach
- People: Cultivating an inclusive organizational culture and equitable talent processes
- Places: Applying universal design principles and accessibility standards across physical workplaces, digital platforms, and product innovation

Given the pharmaceutical industry's stringent regulatory environment and ethical responsibilities, Sanofi prioritizes accessibility, cultural sensitivity, and trust-building, particularly with undersupported communities.



Talking about class and socioeconomic background is still the elephant in the room – but it's foundational for true inclusion."

Melisande Kingchatchaval Schifter, Global Head of Inclusion, Sanofi

While social mobility is intrinsically linked to inclusion, defining and measuring it remains complex. The company is advancing skills-based hiring practices to move beyond traditional employability proxies like educational degrees, recognizing that credentials alone may not fully capture relevant capabilities or skills.

Sanofi has several programmes to promote social mobility and inclusion. A Million Conversations (AMC) represents Sanofi's commitment to rebuilding trust in healthcare by engaging undersupported communities and addressing systemic gaps in inclusion, representation, and accessibility that have eroded confidence in the healthcare system.

At the heart of AMC is the NextGen scholarship programme, a cornerstone initiative demonstrating Sanofi's commitment to social mobility. The programme supports approximately 100 scholars annually across 13 countries, providing financial aid, mentoring, coursework, and internship opportunities, creating a pathway to employment and leadership within Sanofi and the healthcare industry. Internally, their Employee Business Resource Group (EBRGs) on social mobility in the UK and educational events help raise awareness and build inclusion capacity.

To assess socioeconomic diversity in scholar selection, Sanofi applies locally relevant contextual indicators such as geographic data, first-generation university attendance, and parental income levels. However, the company acknowledges these measures have limitations. Personal perceptions and stigma make reliable self-assessment data collection difficult.

Social mobility is important to Sanofi because it aligns with ethical responsibility, enhances performance, innovation, and competitiveness, and helps build trust in healthcare products and services.



Inclusion is the difference between science that works in a lab and sits on a shelf, and science that works in the real world."

Melisande Kingchatchaval Schifter, Sanofi

Sanofi views culture, business alignment, and global-local collaboration as critical drivers of inclusion. Elevating social mobility on the global agenda is a current priority, and the company continues to build on its foundational work to raise awareness and foster open dialogue across all markets. It aims to refine data collection and metrics to better assess socioeconomic diversity, improve local tailoring of scholarship and inclusion programmes, and strengthen integration of social mobility initiatives with broader talent and business strategies.

Start small and build momentum

Since the topic of social mobility is relatively new and underdeveloped within Europe, many companies are figuring out how to position themselves. Launching a big programme alongside multiple other DE&I efforts risks diluting focus and impact. Starting with small interventions helps teams integrate social mobility into broader inclusion work more sustainably.


In addition, small pilots control costs and risks while testing assumptions before scaling. Big initiatives require significant resources, coordination, and change management upfront. If programmes are unproven or misaligned, the risks of failure, wasted resources, or stakeholder disengagement are high. If data is lacking, pilots allow you track clear and measurable outputs on a smaller scale to gain buy-in and momentum (e.g., number of participants, retention rates, employee feedback).

Data collection

Collecting and understanding data will be the key challenge to tackle, in order to boost visibility and leadership accountability, define action plans, and track progress. As there is no single measure to capture SEB, a blend of different measures is the best way to gain a clearer understanding of your workforce's socioeconomic diversity. Consider proxy questions for SEB (e.g. post codes, education of parents/guardians), which can be easier to answer and less intrusive.

It is important to keep in mind regulatory restrictions on collecting personal data, both EU GDPR and local regulations. However, it is possible for companies to collect such data, provided particular conditions are observed (see box: Regulatory challenges to data collection are not insurmountable, p.25)

The following table outlines some possible questions for data collection. Including all of these questions is not recommended. Rather, an organisation's talent team should determine the most appropriate set of questions on a country-by-country basis.

Category	Question
Introduction to precede questions	As part of our ongoing commitment to inclusion and social mobility, we are gathering data on the diverse backgrounds and experiences of our employees. This information will help us understand how different demographic and socioeconomic factors shape opportunities within our organisation and create the conditions for everyone to thrive. All responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and used only to support our inclusion goals.
Self-identification	Compared to people in general, would you describe yourself as coming from a lower socioeconomic background? (Yes, No, Don't know, Prefer not to say)
Subjective SEB	<p>The scale below represents how society is set up. 10 represents the people who are the best off. They receive the best education, earn the most, and have the most respected jobs. 1 represents the people who are worst off. They receive only basic education, earn the least, and have no jobs or the least respected jobs. Where would you place yourself on this scale?</p> 
Occupation of parent	<p>At the age of 14, what was the occupation of your highest earning parent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional/Managerial • Technical/Associated professional • Clerical/Administrative • Skilled manual worker • Semi-skilled manual worker • Unskilled manual worker • Other / Don't know
Educational level of parent	<p>Did any of your parent(s) or guardian(s) complete a university degree course or equivalent (e.g., BA, BSc or higher)?</p> <p>What is the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s) or guardian(s)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD/Doctorate • Master's degree • Bachelor's degree • Vocational or non-tertiary post-secondary programs • Secondary school • Primary school • Did not finish primary school
Family situation and inferred SEB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At age 14, did you live in a multi-generational household, e.g. immediate family alongside grandparents, aunts/uncles, etc.? (Yes/No) • At age 14, was your family home primarily: owned, rented, living with relatives, or other?

Category	Question
Neighbourhood and school environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How safe did you feel in your neighbourhood during childhood? (Very unsafe, Somewhat unsafe, Neutral, Somewhat safe, Very safe) How would you rate the quality of the local schools in your childhood neighbourhood? (Very poor, Poor, Adequate, Good, Excellent)
Access to resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During your childhood, did your family have difficulty paying for basics (food, housing, utilities) at least some of the time? (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always) Did your family have regular access to a library, books, or other reading materials at home? (Yes/No) Was there reliable access to a doctor or healthcare when needed during childhood? (Yes/No) At age 14, did you have a room of your own? (Yes/No) At age 14, did you have books in your household? (Yes/No) At age 14, did you have musical instruments in your household? (Yes/No) How many cars did your household own during most of your childhood? (0, 1, 2, 3+)
Living in area of deprivation¹	What was your home postcode at age 14?
Eligibility for free school meals	Were you eligible for free or subsidised school meals at age 14? ²
School type	Which type of secondary school did you attend for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16? ³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A state-run or state-funded school with no tuition fees A state-run or state-funded school that selected on the basis of academic ability, faith, or other grounds An independent or fee-paying school An independent or fee-paying school, where I received a grant covered 90% or more of the tuition fees Attended school abroad

Skills-based approaches

Social mobility aligns well with the growing shift towards skills-based organisations (World Economic Forum, 2024). Employers are increasingly prioritising demonstrable skills and capabilities over traditional credentials, partly because the rapid evolution of technology and ways of working makes it hard for traditional qualifications to keep pace with the changing needs of employers, and partly because increased competition for talent in a context of demographic change makes it useful to look beyond people with traditional qualifications.

One result is to create a more level playing field for people to thrive, regardless of SEB. Underlying inequalities (e.g. access to quality education, digital divides) may still limit who can acquire the skills that are in demand. However, for most entry-level jobs, organisations could filter based on a set of relevant core skills like data analysis, digital aptitude, resilience, empathy, accuracy and risk-awareness.

Focusing on skills rather than traditional credentials not only makes your organisation more adaptable, it also becomes more diverse by opening up to a wider talent pool.

Applying skills-based approaches to social mobility

For organisations that wish to take advantage of this shift to also improve social mobility, there are several points to consider:

- 1. Redesign job descriptions to specify skills and outcomes,** not degrees or prestige. Include explicit proficiency levels and a "minimum viable experience" section. Make degrees optional where feasible; accept validated experience, CFA/CAIA as one path but not gatekeepers for entry.
- 2. Use skill-based screening:** work samples, real-world simulations, take-home projects, or paid trial projects that reflect actual job tasks.
- 3. Develop a common enterprise-wide skills taxonomy** with clearly defined proficiency levels (e.g., foundational, intermediate, advanced) mapped to roles and career tracks.
- 4. Have both cross-functional and ladder tracks:** allow lateral moves between research, portfolio management, risk, and data roles; provide transparent criteria for progression.
- 5. Offer paid internships, apprenticeships, and "returnships"** that provide real work and a path to full-time roles.

¹ Several countries, including Germany, France, and many Nordics, have regional indicators of social mobility published by statistical offices

² Free meals for lower-income families are offered in countries including the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, and the UK, whereas subsidised meals are offered in countries such as Germany and in parts of France and Spain.

³ This question is relevant for countries including the UK, France, and Spain. The responses can be tailored to give greater specificity based on the local context.

Collective efforts

Collective efforts play a crucial role in accelerating social mobility. When governments, businesses, educational institutions, and community groups collaborate, they can address the complex and interconnected barriers that hinder upward mobility more effectively. These partnerships enable the sharing of best practices, alignment of goals, and coordinated action, creating scalable and sustainable solutions for education, employment, and social advancement that reach a broader population. All of this can start small by collaborating with schools in lower SEB neighbourhoods or sharing your commitment to social mobility on your website. SEO is one example; you should also investigate other organisations in your local market.



SEO/LONDON

SPONSORS FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Providing pathways to success

Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO London) is an education and training charity that helps young people from underrepresented backgrounds enter and progress in the financial sector and other competitive fields. It identifies high-potential students who may lack industry networks or exposure and delivers tailored development programmes that include skills training, mentoring and guidance on navigating professional environments.

SEO London connects participants with internships and work experience at leading asset management firms, providing practical exposure and helping them build professional networks. It also maintains a strong alumni community where former participants support new cohorts and continue to benefit from networks and career development opportunities. The organisation notes that disparities in access at junior levels become even more pronounced when examining progression into leadership roles for those from underrepresented backgrounds.

The charity has begun expanding from the UK into France and plans to grow further in continental Europe through SEO Europe. The organisation observes that in the UK there is more openness to discussing the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. In France, there is greater reluctance to discuss ethnic disparities, reinforced by legal restrictions on collecting and processing ethnicity data. As a result dialogue and initiatives focus on gender and socioeconomic background.

Since its launch in 2000, SEO London has supported more than 10,000 people through programmes that build employability skills and provide intensive support to students from underrepresented backgrounds. Many alumni have progressed into strong roles in major financial institutions. The organisation plans to establish a local French entity, SEO France, as part of SEO Europe expansion initiative, aiming to replicate its UK model and support talented young people in France into competitive career and progression opportunities regardless of background.



Senior sponsorship

Having support from senior leaders is critical for pushing social mobility up the agenda within an organisation. When leaders show they care, it helps ensure that the topic gets the time, resources, and focus it needs. Their involvement sets the tone for the whole company, encouraging people at every level to get behind initiatives and making it easier to bring different teams together, stay on track, and maintain the momentum.

In addition, when leaders share their own personal stories about barriers they have faced, mentors who helped them, or pivotal moments of learning, they humanise the issue and demonstrate why social mobility should be a priority. Such stories translate abstract goals into concrete examples of progress, and can also surface hidden biases and constraints. When senior leaders open up, momentum is strengthened, as people at every level perceive a credible commitment to change.

Valuing resilience

CMS is a large firm with over 5,000 lawyers worldwide, serving a diverse range of clients. Over recent years, it has made strides in improving diversity, particularly in relation to gender, but ethnic diversity remains a challenge (and a priority). On social mobility, a relatively high percentage of board members/senior partners have a lower SEB.

CMS conducts anonymous staff surveys every two years, achieving a response rate of about 70%. These surveys gather information on social mobility, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

In line with efforts to widen access, the firm has removed minimum A-level requirements for graduate recruitment and adopted a skills-based approach. It has also increased outreach to a broader range of universities. Employee-led networks, including one on social mobility, and workshops where employees share personal stories foster inclusion and a sense of belonging. Presentations and community mentoring programmes, especially in regional UK offices outside of London, help extend these values.



The most suitable or competent people should always win, but widening the net means finding talent you might have otherwise missed."

Mark Heighton, Partner and Co-Head of the CMS International Real Estate Group, CMS

CMS also partners with external organisations, such as Real Estate Balance – a real estate sector diversity group – and exchanges best practices with other law firms. It supports charities like Refuge, integrating social causes into its diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DE&IB) programmes.

Measuring the impact of social mobility initiatives (such as the abolition of minimum A-level requirements) will take time, given the long timeframe – often 10 to 15 years – required to observe progression, through to partnership.

Like other international organisations CMS recognise there are additional challenges in pursuing formal DEIB initiatives outside the UK because of cultural differences and that is particularly the case in relation to social mobility.

There is currently no regulatory pressure in the UK around social mobility compared to gender and racial diversity. CMS is motivated by a blend of doing what is right and realising business benefits such as improved talent acquisition, enhanced decision-making, and stronger client relationships.

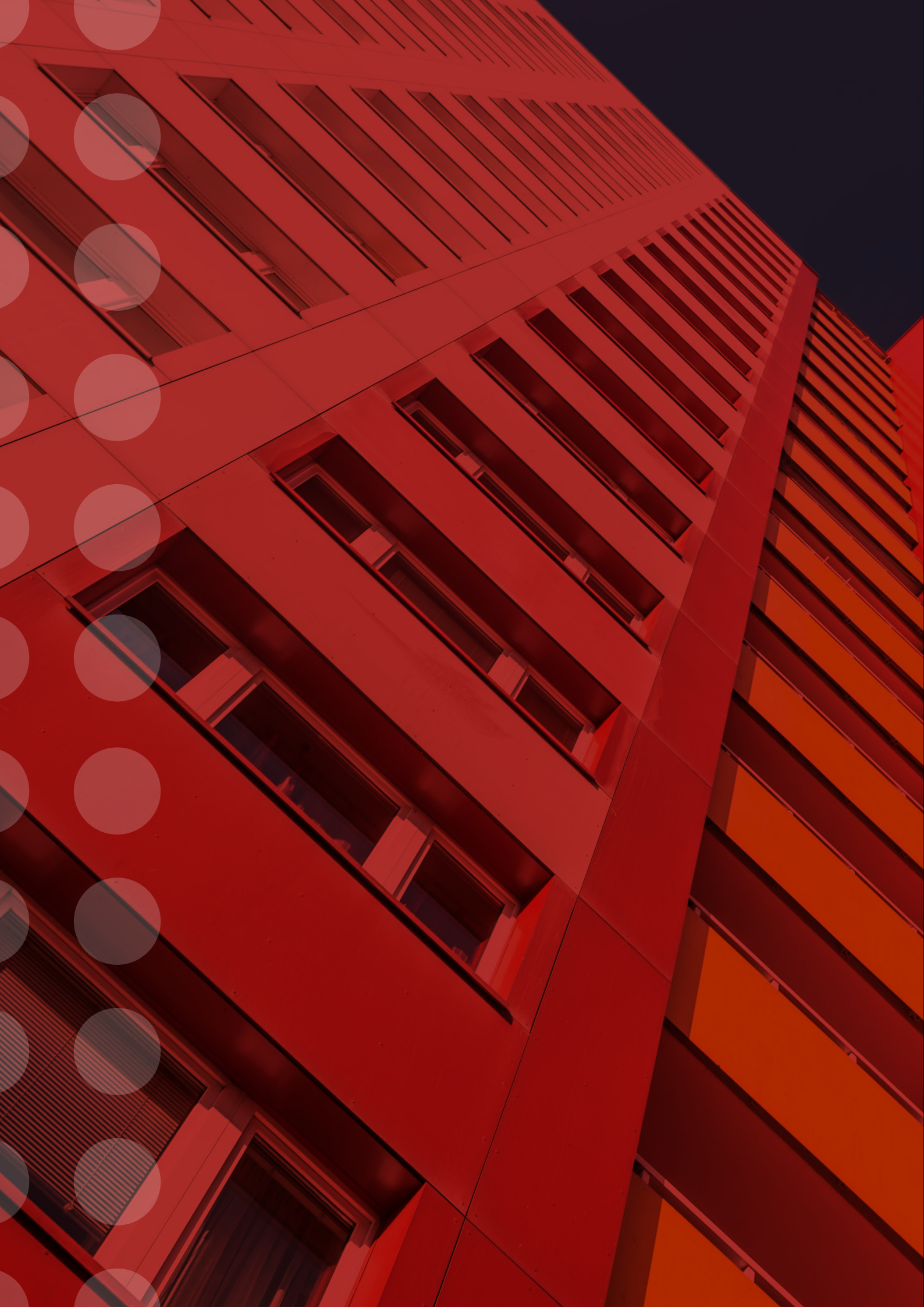


We don't just want to replace privately educated men with privately educated women – we want to broaden the talent pool altogether."

Mark Heighton, CMS

CMS also sees more client demands. Tender processes in the UK real estate sector have become increasingly sophisticated over the past few years with regard to diversity requirements. At CMS, senior leadership actively drives DE&IB efforts, emphasising genuine commitment beyond HR-led initiatives. Employee-led networks foster grassroots engagement and cultivating an inclusive culture where everyone feels they belong.

CMS acknowledges the difficulties in openly discussing socioeconomic backgrounds. Inclusion efforts prioritise resilience and diverse lived experiences. True inclusion, they believe, goes beyond numbers to creating environments where individuals thrive.



CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

The European asset management industry stands at a moment of structural realignment. Firms that act now to broaden access to opportunity will not only strengthen their social fabric but also reinforce their commercial edge. Advancing social mobility is no longer a peripheral inclusion goal, rather it is a lever for growth, adaptability, and resilience in a sector under transformation.

To embed social mobility as a source of long-term advantage, firms should focus on six practical priorities:

- 1. Balance alignment and local relevance:** Combine a clear strategic direction with flexibility for national and cultural contexts.
- 2. Start focused, then scale:** Pilot initiatives that generate measurable results and build internal momentum.
- 3. Build a data foundation:** Establish reliable ways to capture socioeconomic information while respecting local sensitivities.
- 4. Adopt skills-based approaches:** Look beyond credentials to the real capabilities and potential that drive performance.
- 5. Collaborate to accelerate:** Work collectively across the industry to address systemic barriers and strengthen the overall talent pipeline.
- 6. Lead from the top:** Show visible commitment from senior executives to make social mobility a sustained business priority.

The commercial case is unambiguous. Firms that recognise and nurture talent from all backgrounds will be more innovative, better aligned with clients' evolving expectations, and achieve stronger investment performance. By unlocking this underused source of capability, the industry can secure its future competitiveness while contributing to a more dynamic and equitable European economy.

The opportunity now is not simply to "do good", but to compete smarter – to widen the lens through which potential is recognised, and in doing so, position European asset management for the next generation of growth.

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Christelle Faussurier	International Head Corporate Social Responsibility	Natixis Investment Managers
Iva Alexandrova	Senior Fixed Income Portfolio Manager	BNP Paribas Asset Management
Hollie Crompton	Social Mobility Lead	PwC
Louise Preston	Head of Programme Development & Delivery	Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO)
Lynn Rossouw	Network Inclusion Leader	PwC
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APPENDIX: COUNTRY DEEP DIVES

National differences in economic structure, education systems, welfare regimes, tax-and-benefit design, labour markets, housing, and historical legacies shape social mobility. European countries also share certain challenges: skill mismatches, unequal access to high-quality education and training, housing segregation, and uneven regional development.

This section dives deeper into the context and individual challenges that companies need to be aware of to design relevant interventions in the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Italy. It includes the countries' rankings in the WEF Global Social Mobility Index (World Economic Forum, 2020).

The Global Social Mobility Index

was developed by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to measure and compare the ability of people in different countries to improve their economic status or social position relative to their parents. It assesses the degree to which opportunities for social and economic advancement are accessible across different social groups. It assesses 82 global economies on five key dimensions of social mobility: health, education, technology, work and protection & institutions.



1-4

Ranking on the
WEF Global Social
Mobility Index (out
of 82 economies)

The Nordic countries

The Nordic countries consistently rank among the highest globally for social mobility, taking the top four places in the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Social Mobility Index. Their comprehensive welfare states, universal access to quality education, and progressive taxation systems, among other factors, collectively foster equitable opportunities irrespective of socioeconomic backgrounds.

A key driver of social mobility in the region is its free or heavily subsidised education, which extends through higher education. This significantly lowers the financial barriers that often impede upward mobility elsewhere. It is complemented by a strong emphasis on vocational training and lifelong learning, which equips people with practical skills for career progression across diverse sectors. At the same time, generous social safety nets reduce income inequality and provide a stable foundation for social mobility.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly for immigrant and minority populations. Despite the region's egalitarian ideals, informal social networks and elite institutions can still disproportionately benefit those from privileged backgrounds, limiting access to top-tier employment and leadership roles. Moreover, challenges such as school-to-work transitions and youth unemployment persist (Eurofound, 2017).

Leading Nordic companies such as IKEA and H&M actively engage in DE&I initiatives to address these disparities. Their programmes, including targeted hiring efforts for refugees and immigrants, exemplify corporate commitment to expanding social mobility and fostering inclusive workplaces.

Overall, the Nordic model demonstrates that structural support combined with targeted inclusion efforts are essential for promoting broad-based social mobility while recognising and addressing persistent inequalities.

6

Ranking on the
WEF Global Social
Mobility Index (out
of 82 economies)

The Netherlands

The Netherlands consistently ranks highly on social mobility, underpinned by a comprehensive welfare state, universal access to education, and relatively generous social protection. Yet gaps remain, particularly for children from lower-income families and for those with non-Western migrant backgrounds, for whom differences in educational attainment and early labour-market entry persist despite high participation in higher education.

A defining feature is the secondary education tracking system, which channels students into different post-secondary pathways from adolescence onward. This structure provides clear routes into vocational and professional tracks as well as university preparation, but it can reinforce SEB and particularly migrant background disparities if track placement correlates with family resources or local school quality.

Private-sector involvement helps to counterbalance structural barriers. Dutch multinationals and domestic leaders such as Philips, Shell, Unilever, and ASML have ramped up DE&I initiatives and apprenticeship or traineeship programmes focused on refugees, migrants, and students from disadvantaged regions. These efforts extend pathways into skilled occupations and higher education and illustrate how corporate action can complement a broad-based welfare state approach to mobility.

Policy levers with potential to boost mobility include expanding high-quality early childhood education and affordable childcare, reforming tracking policies to allow more flexibility and bridging options across tracks, and increasing targeted funding for schools serving high-need communities.

Even though the Netherlands is generally seen as a country with high social mobility by means of educational attainment, in practice this does not always translate into equal opportunity for career advancement.

11

Ranking on the
WEF Global Social
Mobility Index (out
of 82 economies)

Germany

Germany ranks relatively high in social mobility due to its comprehensive apprenticeship system and robust labour market. A cornerstone of this success is its renowned dual education system, which combines classroom instruction with practical, on-the-job training. It provides clear and well-established pathways to stable and well-paying employment, even for people who do not pursue a university education.

Germany's decentralised economic landscape further supports social mobility by distributing opportunities across multiple industrial hubs such as Munich, Frankfurt, and Hamburg – although disparities persist between western and eastern Germany.

However, while vocational pathways provide valuable prospects, early tracking – where students are directed into academic or vocational tracks around the age of 10 – often limits the possibility for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to transition to higher education. Moreover, the dual pathway is of limited benefit for the asset management sector at present, so long as core roles typically require a university degree, often supplemented by postgraduate qualifications or professional certifications like the CFA.

Leading German firms such as Siemens, Volkswagen, and BASF invest significantly in apprenticeship programmes that offer young people from diverse backgrounds vital opportunities, while companies like Deutsche Telekom and Allianz have initiatives to facilitate the integration of refugees into the workforce.

Overall, Germany's blend of practical education, geographic economic dispersion, and corporate engagement continues to sustain relatively strong social mobility, albeit there are areas where policy and practice can evolve.

12

Ranking on the
WEF Global Social
Mobility Index (out
of 82 economies)

France

France presents a complex picture regarding social mobility. It benefits from a strong public education system and universal healthcare, but significant barriers remain for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Although education in France is highly centralised, with free access to public schools and universities ensuring broad baseline educational opportunities, the system faces criticism for perpetuating inequality. Elite institutions such as the *Grandes Écoles* serve as critical gateways to top careers in government, business, and academia and tend to be disproportionately accessible to students from wealthy or well-connected families.

Inherited characteristics such as social origin, gender, and migratory background strongly influence students' educational performances and paths from early childhood through to higher education, according to a 2023 report by France Stratégie.

The French welfare state plays a pivotal role in mitigating poverty and inequality through programmes like unemployment benefits, housing assistance, and universal healthcare. However, the country struggles with high youth unemployment rates, particularly among those lacking higher education qualifications. Parental background directly impacts labour market outcomes in France, according to a 2016 study by Vallet et al. In French boardrooms, international executives show much greater social diversity: 72% come from non-privileged parental backgrounds, compared to only 38% of French board members (McKinsey, 2022).

In response to these challenges, leading French companies have implemented targeted initiatives aimed at broadening opportunities. For example, L'Oréal and BNP Paribas have recruitment and training programmes specifically focused on young people from impoverished suburbs. Similarly, firms such as Schneider Electric and Danone support social entrepreneurship and deliver training programmes geared towards underserved communities.

These efforts highlight both the ongoing structural challenges to social mobility in France and the role that companies can play in creating pathways for disadvantaged populations.

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Ranking on the
WEF Global Social
Mobility Index (out
of 82 economies)

Italy

Italy faces distinct challenges regarding social mobility. While it boasts a rich cultural heritage and robust industrial sector, social mobility is relatively limited, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds and southern regions.

The Italian education system offers universal access to schooling, but grapples with significant inequalities in quality and outcomes. Early tracking into academic or vocational paths around the age of 14 can restrict future opportunities, and there are disparities in school resources between northern and southern regions. University attendance and graduation rates remain uneven, with southern regions often lagging their northern counterparts.

The prosperous northern and central regions, home to major industrial and financial centres such as Milan, Turin, and Bologna, provide greater employment opportunities and career advancement prospects. In contrast, the southern Mezzogiorno region contends with higher unemployment rates and limited access to quality jobs.

Italy's labour market is characterised by a high prevalence of temporary and informal employment contracts, especially among youth and disadvantaged groups, which undermines long-term career progression. Additionally, family networks and social capital often play a crucial role in securing employment (Eurofound, 2017).

Leading Italian firms such as Fiat, Eni, and Luxottica invest in apprenticeships and training programmes aimed at young people, with some initiatives targeting disadvantaged regions and groups. Furthermore, several companies have developed social responsibility programmes to support the integration of migrants, recognising the importance of broadening access to economic opportunities.

Overall, Italy's social mobility landscape reflects the interplay of regional disparities, structural labour market challenges, and educational inequalities. Addressing these issues through targeted reforms and inclusive corporate initiatives remains essential.

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About Inclusion in Finance Europe

Inclusion in Finance Europe (IIFE) is a cross-company initiative working to accelerate progress towards a more inclusive, high-performing asset management industry. Operating across the UK, North America and Europe, we bring together firms across major financial centres to reshape the industry to achieve better outcomes.

Find out more: inclusioninfinanceeurope.com