

Research Report

ECOSOC

Addressing gender equality in the workplace

MUNISH '11



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Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Addressing gender equality in the workplace

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Introduction

In 1986, The Wall Street Journal Journalist Carol Hymowitz described the experience of female executives who appeared unable to reach the highest levels of corporate success as “Glass Ceilings” The ice hasn’t melted yet. Gender Inequalities for Health and Education have already been healed. Women have made major efforts since 1990, but they have not yet gained gender equality in the workplace. Economy is still a place where gender inequality persists despite the active presence of women in the economic sphere. But women still tend to occupy lower job categories. According to the ILO¹, out of the 550 million working poor in the world, an estimated 330 million, or 60 per cent, are women. Although gender inequality losses aren’t high in OECD² countries, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa suffer the largest losses because gender inequalities, followed by South Asia and the Arab states. Gender inequalities form a major barrier to opportunities for women and long term growth prospects. Promoting gender equality in the labor market requires “empowering women, assuring that men and women enjoy an equal share of the benefits of development.”



The World Bank Data

¹ International Labour Organization

² Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development



Definition of Key terms³:

Gender equality - denotes women having equal access to social, economic, political and cultural opportunities as men. It does not mean that women and men are the same, but rather that their similarities and differences are recognized and equally valued.

Gender Discrimination - refers to the systematic, unfavorable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender roles, which denies them enjoying their rights and accessing opportunities or resources.

Culture - The distinctive patterns of ideas, beliefs, and norms which characterize the way of life and relations of a society or groups within a society. These patterns also include customs and traditions. Culturally determined gender ideologies define rights and responsibilities and what is 'appropriate' behavior for women and men. They also influence access to and control over resources, and participation in decision-making. These gender ideologies often reinforce male power and the idea of women's inferiority, as for example customary laws that dictate that only men can own land. Culture is sometimes assumed to be natural and unchangeable; however it is fluid and historically determined.

General overview:

Gender Equality as a human right was enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In the year 2000 at the world millennium summit, 147 heads of governments committed to combat gender inequality. The percentage of Female labour force participation stagnated at 51% in 2008⁴. Women in the Arab States increased their participation in the labour force by about 9% since 1980. They now are at a 27%⁵, which is approximately half the global average. Information concerning how time constraints affect the professional career is not generally available or regularly collected therefore, it is difficult to measure its impact on gender inequality in the workplace. Today, the main origins of gender inequality in the workplace are:

1) Cultural boundaries:

a) *Women's traditional position in the household*

It is a well-known fact that women's contribution to household work in family oriented cultures exceeds the one of men's. Women often have the burden of caregiving and house-keeping. These burdens limit women in their organization of work and therefore are a threat to the progression in their career. In the world, and this includes the industrialized countries, women are more likely to take care of household responsibilities such as but not limited to preparing dinner and taking care of the children. Although men also have household responsibilities, they generally are of a different nature. These activities can be postponed, which is not the case for taking care of the dinner and

³ UN ECOSOC definitions

⁴ ILO statistics 2010

⁵ Desai 2010



children. Therefore, these women cannot guarantee full time presence and regular working hours that are required for senior job positions.

b) Women discrimination:

Due to the large amount of men presence in managerial positions, it is very hard for women to build a strong presence amongst a vast majority of men. Also many women complain there are too few female role models in the workplace.. In the Arab States, 23% percent of the losses due to gender inequality are in the labor market. This is the highest percentage of all regions.⁶

Furthermore, women are often excluded from the informal social networking activities that are required for their career development. These social activities are often traditionally male dominated activities such as drinking and going to sports events. Thus, it is more difficult for women to build outside-work relationships with their male colleagues.

2) Maternity

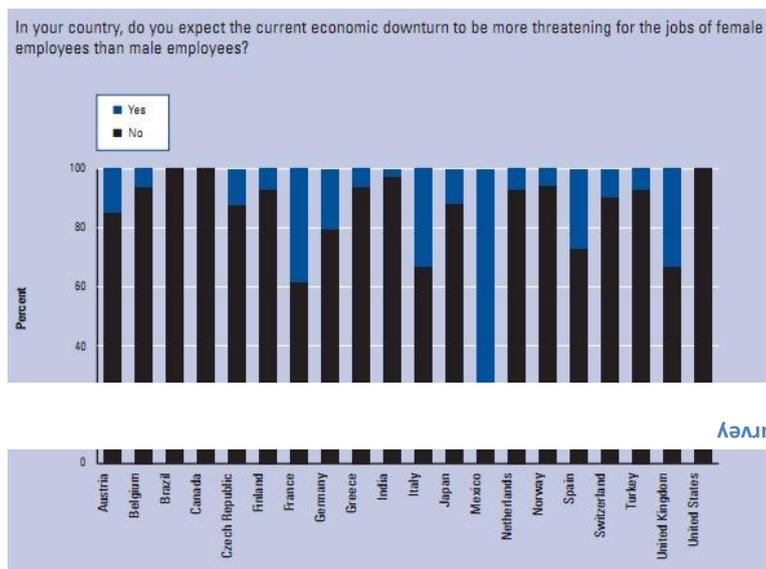
Many industrialized countries offer a good maternity leave, good re-entry programs, flexible working options and childcare services. The United Kingdom and Norway offer the most generous maternity leave. Therefore it is not surprising that the companies offering the longest maternity leave are located in these same countries. (Norway 94% and United Kingdom 74%)⁷ Of all the countries that have been measured, India Mexico and the United States offer the least generous maternity leave. The right to parental leave has been implemented in all European Union Member States. Companies are forced to pay for their female employees during maternity. The problem with these parental leaves is that they can discourage the companies to employ these people in the first place. Maternity is also very difficult time for both female employee concerned and her employer. According to an ILO 2010 survey, women are more likely to take parental leave. This harms their career as they do not stay wired with the evolution of the company. Of the companies that allow longer-term leave, less than half provide re-entry programs that ensure employees stay “wired” with the market changes. Due to maternity, companies also tend to give more job opportunities to employees not considering a parental leave, because they consider it is more risky to give a vast amount responsibility to someone who needs to find the balance between home and work. The greatest percentage of companies that offer child-care facilities is in France, with 89%⁸. Male employees often do not take parental leave as they prefer to continue on with their career while young mothers rather choose for the maternity leave. Therefore, the economic downturn is considered more threatening for women than for men.

⁶ HDRO calculations using data from the HDRO database

⁷ Corporate gender gap report 2010

⁸ Survey Corporate gender gap report 2010





Current Situation

Throughout the years, serious efforts have been made by UN member states and the International Labor Organization (ILO). So far, four ILO Gender equality Conventions have been made:

-Equal Remuneration convention 1951

-Discrimination convention 1958

-Workers with families Responsibilities convention 1981

-Maternity Protection convention in 2000.

On the employer's side, some firms such as Abbott, Accenture and American Express Company who have undertaken family-friendly policies within the firm, such as private lactation rooms for mothers, take home meals and company sponsored full time centers on/near site. This remains a difficult problem to tackle as the firm can sometimes loosen their high implication in a market where it is difficult to just give some employees a part time job where competitors wouldn't. Therefore, it is clear that a proper legislation is required for those companies, as they cannot be the only one on the market to adopt family-friendly policies. On the other side, there have been several reports that family-friendly corporations, that allow parental leave and flexible working hours result in an increase of the employees' well-being and reduce their work related stress. This also increases the loyalty of the employee and improves their performances.⁹

The problem with policies that have been undertaken, which force companies to such as but not limited to accept women's family responsibilities child rearing and generally

⁹ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada by Sheri Todd

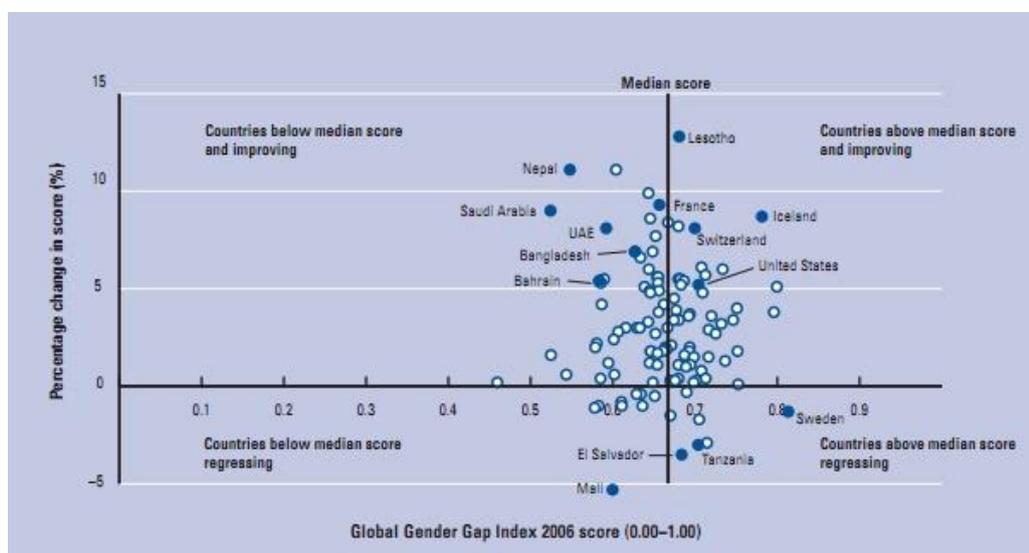


household tasks is that these policies do not force companies to employ these women in the first place. Traditionally, the most-cost employees are women, as the company has to pay for their salaries even if they're not working while maternity. This can encourage companies to not recruit female planning on children employees as their costs can be higher than an average employee. Family-friendly practices not only help the women who want to rise in management positions but it also allows men who to play a more significant role in their household.

At a governmental scale, at this point, many governments in the world have promoted gender equality in all sectors of society. They have done this through quota systems. The quota system according to the ILO is an affirmative action tool intended to ensure that women constitute a critical minority of at least 30 to 40 % on decision making bodies. Most of the countries that have succeeded in implementing these quotas are in Europe, especially the Nordic countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland and above all Norway, who has at least 40 % of the board members in state-owned companies that are women.

Unfortunately these quotas are not always respected, as some political parties, such as in France, prefer to pay a fine rather than accepting more women in their lists.

Many countries such as the United Kingdom and Italy have rejected quotas at the national level. Gender quotas are often criticized for their discriminatory and undemocratic interventions. Quotas should be only temporary, and their purpose is not to advantage women, it is merely to reduce gender inequalities within a country.



Major parties involved:

ILO: The ILO is an international organization responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards. Gender Equality in the workplace is one of its main objectives and it has already made four key equality conventions. The ILO is the main actor in addressing gender



equality in the workplace. It is the only UN affiliated tripartite that allows governments and social actors of the economy to discuss labour standards in the world

UNDP: The United Nations Development Programme helps developing countries and use aid effectively. It encourages the empowerment of women in all its activities

UN Women: In July 2010, the general assembly of the United Nations created the UN Women. The NGO organizes meetings all over the world to discuss gender equality in the workplace. UN Women helps orchestrate the efforts of 25 UN organizations to promote Gender Equality across the UN system

Timeline of key events:

1951: Equal Remuneration convention

-1958: Discrimination convention

-1961: President of the United States, John F Kennedy makes women's rights a key issue of the New Frontier, and names women to many high-ranking posts in his administration.

-1975: The UN sponsors the First International Conference on Women in Mexico City

-1979: Margaret Thatcher becomes the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

-1981: Workers with families Responsibilities convention

-2000 Maternity Protection convention

Possible solutions

Create a UN fund that gives subventions to family-friendly companies. Subventions would range from the amount of female employees and their positions in the company. The *UNWOMEN* or ILO would be charged to report whether the companies are gender equality friendly or not and whether they allow flexible hours for mother employees.

Create a UN fund that allow the UN Women to train young mothers to manage their time and to stay “wired” with their employ

Allow the creation of a UN official ranking of the most family-friendly corporations in the world so that the people considering parental leave can apply for jobs in these corporations.



Appendix:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hBd1HN7WJM&feature=player_embedded

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/pardev/download/mdg/2010/mdg-dw-3-2010.pdf>

HDR report 2010

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