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مؤسسة نماء للارتقاء بالمرأة
NAMA WOMEN ADVANCEMENT ESTABLISHMENT

PEARL INITIATIVE

Diversity in Business Leadership

WOMEN
IN THE
ECONOMY
THE GULF REGION OUTLOOK

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP REPORT

pwc

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Her Excellency Reem Bin Karam
Executive Director
NAMA Women Advancement Establishment

PEARL INITIATIVE

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Pearl Initiative

Over the past several years, private sector entities in the Gulf Region have made significant strides in empowering women and ensuring they play an increasingly important role in the workplace. The level and extent of their engagement needs to be evaluated through data collection and analysis, in order for challenges to be addressed and best practices to be emulated by other entities to continue on the path of women's meaningful integration into the Gulf economy.

NAMA Women Advancement Establishment and the Pearl Initiative launched this collaborative study in 2018 to address the gaps in this area across the Gulf and in various sectors, following the success of our initial UAE-based study published in 2017, which addressed women's participation in the Energy & Environment; Finance & Investment; Healthcare & Wellness and ICT & STEM sectors.

Driven by the determination of Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, Wife of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and Chairperson of NAMA, to bring concrete and incremental results to the region's women's empowerment process, NAMA continues to stress the importance of action informed by research and data-analysis. We are committed to adding to the body of research being done in this regard, which follows from our organisational strategy to promote a regional corporate culture that benefits from a clear, data-driven approach to women's inclusion in the workplace.

This publication will certainly add great value to regional efforts that are steering towards a corporate culture responsive to women's professional requirements and align these requirements with organisational programmes and policies to create more opportunities for women to succeed in the workplace.

The new study is in line with our mission to support one of the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – gender equality.

> " We believe this study will be crucial to understanding the impact of diversity and inclusion in the Gulf Region's private sector, and helping stakeholders generate a consolidated outlook for the region.

I would like to thank the Pearl Initiative for being excellent partners and congratulate the dedicated team that has worked on this study, for their cooperation. I also extend my gratitude to all individuals and organisations that participated in this research, which has helped us achieve our goal of collecting data that will surely assist in the development, monitoring and shaping of important policies and strategies to support women's full integration in the economy.

Diversity and inclusion and the business case for diversity have practically become a mantra for many businesses across the Region. As Diversity & Inclusion has gained mainstream acceptance, so too has the "business case" that has emerged as the centrepiece of the D&I efforts of many organisations. It figures prominently in keynote talks, diversity panels, and internal presentations alike, and when business leaders talk about D&I, the business case for diversity is always a main talking point.

This is a welcome result, as when we first launched our Diversity in Business Leadership programme in 2014, we wanted to demonstrate the value of diversity and inclusion for improved socio-economic outcomes. However, under its flashy exterior and the business case rhetoric, both regionally and globally, we continue to observe that organisations have some way to go in prioritising diversity, and particularly in ensuring that women are supported in a manner that benefits their career and long-term learning prospects.

It is not to say that organisations aren't implementing successful D&I strategies, as many do; however, there are still too many organisations with good diversity optics but are plagued with a revolving door of diverse talent and stagnant progress on important D&I issues.

> " Obtaining any lasting benefit from diversity requires more than just the presence or recruitment of a diverse workforce, but also effective leadership that can manage conflict, create cultures of inclusiveness characterized by psychological safety and growth mindsets, and make organisational change where needed to support a diverse workforce.

I am pleased to present the outcome of our research on gender diversity in business leadership reflecting on women's experiences in the workforce across the Gulf Region. We hope that this data promotes the dialogue on how to promote D&I in the workplace, but also triggers action-based outcomes in businesses regionally.

The data presented in this report is the result of extensive research comprising interviews, focus group discussions and an online survey. This journey has included engagements with organisations across various sectors and five countries in order to present economically valuable information that can support women in the economy, contributing to inclusive economic growth.

Held as part of our Diversity in Business Leadership programme, this report builds upon the legacy of our 2017 research on women in the UAE economy. With these new comprehensive insights into regional trends on women's workforce participation, businesses across the region can move from the question of why and glean lessons on how they can increase the diversity of the workforce effectively and create an environment that supports women's career ambitions.

It is important to remember that diversity in business is not limited to gender, it includes factors such as age, socio-economic backgrounds, and culture. Through diversity we gain the varied perspectives needed to tackle complex problems and come up with innovative solutions in business. In the future, we will be focusing on diversity and inclusion beyond the realm of gender, but until then, we hope that this report will serve to actively prompt more inclusion and diversity within workplaces, businesses, and organisations across the Gulf Region.

This programme is part of the Pearl Initiative's mission to promote best practices in business accountability and transparency. In the contemporary era where businesses are accountable to an even wider range of stakeholders than before, and where the same businesses have wide-ranging, multi-sectoral, and even multinational impacts, increased diversity should no longer be a simple call to action: it should be a way of life within businesses. When a business and its ecosystem reflect its diverse pool of consumers and participants, it remains accountable to the society it serves – thus boosting its standing in the economy.

I thank NAMA Women Advancement Establishment for their continued support throughout the lifetime of our Diversity in Business Leadership programme and its activities. I also wish to thank all our programme and organisational stakeholders for their involvement in, and support of, our programme. I also wish to thank PwC for their support with data analysis for this project.

pwc

Norma Taki
Middle East Transactions Service
Partner, Consumer Markets Leader,
and D&I Leader
PwC

Our commitment to driving the diversity and inclusion agenda extends beyond our daily practice at PwC Middle East. As one of our strategic priorities, we are committed to the advancement of this agenda in the communities we operate in. Collaborating with the Pearl Initiative on this report has supported our perspective of the ongoing dialogue on diversity.

Collaborating with the Pearl Initiative is important to us as we work to realise diversity as a strategic imperative for organisations in the region.

> " Diversity has been found to improve financial performance, breed creativity and innovation, and is an integral factor in navigating the digital revolution.

We released our report, 'Women in Work - Insights from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA),' at the World Economic Forum in Jordan. Our recommendations come into play when analysing the findings of the Pearl Initiative's report, **Women in the Economy - The Gulf Region Outlook.**

Raise awareness and transparency to alter mindsets, dismiss gender stereotypes and bias in organisations and encourage cultural change, with a change in tone that starts at the top. Both reports found that men are generally more optimistic when it comes to workplace interventions currently in place to support women in the workplace. While it is encouraging that many organisations are making strides to drive diversity and inclusion, more needs to be done to bridge the gap between leadership and people on the frontline.

Flexible working is a growing trend around the world and offers benefits for both male and female employees. Companies should also consider introducing paternity leave, which could boost their ability to retain talent - male and female. As we work to level the playing field and strive for balance in the workplace, it is crucial to create a working environment suited for the workforce of the future.

Apply a data driven approach. The best intentions and interventions are not enough to influence real change. Data driven strategies will really help to move the needle and effect change. Organisations need to track promotions to monitor progress and workforce surveys that track the career paths of high-potential individuals.

Accountability is needed. Organisations should appoint someone within the leadership team to be accountable for improving diversity and inclusion. Our collective findings are aligned in recognising leadership accountability as key to driving impactful change. But equally, each of us should take accountability in doing what we can. In its simplest form it is the responsibility to ensure we build and support an inclusive workplace culture to support everyone.

We are pleased to have undertaken this work with the Pearl Initiative and are confident that more work in this space will drive action for the change we aspire to achieve across the region.

4.0

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

4.1 | OBJECTIVES

This research aims to comprehend the extent of women's engagement in the Gulf Region economies and to present and proliferate data and knowledge on this regard. It also presents organisations with recommendations to help them support women's careers and minimise unfavourable workplace and career impacts.

Moreover, the research aims to:

- Facilitate evidence-based changes across regional workplaces that will support women's careers and economic engagement,

- Generate data-driven conversations on the business case for increased diversity and women's economic engagement, and

- Pave the way for further research and engagement on this subject, where there is presently a dearth of data, and in turn encourage action within this field at a policy and programme level across all economic sectors.

4.2 | SCOPE

To explore the extent of women's engagement in the Gulf Region economies, the research examined the following:

- The experiences of women in their respective sectors and workplaces,

- The factors that hinder women's workplace and economic engagement,

- The factors that support women's workplace and economic engagement,

- The ways in which regional workplaces can increase diversity in a meaningful manner, and

- Women's personal vocational expectations as they pertain to career movement.

4.3 | THESIS

This research posits that the nature and extent of women's economic engagement across the Gulf Region is impacted negatively by unfavourable workplace outcomes and policies rooted in gender-based discrimination and adverse treatment. Companies can address these unfavourable outcomes by listening to women in their workplaces, reforming their organisational policies to address women's concerns, and implementing targeted solutions to sector- and workplace-specific concerns.

5.0

GLOSSARY

DIVERSITY

The term "diversity" in the social context refers to the recognition of differences in backgrounds and personal dimensions, such as race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, and so forth. It goes beyond the simple acceptance of differences and works to consciously acknowledge and work toward social, cultural, and economic structures of equality and respect. Diversity also includes a relational aspect, where individuals and groups must learn to relate to other individuals and groups who may hold different qualities and face different conditions.[1]

GENDER

Gender refers to the constructed and acquired behaviours and experiences that are ascribed by society to individuals. This is in contrast to sex, which is biologically ascribed and determined by genetics and anatomy.[2]

The terms 'men' and 'women' refer to gender, whereas 'male' and 'female' relate to sex.
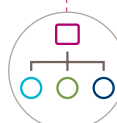
THE GLOBAL INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION STANDARD (GICS)

The Global Industry Classification Standard, or GICS, is an economic categorisation tool developed by Standard & Poor and MSCI in 1999. Organisations are classified under 11 categories and 158 sub-industry categories on both qualitative and quantitative evaluations of their primary activities.[3] This report uses the GICS industry classification in its analyses.

ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT (INDIVIDUAL)

Economic engagement is used to describe any activity undertaken by individuals that results in paid labour within a formal economic sector. In this report, the term is used to refer to individuals' economic engagement and not that of countries and country-level policies.

WORKPLACE

A workplace is used to describe any location where individuals undertake paid economic activity as part of their careers or jobs. This broad definition would thus include individuals who do not work in formal offices and institutions, as well as their contributions to the economy through their activities.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious bias refers to the stereotypes determined by individuals outside of their conscious awareness. These subconscious stereotypes stem from an individual's previous experiences and growth within a cultural context.

[1] Queensborough Community College, "Definition for Diversity," last accessed June 24, 2019, http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/diversity/definition.html.

[2] Emily Esplen and Susie Jolly, "Gender and Sex: A Sample of Definitions," BRIDGE (Gender and Development), Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2-4: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1fdc/5ca19d953d50102dc2ae4a6cd08c91043135.pdf.

[3] "GICS – Global Industry Classification Standard – MSCI," MSCI, last accessed June 20, 2019, https://www.msci.com/gics.

6.0

METHODOLOGY

The business case for increased women's economic engagement in the Gulf Region and globally is well-known. However, the mechanisms and solutions to enable this increased engagement must be built upon direct feedback from core stakeholders – namely, women currently, previously, or in the process of being engaged in the formal labour force. Collecting and consolidating data relating to this feedback ensures that business and economic leaders gain insights into the lived experiences of women in the workforce and their expectations as related to their workplaces and careers.

In this vein, the following research has directly surveyed women and men currently engaged in the Gulf Region labour force to gain their perspectives on how women are currently represented in the economy, as well as what women are experiencing as employees in varied industry sectors. This research was undertaken with the hope that the data collected can be translated into effective internal policy changes that can transform a workplace's approach to diversity, and its treatment of its women employees.

DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected between May 2019 and October 2019 to support this research. Data collection tools included:

- A literature review that comprised of secondary sources and information on diversity and women in the workforce, and the business case for increased diversity,

- A comprehensive survey released online which targeted working professionals across Bahrain, Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, and

- Stakeholder meetings and one-on-one interviews that engaged multiple cross-industry professionals.

All respondents – both within the survey and in interviews – were assured of anonymity and extensively briefed on the scope and objective of this research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

Primary qualitative data gathered from participating sources has not been fully disclosed in order for respondents to remain anonymous.

The survey was taken by a greater number of women than men, thus reflecting their insights to a greater extent than those of men.

Most of the respondents were located in the United Arab Emirates, thus moderately skewing the data to reflect trends in that country. **The uptake of survey participants from other Gulf countries has been low. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised across the Gulf Region.**

The number of respondents across each sector varied widely and was not consistent, meaning that any inter-sectoral comparisons may not be representative.

7.0

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While conducting the research for this report, our survey documented one respondent asking the following question: "Why are we still trying to promote gender diversity in the 21st century?"

At first glance, the question seems unsympathetic. However, as our report demonstrates, the same question validates the fact that many individuals and businesses need to understand the social and business necessity for gender equity and increased diversity. The data presented in this report aims to create a narrative about women's experiences in the workforce, and what organisations can do to actively support women and utilise their skills and potential for business success.

This report is part of the Pearl Initiative's commitment to promoting diversity in business leadership to promote healthy and thriving economies across the Gulf Region. It follows on from our 2017 report, **Women in the Economy: The UAE Outlook**, which examined the extent and nature of women's economic engagement in four sectors of the UAE's economy. This new report examines the same areas but expands the scope of the data to cover five countries and eleven economic sectors across the Gulf Region.

This report offers regional insights on restrictions to the career progression and engagement of women, factors facilitating women's career advancement, and recommendations for organisations to improve their support for the inclusion of women, both in the private and public sector workforce. The report also sheds light on the lived experiences of women in the workforce in parallel with their commentary on the steps that their organisations should take to support them in their careers.

This report was also designed to fill a data gap across the Gulf Region through primary and secondary research, and to offer solutions for decision-makers to consider in promoting diversity and inclusion across regional economies and within organisations.

7.1 | KEY FINDINGS

Our cumulative research (consisting of the survey and one-on-one interviews) demonstrates that there is still a long way to go for Gulf Region economies to support women and, in turn, facilitate true human resource development for economic success. While many organisations have taken steps to support women through diversity and inclusion policies, women employees still report being marginalised at work and having to face an uneven playing ground when it comes to achieving their career goals and work outcomes.

Women reported that their careers were extremely important to them and that their careers are driven by a desire for respect, self-motivation, personal growth, and independence. However, nearly half of all women reported personal obstacles to their career – primarily, they do not want to sacrifice other aspects of their life for work. Second, women reported that taking career breaks negatively impacted their careers, and a lack of confidence held them back at work.

Within organisations, unconscious biases, having children, and preconceptions of women's roles and responsibilities were reported as hindering women's career progression, demonstrating that organisations have to go above and beyond to address the manner in which women are viewed and treated in the workplace to create a supportive, gender-equitable culture. In terms of workplace structures and policies, the top three factors hindering women's career advancement were:

1. Gendered stereotypes and misconceptions;
2. Demanding work hours and conditions; and
3. A lack of supportive workplace policies for women.

RESPONDENTS ALSO STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT MEN WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE MANAGERIAL POSITIONS ACROSS ALL SECTORS.

Men report being more optimistic than women about the extent of their sector and organisations' initiatives to support women, signalling a clear divide between the perceptions of men with respect to diversity initiatives and the experiences of women on the same. However, both genders are optimistic about the potential that diversity and inclusion policies hold for women when actively applied by organisations. Particularly, a supportive organisational culture and leadership commitment to women's workforce engagement were reported as the most influential factors that facilitate the career progression of women within organisations. Respondents aspire to see a positive tone from the top that guides all aspects of the organisation in supporting women and actively facilitating their career development and growth. Other factors that were reported as supporting women were training and development opportunities for women, actively considering women in hiring and succession planning, and ensuring a flexible work-life balance.

Since respondents are hopeful about the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives, organisations should persevere and implement effective policies that support women in the short and long term for cumulative business success. In this regard, organisations should:

Ensure a strong tone from the top

Create a bias-free organisational culture

Implement gender equitable policies, particularly relating to work-life balance and hiring policies

Offer women employees targeted support through activities such as mentorship programmes

This will ensure that the working cultures of organisations and the policies in place therein actively consider the experiences and expectations of women in their growth plans while also giving women the room and resources for career advancement. This, in turn, will enable a happier and more productive workforce that will enable inclusive economic prosperity for organisations.

8.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

The business case for diversity has been a robust topic of discussion across global workplaces and economic sectors for decades, with governmental organisations mandating a multitude of policies to promote diversity and inclusion. To this end, it is essential to understand diversity as a business imperative rather than mere social lip service, particularly in this increasingly globalised era.

[4] Gloria Moss, "Introduction," in Profiting from Diversity: The Business Advantages and the Obstacles to Achieving Diversity, ed. Gloria Moss (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010): 3-4, 9.

[5] International Labour Organization, Women in Business and Management: The Business Case for Change, 2019, xii, https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_700953/lang--en/index.htm.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Sam Bridge, "Saudi Unemployment Falls As More Women Join Workforce," Arabian Business, June 18, 2019, https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/422326-saudi-unemployment-falls-as-more-women-join-workforce.

[8] Bessma Momani, "Equality and the Economy: Why the Arab World Should Employ More Women," Brookings Center Doha – Policy Briefing, 4, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/bdc_20161207_equality_in_me_en.pdf.

[9] Jeni Klugman and Laura Tyson, "Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment," UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment 2016, 2, http://www2.unwomen.org/~/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-report-2016-09-call-to-action-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1028.

[10] Ibid.

[11] International Labour Organization, Women in Business and Management, 29-47.

[12] OECD, "Breaking Down Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment: Policy Approaches to Unpaid Care Work," OECD Development Policy Papers, no. 18 (2019): 15; The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018, "Overview – SDG Indicators," last accessed June 24, 2019, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2018/overview/.

[13] World Economic Forum, "The Global Gender Gap Report 2018," 2018, 13, www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.

[14] "Labor force, female (% of total labor force)," World Bank, last accessed June 23, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS.

[15] Momani, "Equality and the Economy," 3.

[16] Momani, "Equality and the Economy," 3; Dalacoura, "Women and Gender," 13.

[17] Catriona Purfield, Harald Finger, Karen Ongley, Bénédicte Baduel, Carolina Castellanos, Gaëlle Pierre, Vahram Stepanyan, and Erik Roos, "Opportunities for All: Promoting Growth and Inclusiveness in the Middle East and North Africa," IMF Departmental Papers, no. 18/11 (2018): 23.

[18] Katarina Dalacoura, "Women and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa: Mapping the Field and Addressing Policy Dilemmas at the Post-2011 Juncture," MENARA Final Reports, no. 3 (2019): 12.

[19] Purfield, Finger, Ongley, Baduel, Castellanos, Pierre, Stepanyan, and Roos, "Opportunities for All," 52.

[20] International Labour Organization, Women in Business and Management, 31-32.

[21] Dalacoura, "Women and Gender," 14.

[22] Fariba Solati, Women, Work, and Patriarchy in the Middle East and North Africa (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2017): 15.

[23] Ibid., 56-57

For example, as the range of stakeholders that a business engages with grows, so too does their need to engage with a diverse range of opinions and outlooks to offer business outputs and products that cater to this this diversity. To cater to this external diversity,[4] businesses require internal diversity that mirrors their stakeholder base.

Gender diversity is potentially the most-discussed pillar of business diversity. Global trends have shown that bringing women into the economic fold and supporting their careers is beneficial both socially and economically. A survey conducted by the International Labour Organization demonstrated that businesses with increased gender diversity reported "improved business outcomes", which in turn led to increases in profitability.[5] The same survey reported that businesses with increased gender diversity reported improved reputations, innovation, and ease in hiring and retention.[6] This demonstrates that increased gender diversity in the workplace should be a core business mandate for all economic sectors.

Similar arguments can be made for increased gender diversity in workplaces across the Gulf Region. In the second quarter of 2019, women's labour force participation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rose to 20.1% as national unemployment dropped, demonstrating one of the many social benefits of engaging women in the workforce and increasing workplace diversity.[7] It has also been estimated that having an equal number of men and women in the national workforce in the United Arab Emirates would increase national GDP by 12%.[8] Bringing women into the fold and increasing gender diversity within organisations should therefore become a priority for regional economic sectors and their participants.

Despite the convincing evidence proving that more women in the workforce is mutually beneficial to women, businesses, stakeholders, and countries, significant gaps remain in engaging women economically, both globally and across the Gulf Region. Internationally, there are 1.27 billion women in paid labour in contrast to 2 billion men, and women are thrice as likely to take on unpaid labour.[9] When women perform the same roles as men, they are paid less on average, and often work in roles that reflect gender stereotypes or match local expectations of "women's work".[10]

Women tend to be hired in large numbers in junior and mid-level positions but remain poorly represented at managerial and executive levels in organisations, demonstrating the "leaky pipeline" effect.[11] Additionally, international trends show that women take on the bulk of unpaid care work – as much as 76% - which impedes their economic contributions and ability to take on paid labour in the formal workforce.[12]

The 2018 World Gender Gap Report saw Gulf Region countries ranked low when it came to women's economic participation and opportunity:[13]

RANKING:
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY (OUT OF 149)

133	127	148	143	137
Bahrain	Kuwait	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Oman	United Arab Emirates

Women's labour force engagement also requires a boost across the Gulf Region.

World Bank and International Labour Organization statistics for 2018 show promising employment statistics – particularly when comparing the percentage of employed women in most Gulf Region countries from 1998 to 2018.

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

COUNTRY	1998	2018
Bahrain	20.6%	20.5%
Kuwait	24.4%	25.5%
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	13.8%	15.9%
Oman	15.4%	12.8%
United Arab Emirates	11.9%	25.5%
Average	17.2%	18.4%

Indicator: Women employed in the national labour force as a percentage of the total labour force[14]

Across the Gulf Region, women surpass men in terms of educational qualifications, but this does not translate into parallel growth in the labour force. While there are greater numbers of women enrolled in universities than men, the number of women in the labour force itself is still significantly lower than men's labour force enrolment.[15] Additionally, statistics show that women in universities across the Gulf Region are primarily enrolled in the arts and humanities sectors, later going on to be employed in the public sector.[16]

Studies show that women in the MENA region are three times less likely than men to seek employment; when they do, they are twice as likely not to get a job.[17] This means that there is a population of educated and qualified women who are not engaged in economic activity, which in turn means that national economies and organisations are losing out on the products of this unengaged labour force. This is often referred to as "the MENA paradox", as this pattern is visible beyond the Gulf Region as well.[18] In fact, the MENA region has the 'largest gender workforce participation gap in the world'.[19]

In the private sector, the global phenomenon of the leaky pipeline sees women enter the workforce in large numbers, but their representation diminishes as the management levels increase. This trend is mirrored across the MENA region, where only 10.2% of businesses had a woman as their CEO, and 58.6% reported having women as only 1% to 29% of their senior management-level employees.[20] Similarly, 'glass walls' see women in the workforce segregated in departments considered "traditionally feminine", such as Human Resources, Marketing, and Communications. Women in the Gulf Region are also poorly represented in the public sector and in managerial roles, and the wage gap between men and women in the region stands at 40%.[21]

Social constructions of gender also greatly influence the way men and women interact with each other across the public and private spheres of life. The imposition of socially gendered norms on women may limit their entry into the workforce, and even dictate the nature of any jobs they might take on. Numerous studies have shown that women undertake an extensive amount of unpaid labour, which includes housework, caring for relatives and immediate family, and other tasks socially defined as "domestic". Research also shows that educated and / or qualified women may find themselves taking on unpaid work or not even entering the workforce in their areas of expertise because related jobs are considered "socially inappropriate".[22] Finally, unsupportive family members – particularly immediate family – can prevent women from taking on paid roles and limit their activities in the public realm.[23]

The way women in the Gulf Region enter into, remain within, and exit the formal labour market differs from other global trends, and must be understood within a localised context. To understand the range of women's experiences as they participate in the labour market and the workplace, and to understand why some women enter the workforce whilst others exit or do not enter altogether, it is essential to gather and analyse data that asks these questions to Gulf Region labour force participants. Understanding the patterns in this data will help policymakers and organisations act appropriately and create harmonious, inclusive workplaces that foster diversity and value women's workforce engagements.

This information collectively poses the following questions:

● What are women's experiences in the workforce?

● What is preventing women from entering and remaining in the workforce?

● How can women in the workforce be supported for socio-economic development?

Our report seeks to answer these questions in the data presented and the recommendations we propose.
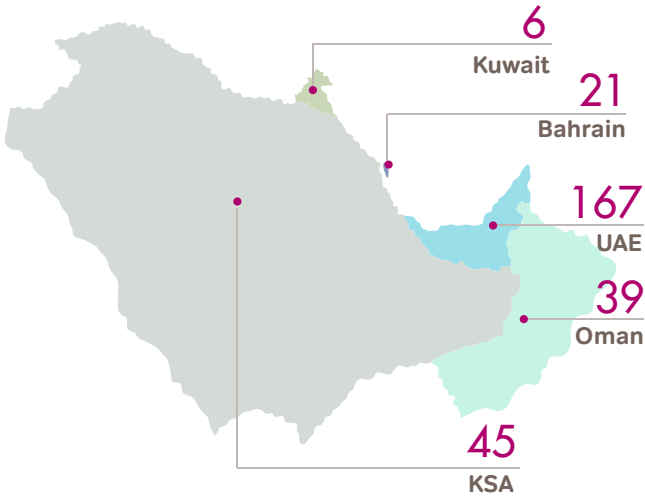
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DEMOGRAPHICS

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

The survey had **278** respondents – all employed from different career levels in the private sector - across the five Gulf Region countries and from across 11 business sectors.

NUMBER OF SECTORS SURVEYED

- Energy
- Industrials
- Consumer Staples
- Financials
- Utilities
- Communication Services
- Materials
- Consumer Discretionary
- Healthcare
- Information Technology
- Real Estate

As per the Global Industry Classification Standard

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES AND RESPONDENTS

6 Kuwait
21 Bahrain
167 UAE
39 Oman
45 KSA

SECTOR BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS

Sector	Value
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT	83
INDUSTRIALS	42
FINANCIALS	38
COMMUNICATION SERVICES SECTOR	31
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	22
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	18
HEALTHCARE	11
REAL ESTATE	11
MATERIALS	8
UTILITIES	7
CONSUMER STAPLES	7

GENDER BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS

90 MEN
188 WOMEN

■ MEN
■ WOMEN
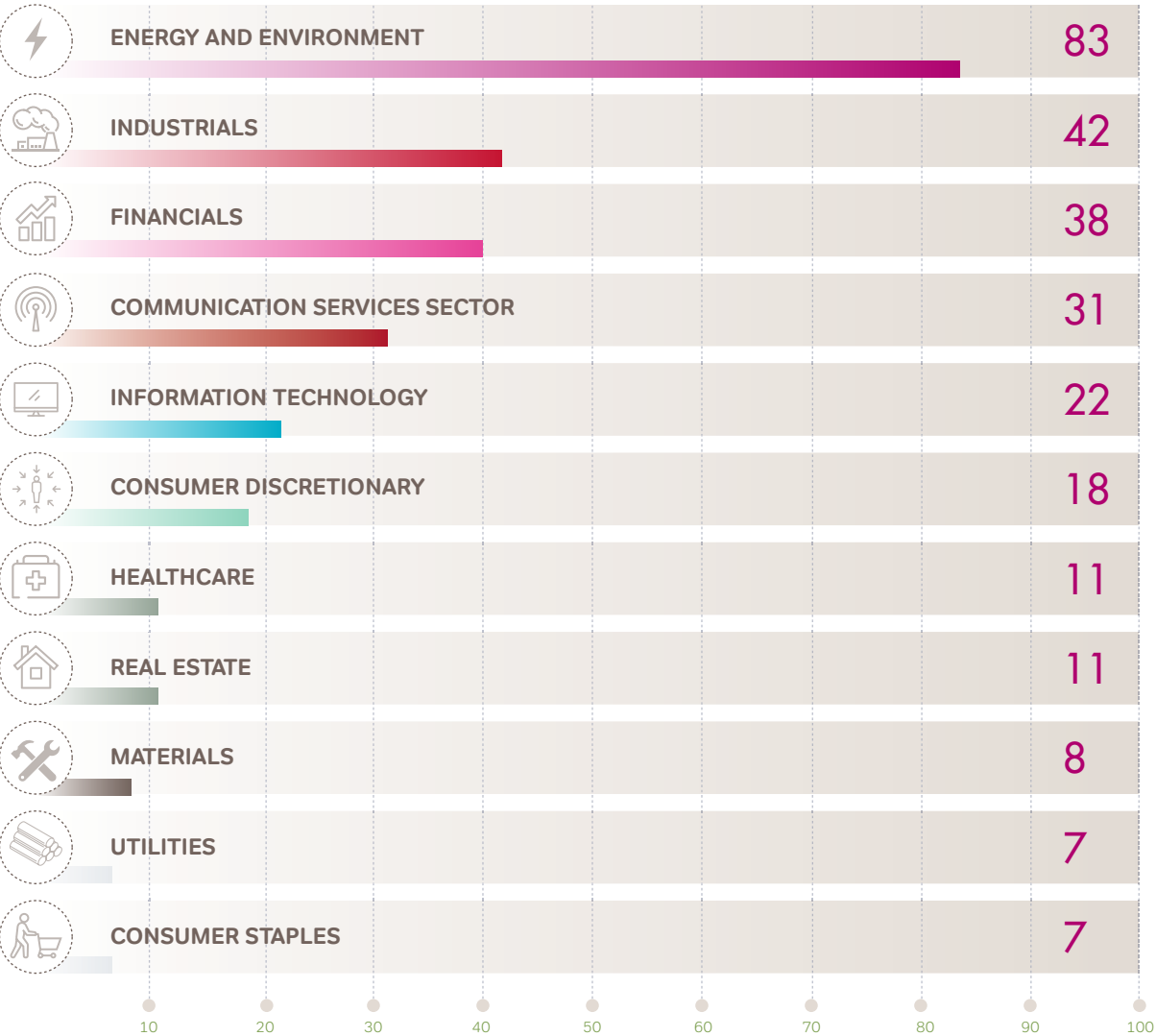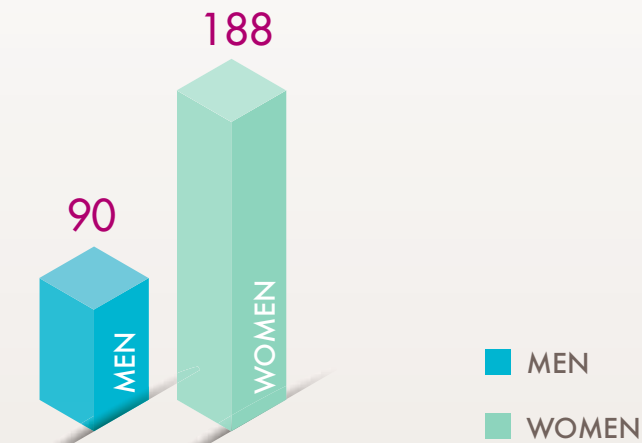
AGE AND GENDER BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS

■ MEN
■ WOMEN

Age	Men	Women
18-22	1	1
23-25	1	16
26-30	5	43
31-35	11	47
36-40	14	31
41-45	15	15
46-50	19	20
51-55	8	9
56-60	9	7
Above 60	11	2

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Qualification	Value
High School Diploma	9
Bachelor's Degree	115
Diploma/Professional Certifications	31
Postgraduate Masters	106
Doctorate (PhD)	17

EMPLOYMENT LEVEL

Level	MEN	WOMEN
Partner/Owner	7	9
Board Level	1	1
Top Level Management	19	29
Middle Level management	41	49
Junior Level	11	29
Entry Level	1	4

■ MEN
■ WOMEN

NATURE OF CURRENT ROLE

Role	MEN	WOMEN
A combination of office and fieldwork	37	35
In the field	1	11
Office Role	46	129
Other	6	13

■ MEN
■ WOMEN

RESULTS

PRESENT STATE OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Respondents across the Gulf region appear to be optimistic about the initiatives of their organisations' in promoting diversity and the level of women's engagement as employees. However, there is a notable difference in optimism between men and women on all statements, demonstrating that perceptions of gender equality in the workplace may not reflect the lived realities of working women.

Women were less convinced about the supportive nature of organisational work culture in supporting their careers than men were. Similarly, women were also less convinced that they were offered the same opportunities as men in their workplaces, that they had the same opportunities for career progression than men, and that they were being paid the same as men for equal responsibilities.

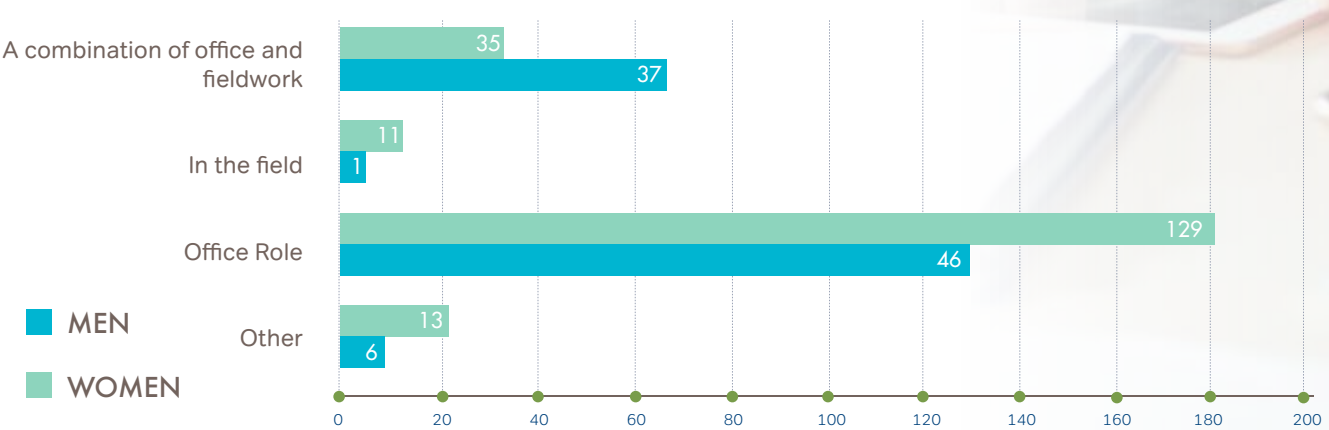## PRESENT STATE OF DIVERSITY IN RESPONDENTS' ORGANISATIONS
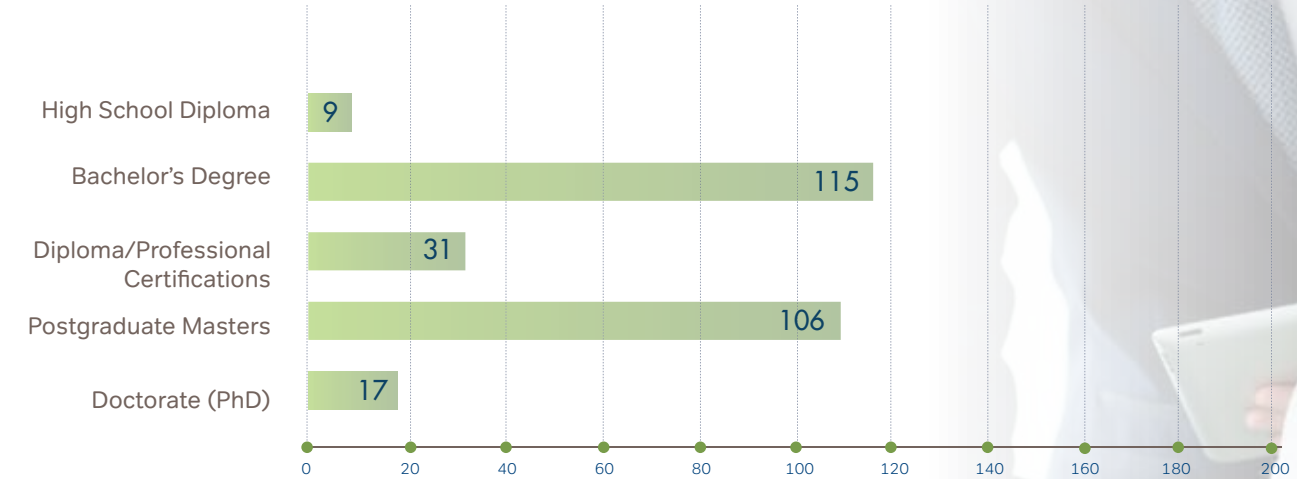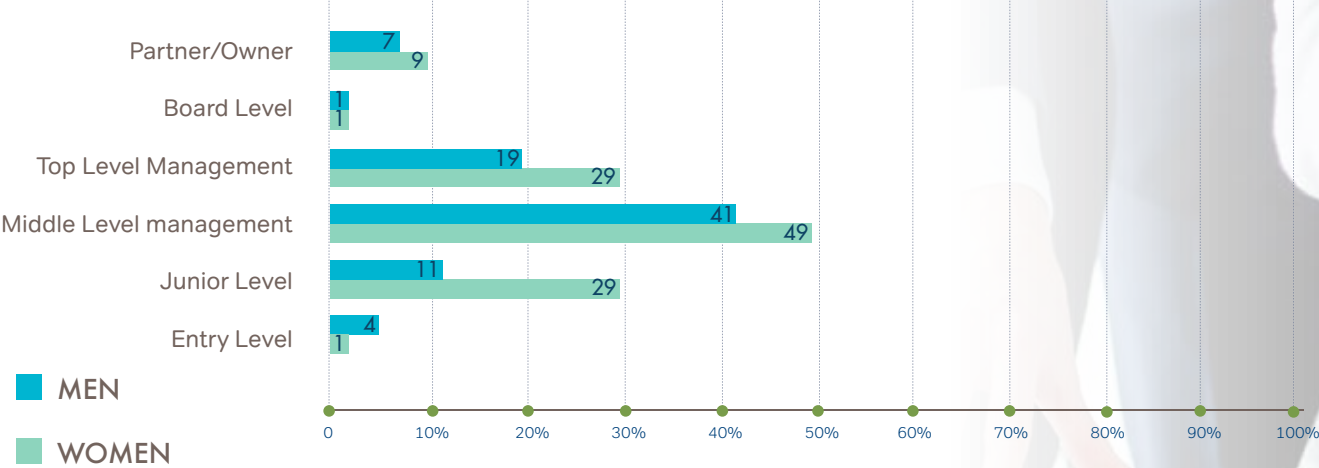
STATEMENTS	OVERALL	WOMEN	MEN
My organisation's leadership is actively trying to empower and promote women employees.	79%	72%	94%
My organisation actively raises awareness about the issues related to women's careers within the organisation and/or sector I work in.	59%	50%	79%
My organisation's work culture supports women employees.	76%	69%	91%
My organisation helps women employees achieve work-life balance through relevant initiatives.	58%	46%	82%
Work appraisals from my organisation's leadership have incentivised women employees to rise to senior positions.	54%	48%	68%
Women employees in my organisation get the same opportunities as men employees.	70%	65%	80%
Women employees in my organisation get the same benefits and facilities as men employees.	77%	72%	88%
The perception of work-life balance at my organisation is equal for both men and women.	71%	66%	80%
Men and women with the same credentials have the same opportunities for career progression.	67%	58%	86%
Men and women are being paid equally for the same responsibilities and roles.	66%	57%	84%
My organisation offers meaningful internship and mentorship opportunities to encourage women to join work.	65%	59%	77%
An equal number of job applications are considered from both genders for every available position.	54%	51%	61%
Job roles assigned to women adequately utilise their professional qualifications and skillsets.	77%	72%	89%

Note that while 79% of men believe their organisations are actively raising awareness to support women's careers, only 50% of women reported the same. Similarly, while 82% of men believe their organisations help women achieve work-life balance, only 46% of women reported the same.

Interestingly, 62% of women respondents without children reported that the perception of work-life balance in their organisations was equal between the genders. However, 71% of women with children reported feeling the same way, which is higher. This fact may be attributable to a trend where women without children are expected to work longer hours as they "do not have responsibilities", which in itself plays into a social construct that women with children perform less work due to familial responsibilities. In that sense, flexi-hours are important for women, as is work-life balance, but there is also a common trend (not noted in the survey) that unmarried / childfree women should "do more" at work because they "do less" at home.

82% of men with children also believed that the perception of work-life balance in their organisations was equal between the genders, but when compared to 71% of women with children feeling the same, there is still a difference between the lived realities of both genders – potentially because more women than men are engaged in the burden of caring for children than men due to social constructs of gender.

The majority of the survey's respondents (73%) reported having a man as their immediate line manager. This was true for both men and women and reveals the lack of women in management positions regionally.

Most companies (70%) across the region were reported as having a non-discrimination and equal opportunity policy (either stand-alone or included in a broader corporate policy), which is a positive development and shows organisational commitment to enshrining equality in internal policies. However, simply having policies is not enough – they must be enforced to enact change.

Respondents reported that the number of women in senior management roles in their organisation was low. Over half of all respondents (51%) reported that the percentage of women managers in their organisations was 10% or lower, demonstrating that there is still progress to be made in ensuring qualified women are actively given opportunities to be industry leaders.

Percentage of women in senior management roles within respondents' organisations

33% Less than 5%
18% 5% - 10%
17% 11% - 20%
18% 21% - 40%
9% 41% - 60%
4% More than 61%
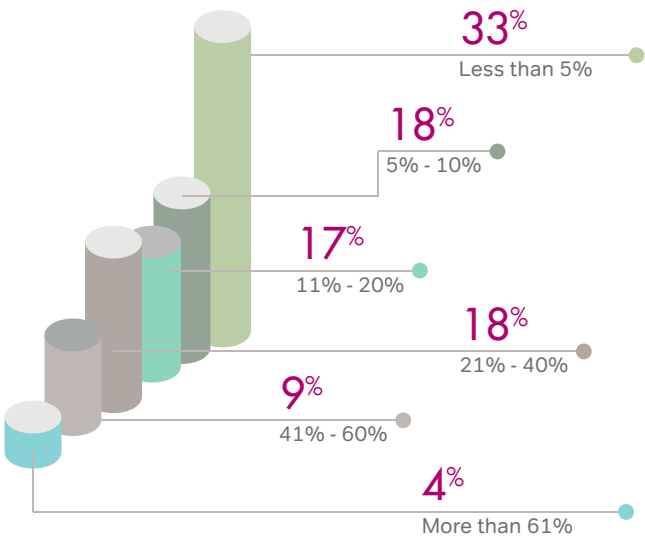
Hiring for women was relatively even: while 17% reported that less than 5% of new hires were women in their organisations, 12% reported that women were 41% to 60% of new hires. However, it is significant that most respondents did not have insights into how many women were hired, potentially suggesting that internal hiring policies may not be as transparent or open to employees.

Percentage of women hired in respondents' organisations

22% Unsure
17% Less than 5%
12% 5% - 10%
12% 11% - 20%
15% 21% - 40%
12% 41% - 60%
9% More than 60%
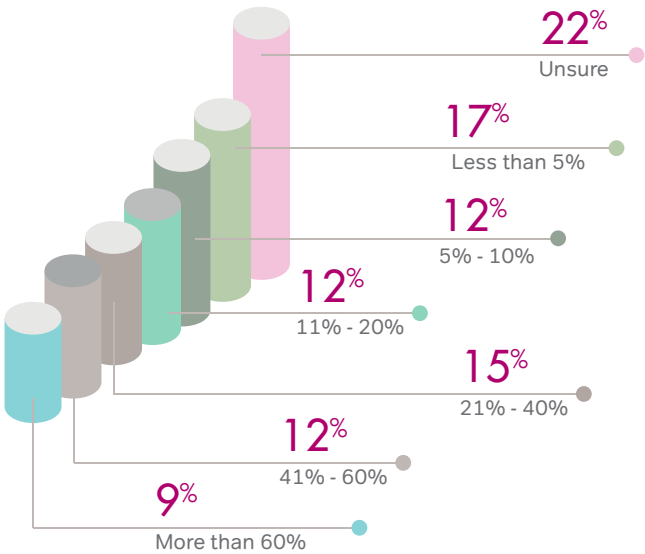
The survey asked respondents to report on how they utilise their time across their day to understand if gendered social conditions play a role in the distribution of duties and imperatives between the workplace and the domestic sphere.

Both men and women reported spending approximately about the same amount of time at the office and at home. Men spent approximately one (1) more hour on leisure activities than women, and women spent a few more minutes on both domestic tasks and in the office than men.

DIVISION OF TIME (AVERAGE HOURS) - WOMEN

4.6 Domestic Tasks
9.7 Leisure
9.7 Income Generation
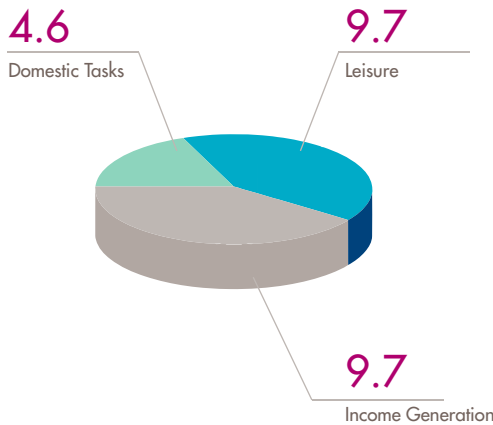
Average time distribution for activities in a day as reported by women respondents

DIVISION OF TIME (AVERAGE HOURS) - MEN

4.1 Domestic Tasks
10.2 Leisure
9.6 Income Generation
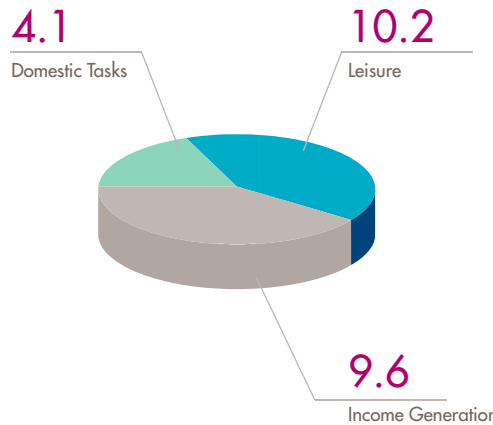
Average time distribution for activities in a day as reported by men respondents

47% of respondents believed that women in their respective sectors were always qualified to work there, and 35% believed that women are often qualified. This perception is essential to understand how women's competencies and skills are being perceived – which in turn could impact their inclusion on projects and work responsibilities, as well as their career progression.

FACTORS HINDERING WORKPLACE PROGRESSION

Organisations and sectors have made great strides in supporting women's economic and career ambitions; however, women still report challenges in the workplace that hinder their career ambitions, and in some cases, even cause them to leave the workforce altogether.

When asked about the factors that hindered women's career progression within organisations, the highest aggregate factor reported was **unconscious bias.** However, the top factor reported by men was different. Men reported that having children is what affected women most in the workplace, placing unconscious bias second. This suggests that men's perceptions of issues impacting women in the workplace may be based on information asymmetry.

FACTORS HINDERING WOMEN'S WORKPLACE PROGRESSION

AGGREGATE	OVERALL	WOMEN	MEN
Unconscious biases	43%	46%	36%
Having children	43%	39%	50%
Preconceptions of women's roles and responsibilities	39%	44%	29%
Lack of support within the organisation	30%	36%	17%
Lack of a career path	30%	36%	19%
Pressure from spouse	21%	18%	26%
Lack of role models	19%	22%	13%
Marriage	18%	13%	29%
Pressure from extended family	17%	12%	27%
Other	9%	8%	11%

These results were in line with one-on-one interviews, where respondents stressed the negative impacts of gendered biases and a lack of flexibility from companies when women employees had children or were looking after their families. Women in particular reported feeling distanced from their duties at work by management upon having children or taking on familial responsibilities.

In terms of workplace policies and procedures, respondents noted that **gender-based preconceptions and stereotypes** were the largest obstacle for women. **Demanding work hours and conditions**, as well as a **lack of sector-specific policies to support women**, were also seen as hindrances for women's careers.

Men appeared to believe that a **lack of requisite knowledge and skills** hindered women in the workplace, but women reported that a **lack of policies supporting them** was a concern. This contrast in perceived experiences versus lived should be noted when strategizing solutions to increase support for women in offices: if men are perceiving women as less than capable of performing their tasks, and if women report that workplace structures are not supportive, it could foster a work environment that is not effectively engaging all employees, meaning that the full potential of all employees is potentially not being utilised for business outcomes.

More than a third of women (37%) also reported a **lack of leadership commitment to diversity** as another factor that hindered their career progress at work.

ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES THAT AFFECTED WOMEN'S WORKPLACE PROGRESSION

	OVERALL	WOMEN	MEN
Gender-based preconceptions / stereotypes	49%	52%	44%
Demanding work hours and / or conditions	47%	45%	53%
Lack of policies supporting women's advancement	36%	41%	24%
Lack of leadership commitment to gender diversity	31%	37%	18%
Lack of training and development programmes	28%	29%	24%
Lack of requisite knowledge and skills	27%	21%	38%
Women in managerial or high-level positions are held to higher standards	24%	30%	11%
Lack of requisite educational qualifications	15%	12%	22%
Other	5%	5%	6%

Most male respondents were **unsure** as to why women left their jobs when they did. However, women reported **a lack of professional advancement, a devaluation of their work outputs and efforts**, and **a lack of work-life balance** as the top three reasons why they left their jobs. However, men reported that they were **unsure** as their reason for women departing the organisation. Yet again, we see a discrepancy in reporting lived and perceived experiences by women and men, respectively.

FACTORS THAT AFFECTED WOMEN'S DEPARTURE FROM AN ORGANISATION

	OVERALL	WOMEN	MEN
Unsure	31%	25%	43%
Family pressures or concerns	30%	26%	39%
Lack of professional advancement opportunities	29%	35%	18%
Lack of work / life balance policies	26%	31%	17%
Devaluation of work and effort	23%	31%	7%
Lack of childcare facilities or parental support policies	23%	25%	20%
Lack of support for women in the organisation	20%	24%	11%
Logistical issues	19%	18%	21%
Lack of job roles that are in alignment with educational qualification and professional experience	17%	18%	16%
Unequal pay	11%	14%	4%
Other	10%	9%	12%
Harassment and / or unethical behaviour towards women	4%	6%	1%

INITIATIVES ORGANISATIONS CAN TAKE TO INCREASE DIVERSITY

The top three factors that all respondents – both women and men - believed helped facilitate career growth for women are:

1. a supportive organisational culture,

2. leadership commitment to supporting women in the workforce, and

3. recruitment opportunities for women.

This is in line with the factors women reported as reasons for leaving the workforce: having a supportive culture and a positive tone from the top would create professional opportunities, facilitate work-life balance, and value the work that women do, the lack of which were noted as reasons why women choose to quit their jobs.

This correlation demonstrates that workplaces should solicit feedback from their employees to understand what is hindering their workplace engagement and what employees are looking for in a positive work environment.

A third of respondents also noted that the presence and provision of training and development opportunities for women (32%), as well as role models for women in their workplaces (31%), would be active facilitators of career growth and development for women employees.
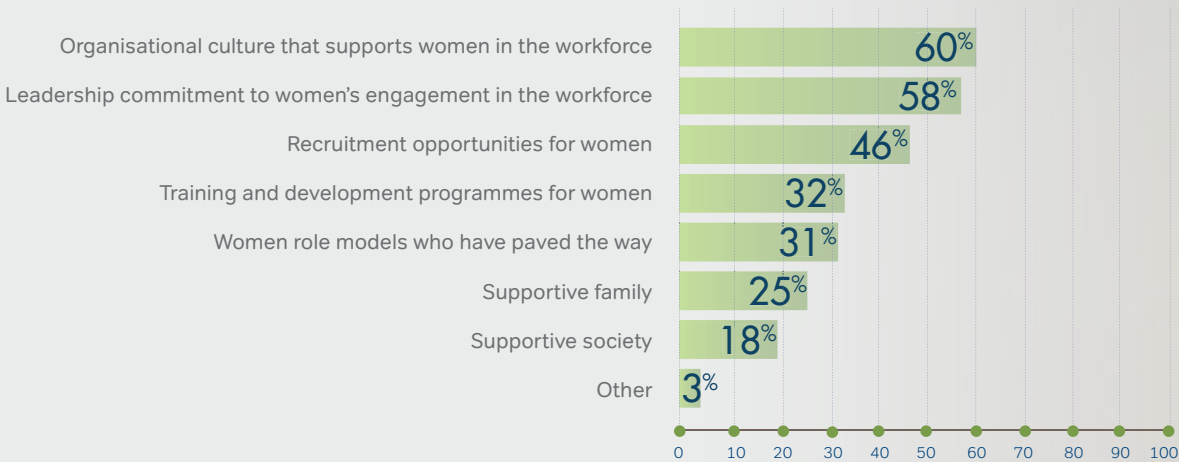
Percentage of perceived organisational factors supporting women

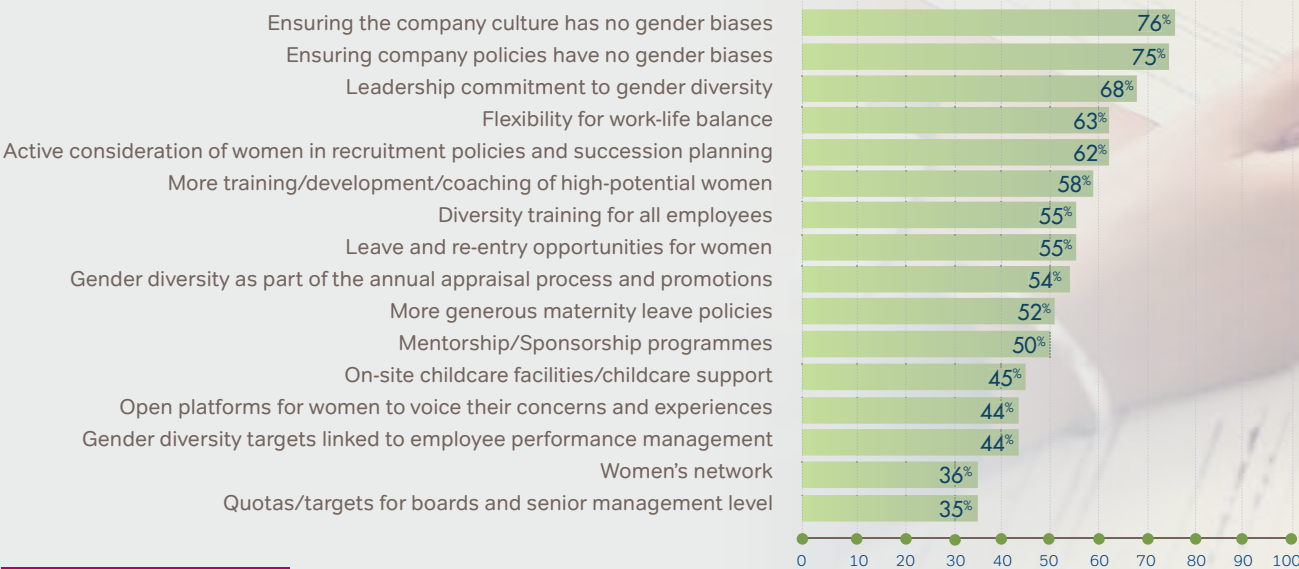| Factor	Percentage
Organisational culture that supports women in the workforce	60%
Leadership commitment to women's engagement in the workforce	58%
Recruitment opportunities for women	46%
Training and development programmes for women	32%
Women role models who have paved the way	31%
Supportive family	25%
Supportive society	18%
Other	3%

These results also reflected the information obtained from one-on-one interviews, where respondents noted the value of a positive organisational culture and active leadership engagement in diversity and inclusion as key drivers of women's career development. It was noted that a supportive organisational culture for women would contribute to their growth and inclusion, and that organisational leaders need to lead by example by setting the right tone from the top for all employees when it comes to supporting women.

Respondents were highly positive about all the major initiatives and global best practices that have been proposed to retain and develop women in the workforce. Of particular importance was **ensuring that company policies and culture have no gender biases** followed by an a**ffirmation of commitment to diversity by organisational leadership**.

In essence, employees are looking for a positive tone from the top from their organisational leaders to promote and maintain gender equality and diversity in their companies.

The top three results were the same across all demographic factors, including respondents of both genders, and those with and without children. Other policies were also largely given the same importance by respondents.

36% of all women employees believed a women's network would be beneficial towards retaining and developing women, while 58% of women respondents also believed the training, development, and coaching of high-potential women would be of benefit.
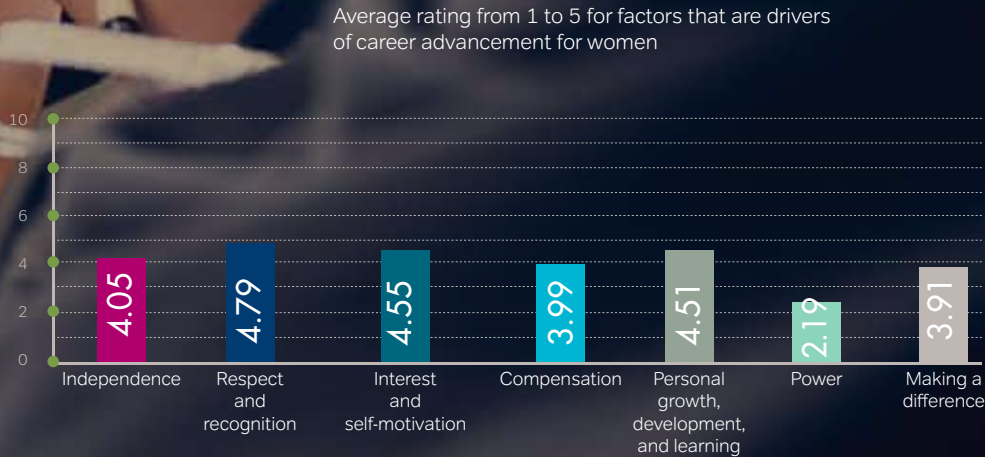
This also reflects the information gathered during one-on-one interviews, where interviewees expressed enthusiasm for a positive, inclusive work culture, leadership affirmation towards women's career development, and the implementation of flexible work policies and procedures. Interviewees were also enthusiastic about having specialised training, development, and mentorship opportunities for women - these were noted as opportunities to learn both hard and soft skills for career advancement, and as networking opportunities.
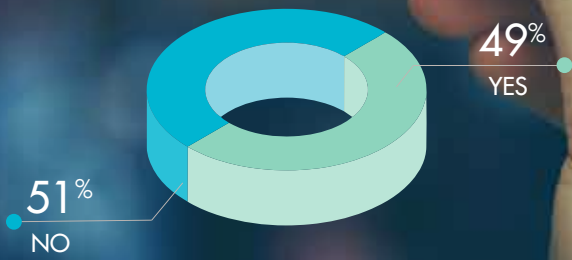
PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Women respondents of the survey answered questions specifically geared towards them to gauge their personal aspirations and career objectives. Men were not surveyed for the purposes of this section.

The vast majority of women respondents asserted that their career was extremely important to them. When asked to rate how important their career meant to them on a scale of 1 to 5, 65% of women offered a rating of 5.

Women reported being driven by **respect and recognition, interest and self-motivation, and personal growth** to further their careers. Independence, compensation, and making a difference were also secondary factors.

Percentage of the perceived effectiveness of policies to retain and develop women in the workplace

Policy	Percentage
Ensuring the company culture has no gender biases	76%
Ensuring company policies have no gender biases	75%
Leadership commitment to gender diversity	68%
Flexibility for work-life balance	63%
Active consideration of women in recruitment policies and succession planning	62%
More training/development/coaching of high-potential women	58%
Diversity training for all employees	55%
Leave and re-entry opportunities for women	55%
Gender diversity as part of the annual appraisal process and promotions	54%
More generous maternity leave policies	52%
Mentorship/Sponsorship programmes	50%
On-site childcare facilities/childcare support	45%
Open platforms for women to voice their concerns and experiences	44%
Gender diversity targets linked to employee performance management	44%
Women's network	36%
Quotas/targets for boards and senior management level	35%

Average rating from 1 to 5 for factors that are drivers of career advancement for women

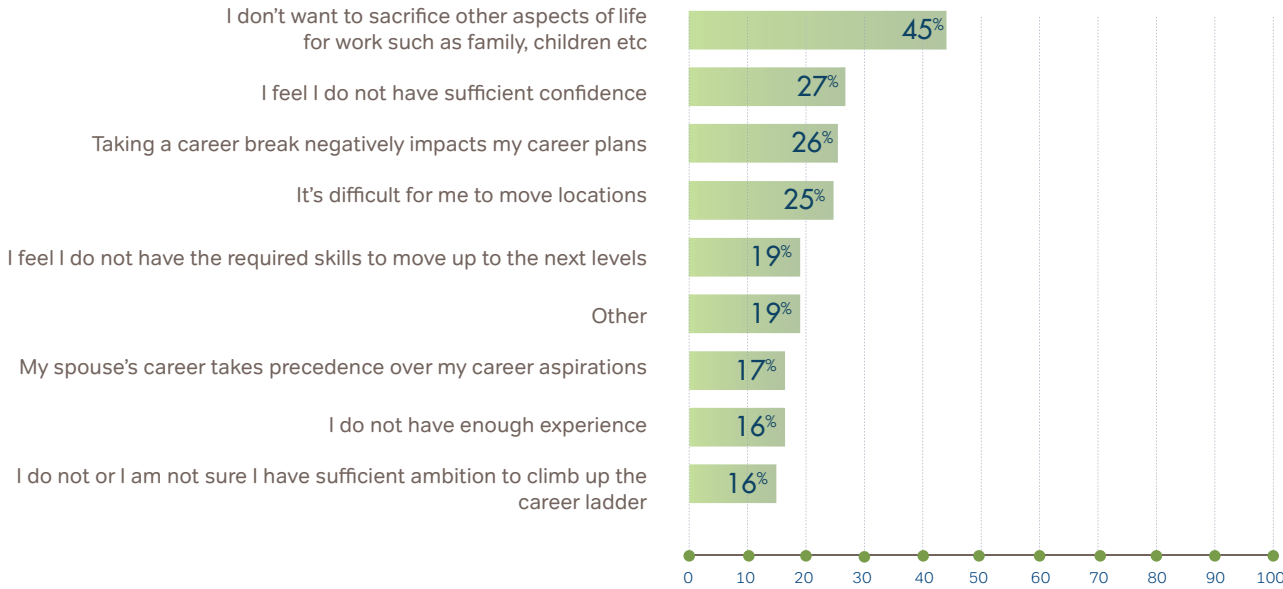| Factor	Rating
Independence	4.05
Respect and recognition	4.79
Interest and self-motivation	4.55
Compensation	3.99
Personal growth, development, and learning	4.51
Power	2.19
Making a difference	3.91

49% YES

51% NO

Percentage of women facing personal obstacles to their career aspirations

Of the women who did report facing obstacles, most (45%) did not want to sacrifice other aspects of their life for work (i.e. wanted a good work-life balance). Others (27%) believed they did not have the confidence it takes to get ahead, and a third segment (26%) said that taking a break from working negatively impacted their careers.

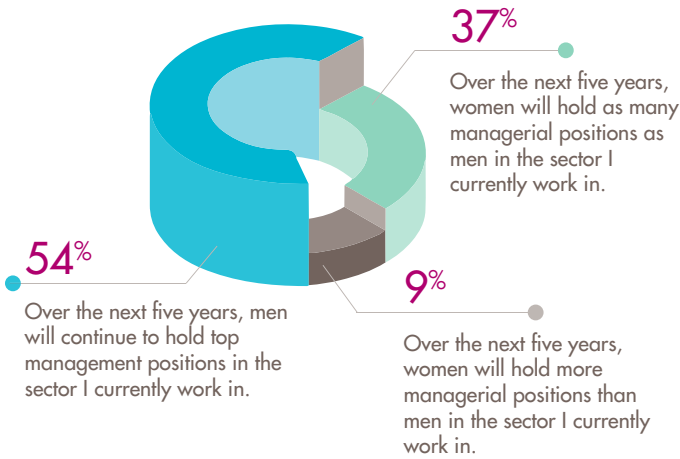**THE NUMBER OF WOMEN WHO REPORTED FACING PERSONAL OBSTACLES AND THOSE WHO DID NOT IS NEARLY EQUAL.**

I don't want to sacrifice other aspects of life for work such as family, children etc	45%
I feel I do not have sufficient confidence	27%
Taking a career break negatively impacts my career plans	26%
It's difficult for me to move locations	25%
I feel I do not have the required skills to move up to the next levels	19%
Other	19%
My spouse's career takes precedence over my career aspirations	17%
I do not have enough experience	16%
I do not or I am not sure I have sufficient ambition to climb up the career ladder	16%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Percentage of responses to obstacles women face with regards to their career aspirations

FUTURE OUTLOOK

In an earlier part of the survey, 79% of all survey respondents reported their belief that their organisation's leadership was actively trying to promote and develop women; however, 54% of the same respondents strongly believed that in the next five years, men would continue to hold more management positions than women. 37% believed that the same number of men and women would hold management positions in the same time frame.

This outlook represents how respondents feel about the future of diversity in their organisations and reflects what they are witnessing in their workplaces today. As men hold significantly more managerial positions than women at present, and as women employees continue to feel unsupported or marginalised at work, women are not as optimistic about women moving into leadership positions. Nonetheless, there is a quiet optimism that can be increased as companies take the steps to boost their support for women employees.

37%
Over the next five years, women will hold as many managerial positions as men in the sector I currently work in.

54%
Over the next five years, men will continue to hold top management positions in the sector I currently work in.

9%
Over the next five years, women will hold more managerial positions than men in the sector I currently work in.

Percentage of responses to future trends for management positions

11.0

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Increased diversity is no longer just "the right thing to do" for businesses across the globe: there are proven, demonstrated benefits to promoting inclusion and having a diverse workforce.

Organisations that facilitate increased diversity witness increased employee performance as employees feel supported and included in workplace outcomes and development efforts. While businesses have certainly taken many steps toward progress in terms of women's workforce engagement, there are still opportunities for them to achieve greater business success by pioneering support structures for women employees. With women comprising half of the population, it serves to confirm that supporting them in the workplace can only positively impact an organisation's bottom line.

This report demonstrates that women are driven by ambition to further their careers, but also that there are significant reasons why they feel unsupported in their respective workplaces. Factors such as unconscious biases, unequal treatment, and a lack of work / life balance create discontent and reduce the productivity and inputs of women in the workforce. This, in turn, leads to reduced economic benefits for organisations that are unable to harness the talents and contributions of women.

COMPANIES MUST ENABLE, FOSTER, AND ENTRENCH DIVERSITY AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE FOR IMPROVED BUSINESS OUTCOMES.

[24] Debra E. Myerson and Joyce K. Fletcher, "A Modest Manifesto for Shattering the Glass Ceiling," in Harvard Business Review on Managing Diversity (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2002), 75.

[25] Drude Dahlerup, "The Critical Mass Theory in Public and Scholarly Debates," in Deeds and Words: Gendering Politics after Joni Lovenduski, ed. Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs (Essex: ECPR, 2014), 137.

[26] Ibid., 157-158.
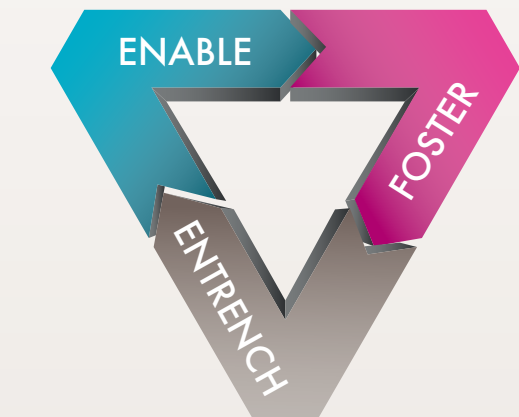
Often the recommendations to promote gender equality and increased diversity cater to the 'symptoms' of inequality, rather than the sources of all inequalities that are present and negatively impacting the workforce.[24] It is important to integrate diverse experiences into broader company policies and create an environment where women are comfortable working outside gendered expectations and beyond restrictive company cultures.

Organisations must recognise that diversity and inclusion initiatives will support their economic outcomes whilst simultaneously promoting social development. There is tremendous business value to be found in creating policies that recognise the challenges faced by women employees in workplaces, including patching the leaky pipeline that sees women exit formal employment and labour markets. Additionally, diversity and inclusion in companies directly benefit the communities they operate within by offering increased career prospects while also generating local value. By moving beyond a solely profit-centric case for diversity and recognising the benefits achieved through community engagement, key metrics, and empathy for women (and other minorities), diversity and inclusion can be a core pillar of corporate stewardship.

EVERY POLICY / SOLUTION MUST BE COGNISANT OF THE INDUSTRY AND SECTOR IT WILL APPLY TO, AS COMPANY AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES DIFFER ACROSS THESE.

ENABLE

FLEXIBLE WORK HOURS AND POLICIES	Women employees often identify a lack of work-life balance as a core impediment to their happiness at work. On the one hand, social conditioning and expectations see women compelled to take on familial duties and commitments (such as childcare) that men are not expected to bear; on the other, women who seek to spend more time with their loved ones find it difficult to do so.

Organisations should implement flexible work hours and policies that support employees who need to manage family obligations, healthcare, and other non-work-related concerns. This would particularly help women, who face the double burden of their work in the office and at home, and who should be trusted by employers to balance their time in a way that accommodates their familial commitments.

Flexible work hours and policies also create a level playing ground for men and women to equally share domestic responsibilities and reduce the burden on women to do so, or without any negative repercussions on their careers. |
| **PAID FAMILY LEAVE** | Women often bear the brunt of care work within families, and take care of not just their immediate families, but also other relatives (particularly within joint families). Introducing paid family leave for both men and women would provide all employees the time to take care of their loved ones. It would also recognise the social burden placed on women to engage in care work while balancing a career and offer family units the chance to decide who engages in care work according to familial needs. |
| **MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE** | While maternity leave is offered to women in many industries, it is often not enough for women to take care of their health and well-being both while expecting children and once their children are born. Maternity leave policies must support women in a manner where they will be able to manage their health and children. Organisations must also view maternity leave as an intermission, not a derailment in work outputs.

Additionally, paternity leave must be institutionalised, as this allows men to spend time with their children and families whilst sharing domestic responsibilities. When companies offer only maternity leave, they inadvertently promote the gendered stereotype that women are the sole caretakers for children and prevent men from playing an equal part in taking care of childcare. Equitable maternity and paternity leave would also offer employees the opportunity to distribute childcare within their family units as they see fit. |
| **'CRITICAL MASS' (30% REPRESENTATION)** | In terms of diversity, critical mass refers to having 30% of a body – whether in the workforce or otherwise – consist of women.[25] Critical mass then begins a process wherein the individuals who make up the 30% are able to facilitate impactful and eventually self-sustaining change.

As demonstrated in the survey and in international research, more men are managers and hold senior-level positions than women. This means that women are not given the chance to lead when they are more than capable of doing so. When organisations create critical mass for women, they enable women to get opportunities to enter workplaces and job roles where they might not otherwise find work for a variety of reasons (such as biases in recruitment and retention). It also gives organisations the chance to recruit and benefit from a pool of talent that would otherwise be denied the chance to grow and succeed – whether it is in management or in the boardroom – and to be ethically evaluated on the basis of their work and not their gender.[26] |

FOSTER

ENTRENCH

HOLISTIC POLICY APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY

Diversity policies cannot be drafted and implemented in silos within organisations – they must be intersectional, cross-influential, and wide-ranging. Successful diversity policies will analyse all the concerns that women face in the workplace, how they impact each other, and create solutions that collectively support women in the workplace.

Policies such as hiring and retention, employee benefits, and skill development should all be examined in unison to understand how women are collectively impacted by these policies and what they need to be supported and successful. More importantly, a holistic approach will help transform company culture and create room for women to be emboldened, included and have increased development opportunities in the workplace.

"TONE FROM THE TOP" AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

A supportive tone from the top is crucial towards instilling an organisational culture of support for women and other minorities. Transformational leadership should be visible and combined with follow-ups (including monitoring and evaluation activities) to ensure that women are being supported, that equitable treatment is the foundation of all organisational policies, and that policies and initiatives that have been established to encourage women's workplace engagement are achieving their intended results.[27]

Senior management must be at the forefront of all diversity initiatives and actively promote and implement them.

MENTORSHIP / SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES

Our research – both one-on-one meetings and the survey – shows that women value and seek out mentorship opportunities in the workplace. Having a mentorship or sponsorship programme would facilitate a transfer of skills and help level the playing field whilst providing women employees a chance to expand their horizons and contribute to organisational success.

Mentorship and sponsorship programmes in the workforce for women give "the old guard" a chance to pass along their insights to women who might otherwise be excluded or not given the chance to grow their skillsets. They would help women gain access to leadership opportunities through networking and inter-level connections, give them access to organisational information and resources, and help them address gendered concerns in the workplace with some comfort.

TACKLING GENDER-BASED INDUSTRY STEREOTYPES

Along with broader social biases, each industry and sector has its own gendered stereotypes of women, which negatively impact women's economic engagement and career development. Organisations must go above and beyond to address these stereotypes within their sectors and their workforce to ensure that women are not penalised for misconceptions that exist pertaining to their capabilities and career expectations. It is only when women are given the same opportunities as men and when gendered outlooks are challenged by organisations that an equitable playing field will be created for women to succeed in the workplace.

COLLECTING ORGANISATIONAL DATA ON DIVERSITY

Organisations should collect data on employee diversity and implement monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of their diversity and inclusion policies understand if their policies are having their intended effects or if they require change.

This data will help organisations understand how they can improve their policies or modify internal practices to effectively support women in the workforce. This data could also be used to give women employees feedback on their performance to support their career development.

Data collection could also tell a story of success in supporting women employees, potentially creating best practices in diversity and inclusion policies that can be rolled out across the organisation or the sector.

ADDRESSING GENDER BIASES

Biases are usually entrenched in daily practices and routines. Efforts must be made to address conscious and unconscious biases, in hiring and at work. Conscious efforts must be made to examine older policies to see if any practices or outcomes are inherently biased, and if biases exist in policy implementation or in employee behaviours. Organisations should uncover what gender biases look like within their industry and workforce and take active steps to mitigate these and ensure women are supported for positive career outcomes.

SHIFTING ORGANISATIONAL COMPOSITION

Organisations should examine how they hire women, how many are brought in during the fiscal year, how many women they retain, and why women decide to leave or stay. Changing how the workforce looks by having a gender-equal balance of employees and taking active steps to support women is essential for maintaining diversity in the workplace.

[27]Judy B. Roesner, "Ways Women Lead," in Issues in Business Ethics: Leadership, Gender, and Organization, ed. Patricia Werhane and Mollie Painter-Morland (London: Springer, 2011), 20.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND DIVERSITY IN BUSINESS

Corporate governance refers to 'a system of rules, practices, and processes' that support the management and activities of a business.[28] Corporate governance is meant to ensure that a business manages all its stakeholders and their interests in an ethical and expedient manner, and this includes employees and the wider public.

Promoting diversity and inclusion should be a core pillar of any business' corporate governance structures. Supporting women within a workforce is an integral part of an organisation's commitment to business ethics, and both management and employees must be actively engaged in the social and business cases for gender diversity in the economy.

To effectively cater to all stakeholders as well as the business' economic interests, diversity of opinions and operations is essential. Having a diverse workforce that represents a business' stakeholder base will ensure diversity in business outputs and decision-making.

Additionally, increased diversity and support for women employees will give businesses access to a larger workforce and ensure that they do not miss out on the skills, talents, and potential of women in the workforce. Diversity prevents groupthink when it comes to strategic decision-making because it actively involves diverse experiences and viewpoints that can potentially avoid poor commercial decisions.[29] This is particularly important when it comes to decision-making at senior management and board levels, as siloed thinking at higher organisational levels has the potential to overlook concerns from a variety of stakeholders and / or take an individual approach to business, rather than a collaborative one.
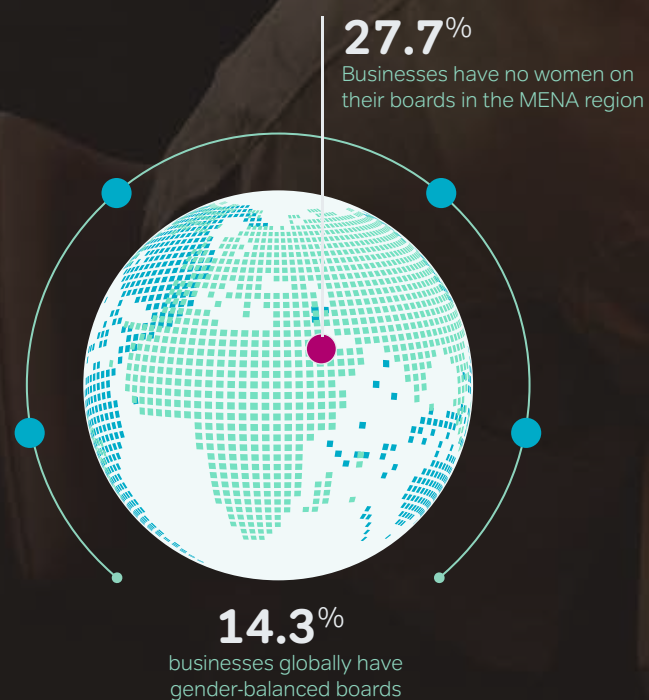
27.7%
Businesses have no women on their boards in the MENA region

14.3%
businesses globally have gender-balanced boards

Globally, only 14.3% of businesses have gender-balanced boards. In the MENA region, 27.7% of businesses have no women on their boards, and women make up only 1% - 10% of the board in 35.4% of MENA businesses.[30] If 50% of a business' stakeholders are women, then it serves to reason that women must be represented across senior management and participate in decisions that impact the customer base. Diversity and inclusion in the boardroom signal a business' openness to a range of ideas, decisions, and experiences whilst demonstrating positive leadership.

Supporting women in leadership across organisations also helps shift industry and internal stereotypes as well as the type of work and roles that women perform. Research – including the Pearl Initiative's discussions with senior women professionals – demonstrates that women employees are often siloed in departments such as Human Resources and Communications that are perceived as "non-strategic".[31] These glass walls hinder women's career growth, prevent women from attaining leadership roles in other departments or job functions, and limit diversity in management styles that could support a business and its employees. By making the promotion and support of women in management a governance priority, businesses can increase their bottom lines and augment their business performance.

Training and development are core functions of many business' personnel management and human resource strategies, which fall under corporate governance. To promote diversity and inclusion, businesses should use training opportunities to host discussions and activities that address conscious and unconscious biases, and create opportunities for women employees to be mentored or sponsored by senior employees and managers. If needed, human resource hiring strategies should also be changed to reduce biases in hiring women and minorities, and when considering promotions and career opportunities for employees.

Women employees should also be a core part of any business' stakeholder and risk management protocols. When producing business outputs, or when creating and implementing new policies, women should be heard in the decision-making processes and should be included as part of every stakeholder group – at critical mass (i.e., 30% of a body should be women) if possible. Without this diversity of opinions, a business risks taking poorly informed decisions by missing out on varied outlooks, experiences, and insights.

[28] Carla Koffel and Jack Mikaelian, Enhancing Gulf Business Competitiveness (Sharjah: Pearl Initiative, 2017): 8.

[29] Peninah Thomson and Tom Lloyd, Women & the New Business Leadership (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011): 15.

[30] International Labour Organization, Women in Business and Management, 49, 51.

[31] Ibid, xiii.

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NAMA WOMEN ADVANCEMENT ESTABLISHMENT

VISION

AN EQUITABLE WORLD FOR WOMEN

MISSION

TO PROVIDE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN TO ACCESS KNOWLEDGE, SERVICES, SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND RESOURCES, THROUGH A DEVELOPMENT NETWORK THAT ADVANCES THEM TO REACH THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL.

OUR PURPOSE

Nama Women Advancement Establishment (NAMA) was founded in 2015 by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, Wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah.

At NAMA, we are determined to mobilise the means required to create enabling environments to advance gender equity and inclusive economic and social growth. NAMA's efforts stem from its core philosophy that women advancement is a fundamental requirement for the sustainable development of nations.

Through its three affiliates; Sharjah Business Women Council, Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council, and Badiri Education and Development Academy, NAMA designs and implements initiatives that support women across the economic, professional and social sectors.

NAMA also engages with grass-roots and international organisations as part of its comprehensive approach towards developing an ecosystem in which women's full potential is realized.

For more information, visit **www.namawomen.ae.**

OUR PURPOSE

Fostering a Corporate Culture of Accountability and Transparency in the Gulf Region

Founded in 2010, the Pearl Initiative works across the Gulf Region to improve corporate accountability and transparency. It is a regionally-focused growing network of business leaders committed to driving joint action, exhibiting positive leadership, and sharing knowledge and experience in order to positively influence regional business and student communities towards implementing higher standards.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Established in Cooperation with the United Nations Office for Partnerships

Strategic Partnership with the United Nations Global Compact

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

• Gulf Region Focus
• Drive for Competitiveness
• Non-Profit Independent Organisation
• Created by Gulf Business, for Gulf Business

OUR PRESENCE

The Pearl Initiative operates across the Gulf Region of the Middle East.

KEY TOPICS OF INTEREST:

GOVERNANCE BY THEME
• Anti-Corruption Best Practices
• Diversity in Business Leadership
• Corporate Reporting Best Practices

GOVERNANCE BY SECTOR
• Governance in Micro, Small and Medium-sized Businesses
• Governance in Family Firms
• Governance in Philanthropy
• Governance in Tech

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER
• The Business Pledge
• Executive Education

The Pearl Initiative believes strongly in the power of collaboration and its ability to have a multiplying impact in promoting a thriving economy in the Gulf Region underpinned by a Private Sector that embraces good governance as a pillar of sustainable growth.

The Pearl Initiative works with regional and international companies operating in the Gulf Region and other international organisations to foster greater insight and appreciation of the business case associated with the implementation of corporate governance.

WHAT WE DO:

To reach and influence business and student communities, the Pearl Initiative:

SHARES INSIGHTS:
We develop and publish reports, insights and good practice references to help businesses independently enhance their capabilities.

CREATES NETWORKS:
We bring together business, government and civil society decision makers to share best business practices and help maximise the economic opportunities available in the region.

BUILDS KNOWLEDGE:
We help build knowledge by bringing experts together with businesses, and host a series of complimentary workshops, roundtables, focus groups and training sessions.

INSPIRES ACTION:
Our focus on impact and collective action guides what we do to ensure we are working together with the community to inspire action and expand opportunities for all.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

29

Regional Insight reports and publications

177 ★★★★

Events and workshops across the Gulf Region

8,667

Event participants from across the Gulf Region

40

Universities engaged across the Gulf Region

7,337

University students reached and engaged

407

High-level regional and international speakers

PEARL INITIATIVE PARTNER NETWORK
As of January 2021

Please get in touch if you would like to become a partner company of the Pearl Initiative at **enquiries@pearlinitiative.org.**

Partner logos: ABDULRAHMAN SALEH AL RAJHI AND PARTNERS Co.Ltd. · asdaa Burson-Marsteller · aramex delivery unlimited · Bank of Sharjah · BMB Share the Joy · CCC · CHALHOUB GROUP · CRESCENT ENTERPRISES · Crescent Petroleum · DANAGAS · EY · Global Partnerships Forum · Gulftainer · IFC International Finance Corporation · KPMG · Khaled Juffali Holding Co. · NAMA WOMEN ADVANCEMENT ESTABLISHMENT · NESMA · pwc · RWE · sabic · saudi aramco · SIEMENS · Shell · stc · Tadawul · TAMER SA'AID · THE WORLD BANK