

*Gender inequality and how to promote gender equality
in the workforce*

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May 2021

C.D.A COLLEGE

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***Purpose:** This paper is a small report on gender inequality how it can be prevented in the workforce. In 2021, there are cases that women are still considered as weak and incapable of holding an important position either in the social or political workforce. Based on some statistics I found while researching on the topic, I realized that we as women can change this negative mentality that society in general has towards women and their skills. “And finally, in our time a beard is the one thing that a woman cannot do better than a man, or if she can her success is assured only in a circus.” (John Steinbeck, Travels with Charley: In Search of America)*

“It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.” (Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre)

According to a McKinsey study on women in the workplace, in the American business world, women are still underrepresented at every level. What it is more shocking, it is the fact that even today, American society still discriminates people of colour. Moreover, research revealed that women are not promoted in high positions not because they do not have the education level needed but because they are not considered capable of managing an entire company (<https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4178-gender-gap-workplace.html>).

Mandy Price the co-founder and CEO of Kanarys Inc., a platform that collects and analyzes cultural and demographic data which are used in forming broad work environments and cultures said that, "It is disconcerting to see that even though the business community is well aware of the benefits of a diverse workforce – such as innovation, employee retention and increased financial returns – there is still a lack of progress in closing the gender gap". (<https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4178-gender-gap-workplace.html>).

In the past two decades, Cyprus has been actively promoting equal employment opportunities for both men and women in the public and private sector. Equal employment opportunity (EEO) refers to the “freedom from discrimination on the basis of protected classes such as race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability or genetic information”. Both the public and private sector uses Diversity Management strategies in a deliberate effort by leaders to hire diverse talent and support an inclusive workplace. Managers are consciously trying to create work environments which values and protects each of its employees equally by providing resources to learn from, connect with and respect individual differences.

Although Cyprus is in favor of equal employment opportunities and there are cases that women are found in a more advantageous position than men, women are still considered less privileged. Gender inequality and discrimination between women and men prevail in the labor market of Cyprus. The vast majority of employees (90%) recognize incidents of inequality. 40% believe that there are wage differences between the sexes, while 20% also report sexual harassment at work. (Phileleftheros 4/3/2021)

Equality of the sexes has always been a basic goal of the Cyprus Government. Towards the end of the 1970s various measures within the framework of Strategic Development Plans were created targeting the expansion of facilities to support family and employment responsibilities. A legal framework was also designed so as to effectively deal with matters concerning gender discrimination. In addition, it aimed at improving the position of women in economic and social life.

The Committee on Gender Equality in Employment and Vocational Training of the Ministry of Labor conducted a survey among 800 employees, aged 18 to 65, from February 2020 to September of the same year. In particular, 90% of employees and all employers acknowledge the existence of gender inequality in the labor market in Cyprus. 86% are convinced that discrimination incidents occur more often in women. In addition, 40% believe in the existence of a pay gap between the two genders and 40% of women (mainly in the private sector) have faced problems related to their gender. Although might argue the existence of sexual harassment in the workplace 20% feel that they have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. What it is more worrying is that the vast majority (78%) stated that they have not reported the incident. (Phileleftheros 4/3/2021)

Furthermore, a very big percentage stated that highly paid positions are given to men although women might be more capable and qualified. This incident it is more common in

the private sector although things have changed in the last decade. For instance, in the education field it was more common to have a male director than a woman director. However, and speaking from a personal experience things have improved and we see more women leading an educational institution. Also, the number of women who study Business Administration has increased lately whereas in the past it used to be a male dominant environment.

In addition, 62% report that men have more opportunities for career advancement. 6% say that women have more opportunities, while 32% answer that they have equal opportunities. This perception is the most prevalent in the semi-public sector with a rate of 89%. In the private sector 69% report discrimination and in the public sector 58%.

If I were to describe Cypriot women throughout the years, I would definitely depict them as powerful and strong, clever and hard-working, capable and able to confront any kind of situation. In other words, Cypriot women are true leaders. Although we are brought up in a patriarch society where the man of the house is considered to be the as the ancient Greeks would say «ο άρχων» which means leader, I strongly believe that behind a successful family a strong and powerful woman is hidden.

The Cypriot woman was prominent in the household as a wife and mother, but at the same time was helping her husband in the fields without complaining. She was the one who woke up before dawn to bake fresh bread and milk the goats and set off her husband and children if any, to work or school. She was the one who made sure that there was always food on the table and clean clothes and last but not least she was the one that made sure that her family was close to God and praise Him day and night.

Moreover, it was not until after the end of the Second World War that women were given the right to education and access to the workforce. According to statistics, at the beginning of the century, the proportion of girls to boys attending primary education was one to three. In 1960 though when elementary education became compulsory the percentage of the two sexes was equal and by the 1980s the majority of girls graduated from secondary education and about 32% of girls left Cyprus to study abroad. In 2021 the percentages are by far higher and about 90% of women study at universities either in Cyprus or abroad.

Cyprus government encourages gender equality in the workforce and inspires and increases the participation of women in the work force and also aims at their fuller social inclusion. (http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page1f_en/page1f_en?OpenDocument) The numbers of women joining the workforce have increased and the role and the position of women in social

and economic life has been strengthened. Women have proved that they are not only good housewives and mothers but effective and successful professionals.

Furthermore, women have progressed in all fields such as politics, media, education, business. Even though, the number of women in managerial positions, the parliament and in other important positions has increased there is still a gender gap. According to statistics, “The largest share of new jobs is concentrated in the services sector which offers better terms and conditions of employment and favours the participation of women. In Cyprus today, about 15,000 women seem to prefer temporary employment while some 16,000, part-time employment in areas such as education, trade, agriculture as well as in processing industries, either because of favourable working conditions or flexible hours which help them combine family, social and employment obligations.”

How to create gender equality in the workplace?

Gender equality, also known as sexual equality or equality of the sexes, is the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviors, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_equality)

In other words, equality should not be defined by gender but depending on someone’s abilities and qualifications. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. (<https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1168>)

Besides following the labour laws and legislations, companies should emphasize on cultural and organizational changes to reduce gender inequality. The gender gap would not be solved by simply hiring more women but all sectors should try and create inclusive workplaces, where all employees should feel welcomed and appreciated as a study published in Science Magazine points out, diversity alone does not create inclusive workplaces.

Organizational changes

Organizational changes should be made in all type of firms, either in the private or public sector. Firstly, firms should start by employing more women and secondly promoting qualified women from within their own organization. McKinsey's statistics show that in the United States of America men currently hold 62 percent of manager positions, whilst women 38 percent.

According to Price, “companies must become assertive about gender diversity and treat it as an integral part of their business strategies. She suggested tying supervisors' bonuses to

diversity and inclusion objectives”. What is more, managers should be liable for creating a diverse work environment where all employees should be included and taken into consideration.

Moreover, all firms should promote transparent employment and promotion methods. In other words, all firms either in the public or private sector should establish a Human Resource Department. Human Resource Management is the “**Human resource management (HRM or HR)** is the strategic approach to the effective management of people in a company or organization such that they help their business gain a competitive advantage. It is designed to maximize employee performance in service of an employer's strategic objectives. Human resource management is primarily concerned with the management of people within organizations, focusing on policies and systems. HR departments are responsible for overseeing employee-benefits design, employee recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward management, such as managing pay and Employee benefits benefit systems. HR also concerns itself with organizational change and industrial relations, or the balancing of organizational practices with requirements arising from collective bargaining and governmental laws.[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_resource_management#:~:text=Human%20resource%20management%20\(HRM%20or,of%20an%20employer's%20strategic%20objectives\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_resource_management#:~:text=Human%20resource%20management%20(HRM%20or,of%20an%20employer's%20strategic%20objectives))

Furthermore, the Human Resource Department should be responsible for effective organizational changes such as constant evaluation reports so as to justify the promotion of employees of both genders. Also, the Human Resource Department should be responsible for better work conditions for both genders. For example, if a firm promotes flexible work schedules then all women qualified or not would benefit from it and be more active and productive in the demanding corporate world. Similarly, the human resource department should also be responsible and liable for all employments. Thus, if all procedures are transparent and well-explained, it would be easier for the gender gap to be reduced and all employees would be positioned to their departments and stations according to their skills and qualifications. Moreover, all departments would have their manager, who would be assigned according to academic and professional qualifications and not because of gender, and all employees would be responsible to report back to him / her. Therefore, the Human Resource

Department is very important in an organization / business and if it well-structured and organized then the benefits of the organization / business would be tremendous.

Cultural changes

“Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture.”

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, [We Should All Be Feminists](#))

Our workplace is our second house and we should feel it this way. It is very important to go to your work place and feel happy and a sense of belonging and acceptance. Thus, in order to bridge the gap, companies must create a respectful work environment for their employees. They should focus on cultivating the notion of equality, acceptance and fairness. If an employee feels that he or she is respected and appreciated by his / her superiors, then his / her work performance would be increased and perhaps unknown abilities and capabilities of an employee would be discovered that would benefit the firm in the long run.

Moreover, women can also benefit from cooperating other women. According to McKinsey one in five women said they were often the only woman, or one of the only women, in the room at work. More precisely, “women who are "onlys" have a significantly worse experience than women who work with other women, and about 80 percent of them receive micro-aggressions, which are verbal and behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults”. (<https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4178-gender-gap-workplace.html>). Thus, women who might have to face micro-aggressions incidents at work it is more likely to quit and leave their workplace or even have their qualifications and skills questioned. What it is more worst, it is the phenomenon of sexual harassment at the workplace. Lately, a lot of women admitted that they were victims of sexual harassment by men who either possessed power or were successful and famous in their work environment.

In addition, a work environment should not only be diverse but also inclusive so as for the gender gap to be eliminated. Price said that, “for businesses to truly benefit from the myriad backgrounds in the global economy, they must make room for everyone in their companies and empower them to speak up”.

In other words, culture is an essential key element of a successful environment. **Culture** is an umbrella term which includes the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the

individuals. We are taught culture through the learning processes of enculturation and socialization, which is shown by the diversity of cultures across societies. (Tylor, Edward. (1871). Primitive Culture. Vol 1. New York: J.P. Putnam's Son)

Moreover, we might have countless academic studies but culture is a notion that depicts our social character and it is above any academic studies and qualifications. In other words, culture is not only taught at school but at home as well. Culture is respect, socialization, appreciation and acceptance. Thus, firms must create a work environment that it will include and respect not only women but all employees so as to make them feel supported and accepted at their workplace.

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.” (Kofi Annan) In conclusion, gender equality would be achieved only when the two genders start to appreciate and respect each other. Moreover, emphasis should be given on increasing the number of women in the work force. Society and the political system in general should start to include more women in all fields. Obstacles which are created to prevent women from being present in the labour market should be eliminated and start to encourage women to be more actively present in various programs as well as promoting measures which permit the conciliation of employment with family life by introducing family friendly labour standards and employment methods and strategies. "It is time we all acknowledge that having a diverse and inclusive workforce is good for business," said Price. "The numbers simply don't lie".

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