

# Women's economic empowerment

GOOD PRACTICES



International Organisation of Employers  
Organisation Internationale des Employeurs  
Organización Internacional de Empleadores  
*The Global Voice of Business*



ACT/EMP  
The Bureau for Employers' Activities

# Key takeaways from a joint IOE and ACT/EMP survey of national employers' organisations, IOE partner companies and other businesses

The IOE (International Organisation of Employers) in partnership with the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) conducted a survey of employers' organisations and IOE partner companies in November and December 2017 with the aim of better understanding their experiences in promoting women's economic empowerment as an enabler for growth and building a knowledge base of good practices of representative employers and companies from around the world. Seventeen responses to the survey were received, from a range of different geographical regions, providing a useful insight into the trends and representation of women in these organisations and businesses.

Women's economic empowerment is an integral part of an effective response to the changing world of work, if only because women represent at least half of the world's potential human resources. There is an undeniable economic and business case for women's economic empowerment in the workplace, market place and community. Strengthening the economic, political, and social positions of women is fundamental to economic growth and development, as well as to enterprise productivity, competitiveness and value creation.

The survey results show that national employers' organisations and member companies in both developing and developed countries have a common interest in and commitment to promoting women's economic empowerment in their organisations and their economies. How they go about this varies widely from country to country and from organisation to organisation; this confirms that the local context matters to achieve material progress on this front.

Nonetheless, certain key themes emerged from the results obtained, including:

- With a few notable exceptions, **few women held management and board level positions**, while women were generally overly represented in lower and middle levels of the organisations. To address this issue, it is essential to work to **overcome the social customs and traditional gender roles** that lead to the stereotyping of

women and which restrict their opportunities. Corporate culture needs to adapt and become **more inclusive and flexible** to accommodate women's needs and to ensure they can access the same employment opportunities as men.

- While many innovative initiatives are described in the responses to the survey, **implementation of these initiatives is sometimes unclear and challenging**. Various reasons were identified for these difficulties including: a lack of financial and human resources; the lack of a gender-specific focus, meaning that gender issues are not specifically addressed by human resources policies; societal norms and a male-dominated corporate culture hinder full buy-in of all employees for initiatives put in place; lack of support from the public sector to coordinate efforts, in particular on the issue of controversial mandatory quotas for women on company boards.

Some examples of good practices reported by survey respondents include:

- Having in place gender equality, diversity and inclusion, and anti-harassment policies
- Offering staff flexible working arrangements
- Offering training, mentoring, advice, and assistance to female employees
- Having transparent remuneration policies

Further research on successful initiatives put in place by the survey respondents and the challenges related to their implementation would provide practical lessons for others. In particular, further information on the following questions would assist the IOE in its work to promote women's economic empowerment:

- How can employers' organisations better lead by example through their internal policies on women's economic empowerment?
- How successful have employers' organisations been in supporting their members, through their external policies, in achieving gender parity on a national level?
- How can and should public policies better support and promote women's economic empowerment, in particular through controversial gender quotas?
- What barriers remain in supporting women's access to leadership positions?

It is clear from the research conducted that there is no miraculous global panacea to promote women's economic empowerment. Nonetheless there are **many ways to better integrate women**

**into today's labour force that are aligned with business strategies and link to stronger business performance.** By sharing and better understanding what works and why, policymakers are better equipped to make informed decisions. As policymakers seek short- and long-term solutions to the challenges of the changing world of work, expanding opportunities and fostering the talent of the previously untapped pool of female talent becomes even more important. This will require the joint efforts of governments, employers, and workers to remove the cultural, economic and social barriers hindering women's participation in the labour market.

Employers' and IOE partner companies have an important role to play in contributing to the construction of effective policies to ensure the inclusion of women's talents, skills, experience and energies in the economy. Further research and efforts will be needed to achieve the goal of gender parity; however it is clear from the initiatives being put in place by the survey respondents that **the groundwork is already being laid for more equal and gender-balanced labour market participation.**

The IOE is the largest network of the private sector in the world, with more than 150 business and employer organisation members. In social and labour policy debate taking place in the International Labour Organization, across the UN and multilateral system, and in the G20 and other emerging processes, the IOE is recognised as the Global Voice of Business.



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© IOE 2018 | 71 Av. Louis-Casati | 1216 Cointrin/ Geneva  
T: +41 22 929 00 00 | [ioe@ioe-emp.com](mailto:ioe@ioe-emp.com) | [www.ioe-emp.org](http://www.ioe-emp.org)