



## ► How employer and business membership organizations can accelerate the business case for change

Employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) play a critical role in representing their enterprise and association members through policy advocacy with government and relevant stakeholders on key labour and social issues that enable a competitive business environment. This includes advocating for a workforce that possesses the necessary skills and talent so enterprises can better navigate and respond to transformative changes in the world of work. In addition, EBMOs need to provide information to their membership that enables them to make the right decisions to grow and sustain their businesses.<sup>1</sup>

While the complexity of today's business environment adds to the challenges businesses may encounter, having staff equipped with the right skills and talent – regardless of their gender or background – enables enterprises to better navigate any upheaval. Critically, more and more research shows that businesses would gain significantly by embracing gender diversity as part of their talent management strategy and overall business strategy. As such, EBMOs throughout the world are multiplying their commitment and efforts to more effectively advocate for gender diversity by echoing the business case and the need to utilize the wide pool of talent of both women and men.



**More and more research shows that businesses would gain significantly by embracing gender diversity as part of their talent management strategy.**

<sup>1</sup> This brief is based on findings from the ILO report on *Women in Business and Management: The business case for change* (Geneva, 2019).

# Gender diversity improves the bottom line

In the 2019 report on *Women in Business and Management: The business case for change*, the International Labour Organization (ILO) finds that nearly 60 per cent of surveyed companies agree that gender diversity initiatives improve business performance. This is supported by a growing body of research across the globe that companies benefit when there are more women in decision-making positions. Beyond the benefits to individual companies, the greater participation of women in the labour market, both quantitatively and qualitatively, may positively contribute to gross domestic product growth.

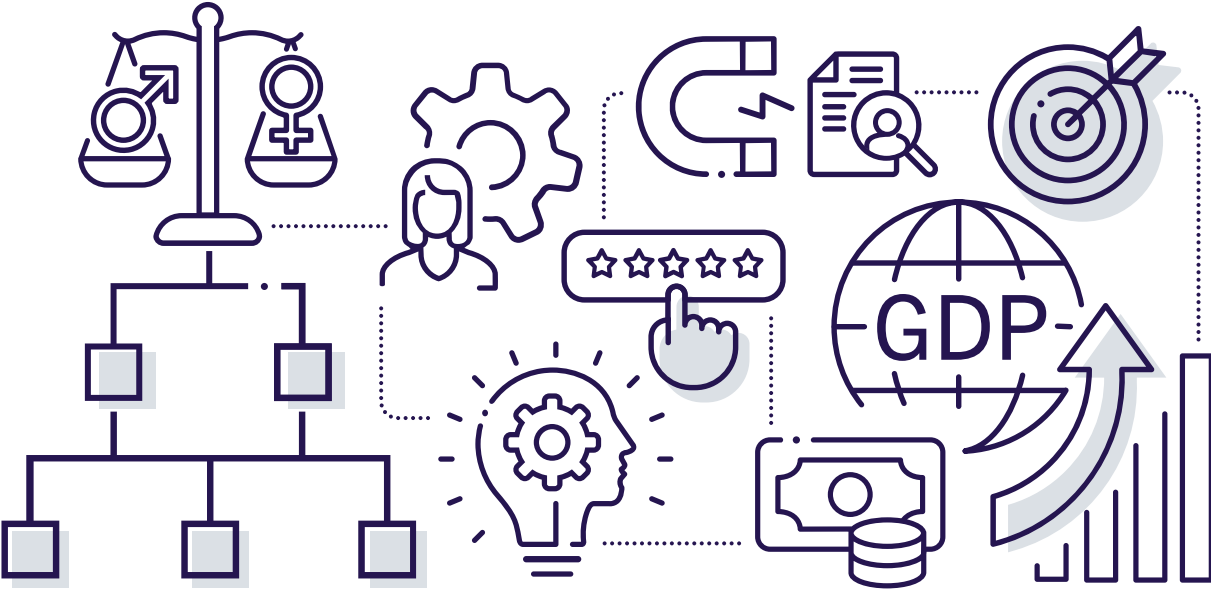
Employers globally are fully committed to continue making progress on developing women as a critical talent pool. Employers engage to provide the extra push necessary for equal opportunities and integration of women at the workplace. Everyone has a shared responsibility: public institutions, the private sector through employers' organizations, workers' organizations, and other stakeholders all have a role to play.

Mthunzi Mdwaba, Vice President, International Organisation of Employers; Vice Chairperson, ILO Governing Body; and President and Chief Executive Officer, Tzoro IBC, South Africa

As the world of work continues to transform, skills shortages as well as the need for new skills continue to be major challenges for many businesses. In nearly all regions of the world, women are surpassing men as tertiary graduates, and yet the growing talent pool that women represent is often overlooked.

In addition, women are consumers and make the financial spending decisions in many households. Their perspective for strategic business decisions is therefore critical.

A challenge for EBMOs and their members is how to unleash the potential for more women to become business leaders and managers and for companies, in turn, to reap the benefits to their bottom line.



# Serving enterprises and association members

Many companies around the world are introducing measures and building the knowledge base on how to advance women in business and management. While there are no one-size-fits all solutions, good practices are often shared through events and publications.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the majority of businesses continue to grapple with the challenges of enhancing gender diversity to access the benefits they stand to gain.

EBMOs have a key role to play in guiding and mobilizing their members, be they companies, industry associations or regional (provincial) structures. Working with members on gender diversity is also important for developing consensus on policy positions for the advocacy work of EBMOs.

Actions that EBMOs could consider taking to raise awareness on the benefits of gender diversity for members are:

- Developing and sharing information on women in business and management through evidence-based research and company good practices.
- Developing advocacy material on gender diversity through brochures, videos or social media.
- Assisting members to design a gender diversity policy and measures.
- Assisting members to develop an inclusive organizational culture free of gender bias.
- Providing advisory services on the design of recruitment and promotion procedures to advance women in management.
- Offering training programmes – these can be specific sessions or integrated into regular training activities. Topics can include the business case on gender diversity, meeting skills shortages and human resource development measures to advance women in management.
- Integrating gender diversity into the agenda of major business events of the organization and not as a separate issue.
- Ensuring gender balance among speakers at conferences and events and have women speak not only on gender issues, but important business topics such as trade, climate change and industrial relations.
- Establishing dedicated women's councils.
- Networking with business women's organizations and holding joint events.

**One key aspect of responsible practices and inclusiveness is gender diversity. Company boards, top management and human resources must work together to develop strategies to enhance female representation in their companies.**

Robert Yap Chin Kok, President, Singapore National Employers Federation

<sup>2</sup> ILO, Bureau for Employer's Activities (ACT/EMP): *Gender Diversity Journey, Company Good Practices* (Geneva, 2017).

# Policy advocacy

EBMOs play a key role in shaping national policies through their advocacy work with governments, stakeholders and parliaments. Advocating for policy approaches and measures to support gender diversity can benefit not only women and their families, but also the world of business and national economies.

Reflecting the needs of their members, EBMOs can, for example, advocate for gender diversity in relations to the following:

- Putting forward the business case for gender diversity in all levels of the workforce.
- Working with public authorities to break down structural, social and cultural barriers that prevent women from maximizing their potential.
- Participating in legal reform to remove restrictions on women's ownership of land, resources and access to credit.
- Promoting policies to enhance women's access to business development services and enterprise establishment and development.
- Framing of laws and policies on maternity protection, paternity and parental leave, and reducing the gender pay gap.
- Advocating for educational reform to encourage more girls and women to enrol in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines that often support the career path to growth sectors as well as decision-making positions.
- Engaging in critical debates on quotas, gender diversity disclosure requirements and voluntary measures to advance gender diversity.



Practicing equity, building gender-sensitive human resources management systems, creating enabling environments for women in the corporate world, establishing an accommodating social infrastructure and endorsing work-life balance arrangements for both women and men are all vital elements for successfully advancing women's careers.

Redha Bin Juma Al Saleh, Vice Chairperson for Administration and Finance Affairs, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

In research and engagement on these issues, it is important to examine the linkage between issues such as work-life balance and women's possibilities to advance to high-level management jobs. Undertaking a cost-benefit analysis with a long-term view can also help to ensure that policy positions are sustainable and guarantee the relevance of the EBMOs.

EBMOs can have considerable influence, for example, in engaging their companies to not only support girls in their community to study STEM, but also to hire qualified women as engineers and technology specialists and to ensure through workplace policies and measures that these women are able to perform successfully in a working environment traditionally dominated by men. This sends back positive reinforcement messages to girls and young women contemplating the study of STEM subjects.

# Advocacy partners

EBMOs can influence and partner with numerous entities to enhance gender diversity. A few examples are given below.

- **Government:** EBMOs can engage with different parts of government depending on the issue to be addressed. Frequently sought avenues are ministries of education and training, labour and employment, gender, social security, industry and entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized enterprises and even the Cabinet.
- **Parliament:** EBMOs can lobby their positions with different political parties and individual members of parliament.
- **Academic institutions:** Partnership can be established to conduct research and compile data to inform advocacy positions.
- **Other business organizations:** EBMOs can collaborate with chambers of commerce, sectoral associations or regional associations to develop a consensus on policy positions.
- **Trade unions:** Working with trade unions is important for negotiating and reaching agreements on a range of gender issues.
- **Women's business organizations:** EBMOs can partner with organizations supporting and advocating for gender diversity given their knowledge of the issues at hand and their representation of women themselves.
- **Media:** It is important for EBMOs to use the media to share messages on gender diversity and drive cultural change in the population and in companies.



# Gender diversity within business representative organizations

Supporting members of EBMOs on promoting women in business and management can be more effective if the business organization itself “walks the talk” and applies the measures to its own staff and structures. This gives the organization first-hand and practical experience on the issues and also positions the organization as a role model.<sup>3</sup>

Some actions that can facilitate this include:

- Consider adopting a gender diversity policy as a strategic goal.<sup>4</sup>
- Designate a staff member (a focal point) to be responsible for coordinating efforts on gender and diversity.
- Train staff members on the business case for women in business and management and how they can support members in this regard.
- Review recruitment and promotion procedures, including job vacancy notices and job descriptions to counter gender bias.
- Consider introducing targets to reach gender balance at all levels, including top positions and positions on EBMO boards.
- Review criteria that may be excluding women from leadership positions and board membership.
- Review membership criteria and encourage more women-owned businesses to be members.
- Assess if there is a gender pay gap and take measures to address it.
- Introduce staff policies to improve work–life balance.

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.

Source: International Organisation of Employers and ILO, ACT/EMP: *Women's Economic Empowerment – Good practices* (Geneva, 2018).



## For further reading, please see

### Women in Business and Management: The business case for change

ISBN 978-92-2-133168-1

ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP)

Route des Morillons 4

CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland

Web page: [www.ilo.org/employers](http://www.ilo.org/employers)

<sup>3</sup> ILO, ACT/EMP: *Promoting women in business and management: A handbook for national employers' organizations* (Geneva, 2017); ILO, ACT/EMP: *A global snapshot: Women leaders and managers in employers' organizations* (Geneva, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> International Organisation of Employers, *Fact Sheet for Business: Diversity*, [www.ioe-emp.org/index.php?eID=dump-File&t=f&f=110975&token=ceaf1b43a875e47512cf93fb628dd5331c27ebcc](http://www.ioe-emp.org/index.php?eID=dump-File&t=f&f=110975&token=ceaf1b43a875e47512cf93fb628dd5331c27ebcc) [accessed 12 May 2019].