

Changing the game: Gender Equality in Business

Report

Changing the Game, lunch-time event hosted by Catherine Bearder MEP, in the European Parliament on 21 October 2015 co-organised by the European Women's Lobby and PwC.



LtoR: Gilly Lord, PwC, Michel Croisé, Sodexo, Catherine Bearder, MEP (Host), Joanna Maycock, EWL (Chair), Daniela Bankier, European Commission, Linda Carpenter, Ford, Amélie Leclercq, BPW Europe



[Catherine Bearder](#), MEP, Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe



“Stereotypical assumptions continue to relegate women and men to gender rigid roles. Business has a role in changing mindsets.”

In her opening address, Catherine warmly welcomed the participants and said that this debate was timely as we need to encourage change in business culture to ensure that women can take a leadership role. Issues relating to the underrepresentation of women in all spheres of decision-making, including business especially at the highest level, cannot be addressed in a vacuum. They need to be placed within the broader framework of gender equality in society. There is still an assumption that women will take parental leave as perceptions of women’s caring roles continue to dominate our mindsets. Women are underrepresented in STEM (science, technology engineering and math), yet in the near future, 90% of jobs in all sectors will require some level of digital skills. She invited participants to check out “*#I look like an engineer*” which clearly demonstrates the pool of talented women which businesses should embrace to avoid wasting talent. We are facing a backlash, the withdrawal of the maternity leave directive bears witness to one of its many forms which leaves women and by extension, the whole of society, working and living in outdated and old-fashioned laws. While we still have a lot of work to do, we have however made some progress concluded Catherine, recalling how just 40 years ago, she had to ask permission from her employer to wear trousers at work!

Dr. Daniela Bankier, Head of [Gender Equality Unit](#), European Commission



“Institutions and companies should work together to reinforce each other.”

Daniela welcomed this debate on promoting more women in private and public sectors which the business sector has clearly a role to play. Only 3 % of CEOs in listed companies in Europe are women. Only one in five women are at the highest level of decision-making in companies where women are over represented. Progress is very slow and if not accelerated it will take us a very long time to reach gender equality. Different gender patterns of labour market participation means that women are more often than men employed in part-time positions. This poses a problem from a fairness and fundamental rights point of view but it is also an issue for the EU’s competitiveness, companies, businesses and demographic challenges. In addressing the issue of what can be done, Daniela stressed that we can work on the institutional level but there are also things companies can do and they should reinforce each other.

From an institutional point of view, the Commission has proposed legislation that sets a target of 40% women in

supervisory boards in listed companies in the EU. The proposal is currently being discussed in the Council, the European Parliament adopted its position, so we are confident that an understanding will be reached with the member states in the near future. She stated that in the member states where a critical mass of women has made it to the supervisory board, legislation has played an important role. However, legislation is not the only solution which must be supported by policies that aim full and equal participation of women in the labour market. Gender equality in education is also important and she pointed out that we also have to address issues relating to young boys' poor educational performance. She concluded by saying that there is a lot that businesses can do to build a talent pool of women within companies, create work life-balance and family friendly work places and eradicate biases when it comes to hiring women.

Amélie Leclercq, Representative of Business and Professional Women Europe



“Binding measures sparks public debate which in turn influences decision-makers; we want 50-50 by 2020.”

Amélie presented the EWL's [second progress report on Women on Boards](#). Of the 11 countries in this report representing a mixture of those that have legally binding quotas and those that operate under a voluntary-basis for a gender balance on boards, it is clear that in the absence of a legal framework the situation evolves very slowly. In order to have legislative frameworks for quotas, public opinion is key. If citizens aren't pushing in this direction politicians won't do anything. The report shows that in countries that were in the process of changing their legislation, public debate alone had a positive impact on the outcome of the process. For the EWL, we would like to go beyond the EU Women on Boards Directive: 30% or 40% gender balance in the boards is not enough, we need equality, i.e. 50%, by 2020.

If we want to reach this target by 2020, clearly defined steps are needed. The example of Finland shows, that if you don't have short term steps the big goal is very difficult to reach. The same is true in Italy. The overall goal cannot be reached if intermediary steps are not planned. The EWL and BWP are in favour of sanctions which should be supported by the companies themselves. It should be said that there are some great companies who are doing tremendous work to reach gender equality and the resources, which they put in costs them money.

How do you bring women from the middle management to the top management? Studies show that in order to become



part of the top management, women have to change their behaviour, lifestyles and relationships. We have to see which intermediate goals we can give to those women to support them to move from middle management to high management. It also shows that the higher you are in the hierarchy of the company, the bigger is the gender pay gap. In France there is a **30% gender pay gap in high positions** because salaries in those positions are negotiated on an individual level. Having a balance in the board makes sense for businesses because it creates more efficiency. If small companies are not introducing gender equality on boards, they will lose out on their business.

Michel Croisé, CEO, Sodexo Benelux



“A company has to mirror the society in which it operates. Quality of life is health and equality. Never compromise on diversity.”

Michel explained that he works in a company where there is very little staff turnover, which he believes is due to its [diversity policy](#) which is part of its DNA. Diversity was and remains the corner stone since its creation in 1966. Why is diversity crucial? First of all for emotional reasons: we believe that quality of life is what we have to work for. Quality of life is health and equality. You cannot be happy if you don't have health or if you are treated unequal and this also means gender equality. A company has to have the composition of the society in which the company operates. Otherwise it is impossible to serve people if the company does not reflect the diversity of the people it serves. Rationally speaking, it cannot serve the market if it cannot think like the clients. A private company has to build coherence in reflecting diversity, which includes: gender, age, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, culture, disability, etc. If you are coherent you have a coherent company. It is a question of the behaviour of the leaders. Never compromise on diversity. People want to work more and more in a company which reflects their own values. Michel explained that at the beginning, he was personally against quotas as it is difficult to sell within a company. Now he says, if you don't have quotas it doesn't work. If we don't have measurable objectives and intermediate short term targets we can't reach it. It is a question of leading by example.

Linda Carpenter, Senior European Manager, Ford Motor Group



“I hit the glass ceiling at the age of 33. It wasn't a ceiling based on the lack of ability to progress. I didn't take the promotions because that would have required me to travel and I didn't want to leave my family. It is difficult to balance work and family life.”

Linda explained that she is the most senior European female manager at Ford, a very male dominated industry because it is very engineering led. Ford was established in 1976 in Europe and has 60000 employees. The EU operating committee (board) has 13 members and there are 3 female board members. Ford covers four fields of operation and the gender diversity is quite different in the different specific fields. The Management structure is composed of 11% of women, HR has 34% women, and engineering only 3% women. Linda is an engineer and acknowledged that her head teacher at school supported her to make this choice early in her life.

Since 2007, the company has tracked data which reveal that the number of women has increased in HR, IT and Marketing. The company has good policies which pays off: excellent return rate after maternity leave (more than 90%), and broadly speaking they have equal pay. Ford has established a women's network, mentoring programmes, external activities to encourage women and a talent pool by actively going out giving prizes for competitions in schools etc. Despite this, the question needs to be asked: why hasn't gender equality increased? Linda explained that she herself hit the glass ceiling at the age of 33, not because of the lack of promotional opportunities, but having to make decisions about work-life balance. Her work requires a lot of traveling and operating across different time zones. The challenge within her team is the difficulty to balance work and life, which makes her work challenging as a boss, who has to be more flexible, to have to allow people to work with schools' opening times and holidays.

Gilly Lord, Partner for Regulatory Affairs, [PwC](#)



“It is about motivating men. This should not be about fixing women; there are many things that men can do different that would help us.”

Gilly recalled that we often talk about gender equality as being a recent thing as we imagine prehistoric men and we think of male dominated societies. But there is research which shows that hunter gatherer tribes who are still around today operate on an entirely gender equal basis, suggesting that naturally, we are meant to be gender equal. It is not some modern creation. However, when we look at the division of labour within heterosexual couples we see how wrong that all went. Each week, men spend on average 11 hours and women 23 hours on unpaid domestic work if they both have equivalent paid jobs. Even if women are the main breadwinner they work 10 hours more in unpaid work.

Changing the game must not be about fixing women. It is about motivating men, as there are many things that men can do different that would help us.

Recounting her own experience of sharing care and work on an equal basis with her partner, she talked about the difficulties her partner encountered as a man. Stating that she is not a fan of the ‘women on the board’ directive, which she feels is premature as it could put additional pressure on women in the absence of a holistic care model for both women and men, Gilly would prefer a quota where employers have to make sure that people work flexibly, including men. Companies should have quotas which get men to take the paternity/parental leave which is technically made possible by state legislation but not taken up by men. We need to change our mind-sets. Companies and the media, who tend to portray stereotypical gender roles, have undoubtedly a role to play.

Summing up - Joanna Maycock, Secretary-General of the [European Women's Lobby](#), Chair of the event



“Leadership is key; today’s event is clear that we have a common agenda and that together we can change the game.”

Joanna placed today’s event in context. We have stopped progressing on gender equality in the EU. We can observe stagnation in the past 5 to 10 years. The [EIGE Gender Equality Index](#) clearly shows this and we are now at about 52 % of gender equality in Europe. This begs the questions, what do we need to do now? It is clear that we need to engage in new discussions with new stakeholders. We need to engage in spaces where many women work as that is where there is real potential to change the lives of women and men. Clearly the business sector is one of these key stakeholders. The event today provides new opportunities to cooperate with private business sector actors. There are still many questions that remain, for example, more equality is good for business, which is a convincing argument, why then are businesses not doing more? We must continue discussing together. We must not become fatigued and need to use the data to show that we are not there yet. Leadership across the business community, governments, political parties, institutional settings and civil society can make it happen. Together we can change the game.

#Changethegame

