



CREATIVE  
CULTURE

# GENDER INCLUSION ACROSS CULTURES

November 2020

# INTRODUCTION



As the world unites to combat a global pandemic, it still is searching for answers and ways to making it a fairer and more considerate place to live. In this context, various sensitivities around minority groups have resurfaced, pushing many private and public organisations to question how they address these inequalities.

In this white paper, we have decided to focus on gender inclusion and are looking to understand why, in 2020, there still are such disparities and inequalities when it comes to women's inclusion in the workplace. This paper puts forward the fact that diversity and inclusion (D&I) must be looked at with a cultural lens as a one-size-fit all approach simply won't work when operating across international markets. Different cultures have varying levels of maturity on the topic as well as diverging views on what D&I actually means and how it should be tackled.

For instance, while gender pay gap is still a reality in many countries, the reasons behind it are complex and vary across cultures. While the traditional role of women in the household is evolving in most countries, it seems to still be the main point of focus to explain why women cannot aspire to the same career expectations as men.

On a more positive note, we will see that the future is bright. Millennials and Gen-Zedders across the world are reigniting the flame lit by previous generations of feminists. Through social change like the #MeToo movement, younger members of society are pushing for more gender equality, and therefore pushing companies to act and introduce new policies to ensure gender inclusion in the workplace.

As a member of WEConnect International, a network that supports and promotes women-owned businesses around the world, trying to shed a light on how gender inclusion can be improved across the board could not be more important to us.

Thanks to the help of our network of in-market experts, we provide an insight into the current situation regarding gender inclusion in the workplace across seven different markets and cultures. All varying in their economic wealth and their position on the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, our markets of focus include the United States, Japan, Finland, India, Italy, El Salvador and Saudi Arabia. In each case study, we take a look at the current situation in each nation, what the cultural drivers for it are, and how successful different companies have been at tackling this issue.

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**WOMEN  
OWNED**

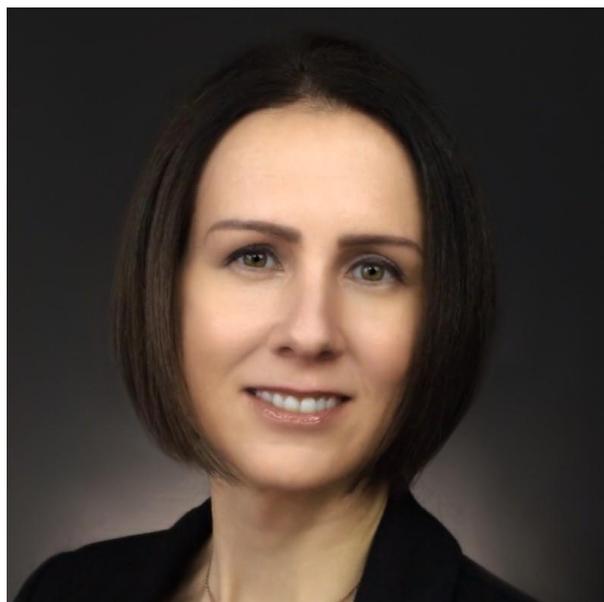
# TESTIMONIAL



Jennifer Dwivedi, **Manager of Content Strategy and Localization at Hyatt Hotels**, describes what this entails for Hyatt Hotels' portfolio of brands around the world.

*At Hyatt, we care for people so they can be their best. What better way to care for our members, guests and colleagues than to speak to them thoughtfully and inclusively. The scope of inclusivity is wide—accessibility, gender, ethnicity, age and more—and it can often present a challenge when approaching voice, tone and grammar within languages. In recent decades, many steps have been taken across countries and cultures to address the inequities inherent in gendered languages, but there remains work to be done.*

*Our approach lies in building a strategy based on cross-functional and cross-cultural conversations, both within Hyatt itself and with our partners. Candid discourse, careful thought and empathy are key to determining the correct course of action for each of our core languages—a “one size fits all” solution simply won’t work. Cultural norms and nuances will certainly come into play as we adopt a modified approach within each language, but our values as a company will remain the driving force behind what we seek to achieve: to make each and every member, guest and colleague feel welcome and included. In today’s world, this is more important than ever.*



# INSIGHTS INTO ITALY



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Our first case study is Italy, where traditional gender norms continue to influence people's everyday lives. While individual experiences vary widely, there is still a widespread cultural expectation that women will prioritise their role as caregivers and homemakers, and that men will provide for their families financially. As such, Italian women are far more likely than their male peers to work part-time or to give up paid work entirely.

A report by the European Commission found that the female employment rate in Italy was among the lowest in Europe in 2016, with just over 50% of women aged 20–64 in work compared with over 70% of men. Over 30% of women in the labour force had a part-time job, whereas under 10% of working men were in the same position.

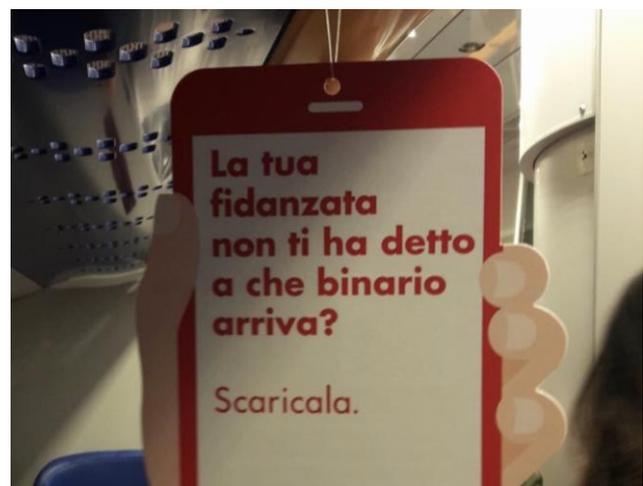
Italy also has a sizeable gender pay gap, with the average salary for men and women standing at €44,000 and €23,000, respectively. This is despite the fact that women are more likely than men to attend university.

Cultural gender norms are reflected in Italy's legal framework. As regards to maternity and paternity leave, mothers-to-be can claim a one-off lump sum of €800 (Bonus mamma domani) as well as 80% of their pay for five months (congedo di maternità). By contrast, new fathers are entitled to receive 100% of their pay for a period of just seven days within five months of the birth (congedo di paternità).

Another telling example is the legislation surrounding advertising. While the EU 27 collectively have 61 regulations governing how men and women can be portrayed by advertisers, Italy has no national legislation on this issue. Instead, the task of regulating the industry falls to the Italian advertising standards authority (the Istituto dell'Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria or IAP).

The IAP has a code stipulating that *“Marketing communication should respect human dignity in every form and expression and should avoid any form of discrimination, including that of gender.”*

However, ads that objectify, sexualise or degrade women are still commonplace. In 2019, for instance, the train operator Trenitalia faced a backlash for a campaign that used a play on words built around the idea that a man should break up with his girlfriend if she forgets to tell him the right platform information.



# INSIGHTS INTO ITALY



## LOCAL INITIATIVES

In recent years, Italy has introduced legislation to address the question of gender equality in the workplace. In 2011, it enacted what is commonly referred to as the Golfo-Mosca law, which states that women must account for at least one-third of the members of boards of directors. Analysis by the European House – Ambrosetti Observatory on Corporate Governance shows that this led female representation on the boards of companies listed on the FTSE MIB (the Italian stock market) to increase from 5.1% in 2011 to 37.8% in 2018.

Progress is also being made at individual companies and organisations. For example, energy infrastructure firm Snam is one of 325 companies around the world to be included in Bloomberg's Gender-Equality Index (GEI) 2020, which tracks the financial performance of public companies with a commitment to improving gender equality.

Snam's many initiatives to promote gender equality in the workplace include the GROW project (Generating Real Opportunities for Women), Young women @ Snam and Women in Security. While such programmes may not be a silver bullet (women still only account for 14.6% of the workforce at Snam), they demonstrate a willingness to affect change and a recognition of the strategic importance of the issue.



**In 2017 Snam became a Supporting Member of Valore D, the first association of companies that promotes diversity, talent and female leadership for the growth of companies and the country.**

# INSIGHTS INTO JAPAN



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

As is the case in Italy, gender norms are deeply embedded in Japanese culture, with women and men expected to play very different roles within society. In fact, it could be argued that conservative views on gender are even more prevalent in Japan than in Italy: a 2017 study found that only 50–60% of Japanese people thought it was acceptable for married women to work outside the home.

In its Global Gender Gap Report 2020, the World Economic Forum notes that Japanese women spend around four times as long as men on domestic chores. This factor is exacerbated by a famously demanding and fast-paced corporate culture in which employees are expected to show dedication by working long hours and the concept of a work-life balance is anathema to many. These two elements (a cultural expectation that women will prioritise family and the home, coupled with a lack of flexibility enabling them to juggle a career and motherhood) make Japan one of the world's worst performers on gender equality issues. In fact, Japan ranks 121 of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 rankings compiled by the World Economic Forum.

Where individual companies in Japan are keen to change the gender balance of their workforce, they are hampered by a lack of women attending Japan's elite universities. The fact that only 20–30% of students at such universities are female (this falls to just 15–25% for STEM subjects) means that women are underrepresented in the key talent pools from which many Japanese firms recruit.

A lack of qualified candidates results in many women being hired as administrative staff (*ippanshoku*) rather than generalists (*sogoshoku*). This means that their potential for career growth is limited from the start.



# INSIGHTS INTO JAPAN



## LOCAL INITIATIVES

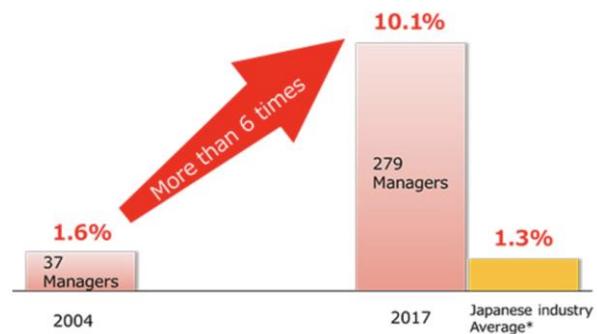
It would appear that policymakers in Japan appreciate that the situation needs to change. Japan's long life expectancy and low birth rate mean that the percentage of the population who are of working age has fallen considerably in recent decades. In this context, it is hard to defend a status quo in which talented individuals are effectively excluded from the upper echelons of the workforce on the basis of their gender (just 3% of senior managers in Japan are women).

In 2015, the Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe launched a programme aimed at encouraging companies to promote women to senior positions. The scheme offered companies up to ¥300,000 (\$2,500) for hitting targets to train and place more women in senior jobs. And yet, the ¥120 million (\$1.4 million) allocated to the programme for the 500 companies expected to apply remained largely unused 17 months after launch. This may indicate that traditional gender norms are proving hard to overcome in much of Japan.

To consider a more positive example, the carmaker Nissan was defined as a *Nadeshiko*<sup>1</sup> brand by the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 2017 in recognition of its efforts to promote gender diversity in the workplace.

Specifically, Nissan had succeeded in increasing the percentage of women in its management team from 1.6% in 2004 to 10.1% in 2017.

Moreover, the company had encouraged employees to adopt a healthier work-life balance through its "Happy 8" programme (a reference to an eight-hour working day).



<sup>1</sup>The idealised woman in Japanese.

# INSIGHTS INTO FINLAND



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Our third case study is Finland – a country at the opposite end of the gender equality spectrum. According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2020, Finland is the third most gender-equal country in the world, just behind Iceland and Norway.

The unemployment rate among the working-age population (anyone aged 15–64 and actively looking for work) is slightly higher for men than for women, at 7.62% and 7.42%, respectively. Women also account for 32.8% of the members of Finnish companies’ boards of directors and 47% of the Finnish parliament. This drive for gender inclusivity is a long-standing tradition in Finland, which extended the franchise to all women and men in 1906 and enshrined maternity leave in law as far back as 1917.

However, it is important not to paint Finland as a gender-equal utopia. Even in one of the most inclusive countries in the world, we may still be several decades away from genuine equality.

For instance, the pay gap shows that the average woman earns 84% of the wage of her counterpart for regular work and women still have to work harder to prove that they are as qualified as men. Additionally, women-led industries have lower salaries and women partake in part-time and fixed-term roles more often than men. These factors combined lead women’s career progression to be slower than men’s.

## LOCAL INITIATIVES

One way in which Finland strives for gender equality is through generous provision for new parents. Mothers are entitled to a maternity grant (*äitiysavustus*) and maternity leave (*äitiysvapaa*). Fathers can take up to 54 days of paternity leave (*isyysvapaa*), 18 of which can overlap with the mother’s maternity leave. After this period, either parent can claim parental leave (*vanhempainraha*) for 158 working days. Alongside measures such as the free “baby boxes” provided by the state and universal childcare for pre-schoolers, this legislation helps to lessen the impact of motherhood on women’s careers.



Other countries could also follow Finland’s example in terms of supporting female entrepreneurship. Between 1997 and 2012, the state-owned specialised financing company Finnvera offered ring-fenced funding for women looking to start a business. This is thought to have helped launch 11,000 companies and grow the percentage of female entrepreneurs in Finland to 30%.

# INSIGHTS INTO THE US



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The United States may be the world's largest economy, but it is far from the top of the leader board for gender equality. As a matter of fact, the US comes at number 53 in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 rankings, just behind Cape Verde, Luxembourg and Bangladesh.

There are several dimensions to this surprisingly poor performance. Firstly, the US system creates a significant financial burden for women who become mothers. A 2019 report by Unicef found that the US was the only country in the OECD or EU to offer no paid maternity or paternity leave at the national level.

Even women fortunate enough to have medical insurance pay \$4,500 on average for the delivery alone, moreover high childcare costs act as a strong incentive for women to stay at home looking after their children rather than return to the workplace.



A 2017 OECD report found that two parents with moderate earnings who both work full-time were likely to spend around 22% of their disposable family income on day care.

The second key dimension is a lack of women in leadership and decision-making roles at all levels of American society. As of October 2020, women make up just 23.7% of serving members of Congress. Meanwhile, women account for approximately 26.1% of boards of directors in the USA.

The cultural reasons behind this situation are complex and varied, but they largely relate to a sub-conscious tendency to see women primarily as caregivers rather than professionals. As Sheryl Sandberg explores in her book *Lean In*, this affects how women are expected to behave in the workplace.

For example, women often experience pressure to take on subservient tasks and roles – from serving drinks to arranging gifts for teammates' birthdays or mentoring junior staff – in a way that their male colleagues do not. Women who fail to live up to these standards can often find their career prospects unfairly curtailed. Similarly, women who express their opinions in an assertive manner may find themselves described as “bossy” whereas a man might be praised for showing leadership.

# INSIGHTS INTO THE US



## LOCAL INITIATIVES

The cultural roots of America's gender inequality run deep, but there are signs of a generational shift in attitudes. For example, Millennials and Generation Z (defined as those born in or after 1981) are more likely than older generations to hold progressive views on social issues, according to the Pew Research Center. On gender issues specifically, the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements raised awareness of discrimination and sexual harassment and helped decrease tolerance for unacceptable behaviour. These movements demonstrate that mistreatment of women now represents a source of reputational risk for companies.

A prime example of this dynamic at work is the case of Nike. In 2019, six-time Olympic gold medallist and new mother Allyson Felix was renegotiating her sponsorship contract with the company. In a piece for *The New York Times*, Felix described how Nike intended to pay her 70% less because she was not yet performing as well as she had prior to her pregnancy. For a brand that prides itself on its values, this accusation had the potential to cause considerable damage. After a public backlash and a congressional inquiry, Nike announced that it was changing its maternity policy.



# INSIGHTS INTO SAUDI ARABIA



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Our fifth case study is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whose cultural landscape is a world away from that of a country like the US. Until very recently, extremely conservative values on matters including gender have been enshrined in law, and a strict division between the roles of women and men is still deeply engrained in the culture. For example, the traditional view was that Saudi women should not mix freely with men who were not members of their family. As a consequence, women tend to be severely underrepresented in the workforce.

In the second half of 2019, for example, women accounted for just 23.2% of workers despite making up 58% of university graduates. As a result, Saudi Arabia comes in at 146 (out of 153 countries) in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 rankings. However, it is important to note that there are generational differences in attitudes, with Millennials and members of Generation Z typically holding less conservative beliefs than older cohorts.

Women in Saudi Arabia may be further from gender equality than their counterparts in other countries, but there have been rapid and far-reaching changes in recent years. In 2016, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman introduced a radical series of reforms called Vision 2030, with the aim of opening up society and the economy to international trade and investment. These reforms have included decisive action to improve the status quo for women, who have been permitted to drive since 2018 and travel freely since 2019 (they previously needed the permission of a male guardian).

## LOCAL INITIATIVES

Laws have also been introduced to prohibit discrimination based on gender in employment, prohibit the dismissal of pregnant women, criminalise sexual harassment and create a Family Affairs Council to enhance the position and role of the family in society.

Amid these sweeping changes, certain brands have tapped into the cultural zeitgeist by producing ads celebrating female empowerment. One example of this is Adidas, which produced a striking campaign to mark International Women's Rights Day in 2019. Its commercial featured three Saudi athletes (Lojain Alrefae, Raha Moharrak and Saja Kamal) and was filmed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Coming as it did just one year after women were first permitted to attend sports matches, this ad demonstrates just how quickly the paradigm is shifting.



# INSIGHTS INTO INDIA



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Our sixth case study is India, which has experienced rapid economic growth in recent years. In the two decades to 2015, for example, levels of extreme poverty plummeted from 46% to approximately 13.4%. Such statistics are indicative of genuine improvements in living conditions for many of the 645 million women who call India home. The World Economic Forum report also notes that India has had the fourth highest number of years with a female head of state over the last 50 years.

In the workplace, however, the evidence suggests that this progress has not benefited the two genders equally. Boys' and girls' career prospects diverge early in India; the literacy rate is just 66% among women compared with 82% among men. Indian women of working age have one of the world's lowest labour force participation rates (25%) and female income is estimated to equate to just 20% of male income. There is even evidence to suggest that female participation in the workforce may have fallen in recent years because additional disposable income has meant that some families can now afford to withdraw their daughters from lower-status manual labour.

From a regional perspective, Bengaluru has the highest level of gender diversity in the workplace (women account for 34% of the workforce), followed by Mumbai (33%), and Pune (32%). While large companies have the highest percentage of female employees at 33%, women account for just 27% of the workforce at mid-sized firms and 21% at small companies.



# INSIGHTS INTO INDIA



## LOCAL INITIATIVES

Given the economic and social benefits of diversity, there have been efforts to improve the gender balance in Indian workplaces in both the public and the private sector. The government has enacted a number of laws in recent years aimed at improving the lot of working women.

One legislative landmark was the 2013 Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. This law officially defined and prohibited sexual harassment, as well as establishing a process for seeking redress. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women and Child Development runs a wide array of programmes to promote female empowerment, including the Working Women Hostel, the Women Helpline Scheme and the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP).

As we have seen in other countries, companies with a presence in India have also introduced women-friendly policies internally.

One particularly striking example is the case of Accenture. In 2017, the professional services company announced a plan to achieve a gender-balanced workforce by 2025. This conscious effort to improve female participation has involved publishing transparent statistics on all of its international sites, including India, where it employs over 45,000 women. As a result, Accenture ranked among the top 10 on the 100 Best Companies for Women in India list compiled by Working Mother and AVTAR in 2016 .



# INSIGHTS INTO EL SALVADOR



## CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Our final case study takes us to El Salvador in Central America. Salvadorean culture is another tradition in which gender-based roles and expectations are extremely influential, with men and women typically divided into the breadwinner and caregiver categories. Just 50% of adult women participate in the labour force, whereas this figure is 82.9% among men. This is despite similar levels of literacy and education across the genders and the fact that women are marginally more likely than men in El Salvador to receive a tertiary education.

When women do find employment, one in four are likely to experience discrimination at some point in their working lives and 45% report receiving lower pay than their male colleagues for the same work. Similarly, 10% were threatened with dismissal for requesting time off to care for relatives and 38% of women who reported violence or harassment in the workplace were dismissed.



## LOCAL INITIATIVES

One key initiative to address gender equality in the workplace is the Sello de Igualdad de Género IGUAL-ES (gender equality seal) introduced by the Salvadorean government in 2018 with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



This opt-in initiative provides companies with official recognition of internal schemes and policies designed to promote women and improve their experience of working life. By rewarding companies' efforts in this way, the government hopes to affect meaningful change across the labour market.

In terms of private companies, the multi-national conglomerate Unilever has had particular success in achieving gender diversity in El Salvador. Policies such as those requiring women to make up 50% of candidate shortlists for roles have proved an immense success. In fact, as of 2019, women now occupy 56% of managerial posts in the country. The company has also rolled out a programme to support staff who become parents. The MAPS (Maternity and Paternity Support) programme offers financial support as well as key benefits such as flexitime and dedicated spaces for breastfeeding.



## CONCLUSION

Although gender roles are deeply engrained in these seven markets, these examples prove that companies have a real opportunity to enforce positive change in their workplaces. As can be seen in these case studies, some companies have strived to create a more inclusive workplace culture and introduce more equal legislation towards maternity and paternity leave in order to lessen the impact of motherhood on women's careers. Others have introduced schemes to improve women's work-life balance and prohibit gender discrimination.

Despite the different approaches, one thing is clear: the barriers to women's progression in the workplace are also obstacles for economic growth both on a national and international scale. Firstly, it is clear in some cultures that companies are missing out on a well-educated and capable workforce. Beyond this, it is widely demonstrated that countries with lower levels of gender equality tend to become more impoverished, see a decrease in GDP and, consequently, a slowdown in their economic growth and innovation. When countries and international companies rise up to the challenge of gender equality, they are setting themselves up for a positive future.



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