

## Topic: Women in Business

Women represent approximately one half of the World's population but it will take more than 80 years until gender equality is achieved globally in the fields of education, health care, economy and politics.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, no 'buts' in gender equality as such. From the economic and social view point, we are talking about the benefits that are not limited exclusively to one gender. It is human potential – skills and productivity – that is deemed to be the most important factor defining the competitiveness of the country. Development and utilization of skills of this other half of the world's population has a great influence on the growth, competitiveness and readiness of the national economy and individual companies for their future.



**Olga Pietruchová**, Director of the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

"An increase in the employment of women has contributed to the rise in global GDP more than new technologies. Gender equality has therefore a significant economic impact. In Slovakia, only a one fourth of the entrepreneurs are women and women, in general, earn 18 % less than men."



### WOMEN AND SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS GO TOGETHER

- According to a study conducted in 21,980 companies in 91 countries, higher numbers of female leaders in top positions of corporate management correlate to increased profitability and economic growth of these companies. (*Is Gender Diversity Profitable?*, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2016)<sup>2</sup>
- Net income growth of companies with women on management boards reached in average by 14 % compared to 10 % for those with no female representation on board. (*Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance*, Credit Suisse, 2012)<sup>3</sup>
- A greater number of women in labour force in traditionally male-dominated industries would increase productivity in many countries by 3 % to 25 %. (*Women. Fast Forward: The Time for Gender Parity is Now*, EY, 2015)<sup>4</sup>
- Diversity in the workplace translates into increased profitability. Companies with a high number of female representatives are 15 % more likely to have financial results higher than the national industry median. (*Diversity Matters*, McKinsey&Company, 2015)<sup>5</sup>
- Thanks to gender diversity company's capital gains may be increased by almost 41 %. Higher productivity in offices is credited to the differences in views, understandings, and skills between men and women. (*Diversity, Social Goods Provision, and Performance in the Firm*, MIT & George Washington University)<sup>6</sup>

1 [http://bit.ly/WEF\\_GenderGap](http://bit.ly/WEF_GenderGap)

2 <http://bit.ly/PetersonInstitute>

3 [http://bit.ly/CreditSuisse\\_Gender](http://bit.ly/CreditSuisse_Gender)

4 [http://bit.ly/EY\\_WomenFastForward](http://bit.ly/EY_WomenFastForward)

5 [http://bit.ly/McKinsey\\_Women](http://bit.ly/McKinsey_Women)

6 [http://bit.ly/MIT\\_Diversity](http://bit.ly/MIT_Diversity)

Supporting women employment and their career development is beneficial for a company primarily from the view of human capital and selection of the best talents. Women are often better educated and their approach to solving problems is different from men, which guarantees a greater diversity in decision-making processes. In a long-term view, diversified teams bring better understanding of customer needs, develop innovation skills and help companies enter new markets.

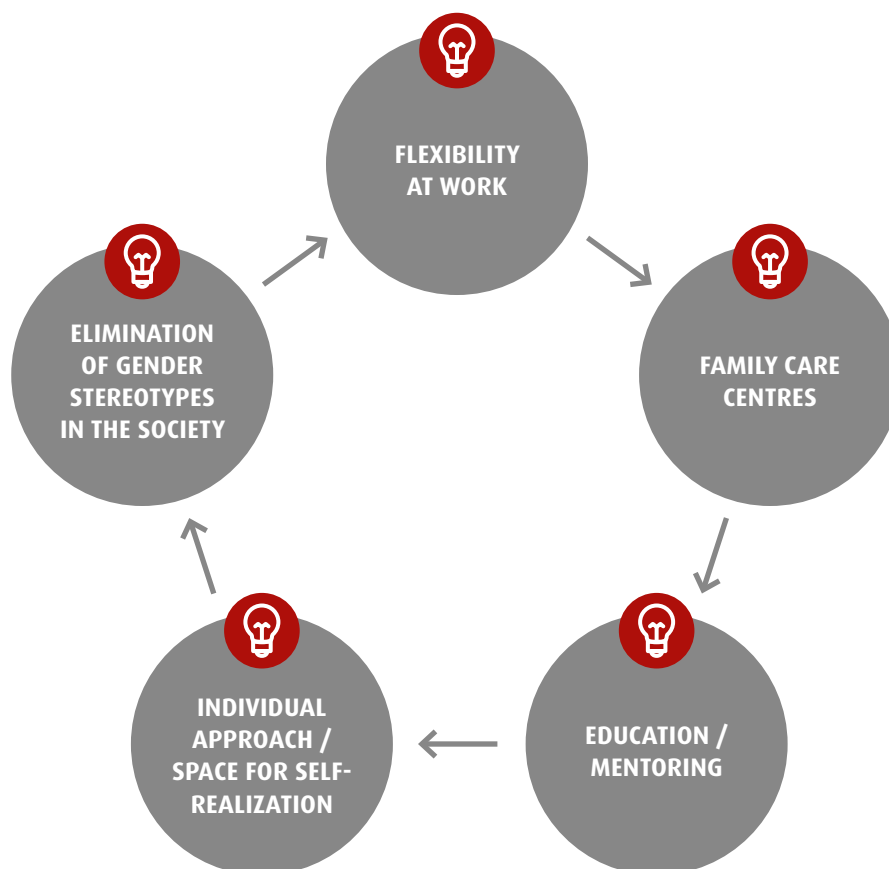
Women are becoming a valuable capital in the global marketplace not just as workers but also as entrepreneurs, investors, but most importantly, as consumers. Based on various researches, women's discretionary buying power is on the increase and women stand behind 80% of all consumers' buying decisions.<sup>7</sup> This is one of the many reasons why their voice should matter in companies.

The topic of women in business touches women and men equally. Promotion of women education and career development goes hand in hand with a greater engagement of men in a family life and proportionate division of the responsibilities related to taking care of children and household. This topic goes beyond the field of business and relates to the conventional behaviours and stereotyped roles man and woman take in our society (a man as a breadwinner, a woman as a caretaker) which are inherently present in our life since the early childhood.

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## Business Leaders Forum Recommends

The principle of equal pay for equal, or comparably demanding, work should be included in company's regulation documents of each responsible company. Company's regulations as such are not sufficient. It is essential that the given rules and regulations are applied in practice. This can be done via regular checks and comparisons of job positions and associated salaries. The other areas of the Recommendations for the companies that wish to support female career development are mutually interconnected:



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<sup>7</sup> <http://bit.ly/womeneconomics>



## Flexibility at Work

Up to 95 % of parents in Slovakia consider flexible working hours and one day off for family reasons an effective means of aligning professional and personal life.<sup>8</sup> The respondents ranked work for reduced hours and work from home or telework among the most beneficial means of balancing work and family life. Mothers of small children expressed greater interest in the arrangements mentioned above than men.

Flexibility at work is a key element for women – mothers. Day care centres such as kindergartens are either expensive or hardly accessible and a lot of mothers do not want to leave their small children in some institutions. If there is a possibility of reduced working hours for parents in combination with work from home during the time which is suitable for the young family (for instance in the evening, when a father/partner is back home from work and can take care of a child), this is a really effective *work-life balance* solution from the employer's side.

However, a possibility of reduced working hours should be only a temporary solution for a woman who has just returned from maternity or parental leave. If this was implemented as a permanent solution for mothers, it would not be for their benefit as it would negatively impact their economic independence due to adjusted salaries and in turn also retirement benefits.



**Olga Pietruchová**, Director of the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

*"An increase in the statutory maternity pay rate and the introduction of paternity leave have proven to be effective measures having a direct effect on women's involvement in the labour market. Each year the number of men taking paternity leave doubles. Currently we have 7 % of men on paternity leave."*

It is not only mothers and fathers of small children who appreciate when their employer provides them with a possibility to adjust their working time according to their needs. Nowadays, a new concept of *work-life integration* can be implemented in various types of administrative work. It represents a shift towards a new way of work bringing more informal, personalized flexibility at work when it is on employee's sole discretion to decide where, when and in what way they execute their daily working tasks.



### BEST PRACTICE

Thanks to the conditions the company creates for its employees, **T-Systems Slovakia** was awarded the Best Employer 2016 prize in the category of IT and telecommunications in a public opinion poll conducted by the portal Profesia.sk. The company actively promotes forms of flexible work arrangements, especially flexible working time and reduced working hours. Men and women with children younger than 12 and pregnant women are offered a benefit of work from home for 7 working days per month. The same target group is allowed to leave work earlier on the last working day before Easter and Christmas (of course only after the agreement from the management they report to). New fathers receive from the company a benefit of paid time off on the day when their child is born. Work-life balance of T-Systems employees is further reinforced by various discounts for free-time activities and child care but also by organising summer camps for children during summer break. The company offers to their employees a possibility to anonymously consult a psychologist, and financial or legal advisor, but also a possibility to participate in an online wellness programme focusing on health and coaching.



### DO YOU KNOW...?

The share of women in leading positions in the Slovak companies is growing but still does not reach the average level of the European Union. In 2016, women represented one third of top management positions in the biggest Slovak companies. Most of them occupied leading positions in the field of human resources (up to 82.5%), a little less in financial sector (56.2%) and marketing (50.7%). The IT market and CEO positions, however, still remain the domain of men. Only 6.7% of the IT company leaders are women and CEO positions are held by women in less than 9% of the Slovak companies.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [http://bit.ly/IVPR\\_research](http://bit.ly/IVPR_research)

<sup>9</sup> [http://bit.ly/Bisnode\\_Women](http://bit.ly/Bisnode_Women)



## Children Care Centres

For several years now Slovakia struggles with the lack of capacities in the centres that offer care for children in the pre-school age. This problem strikes our Capital the most. This is the area where the employer can intervene and try, at least partially, to compensate parents of small children for the services not provided by the state.

A kindergarten in the company's premises or reserved slots in a kindergarten in the company's surroundings can make mothers' and fathers' lives a lot easier. One of the options is also either a financial contribution from the employer for private kindergartens, or their cooperation with a network of kindergartens which, as they agreed, provides discounts to the company's employees. From a logistic point of view, a company can help significantly by securing the picking-up of children from their parents upon the arrival to work and their subsequent transport to the given child care centres.



### BEST PRACTICE

A lot of parents would like to return to work earlier than their child reaches the minimum age for admittance to a state kindergarten. Private pre-school child care is rather expensive and complicates early return of parents to work. Therefore, **Pivovary Topvar (Topvar Brewery)** decided to support their employees in early return to work from parental leave and, besides flexible working hours and the possibility to work for reduced working hours or from home, they provide a monthly contribution in the amount of 250 euro for securing reasonable child care.



### RECEIVE SUPPORT FOR OPENING A KINDERGARTEN IN YOUR COMPANY

Since the summer of 2017, employers can, via the Implementation Agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, apply for a support from the European structural funds for the creation of a children's corner or opening a kindergarten directly in the company's premises. Except for Bratislava region, all regions in Slovakia have a possibility to receive a support also for flexible forms of work for mothers of small children. The national project Family and Work focuses primarily on children in the pre-school age of 3 years and above who did not get a place in the state kindergarten: <https://ia.gov.sk>.



## Education and Mentoring

A vast majority of women takes a break from their professional life after they give birth to their child. This significantly impacts their future career development and income. In such cases employers can contribute to the mitigation of negative impacts of this natural career break.

During maternity or parental leave, a company can secure their female employees keep a meaningful contact with their profession by providing a regular feed of company's news (either via a distribution of the company's magazine or via the access to the intranet) but also on-line education courses, or a possibility to execute some smaller tasks assigned or even enabling a gradual return to work by a gradual increase in duties and working hours.

From the point of view of a positive role model, mentoring programmes can be of a help for women. Such mentoring programme provides a consultancy and support from a senior employee to a new employee in the area of professional and personal growth. Mentoring, whether internal or by external providers, represents a unique possibility to get inspired and learn from proven tips but also mistakes of a more experienced professional.



### BEST PRACTICE

Each year **Philip Morris Slovakia** conducts an assessment of competences and skills, monitors working interests and directions of its employees. The so-called Talent Pool includes naturally also the female employees who are currently on maternity or parental leave. In case there is a vacancy which would mean a step forward in a career of such woman, she will be offered the position.



## BEST PRACTICE

Since 2009, **VUB Bank** regularly organises Business Academy for women eager to start their own business. During a three-day workshop, VUB professionals together with the invited specialists share their pieces of advice with the beginning entrepreneurs on how to successfully start a business. Besides specialized lectures, participants are provided a space for discussions, personal consultations, contact exchanges, and most importantly, the application of the learned skills. Each of the participants is given a possibility to prepare her own business plan under the supervision of the present specialists. The best business plans are later rewarded by the bank.



## Individual Approach and Space for Self-Realisation

It is welcome when a pro-family approach is anchored in company's internal documents. However, the successful implementation of the measures oriented towards the employees who are parents in everyday practice is dependent on the culture of the company. Respect, trust and humanity are not something that can be forced on the employees. They derive from the attitude and values of the corporate top management, regular managers and supervisors, and are carried over to the very core of the company – its employees.



**Marcela Krajčová**, HR Manager of Philip Morris International

“Even though we have our rules and regulations, we are a ‘human’ company. One of our female employees was allowed to take sabbatical leave for several months, other had her working time unusually adjusted to meet her individual needs, and the next one was offered a possibility of gradual integration via reduced working hours. It is exactly this individual approach which helps our employees feel good in our company.”

We are all unique and each of us is different. For one person, for instance, a work from home is most suitable due to family reasons, for another, for the same reasons, a work from home does not allow adequate concentration on their tasks. Regular checks of employee's needs and evaluation of meaningfulness of the measures already in place is therefore imperative.

In many big, especially international, companies it proved to be a good practice to have their own female employees work as ambassadors supporting women's career development. They are being organized within the so-called *Business Resource Groups* or *Employee Resource Groups* which are volunteering groups oriented towards one specific topic related to diversity in the workplace. Besides women and gender equality, these topics include LGBTI and people with disabilities.



**Jana Lancíková**, Leader of the Group Women in IBM, IBM ISC

“In a company-wide survey on a global level up to 80 % of the leaders of Business Resource Groups, both female and male, stated that thanks to the activities which are out of scope of their official job responsibilities they feel more engaged. They can develop their organisational and communication skills and feel more content. The greatest benefit of such groups is that they bring changes from below – and this is why they are effective.”



## BEST PRACTICE

**IBM** is an international company with diversity and gender equality historically deeply rooted. 56% of the employees in the IBM centre in Slovakia are women. Women also hold 51% of managerial positions in the company in Slovakia. IBM started groups in which its employees can become engaged based on the chosen topics already in 1995. Initially informal groups, which were focused more on networking at their beginnings, turned gradually into well-organised teams. In 2016, Women in IBM organised 33 events focusing on professional and personal development of female employees. Thanks to the activities of this group as well, the topic of motherhood resonates in the company. IBM offers female employees a possibility of flexible working time, there is a kindergarten in its Slovak headquarters in Bratislava, and keeps in touch with them during their maternity leave via a special website.



## Elimination of Gender Stereotypes in Society

HR managers probably know this very well. A male candidate feels 100 % qualified for the open position although they dispose with only 50 % of the required skills. On the other hand, a woman does not even apply for the same position if she feels she meets only 80 % of the requirements. Women have a tendency to underestimate their talent, achievements and trust themselves less. In the end we can say that the inequality in wages is partially driven by the fact that women ask for less money than men, or do not ask for a pay rise but hope this initiative will come from the boss.

What drives such behaviours? The personality of a child, its future life and professional career as well are influenced from the early childhood by gender stereotypical behaviour and prejudices which are passed on others often unconsciously. While we expect obedience, humbleness and sensitivity from girls, boys are encouraged to higher impetuosity, competitiveness and we try to suppress their emotiveness by words like "men do not cry". We encourage girls care more about others or do household chores, but we motivate boys to perform better in sports or to develop their technical skills.



**Gabriel Galgóci**, General Manager & Director Client Network Operations Management, AT&T

„It is of no use that gender equality is presented as a natural thing in many companies when we differentiate children by toys, activities and our approach to them from the early childhood. By doing this we influence their life journey. Our company currently tackles the challenge of how to persuade women to continue in their managerial positions after they return to work from maternity leave.”

A web portal *Pink and Blue World*<sup>10</sup>, which serves parents and schools as a useful tool for gender-sensitive education of children, points out to the fact that children will be able to realize themselves according to their interests only when we, as parents, create for them the most open environment we can and offer them a variety of options during their upbringing.

Can companies contribute to elimination of gender stereotypes, which are as unfair to girls as they are to boys? Yes, definitely. For instance, companies are the main advertisers. Their ideas and messages are transmitted during the breaks in commercial television programmes, between the programmes, or from the magazines directly to the heads of children and their parents. If advertising industry continues to produce gender stereotypical pictures of the society (for instance, a woman doing household chores, never a man), it contributes to inequality between men and women. Fortunately, there are still advertisers who do not see anything strange in supporting a girl in her effort to become a cosmonaut or leaving a woman use a lawnmower from their assortment.<sup>11</sup>



### DO YOU KNOW...?

According to a research conducted by researchers from Cornell University in 2005, women-mothers pay the so-called motherhood penalty.<sup>12</sup> During the experiments, the participants in the research evaluated curricula vitae of potential candidates for a job. The only difference between two groups of curricula vitae was the parental status. The results revealed that mothers were viewed as less competent, less engaged and overall less appropriate for a given job. Even if they were chosen for a given job, the salary offered to them was significantly lower than to non-mothers. On the other hand, parental status of male applicants was considered an advantage. These conclusions were further supported by the recent analysis conducted by the Slovak Institute for Financial Policy (IFP).<sup>13</sup> Motherhood is closely connected to lower wages, whereas paternity means a higher salary. Based on the IFP estimates, each child lowers a female's salary by 0.7 %, whereas for a man the salary increase by 3.1 % was noticed. Each year a woman spends on parental leave lowers her salary by further 0.3 %.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ruzovyamodrysvet.sk>

<sup>11</sup> Alliance of Women – The Way Back annually gives a Sexist Blunder Anti-Award to the advertisers with the most sexist advertisements in the public or internet space in Slovakia. Besides announcing the "winners", organisers try to draw attention also to the positive examples in the advertising practice which can serve as an inspiration for other advertisers: <https://sexistickykix.sk/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://bit.ly/MotherhoodPenalty>

<sup>13</sup> <http://bit.ly/MotherhoodPenalty2>

Another opportunity of how a company can contribute to a positive change in the society is a financial and expertise support for educational programmes in the fields which are traditionally conceived as dominated by men. Due to prejudices (“this is not something suitable for a girl”) we lose many talents who did not even get a chance to develop themselves.



**Ivana Medvedová**, Global Manager for Commercial Applications and IT Services, IBM

“Despite the fact that the ratio of women in rather technical positions is still low, our experience is that their presence in teams has a positive impact. Women nurture cooperation and ability to listen and enhance creativity in teams. If there is a woman in an IT team, she is often the leader.”



#### BEST PRACTICE

The IT sector is a rapidly growing and well paid sector with a perspective. The project **Aj Ty v IT** (You Too in IT), supported by the companies such as IBM, DELL, Slovak Telekom, Datalan or AT&T, originated with an idea to encourage girls in studying informatics and subsequently getting a job in this field. As Petra Kotuliakova, its founder, says, it is crucial to encourage the interest in this field already among girls at primary, secondary schools and high schools, especially in the rural areas. Throughout the year, Aj Ty v IT organises for high school female students IT workshops and discussions with women who were successfully employed in this sector. The project provides supplementary education to college and university students as well and sends the message to the society about IT being a perfect choice for girls.



#### FATHERS BELONG TO FAMILIES

Slovak women devote weekly 16 hours in average to household chores, whereas men only 7 hours.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, women mostly carry out tasks which are time-consuming and routine and have to be carried out simultaneously. It is believed that gender equality will become a reality only when the upbringing of boys will resemble the upbringing of girls, and the other way around. Traditional perception of the role of women in society will not change unless the perception of men’s role changes. Therefore, if we encourage our daughters in their dream to become a tram driver, we cannot forget to teach our sons cook, clean the house and take care of the younger siblings. If mothers and fathers participate in a professional and family life proportionally, fathers can spend more time with their children and build stronger relations with them. The positives of greater involvement of fathers in a family life were not left unnoticed by the European Commission. The Commission proposed a legal law guaranteeing paternity leave after the birth of a child lasting at least ten days and four months of parental leave that cannot be transferred to the other parent.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> [http://bit.ly/EC\\_Equality](http://bit.ly/EC_Equality)

<sup>15</sup> [http://bit.ly/EC\\_PaternalLeave](http://bit.ly/EC_PaternalLeave)

We would like to thank to the representatives of member companies in Business Leaders Forum: **Pivovary Topvar, Philip Morris Slovakia, T-Systems Slovakia, VUB Bank** for their valuable examples of a good practice, but also to other signatories of the Slovak Diversity Charter: **AT&T, IBM ISC** and the non-governmental organization **Aj Ty v IT**. Special thanks go to **Olga Pietruchová**, the director of the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, for her expert help with the Recommendations.



These Recommendations were created based on the initiative of the **Slovak Diversity Charter**. Join the Charter with your company and publicly declare your support for diversity and inclusion in the workplace: [www.chartadiversity.sk](http://www.chartadiversity.sk)

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