

Forum: GA3- Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural

Issue: Reducing Racial and Gender Inequality in the Workplace

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I. Introduction

In 2022 women have restricted access to jobs in 86 countries and 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal economic opportunity¹. In 2018 a survey in the UK found that 70% of workers who belonged to ethnic minorities, had faced racial harassment in the past five years and 60% said they were treated unfairly by their employer based on their race². Although gains have been made for women and racial minorities, these staggering numbers show that nations still have a long way to go to achieve equality.

Something that applies to both gender and racial inequality is the presence of the glass ceiling in business. This term is used to show the invisible barrier women and racial minorities face in the workplace that prevents them from continuing to advance and achieve pay and jobs that racial majorities and men seem to dominate. Women and racial minorities often face stereotypes and discrimination that contribute to the glass ceiling barrier.

Many male dominated fields such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) continue to be dominated by men due to negative bias and stereotypes about women in these fields. Many women despite being as skilled as their male counterparts in these subjects lack the self-confidence to apply in these fields. Research done by a professor at Harvard Business school shows that women are less likely to express their ideas on 'male topics' and men and women are more likely to lowball their achievements in subjects that are

¹ World Bank Group. "Nearly 2.4 Billion Women Globally Don't Have Same Economic Rights as Men." *World Bank*, World Bank Group, 8 Mar. 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men>.

² University of Manchester. "Racism Is Still a Huge Problem in UK's Workplaces, Finds Report." *Racism Is Still a Huge Problem in UK's Workplaces, Finds Report*, University of Manchester, 12 Apr. 2019, <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/racism-is-still-a-huge-problem/>.

stereotypically common for the other gender. This is largely due to stereotypes about what each gender should be good at.

Racial minorities are also negatively affected by stereotypes in the workplace. Racial stereotypes can often lead to microaggressions such as assuming a person's occupation, nationality, or language ability based on their race. This can reinforce the racial majority in that nation and move away from the idea of inclusion and diversity.

II. Definition of Key Terms

A. Glass Ceiling

The Glass Ceiling is described as an invisible barrier women and minorities face that prevent them from attaining higher paying jobs and upper level positions.³

B. Stereotype

A stereotype is a mental image of a certain group of people that is oversimplified, prejudiced and often leads to judgment of that group.⁴

C. Microaggressions

Microaggressions are comments or actions that show prejudice towards a marginalized group, often a racial minority. These acts fall under the category of workplace violence.⁵

D. Equity vs. Equality

Equality is the idea that everyone should be treated fairly and have the same opportunities. The idea is that if everyone is treated fairly then they will all be able to participate and achieve their potential in society. Equity on the other hand starts out with the idea that not everyone in society is

³ "Glass Ceiling Definition & Meaning." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/glass%20ceiling>.

⁴ "Stereotype Definition & Meaning." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype>.

⁵ "Microaggression Definition & Meaning." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression>.

the same and some people face adversities and challenges that others don't. These challenges are included in terms of what is and isn't fair.⁶

III. General Overview

A. Promotion and Wage Gaps

Equal pay is a common issue associated with workplace discrimination. Women globally make less than 80 cents per dollar that a man makes.⁷ Although there are equal pay laws in many nations, they have not adequately solved this ongoing problem. This issue is highlighted by Equal Pay Day which is recognized by the UN on September 18th, although many nations have their own variation of this day. For example the United States which recognizes Equal Pay Day based on the extra amount of days it takes women to earn the same amount their male counterparts earned the previous year. In 2022 this day was observed on March 15th. And while there is a wage gap among women and men there is also a promotion gap, in which women work in entry level jobs more often than men and are less likely to be put up for a promotion or given a raise. Women often are held to higher standards and need to prove themselves more than men who can be promoted solely based on future potential. Other research has shown that although women have higher workplace evaluations than men, they are still less likely than men to be promoted because they are seen as having less leadership skills than men. The promotion and wage gap cause disparities between men and women but also causes issues between races. Racial minorities

⁶ "Rise Module: Equality vs. Equity." *RISE*, <https://risetowin.org/what-we-do/educate/resource-module/equality-vs-equity/index.html>.

⁷ "Equal Pay Essential to Build a World of Dignity and Justice for All, Un Says, Commemorating First International Equal Pay Day || UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072722>.

have more entry level job representation and have very little people higher up in companies. In the US Black men are paid 71 cents to every dollar a white man makes and a Black woman makes 63 cents to a white man's dollar. Racial minorities are underrepresented in jobs that have high potential for promotion and advancement and are overrepresented in jobs that have low growth and wage rates. They face a lack of help from supervisors who are more concerned with the look of the company which usually results in tokenism which does not benefit people of color at all.

B. Workplace Violence

The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration states that “Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults.”⁸ Overall workplace violence is an action that makes a victim or victims uncomfortable and often causes an uncomfortable or hostile work environment.

i. Physical Harassment

Physical harassment often occurs towards women and women of color as sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual behaviour. The WHO has found that one in three women have been victims of sexual or physical violence⁹. Many of these victims suffer in silence. A popular movement known as the #MeToo movement was founded in 2006 as a way to support those who have suffered

⁸ “Department of Labor Logo United Statesdepartment of Labor.” *Workplace Violence - Overview | Occupational Safety and Health Administration*, <https://www.osha.gov/workplace-violence>.

⁹ “Eliminating Harassment and Violence in the World of Work: UN Global Compact.” *Eliminating Harassment and Violence in the World of Work | UN Global Compact*, <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/academy/eliminating-harassment-and-violence-in-the-world-of-work>.

sexual abuse and help them heal and create resources for allies and victims. Due to the popularity of this movement light has been shed on this issue which has for example led to the first convention on violence in the workplace by the UN Global Compact.

ii. Psychological Harassment

A very common form of psychological harassment takes the form of microaggressions which are often committed against marginalized groups and racial minorities. These microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional and are sometimes even disguised as compliments. They usually are derived from negative prejudice or bias against a certain group or groups. Some examples of microaggressions are: treating a person as less of a citizen because they are not a part of the racial minority in their nation, assuming a person won't be articulate or speak the native language well based on their race, and not accepting that racism exists and not accepting differences between different types of oppression.

C. Stereotypes and Bias

Women often face stereotypes in the workplace, for example they are often described using adjectives connected to emotionality in women's performance reviews and adjectives connected to tasks with men's performance. Women are often evaluated as people not possessing leadership characteristics and have to work harder to prove themselves. Women are also made to complete tasks that do not help them earn a promotion, but rather are more based on care. There is also a double standard because men are praised for being family oriented when interviewing for jobs, but mothers are perceived as less confident and less committed to their work. People of color also experience these stereotypes when they are

not given the benefit of the doubt in the workplace or it is assumed that the white person is the boss rather than a person of color. A person can also be affected by stereotypes exclusively based on their name. It has been shown that white sounding names on resumes have a better chance of receiving callbacks than those with not traditionally white names.

D. Racism

Racism in the workplace can be obvious but is often subtle and hard to recognize if it is not properly addressed. On top of unequal pay and microaggressions/workplace violence, people of color also face the issue of tokenism in the workplace. Tokenism is the practice of hiring a small number of diverse employees in order to have a company present as diverse, when really it is just for presentation and no progress is made in improving lives for people of color in the workplace.

IV. Major Parties Involved

A. UN Women

UN Women works to empower women in the workplace. Along with the UN Global Compact they created the “Women’s empowerment principles” as guidelines to help companies promote women’s engagement in the workforce. They have also created multiple reports on women’s work and created resources for business leaders and employees.

B. UN Committee on Racial Discrimination

This committee is formed by a group of experts monitors the implementation of *The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* which was adopted in 1965 and prohibits racial discrimination in all sectors of life including the workplace.

C. UN Global Compact

The UN Global Compact is an initiative that aims to guide companies and businesses toward sustainability through their ten principles which include the protection of human rights and the elimination of discrimination in the workplace. Over 15,000 companies from 160 countries are participating in this initiative.

D. Iceland

Iceland is rated as the best nation in the world in terms of gender equality. Many women occupy positions in government in either the cabinet or the parliament with women accounting for about 48% of total elected representatives for the parliament in 2016¹⁰. This is very close to political equality and this equality spreads to the workplace. Although Iceland's workforce is not completely equal, in 2018 a law was put in place that required companies employing over 25 companies to get certified, showing that they are paying equal wages or they would risk receiving daily fines¹¹. They are not the only nation to have laws forbidding unequal pay, but this proactive law can not be seen in many other countries' policies.

E. France

France is one of the least racially tolerant nations in Europe. France, despite it being racially diverse, has taken a "color blind" approach to race in which they acknowledge all French people under the French identity no matter their race, gender, etc. Race has become somewhat of a taboo and sorting people based on race or ethnicity is a reminder of nazi practices during the

¹⁰ Written by Magnea Marinósdóttir. "This Is Why Iceland Ranks First for Gender Equality." *World Economic Forum*, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/why-iceland-ranks-first-gender-equality/>.

¹¹ "Equality Won't Happen by Itself: How Iceland Got Tough on Gender Pay Gap." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 20 Feb. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/20/iceland-equal-pay-law-gender-gap-women-jobs-equality>.

holocaust. The French government has even removed the word race from their constitution and replaced it with the word gender in their revision of the document. The first article formerly read that all citizens were equal before the law “regardless of origin, race or religion.” This color blind approach does not have good results as many French people took to the streets to protest racial discrimination in France after the death of George Floyd in May of 2020. On top of that it has been reported that A third of French 18-34 year olds have faced workplace discrimination and 68 percent of those have faced this discrimination due to their origin or race.¹² Ignoring race in the workplace and other sectors has proven to not be a success when it comes to discrimination in France.

VI. Previous & Possible Solutions

A. Hiring and Promotion Processes

It is important to make sure that there is no internal bias in the hiring process and the interview panel is diverse. Longer shortlists also help to diversify a workplace and bring in more female and racially diverse candidates into the running. Gender bias can also be avoided when writing job descriptions. Some adjectives can be associated with gender and it can be more inclusive to avoid gender charged adjectives such as competitive, decisive, and dominant for men and nurturing, loyal and understanding for women. Fair promotion opportunities are also important in

¹² Rfi. “A Third of French 18-34 Year Olds Have Faced Workplace Discrimination.” *RFI*, RFI, 7 Dec. 2021,

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20211207-a-third-of-french-18-34-year-olds-have-faced-workplace-discrimination-racism-gender>.

achieving gender and racial equality and can be achieved through skill based assessments that minimize racial and gender bias.

B. Mentoring

Offering workshops or coaching for women and minorities as well as mentoring from senior employees in order to improve on their skills and advance to higher paying positions. For women in higher up positions, having them mentor other employees, especially men, can help them gain leadership skills and break down the gender bias and the stereotype that men are better or born leaders.

C. Workshops, Safe Spaces and Inclusivity Goals

Another implementable solution is to have guidelines for workplace conduct and having a zero tolerance policy for racist behavior. This can be reinforced through workshops and programs to show acceptable workplace conduct and increase awareness for racism, sexism, inappropriate behavior and when to report it. Employees should be encouraged to report workplace violence and other inappropriate behavior. And if inappropriate behavior does occur support could be offered to those affected by it. Workspaces should also be safe for workers to share their experiences and getting input from women and racial minorities about equality programs can improve already existing programs.

D. Flexible Work Hours

Offering part time jobs, flexible work hours, or allowing employees to work hybrid or fully online can offer a healthier work-life balance. Flexible hours capitalize on the free and productive hours of an employee's day. Working online can also help reduce sexual harassment cases in the workplace and allow women and minorities to feel safer. This method is also helpful for working

parents who can fit their hours around childcare and also be able to spend more time with their children.

E. Salaries

It is also important to keep salaries transparent and ensure that employees doing the same work are receiving the same benefits and salary and are not paid less based on their gender or racial minorities.

VII. Conclusion

Gender and racial inequality affects many people in different workplace scenarios and can make the workplace uncomfortable and sometimes even hostile. As equality has become more of a concern through light shed on the issue by the #metoo movement for example. It is important to correctly address this problem and not take negative stereotypes and bias into account when hiring. It is vital to allow women and minorities the same opportunities as racial majorities and men in order to avoid the glass ceiling and allow more diversity in higher paying and upper level positions.

VIII. Questions to Consider

To what extent are racial minorities discriminated against in your nation?

To what extent is gender inequality an issue in your nation?

Is equity or equality a better principle for making a workplace more equal?

Is managing equal promotions or equal wages more important in reaching equality?

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