Gender equality: progress, setbacks, and COVID-19 challenges toward 2030

Igualdade de gênero: progressos, retrocessos e desafios da Covid-19 rumo a 2030

Igualdad de género: avances, retrocesos y desafíos desde el Covid-19 hacia el 2030

María Luisa González Marín
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1806-0429
PhD (c) Graduate Researcher at International Ibero-American University – UNINI/Mexico. BA in RH Administration and MSc. In Organizational Communication, ULATINA, Costa Rica.
marialg30@gmail.com (correspondence)

ABSTRACT

Despite advancements in recent decades, achieving the 2030 gender equality goal outlined in the United Nations' Agenda 2030 remains uncertain, compounded by the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study explores labor-related findings from a Costa Rican doctoral investigation, revealing that 39% of leadership positions are held by women for Sustainable Development Goal 5, while 61% are occupied by men. Globally, 2400 million women lack equal economic opportunities, and 178 countries face legal barriers hindering women's full participation. Initiatives like the Gender Parity Initiative (GPI) in Costa Rica strive to bridge gender gaps in labor market participation, compensation, and leadership. The study also highlights Sexist Microaggressions, subtle workplace insults reinforcing gender biases. Emphasizing the business case for gender equality, the analysis underscores women as the world's largest emerging market, with McKinsey predicting their global purchasing power to reach $40 trillion by 2025. To promote workplace gender equality, the study draws on the UN Agenda 2030, advocating for quality education, healthcare, decent work, and active social participation. The conclusion echoes Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' urgent call for collective action, emphasizing the need for commitment and bold measures to accelerate progress and bridge the gender gap.

Keywords: gender equality, workplace diversity, sexist advertising, unconscious bias.

RESUMO

Apesar dos avanços nas últimas décadas, alcançar a meta de igualdade de gênero até 2030, delineada na Agenda 2030 das Nações Unidas, permanece incerto, agravado pelas repercussões econômicas da pandemia de Covid-19. Este estudo explora descobertas relacionadas ao trabalho a partir de uma investigação doctoral na Costa Rica, revelando que 39% dos cargos de liderança para o Objetivo de Desenvolvimento Sustentável 5 são ocupados por mulheres, enquanto 61% são ocupados por homens. Globalmente, 2400 milhões de mulheres carecem de oportunidades econômicas iguais, e 178 países enfrentam barreiras legais que impedem a participação plena das mulheres. Iniciativas como a Iniciativa de Paridade de Gênero (IPG) na Costa Rica buscam reduzir as lacunas de gênero na participação no mercado de trabalho, remuneração e liderança. O estudo também destaca micromachismos, insultos sutis no local de trabalho que reforçam preconceitos de gênero. Enfatizando o caso de negócios para a igualdade de gênero, a análise destaca as mulheres como o maior mercado emergente do mundo, com a McKinsey prevendo que seu poder de compra global atingirá US$ 40 trilhões até 2025. Para promover a igualdade de gênero no local de trabalho, o estudo recorre à Agenda 2030 da ONU, defendendo educação de qualidade, cuidados de saúde adequados, trabalho decente e participação social ativa. A conclusão ecoa o apelo urgente do Secretário-Geral Antonio Guterres por ação coletiva, destacando a necessidade de comprometimento e medidas audaciosas para acelerar o progresso e reduzir a lacuna de gênero.

Palavras-chave: igualdade de gênero, diversidade no trabalho, publicidade sexista, preconceitos.

RESUMEN

A pesar de los avances en las últimas décadas, alcanzar la meta de igualdad de género para el año 2030, establecida en la Agenda 2030 de las Naciones Unidas, sigue siendo incierto, agravado por las repercusiones económicas de la pandemia de Covid-19. Este estudio explora hallazgos laborales de una investigación doctoral en Costa Rica, revelando que el 39% de los puestos de liderazgo para el Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 5 son ocupados por mujeres, mientras que el 61% lo están por hombres. A nivel global, 2400 millones de mujeres carecen de oportunidades económicas iguales, y 178 países enfrentan barreras legales que impiden la plena participación de las mujeres. Iniciativas como la Iniciativa de Paridad de Género (IPG) en Costa Rica buscan cerrar las brechas de género en la participación en el mercado laboral, la remuneración y el liderazgo. El estudio también destaca los micromachismos, insultos sutiles en el entorno laboral que refuerzan los sesgos de género. Al enfatizar el caso empresarial para la igualdad de género, el análisis destaca a las mujeres como el mercado emergente más grande del mundo, con McKinsey prediciendo que su poder adquisitivo global alcanzará los US$ 40 billones para 2025. Para promover la igualdad de género en el trabajo, el estudio se basa en la Agenda 2030 de la ONU, abogando por una educación de calidad, atención médica adecuada, trabajo decente y participación social activa. La conclusión resuena con el llamado urgente del Secretario General Antonio Guterres a la acción colectiva, destacando la necesidad de compromiso y medidas audaces para acelerar el progreso y cerrar la brecha de género

Palabras clave: igualdad de género, diversidad en el trabajo, publicidad sexista, sesgos inconscientes.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender equality refers to the equality of rights, responsibilities and opportunities between women and men, boys and girls (United Nations Development Program, 2023). It does not mean that women and men are equal, but rather that men and women, in their diversity, are given equal value and real enjoyment of rights and obligations regardless of their sex, and that their opportunities and expectations do not depend on whether they were born male or female.

Due to the multiple interpretations, circumstances and events that influence an accurate handling of the concept, this article addresses basic concepts of gender, gender stereotypes, sexist advertising, unconscious bias, inclusive work environments, benevolent sexism, motherhood, conscious companies, promotion of equality. It includes statistical information on gender gaps in Costa Rica, a description of the Gender Parity Initiative (GPI-Costa Rica), general information on Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality, and data on business self-diagnosis using the United Nations WEPs tool.

Basic concepts

Why do we talk about gender equality and not equality of the sexes?

Simply because it is understood that people are born with a biological sex referring to physical, physiological and hormonal characteristics that distinguish them at birth. However, this sex, even before birth, is assigned a series of expectations, behavioral norms, ways of thinking, which are directly related to the place where they were born, the culture, the time, the family, etc. These characteristics are what is called gender. That is why it is said that gender is a social construction that will be determined by society.

At the beginning of the last century Simone de Beauvoir, existentialist philosopher, writer, social theorist and feminist activist, born in 1908, caused great controversy when she said that women "are not born" but "are made". This phrase, taken from her book *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, is key, foundational for feminism and there she proved to be a precursor of the movement, a fighter for equality and women's rights. The author was referring to the fact that the paradigm that is attributed to each of the sexes depends mainly on the society in which one was born, therefore, it will be changeable because the characteristics and expectations assigned to men and women at birth will depend on the time and place of birth.

Since before a baby is born, the anxiety and desire to know if it will be a boy or a girl grows and in that eagerness, people start to plan about the gender; perhaps you have seen these activities that are used to do recently to reveal the sex of the baby that is about to be born.

How is the biological sex revealed? It is revealed with colors: pink if it is a girl, light blue if it is a boy. Mandates are given, without bad intentions, but characteristics are attributed *a priori.*

Some of these characteristics are, for example, gender socialization, which consists of binding people into specific gender roles and expectations from an early age. For example, boys are expected to be brave, strong and even aggressive, while girls are taught to be docile, submissive, and to take care of others. Therefore, all of the above shapes the way individuals perceive and behave according to their gender.

Another factor that has a strong impact is the reproduction of historical patterns in which the traditional division of labor between men and women has been perpetuated, limiting women to make career decisions in areas that are not traditional for them. Having generalized beliefs and expectations about how people are supposed to behave, based on their gender, is what is known as gender stereotypes. They are social and cultural constructs and are transmitted through various means, such as the family, the media and society in general.

The social pressure exerted by these factors, strengthened by the media, encourages the need to adhere to these stereotypes in order to avoid rejection, creating what are called "gender stereotypes".

Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are simplified generalizations and do not reflect the diversity and complexity of individuals. Breaking gender stereotypes is fundamental to fostering gender equality and allowing people to express themselves and develop according to their own abilities and interests, regardless of their gender.

Gender stereotypes come in different formats and direct the course we take in life: career, occupation or what is thought of that person. They have been used historically by society, we have absorbed them, they are lodged in the unconscious. So, it can be stated that "gender" refers to those attributes and social opportunities associated with being a man and a woman and to the relationships between women and men, boys and girls. The United Nations Development Program states that these attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context- and time-specific and, therefore, changeable. It is what is expected, allowed and

valued in a woman or man in a given context (2023, para. 2).

The media play a key role in perpetuating gender stereotypes and while they do influence gender inequality, they have the potential to be a powerful tool to challenge and change stereotypes, promote equality and foster a more just and inclusive society. For example, media advertising presents gender stereotypes, showing women in traditional and limited roles. This type of advertising is categorized as sexist advertising.

Sexist advertising

Historically, we have been inundated with advertising that denigrates women.

"Sexist advertising is the set of advertising images that show stereotypes of gender roles, which promote inequality between men and women" (Cuesta, 2022, para. 1). These actions humiliate women, "objectify" them, discriminate against them and at the same time disassociate them from the product being promoted. Figure 1 shows the repetition of these stereotypical concepts. The image, used to celebrate Children's Day, is an advertisement of the French multinational retail chain, Carrefour, from 2018, which was widely criticized: With "C" for champion, with "C" for cook.

**Figure 1.** *Advertising Children's Day, Carrefour, 2018*

Source: Facua (n.d.)
Note: Advertising originally in Spanish

This other ad, from Spain's Edix-Unir online university, says: "If your mother can't pronounce what you want to do, you are a future *digital worker*," implying that mothers are out of date and unaware of what is in vogue in the labor market.

Figure 2. Advertising Edix-Unir University, Spain - Call for Enrollment 2020
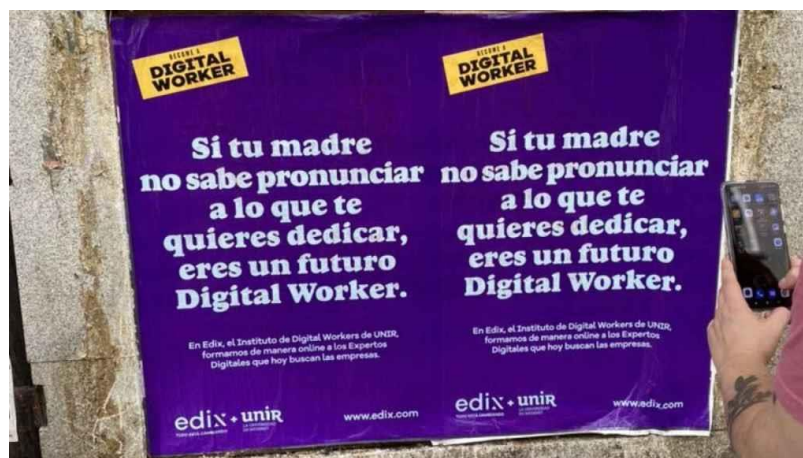
Source: Facua (n.d.)
Note: Advertising originally in Spanish

This is an example of the biases we have lodged in our unconscious and this type of message activates them.

Other examples from 2020:

Example 3: "*Óptica Etnia* Barcelona: Buy yourself some glasses to look at *chichis* (boobs/tits in English)".

The name of this advertisement is not the original one, but it is the one adopted by FACUA after the article that the author Yolanda Domínguez in 2021 dedicated to this campaign. The company has assured that it intended to parody the clichés of the series of the 70's but, according to FACUA, the irony is not appreciated (Verne, 2020, para. 7).

The FACUA Foundation for International Cooperation and Sustainable Consumption is an institution created by FACUA-Consumers in Action as a means to contribute to the promotion of international cooperation activities with the consumer movement in Latin America and the Caribbean and other continents, as well as to devote itself to the study and research of the consumer movement and also to the training of leaders and collaborators of FACUA, as well as citizens who are committed to a more rational and sustainable consumption (FACUA, n.d., p. 1).

Example 4: "*Corte Inglés*: 97% dedicated. 3% selfishness. 0% complaints. 100% mother".

The campaign that the company launched in 2019 on the occasion of Mother's Day, in FACUA's opinion, expresses the idea that being a good mother has a lot to do with being devoted to the family without complaining.

Figure 3. *Advertising Optica Etnia-Barcelona, 2020 and Corte Inglés, 2020*


Source: Facua (n.d.)
Note: Advertising originally in Spanish

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The advertising examples presented show how the media reproduce stereotypical ideas that influence today's society. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate how these biases are preserved in this and other environments. Specifically, the present study addresses the findings obtained from the analysis of the labor area.

The doctoral research that has been developed on the actions carried out by companies in the private business sector in Costa Rica and their effect on the Sustainable Development Goals in the period 20222 revealed, for SDG 5, that of the 47 companies that were invited to participate in the survey, 39% of the leadership positions are held by women, while 61% of the leadership positions are held by men.

Figure 4 *Doctoral research findings*

Doctoral Research Findings
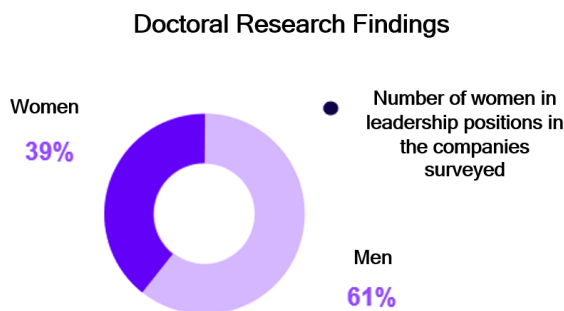
Source: Own elaboration

Only conscious companies will influence change

The World Bank study entitled "Women, Business and the Law 2022" states that around 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal economic opportunities and 178 countries continue to have legal barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the economy. In 86 countries, women face some form of labor restriction and 95 countries do not guarantee equal pay for work of equal value (2022, para. 1-2).

Globally, women still have access to only three quarters of the rights granted to men, which translates into an overall score of 76.5 out of 100 points, indicating the existence of full legal parity. However, despite the disproportionate effect the global pandemic has generated on women's lives and livelihoods, 23 countries reformed their laws in 2021 and took much-needed steps to promote women's economic inclusion, according to the report (World Bank, 2022, p. 2).

**Figure 5.** *Indicators of gender gaps in Costa Rica*
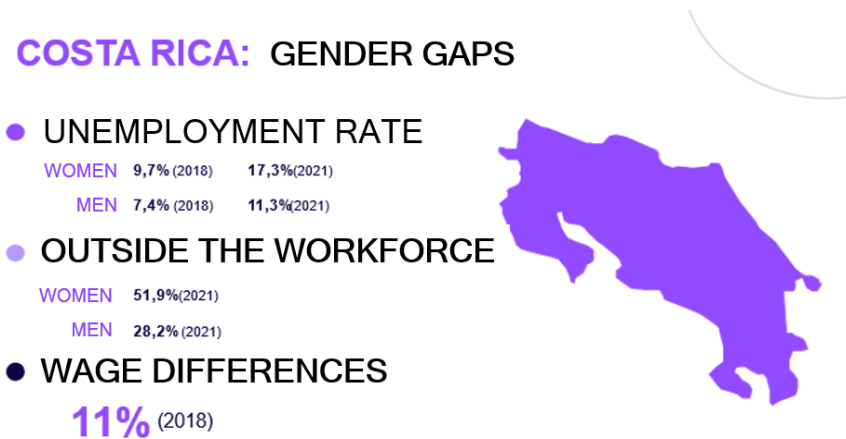
Source: National Institute of Statistics and Census of Costa Rica, 2018, 2021.

Gender Parity Initiative - GPI - in Costa Rica

Several initiatives have been created focused on eradicating disparity, for example, the gender parity initiatives stand out, which "are high-level public-private partnerships promoted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to increase the number of women in the workforce, in leadership positions and close wage gaps" (CR Gender Parity Initiative, n.d., p. 1). In Latin America and the Caribbean, since 2016, they have been promoted with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the French Development Agency (AFD). The purpose of the GEM in Costa Rica is to close gender gaps in participation, remuneration and leadership in the Costa Rican labor market through evidence, experience and the development of strategic alliances. The GEM in Costa Rica has defined a path towards parity:

Figure 6. Roadmap to gender parity defined by the IPG of Costa Rica
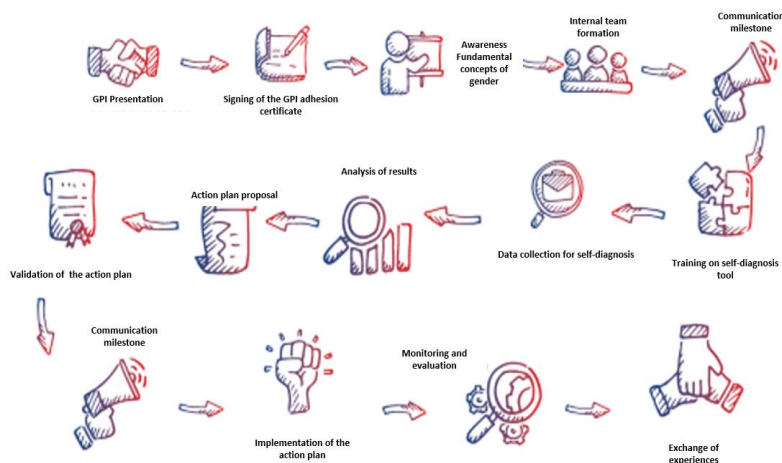
Among the various actions included in the process of corporate adhesion to the IPG, companies are invited to self-diagnose using the United Nations WEPs Tool.

The tool consists of 18 questions and each question is measured in 4 dimensions:

- Commitment

- Implementation

- Measurement

- Transparency

Each dimension also includes very specific verification questions.

Self-diagnosis is an excellent guide for companies because it helps them to:

- Evaluate the company's **strategic approach** and **commitment to** gender **equality.**

- Identify **gender gaps** to attract and retain the best gender-neutral **talent**, have more inclusive **value chains** and more sustainable and efficient **markets.**

- Know what **policies** exist in the organization, how they are measured and how they are communicated.

- Establish a **process of continuous improvement** by establishing a baseline that will serve as a guide for designing an **action plan**. The tool allows for multiple measurements, which facilitates evaluation and monitoring for further improvement.

- Set **concrete goals and objectives**, and measure progress over time. The tool is articulated with programs promoted by international organizations (UNW, ILO, UNGC) and national labels.

- Contribute to the **2030 Agenda**, national and international commitments to advance the gender agenda.

The construction of gender does not only refer to the issues of men and women, but is crossed by a series of stereotypes that then create or deepen discriminations. We grow up with stereotypes about people's appearance, which leads to pigeonholing them: tattoos, skin color, build, hair type, ethnic issues, or that sexually diverse people only think in fun and have no intellectual or professional capabilities, all of these prejudices being very common in the workplace.

This construction of gender attributed to each of the sexes, which is changeable and will depend on the context in which one has grown up, is also nurtured by many institutions from families, schools, advertising and workplaces.

Gender stereotypes are a form of unconscious bias because they bring that automatic association and implicit prejudice that we have towards certain people or groups, and we are not aware of it, they are called unconscious biases.

Unconscious biases: what are they?

Gender stereotypes are fostered or generalizations are made about how women and men should behave: who are better providers, who are more detail-oriented, who should pay the bill, these types of situations, which we consume throughout our lives, are installed in our thought patterns and decisions can be made based on these stereotypes, therefore, it is called unconscious biases.

Now, every day, the brain uses the concept called "cognitive shortcuts", an argument put forward by the Israeli-American psychologist and economist and 2002 Nobel laureate in economics, Daniel Kahneman, in his studies on decision-making, which are basically associations we make from everything we have learned.

In the field of cognitive psychology, these mental shortcuts are called cognitive biases. Kahneman, in his book *Think Fast, Think Slow* (2011), explored intuitive and reflective thinking systems to determine how cognitive biases can influence our decisions. For example: if the traffic light is red, I stop. These associations allow us to survive and are part of what is called System 1 or the Rapid/Intuitive System, which allows us to cope with daily demands and make decisions without collapsing.

Cognitive biases are developed by all people and occur due to different socio-cultural, moral and emotional factors, although other aspects related to memory and information processing also play a role.

Regarding System 2, which is associated with choice and concentration, this is a more reflective process, with better attention, which allows us to make complex mental calculations, plan a route or remember the name of a person that at a certain moment we do not remember, incorporate criteria, take into account what we have learned about non-discrimination.

95% of decisions are made with System 1: walking, combing our hair, bathing, brushing our teeth, among others.

Once learned, they continue to be made automatically. Likewise, when interacting with people, associations are made, which are nourished by these stereotypes and unconscious biases emerge. For example, if someone comes to an interview for an administrative job and arrives with torn pants, the immediate reaction is to think and feel that this person is not "responsible", that he/she is "not serious". Another example is when a person 50 years old or older interviews for an IT position and the reaction is to think that this person, because of his or her age, is not a person up to date in technology.

The reality that women want to change

On the issue of gender equity, women know that there is a reality that they want to change, but the construction of gender has been unequal and has generated different valuations of the feminine and the masculine. For example, women spend many more hours of the day in unpaid domestic work compared to men, and in employment they are in a pyramid in which, as one moves towards decision-making positions, there is less female participation. In addition, the wage gap between men and women is a global problem.

The face of inequality in work environments

The International Labor Organization - ILO, reported in March 2023, that gender differences in employment are greater than previously thought and highlights that women's access to employment, working conditions and income differences have improved minimally in the last 20 years. Work environments that foster gender inequality are nurtured by behaviors that reinforce gender inequality. One such behavior is benevolent sexism.

Benevolent sexism

In work environments, it is common for benevolent sexism to be applied, referring to the belief that women need protection because they are weak and fragile and need the protection of a man.

Benevolent sexism is indirect, it shields itself perfectly and hides from confrontation because it does not seek to be made visible. It is subtle, but it has the deceptive charge of wanting to perpetuate behaviors associated with women, particularly those related to the need for a man to protect them.

The authors Glick and Fiske (1996) presented a theory of sexism formulated as ambivalent towards women and validated by a measure known as the Sexism Inventory. Benevolent sexism, according to these authors, coexists with another form of sexism: hostile sexism. "Both forms of discrimination make up what these authors have baptized as ambivalent sexism" (Psychological World, 2018, para. 3).

Historically, working mothers have faced challenges, but motherhood has created a barrier for many of them in their aspirations for professional growth.

The challenge of motherhood

Working women face a great challenge in finding work-life balance. Work and motherhood, seem to be irreconcilable realities and emerges as an obstacle, said a study published by Forética's Social Impact Cluster, formed by 66 large companies and corporate social responsibility professionals, in March 2019:

Maternity penalizes professional careers for 70.6% of women. This is not the case with paternity, something that only 56.9% of men consider an obstacle in the labor trajectory. Perceptions are not far from reality (Atienza, 2019, para. 2).

Forética is the leading organization in sustainability and corporate social responsibility in Spain. Its mission is to integrate social, environmental and good governance aspects into the strategy and management of companies and organizations. It currently has more than 200 members (Forética, n.d., p. 1).

Working mothers face many challenges. Some of them are:

The feeling of guilt. Mothers feel guilt for leaving their children to go to work; leaving children in the care of a caregiver is always a stressful time, and having this possibility is also unrealistic for many mothers without the economic capacity to do so.

Priorities are criticized. The family itself and many people criticize mothers who choose to work and/or pursue a career instead of being a full-time mother.

The never-ending burden of multitasking. It has been said that women are very effective at multitasking, but this is not so true. Losing focus on an important task because you have to be multitasking prevents excellence and causes frustration; the effort is enormous and the recognition is nil.

No time for themselves. When mothers are raising children and working, there is a stage in which the mother's identity is almost annulled. The self ceases to exist and becomes the support given to others. Mothers are at pains to take the work out of other people's hands and very often lack a support network to give them a moment of respite.

Wanting to be perfect. The "wanting to be perfect" syndrome overwhelms many working mothers. Delegating is not an option for many and this ends up wearing them down and making them sick.

Companies aware of this reality can do a lot to improve these conditions and, among other things, must start by offering:

Equal pay for men and women in similar positions

The UN reports that women's wages are 23% below the wages paid to men and this is a worldwide statistic. Helping to close the gender pay gap becomes an opportunity for organizations. Therefore, three steps that pave the way to achieving that goal stand out, according to Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and author of the book Lean In (2013). These are:

- Conduct a comprehensive job analysis and associated functions, including the salary component.

- Competencies, knowledge and experience are the dimensions under which jobs should be defined.

- Design a salary structure that assigns gender-neutral salary bands to each position and always guarantees that "equal pay for equal work", which in many countries is considered a constitutional right.

Equivalent maternity and paternity leaves

Several countries have laws that allow the mother to take maternity leave, as well as many that have paternity leave.

Providing real opportunities for women to reach leadership positions

Women continue to fight a battle for access to leadership positions. The disparity is real and, although some organizations encourage women to be part of the leadership team, women are still in the minority.

In the annual "Women in the Workplace" reports (2022), published by McKinsey & Company since 2015, this firm proposed several alternative solutions to eliminate this disparity:

• Define an indicator that allows progress to be made in the number of women in leadership positions and that constant reviews are made of the status of the indicator.

• Ensure that, in open positions, women are included as candidates and ensure that women from the company are integrated into the interview process.

• Train interviewers to conduct a fair and ideally standardized interview process that allows for selection without bias of any kind.

• Have a policy that describes the hiring process. Communicate and validate it continuously.

• Have a policy that describes the internal promotion process. Communicate and validate it continuously.

• Leadership development programs should be offered to men and women, with the same content, standardized, without gender difference.

Also, McKinsey & Company highlights that companies can access various tools that support working mothers to better face work challenges.

Support tools for working mothers

- Flexible schedules and hybrid work are definitely a positive differentiator that has an impact on the retention of working mothers.

- Virtual work is very valuable and appreciated by working mothers because it allows them to balance work, personal and family life.

Successful companies that manage these schemes have taken on the task of clarifying the terms and conditions that will govern the employment relationship, so that the limits, responsibilities and objectives to be met are clearly known.

- Development plans, accompaniment, mentoring programs, coaching, educational assistance, etc.

Working mothers deserve to continue to grow in knowledge. Offering them opportunities for development strengthens them and gives them options and paths towards their career development.

Another behavior that occurs in the workplace is Sexist Microaggressions. This also perpetuates the gender stereotypes that do so much harm.

Sexist Microaggressions

These are everyday insults in the work environment that come from unaware people. For example, men interrupt

women three times more often than men, in meetings there is the "invisible woman syndrome", when it comes to performance evaluations, women are mentioned at least one characteristic of their personality, but not men.

Tasks that women are often assigned or choose to perform on the job are often not recognized for promotion. In many organizations, women take on tasks that tend to create a good work environment; for example, organizing a team building activity, taking charge of birthday celebrations or remembering work anniversaries, but these efforts or organizational skills are not taken into account when it comes to promotion. Some examples of Sexist Microaggressions are:

- Do not look directly at or address the woman, but rather her male companion, even if the woman is the consultant.

- Comment about women: "surely it is in those days".

- Not taking a woman's idea into account when she exposes it, but if a man exposes it, it is taken into account; this is called "invisible woman syndrome".

- Ask women when they are going to get married or have children.

Why can it be said that Gender Equality is "good business"?

The claim that women are the world's largest emerging market is based on several economic reasons and trends:

Increased purchasing power. Increased access to education, job opportunities and participation in the economy has led women to improve their income and become decision makers when purchasing goods and services.

Demographic changes. The aging of the population and the reduction of the birth rate generate a repositioning of women in society due to the growing demand for health, education and child rearing services and the constant search for family welfare.

Consumption patterns. They differentiate women from men's consumption patterns, particularly because of the responsibility with which women make purchasing decisions in which there is an orientation to select companies and suppliers that truly satisfy their needs.

Entrepreneurship. Female creativity has stood out because for a long time women have faced barriers and obstacles in their participation in the public sphere and in the recognition of their creative talents. Although female entrepreneurship was very high before the pandemic, Covid-19 was a challenge for women in terms of innovation. As a result, the growth rate of small businesses around the world has increased since then. This phenomenon activates value chains, which are related to new forms of financing that are created to support them, in addition to the high demand for training and development to ensure the success of their business.

According to the Global Entrepreneur Monitor (GEM), in 2020, approximately 250 million women worldwide were involved in entrepreneurial activities, representing a participation rate of 30%. The consulting firm McKinsey reported in 2022 that the global purchasing power of women will reach $40 trillion by 2025, a factor that is driven by the increase in female employment rates and the placement of women in leadership positions.

How to promote gender equality at work?

We can start by reviewing what the United Nations Agenda 2030 (n.d.) states for Sustainable Development Goal - SDG 5 in terms of Gender Equality: *"Women and girls continue to face discrimination and violence in all parts of the world. Moderate progress is observed and measured with regard to gender equality, including access to primary education for girls and boys"*. This fundamental right is the basis for peace, prosperity and social sustainability. Access to the best quality education, adequate medical care and services, decent and well-paid work and social participation in some political and economic decision-making processes will undoubtedly bring enormous benefit to societies around the world.

Proposal of a research agenda for future studies

In response to the evolving landscape of gender equality, this research agenda outlines potential empirical studies aimed at delving into multifaceted aspects of this critical issue. The agenda spans diverse subjects such as workplace dynamics, media representation, legal frameworks, initiatives for gender parity, and the impact of pandemics on gender disparities. Employing various methodological approaches, including surveys, case studies, content analysis, and program evaluations, these studies aim to uncover causal relationships and provide nuanced insights into the contexts and cases surrounding gender equality. By addressing these pivotal areas, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering equitable societies globally.

Table 1. Proposal of a research agenda for future studies in gender equity

SUBJECT/TOPIC	POSSIBLE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP	CONTEXTS AND CASES FOR ANALYSIS
WORKPLACE GENDER DISPARITIES	Mixed-Methods Survey and Case Studies	Economic Contraction & Gender Gaps	Private Enterprises in Costa Rica: Impact of COVID-19 on Leadership Roles
MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN	Content Analysis and Qualitative Interviews	Media Influence & Gender Stereotypes	Global Media: Examining Gender Stereotypes in Advertisements
MICROMACHISMS IN THE WORKPLACE	Observational Studies and Qualitative Interviews	Workplace Culture & Gender Bias	Multinational Corporations: Identifying and Addressing Micromachisms
LEGAL BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC EQUALITY	Comparative Legal Analysis and Case Studies	Legal Frameworks & Economic Opportunities	Analysis of Gender-Related Legislation Across 5 Latin American Countries
INITIATIVES FOR GENDER PARITY	Program Evaluation and Longitudinal Surveys	Effectiveness of Gender Initiatives	Assessing the Impact of the Gender Parity Initiative in Costa Rica
WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP	Quantitative Surveys and Case Studies	Economic Trends & Entrepreneurial Success	Global Entrepreneurial Landscape: Trends and Challenges for Women
IMPACT OF PANDEMICS ON GENDER EQUALITY	Longitudinal Surveys and Qualitative Interviews	Health Crisis & Gender Disparities	Comparative Study: COVID-19 Impact on Women in 5 Diverse Countries

Source: Own elaboration

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article ends by mentioning that in March 2023, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated before the Commission on the Status of Women that: Progress towards gender equality "is fading before our eyes" (Guterres 2023 cited in Subramanian, 2023).

Guterres, speaking to the UN's key women's rights group ahead of International Women's Day last March 8, mentioned that gender equality is "300 years away," according to the latest estimates from UN Women, the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment.

To achieve gender equality, Guterres called for "collective" and "urgent" action, from increasing education, income and employment for women and girls, especially in developing countries of the Global South, to promoting the participation of women and girls in science and technology. Also, he added, "Centuries of patriarchy, discrimination and harmful stereotypes have created a huge gender gap in science and technology, Guterres said. Let's be clear: global frameworks are not working for the world's women and girls. They need to change" (para. 13).

In conclusion, commitment and bold action are needed to accelerate progress, including through the promotion of laws, policies, budgets and institutions that promote gender equality. Greater investment in gender statistics is vital, as less than half of the data needed to monitor SDG 5 is currently available.

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