

IN BRIEF



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES WORKSHOP FOR REPUBLIC OF KOREA

APRIL 2023

Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

Snapshot

The UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality organized the first workshop on the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) in the Republic of Korea. Established by UN Women and UN Global Compact, the WEPs are a set of Principles offering guidance to business on how to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community.

Hosted in Seoul on 20 April 2023, the event brought together 70 business representatives responsible for corporate strategies, including human resources, to learn about the UN's gender-equality guidelines for businesses and benchmark global companies' practices. The workshop was filled with enthusiasm from participants taking notes of key messages shared and asking questions. Initially scheduled for two hours, the workshop ran over by 40 minutes due to the lively interactions between speakers and participants.

"We would like to gain insights from the United Nations on how companies can internalize efforts for gender equality," said one message projected on the screen. "We would like to benchmark global companies' practices in implementing gender equality policies more proactively within our organization," proclaimed another. Both messages were written by participants describing their reasons to join the workshop, and on what they mean for Korean businesses.

The workshop was organized to introduce the business community operating in the Republic of Korea to the WEPs and it was co-hosted by the UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality and the UN Global Compact Network Korea.

Words from the Organizers



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

"We believe that companies can take the lead in achieving gender equality through innovation, employment, and finance. Such efforts will not only benefit women and men who work for companies, families, and communities but also the social responsibility and financial performance of companies."

-Jeongshim Lee, director of the UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality

"I hope that this event today will be a signal to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and diversity and inclusion within companies and that it will be an opportunity to create substantial change by leading active sharing and discussion."

-Yeoncheol Yoo, Secretary-General of UN Global Compact Network Korea



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung



"We welcome Korean companies to the global WEPs network of nearly 8,000 signatories. To be a leader in today's global market, gender equality needs to be at the core of business models. It is what stakeholders - investors, business partners, talent, consumers - expect from companies."

-Anna Falth, Global Head of WEPs, UN Women



Gender Equality Means Better Business

WEPs - UN's roadmap on gender equality for the private sector

Keynote Speech

The keynote speaker, Mi Hwa Park, WEPs Coordinator at the WEPs Secretariat at UN Women, highlighted the significance of the WEPs for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. She explained that companies striving for gender equality ultimately become the ones where talents prefer to work, consumers prefer to purchase from, and investors prefer to invest in, leading to long-term profit growth.

[According to a study conducted by UN Women of 350 major companies from G7 countries in 2021](#), WEPs signatories demonstrated better performance in 10 key performance indicators relating to gender equality, namely: the proportion of women on boards, among executives, and in senior management; flexible work; living wage; parental leave; equal opportunities; human rights; social supply chain; gender audit; career development for all employees; and gender balance in the workforce.



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

Mihwa Park, WEPs coordinator, WEPs Global Secretariat, UN Women, delivering her presentation.

Park also shared innovative best practices with regards to each WEPs principle. One example was a Latin American Airline that offered training programmes to develop women pilots to reach gender parity in their pilot pool since there was a lack of women graduates from aviation schools. Another example referred to an investment bank in South Africa that has introduced sponsorship programmes supporting women employees, going a step further from traditional mentoring programmes to support women's career advancement and capacity development.

BOX 1

The Seven Principles of Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

- Principle 1  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2  Treat all women and men fairly at work- respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Principle 3  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

Case Studies

Global WEPs signatories also shared their experiences. Featured in the workshop were GSMA, a global organisation unifying over 1000 mobile operators and businesses across the mobile ecosystem; Mastercard, a global card brand; Nestlé, one of the world's leading food and beverage companies; and RSM International, a global network of 120 assurance, tax, and consulting firms. They covered all seven WEPs, but highlighted the following four:

1 PRINCIPLE

High-level corporate leadership

Tamara Dancheva, Senior Manager for International Relations at the GSMA, explained how its corporate executives have taken the lead in changing the corporate culture. "The decision to join the UN WEPs was led by the Director-General of the GSMA, Mats Granryd, who apart from being a feminist, understands that being an inclusive employer is the right thing to do and critical for the fulfilment of GSMA's mission to connect everyone and everything to a better future," Dancheva noted. For example, "One GSMA": an employee-led forum established to lead on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), is sponsored by the GSMA Chief Financial Officer Louise Easterbrook, Chief Regulatory Officer John Giusti, and Head of Human Resources Lizzie Chilton. Dancheva emphasized that "it is absolutely critical to have both leadership and employees' buy-in, as it only then that D&I becomes a part of the company culture."

4 PRINCIPLE

Education and training for career advancement

Amanda Gervay, Senior Vice President for People and Capability at the Asia Pacific office of Mastercard, presented how Mastercard invests in women employees' empowerment through its gender-balance initiatives. For example, Mastercard has achieved pay parity where women earn \$1 for every \$1 that men earn, at the same level doing the same role. Globally 81 per cent of its application process had at least one female candidate for all roles. Mastercard also runs a women leadership programme in order to develop career paths for women as well as to amplify their voices within the organization. "We provide training through simulations of real-life scenarios to our vice-president level and above, allowing them to practice leadership skills," said Gervay. "We do aim to have them ready for board seats in the next two or three years."

5 PRINCIPLE

Enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices

The efforts of companies extend not only within their organizations but also beyond. Nilüfer Demirkol, Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Nestlé, talked about their gender equality efforts within the supply chain. Nespresso, one of Nestlé's businesses, for instance, integrated a gender perspective into their own programmes designed for improving the livelihoods of coffee farmers by introducing a gender-analysis tool. They collected the data on the gender gap in their operations in Indonesia, Guatemala, and Ethiopia, and suggested possible actions to close the gap. "This tool is a gender data set which was designed to provide insights that enable action to be taken, ensuring women have access to resources and empowering them to participate in the decision-making process," Demirkol added.

7 PRINCIPLE

Measurement and reporting

Candice Eaton Gaul, Global Diversity and Inclusion Leader at RSM International suggested that companies disclose the journey of promoting gender equality through transparent tracking and reporting. Eaton Gaul explained: "Businesses that want to be sustainable and successful with global competitiveness have gender equality as a focus at board level as it is a critical governance issue."

She mentioned a few reasons for this. First, diversity provides business opportunities, and when not properly implemented, there are business and reputation risks. "Good corporate governance means taking charge of public perception, or perhaps in some cases, public scrutiny," Eaton Gaul said. "As a result of hyper transparency of social media and our increasing interconnectedness, we need to be honest about the position of our businesses in terms of the current state, regardless of whether that position is favourable or not." She stated that "it is important to be honest even in unfavourable circumstances because it garners the respect of the marketplace and employees. It's courageous to admit that there is a journey for improvement and commitment for action."

The second reason is to prepare for actual regulations being enacted. Eaton Gaul mentioned that, according to the Gender Pay Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2020 and 2021, gender equality has regressed, leading to increased pressure from various research institutions for data disclosure and corrective measures. "We can also see that coming to life in Europe, following the 'woman on boards' directive of the European Parliament laying the path for others to follow."

The speakers from RSM, GSMA and Mastercard highlighted that they publicly disclose key gender equality indicators, including data on the gender pay gap, and take action to close the gap.

Q&A Session

During the questions-and-answers session, there was a question on how to generate the momentum for advancing the WEPs, as well as request for concrete suggestions on facilitating promotion of women to senior management positions.

Eaton Gaul stated: "Access to opportunity is crucial because it provides individuals with the chance to explore alternative paths, empower them to shape their future, define their aspirations, and determine their personal development journey."



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

The speakers of Women's Empowerment Principles Workshop for Korea answer questions in the Q&A sessions.

"There are divergent opinions regarding quotas, but let's be candid," Dancheva said. "Without setting targets, progress will be stagnant, as targets demonstrate a willingness and commitment to change. [...] If we claim a lack of qualified women for board nominations, why not consider nominating a senior woman who doesn't necessarily hold a vice president position? Lowering the criteria and initiating from there can be a starting point."

Furthermore, Park stated: "It is important to look beyond number of women in senior management and executives. Often the positions held by women tend to have less decision-making power than the roles held by men. While getting more number of women up in the leadership is important, they need to be at positions with more decision making power."

It was also mentioned that it is necessary to garner support not only from women but also from men in order to support an enabling environment in the workplace. Gervy stated: "Male allyship is of incredibly important. In most organizations today, the reality is that many decision-makers responsible for hiring and promotions are males."

To achieve this, there is a need for an increased understanding that gender-inclusive workplace benefits not only women but ultimately also men. For instance, Mastercard has implemented a gender-neutral policy that provides a minimum of 16 weeks of paid leave to both women and men, aiming to increase male involvement in domestic responsibilities. This initiative aligns with the third principle of the WEPs, which ensures the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.

Ji-yeon Park from Korean retail company BGF, a workshop participant, said: "As there is a high proportion of men in our company, I need strategies on how to implement gender equality policies, and this event was very helpful."

Another participant mentioned: "It was informative to not only receive an overview of WEPs but also learn about various cases from different companies. I highly recommend WEPs to our company and our partner companies."



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

Approximately 70 representatives from Korea-based companies and institutions participate in the WEPs workshop on April 20.

BOX 2

Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Eligibility Criteria

All companies committed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community are invited to join the WEPs. This includes private, public, and state-owned companies of any size and industry and, established under national law. Cooperatives, industry associations, and chambers of commerce are also eligible. UN Women provides various materials such as manuals, case studies and guides, as well as consulting services to WEPs signatories. In response to the high demand, the UN Women Centre in Seoul plans to organize follow-up events for the private sector to continue the discussion on gender equality and women's empowerment through WEPs.