



## Global Leadership in Action Series – Report No.1

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Ibec's first Global Leadership in Action series of events kicked off with the theme of *Achieving an Equal Future by Getting Serious About Gender Equity*.

**Jackie King**, Executive Director, International Business, and **Kara McGann**, Head of Social Policy, Ibec were joined by:

- **Frances Fitzgerald**, Member of European Parliament and EPP lead of the committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality;
- **Donna Leinwand Leger**, president and founder of DC Media Strategies LLC and a senior advisor to Stanton Communications;
- **Vicki Saunders**, founder of SheEO and #radical generosity;
- **Hanni Rosenbaum**, Executive Director of Paris-based Business at OECD (BIAC).

We were then joined by the following panellists:

- **Mairéad Nayager**, Global Chief HR Officer at Diageo headquarters;
- **Annemarie Muntz**, head of global public affairs for Randstad;
- **Janice McDonald**, award-winning entrepreneur, best-selling author, independent director and international speaker.

The wide-ranging conversations among our exceptional speakers and panellists touched on the key challenges, opportunities, good practices, and areas for focus, in the broad tapestry of issues surrounding gender equity.

A flavour of some of the major conversation points included:

- How far we have come and how far we still have to go to achieve gender equality;
- The impact of COVID-19 on the progress on gender balance;
- The care economy;
- The need to remain agile and evolving on the gender agenda;
- The power of language;

- Engaging men on the matter of gender equity;
- The challenges for female entrepreneurs;
- Gender stereotypes and attitudes;
- Education and youth.

This report will offer some highlights of the conversations and serve as a backdrop from which our next events will launch.

## 1. Global economic landscape for gender equity and the “Covid effect”

Setting the context for the event, the global landscape and some of the key business case statistics on the economic value created by gender equality were outlined. The impact that could be achieved in terms of GDP through progress on gender equality was significant, as was the size of the negative result should the gender-regressive effects of Covid go unstopped:

- In a best-in-region scenario where all countries match the performance of the country in their region that has made the most progress toward gender equality, \$12 trillion a year could be added to GDP in 2025 – that is equivalent in size to the GDP of Japan, Germany, and the UK combined<sup>1</sup>.
- Failure to counter the gender-regressive impacts of COVID-19, would result in global GDP growth \$1 trillion lower in 2030 than it would be if women’s unemployment simply tracked that of men in each sector<sup>2</sup>.
- The impact on growth would be worse if increased childcare responsibilities, a slower recovery, and reduced public and private spending on services such as education and childcare force women to leave the labour market permanently; this is a trend which we are already seeing evidence of<sup>3</sup>.

The legacy of Covid may be that even the limited gains in gender equality made in the past decades are at risk of being somewhat rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems, which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic.

Global and local research has identified that based on the sectors women dominate, the positions they populate, and the greater level of responsibility for child, elder care and household duties; that the pandemic impact for women has the potential to be catastrophic. Women’s jobs have been identified as being 19% more at risk<sup>4</sup>, senior-level women are more exhausted and burned out compared to men, with 1 in 4 considering stepping out or slowing down in their careers. Other

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

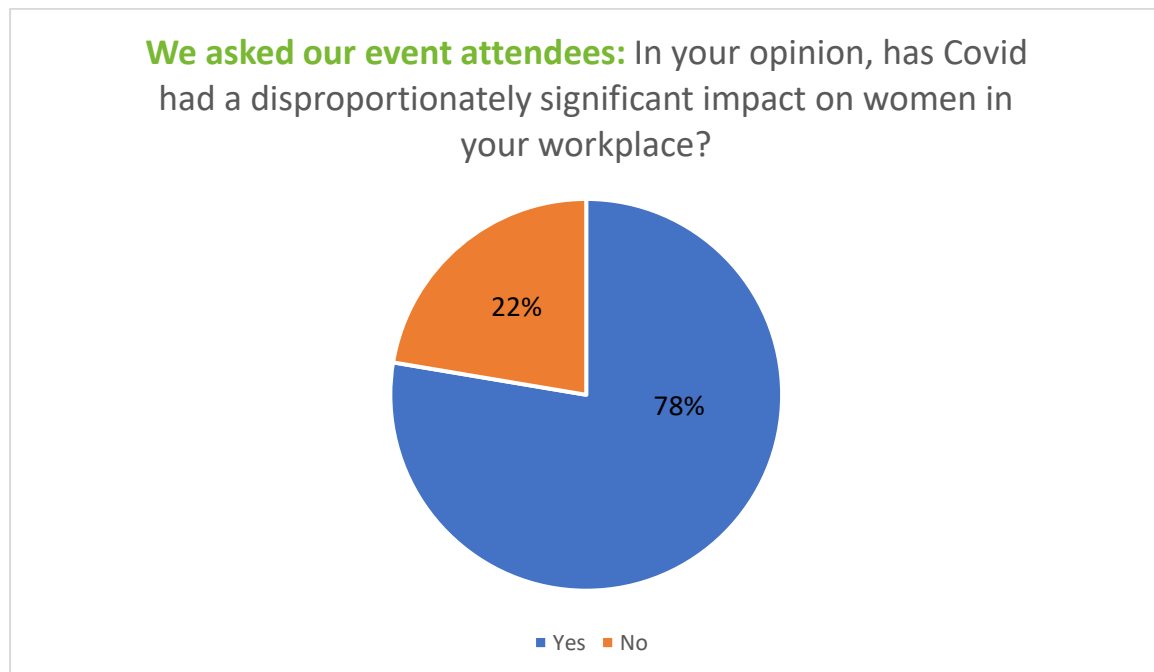
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

commentators have posited that progress for women in work across the OECD could regress to 2017 levels by the end of 2021<sup>5</sup>.

It is acknowledged that a key factor in women’s progression within organisations is the visibility of their input to colleagues and managers. While many Ibec survey<sup>6</sup> respondents had specific initiatives in place to support women’s visibility, few had implemented new initiatives since the pandemic began. Therefore, while a lot of good foundational work is underway in organisations helping progress to gender equality, the Covid effect has not really been taken into account. A failure to swiftly and decisively address the slippage that is becoming apparent for women, and minimise its impact going forward, will have long-term implications for gender balance and the representation of women in the workplace and undo hard won progress to date.

The majority of event attendees polled were in agreement that Covid had a significant effect on women in their workplace.



There has been dramatic progress achieved in gender equality over the last 100 years, with changes in law, women’s voices being stronger, and business getting involved in diversity and inclusion. However, when examining the situation today and the statistics and challenges emerging, there remains work to be done.

Echoing the earlier economic arguments, the need to take gender equality seriously, not as an “add on” or something we do “when we have time” was emphasised. It was acknowledged that there was a role for all in this agenda, business, government, policy makers and individuals.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pwc.ie/media-centre/press-releases/2021/women-in-work-index-reveals-covid-reverses.html>

<sup>6</sup> Ibec (2021) <https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/media/2021/04/18/new-ibec-research-reveals-impact-of-covid-on-women-in-business>

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *What is the responsibility of the workers and certainly women themselves? You are not secure in your job; you should educate yourself on long-term trends in the labour market. You should grab the opportunities; no job is secure. We have seen a lot of new jobs, we see a lot of diversity in work forms, that's great... so post-Covid there will certainly be more hybrid working, more flexibility so that will help.*

## 2. Care

A major theme discussed throughout the event was that of care. It was seen as a significant challenge spotlighted throughout the pandemic, as people tried to combine work and family life. Despite this many countries did not consider childcare as essential during the crisis. Discussion ensued around what influences women's and couples' choices in their careers and the role that care plays given how it is balanced, as well as how work and family life are defined.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *The loss to the economy is potentially very high when it comes to women – women who have opted out of working for a variety of reasons, women who have not been able to get the level of childcare...only one third of families have equal care between women and men when it comes to caring tasks.*

Some employers have acknowledged the importance of care and employment. For example, Diageo introduced in 2019 equal parental leave fully paid for 26 weeks for men and women who have become parents. This not only acknowledges the reality of dual career couples, the different ways people become parents, and that there is often more than one parent involved, but also has an indirect benefit to women as men are encouraged to take leave also.

While Covid changed how many worked and offered an opportunity to re-examine models of care and work life balance, it also highlighted the increased number of women taking on more care and household duties and reverting to traditional norms regardless of their employment status. Women have traditionally done the care work in society which has been quite undervalued, and there is a need to examine this and look at care in a different way.

Building on this, commentators discussed how the care economy and who is doing the caring requires attention. In the caring economy, 76% of healthcare workers, 93% of childcare workers, 95% of domestic cleaners, and 86% of personal care workers are women. How we approach and value care has a significant impact therefore for women and it will tell us a lot about what and who we value in how we deal with this. There were calls to support the care economy and to create high value jobs in this sector.

## 3. Engaging men

The need to engage men more meaningfully was highlighted as necessary to progress the gender equality agenda.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *Women on their own can't have conversations about women and expect phenomenal results – they definitely need men, who are still in the majority in*

***leadership roles, to be influenced and open to change. So, it has to be the case that this is a discussion that involves not just creating allies but having leaders who will take action.***

The issue of gender equality was emphasised as not being a “women’s only” issue, but rather a societal issue and that men therefore need to feel part of the conversation. The discussion among attendees developed around how important it is not only to find male allies, but to have them move beyond champions to taking meaningful action. This was seen as a crucial step towards encouraging a more evolved dialogue on the issue and ensuring that the right equity measures are supported and put in place to level the playing field. The current situation is not benefitting all men either and so greater equity was seen as essential for all.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *We have to be bold, put aside the budget, make the investment, and ensure we build the capability of everyone in the organisation. This isn’t something that is just exclusive to women to lead this conversation - it has to be something that is owned and led by everyone.*

The issue of gender fatigue was cited as one reason why the progress around gender equality may have stalled. Many organisations have been working in this area for decades and investing resources into equality and gender initiatives over that time and this has led some to the conclusion that the issue has been addressed. This has made it complicated for leaders to take on board gender equality in a consistent way in terms of implementation.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *I think it’s time to take some of the burden of equality off the shoulders of women and put it onto the shoulders of male leaders and male champions. We need male champions when it comes to gender equality.*

It was suggested that when targets are set in the workplace around gender equality that many, in particular men, considered this to be a contest where they may not have as much access to opportunity. To shift this, a change in narrative has to occur where everyone talks about having the best talent for the organisations regardless of the diversity it brings and that those opportunities are open to everyone. However, others felt that there was still a lot of work to do to unpack the unconscious biases that may prevent those opportunities to be equally available to all. While organisations may legitimately be looking for the best talent, the criteria used may not be inclusive enough.

#### **4. Language**

An interesting discussion surrounded the issue of language which was far reaching. On the positive side, gender equality is now part of the conversation in the boardroom, the newsroom and the classroom and many women are feeling empowered enough to air grievances. However, gender equality is not the same as equity, and women are still facing barriers that prevent them from having the opportunity to hold certain leadership roles. Indeed when they do take those roles it is newsworthy as they are often the first in their field and it is still exceedingly rare.

For example, while 442 companies went public in the US in 2020, only 4 were founded by women<sup>7</sup>, and Bloomberg's Billionaires Index<sup>8</sup> found that self-made men outnumber their female peers 20 to 1 on wealth generation. While Yale Law Women Top Firms Report<sup>9</sup> found men and women entered the workplace in equal numbers and at the same levels but only 20% of equity partners were female as women had dropped out before leadership level.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *We need everybody on our labour market; that's to do with welfare, to do with aging, demographics - so we need that participation.*

When looking at women's participation and how some women self-select out of the workplace or from applying for roles, again language was examined as it may not encourage them to see themselves in that environment. However, the powerful effect that adjustments in language can achieve highlighted the importance of employers intentionally creating an inclusive environment.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *Words are really important - when we think about gender transformation we should also try and think about transforming, how we talk about these things and the words that we use.*

Similarly linguistic studies have found a change in vocabulary, results in a change in outcomes. A study by Harvard Business Review<sup>10</sup> highlighted how as greater numbers of women joined the boards of multinational organisations, there was a resulting change in language and vocabulary. The language became more inclusive and collaborative while the organisations saw an increased propensity for change and innovation while the risk of transformation was decreased.

The importance of equipping people to have the right language to enable them to have the conversations in organisations need to be part of the skills development for managers and leaders.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *A perceived notion that women entrepreneurs are risk averse. That is inaccurate language - in fact we are risk rational. It's a subtle difference but the notion around being rational and their thinking behind it was 'we want more information before we make a decision'. How is that a bad thing?*

Another important dimension of languages surrounds artificial intelligence and the reality that women are not going into cloud computing and AI at the same rates as men. This is a real problem with far reaching consequences.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *An issue of language that we don't think about as often is the language of algorithms. Men are designing AI and they are loading it unintentionally with bias.*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/female-entrepreneurs-face-obstacles-taking-companies-public-2020-12?r=US&IR=T>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/billionaires/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ylw.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-YLW-Top-Firms-Report-vF.pdf>

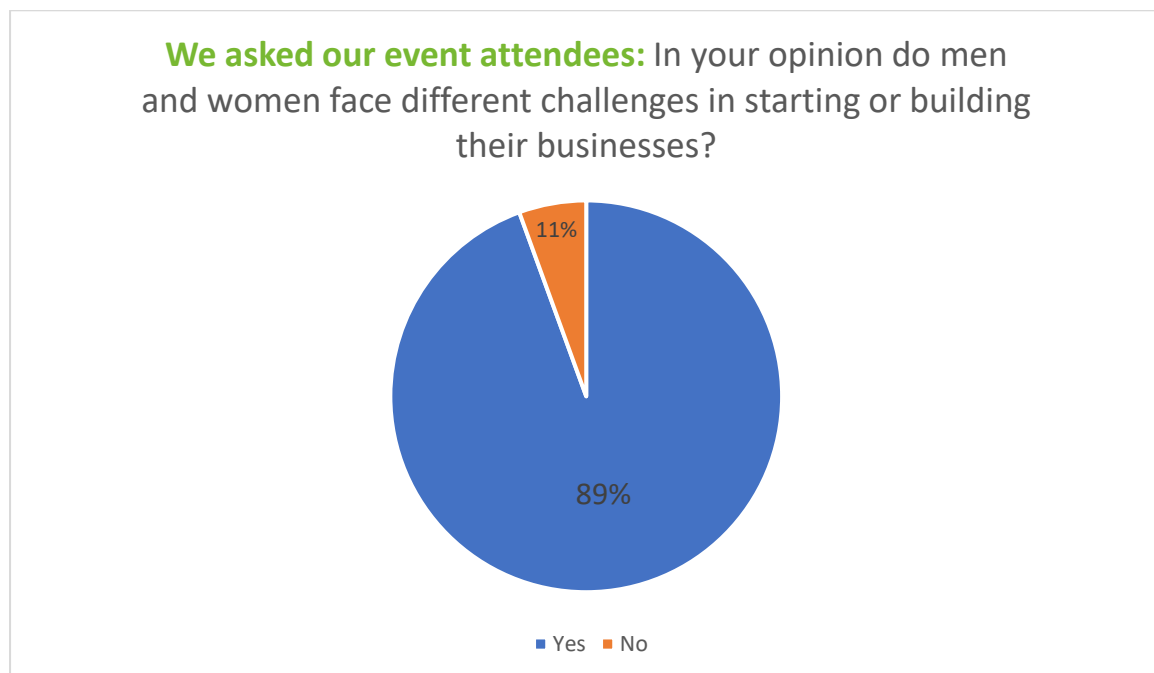
<sup>10</sup> <https://hbr.org/2021/04/research-adding-women-to-the-c-suite-changes-how-companies-think>

Organisations have demonstrated the language effect when examining why women were not making it through their online job screening processes. The online system, based on an algorithm, was screening out females as the computer code was biased against women. This is something that we are going to have to be very mindful of in the future. The outcomes are being shaped without women participating. While technology as a source is not gendered, it may act as such if only one gender is coding it through AI because humans are biased.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *Wake up everybody - this model that we have, this world that we have in front of us is not good enough. It doesn't include people, it puts way too many people to the margins, we're still talking about gender equality. We're going to figure this out just at the point when gender is not a thing anymore. Talk to the next generation coming along - everything is nonbinary, flex, in-flow.*

## 5. Entrepreneurship

It was highlighted that we are living in a world designed by less than 50%, so we are not capturing diverse ideas and solutions for solving the world's problems. While Governments are good at supporting start-ups, capital and access to finance remains a challenge for female entrepreneurs. Covid too has had an impact on gender and entrepreneurship. For example, in Canada, there has been a major backslide and a 48% decrease in the amount of money going to female entrepreneurs.



Crucial too for entrepreneurial success is the presence of strong networks to ensure the entrepreneur is aware of everything that is available from grants to opportunities. Traditionally the 'old boys' network' played that role but now there is growth of female supported networks which introduce and sponsor those female entrepreneurs with their connections.

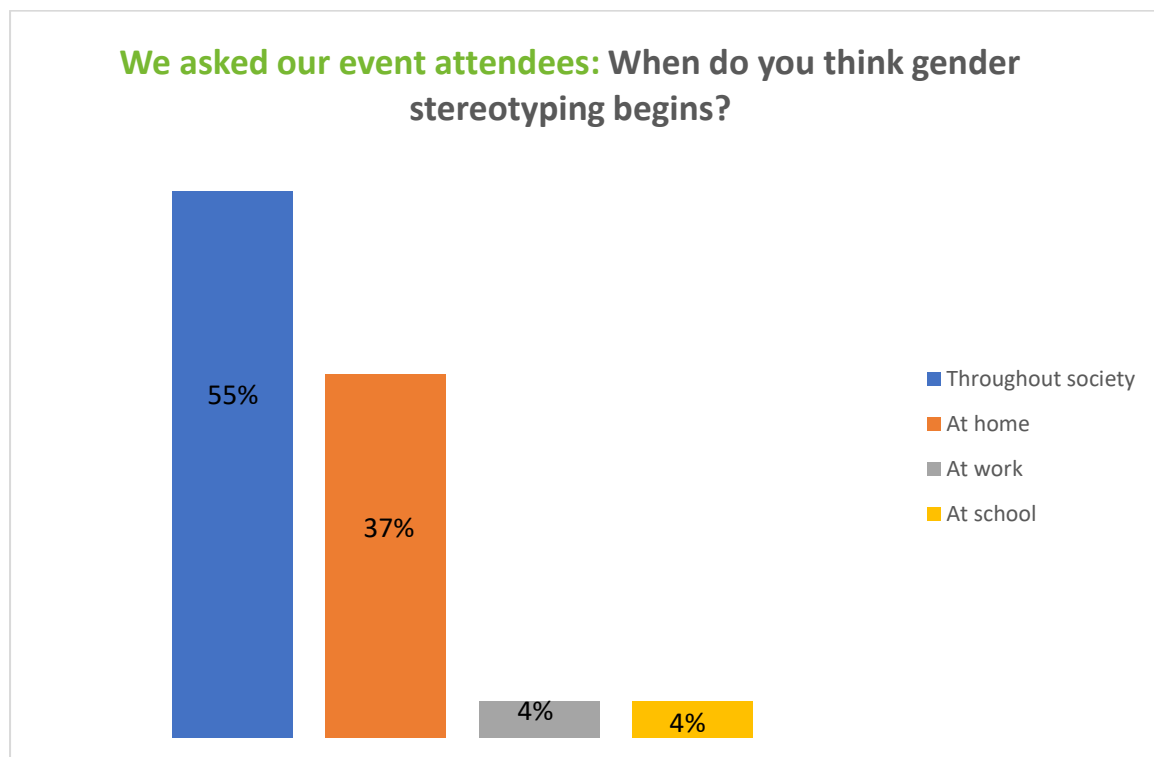
**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *Those with the resources haven't always been in a community with those with the ideas.*

## 6. Attitudes and gender stereotypes

Undermining positive strides around gender equality can be attitudes and gender stereotypes. The need to address systemic issues early on are key to gender equality and a focus on education is essential if we are to get to the root causes of the issue.

In many countries, girls outperform boys in education and women obtain higher education levels than men. Yet, despite such positive results girls are still less likely to be employed and often earn less worldwide. Part of the cause of this seems to relate to attitudes towards competition and failure among boys and girls, which finds that girls express fewer positive attitudes towards competition than boys. To address this and close this gender gap will require starting with education, non-discriminatory curricula and well-trained teachers. But it will also require a real focus on attitudes and stereotypes, conscious and unconscious biases and this responsibility is shared between schools, teachers, business and parents.

**Comments highlighted during the discussion:** *In addition to the education results, we must also address these more subjective points such as attitudes and gender stereotypes. This must be addressed early on, so that girls have the confidence to engage in careers based on their qualifications and an objective assessment of their strengths, and also boys might actually consider careers where they currently are underrepresented.*



Similar challenges impact the number of women undertaking STEM careers and can be linked to cultural stereotypes in workplaces. Again a 'whole of society' approach will be required including early intervention, role models to show that girls can pursue successful careers in STEM, further role



models in business, in academia, and government, as well as partnerships between business and education to influence curriculum design and provide mentoring.

#### What our event attendees told us:

Throughout the event, we asked delegates for their comments on various topics we were discussing and for their thoughts on the questions that remain unanswered. The main areas that emerged for further exploration were:

- How to change the narrative and rally a call to action?
- How to gather data, monitor and measure progress and outcomes?
- How to start the conversation on engaging men and moving them from being allies to taking real action?
- How to avoid losing the focus on gender equity to a broader, 'watered down' approach to diversity and inclusion?
- What are some tangible examples of what other employers are doing, what worked and what did not?
- How do we remove the barriers to females working through critical life stages?
- How do we create a pipeline of talent that represents diverse groups within an organisation, so we are not always scrambling to achieve gender balance at the leadership level?

#### What's next?

**Ibec Global Leadership in Action** will host our next event in **September**, which will focus on gender smart investing, gender and wealth management, the power of the purse, and the fact that women drive the majority of consumer purchasing decisions through buying power and influence. Further details on this event will be shared with you in due course.

Ibec is currently working on a vast array of issues throughout our diversity and inclusion work. We work with employers, government, NGOs and other parties; share best practice; lobby for progress around all aspects of diversity, inclusion and belonging and engage in research on many of these themes. Among the topical areas currently underway include:

- Working with government to support the introduction of a meaningful gender pay gap reporting measure in Ireland;
- Addressing the gender balance on boards in PLC, Private and Multi-national organisations;
- Supporting the development of a national anti-racism strategy in Ireland and engaging business around this issue;
- Encouraging greater employment of people with disabilities through lobbying for changes in the grants and funding availability and ownership for people with disabilities and ensuring the relevant advice and information supports are available for employers;
- Raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing marginalised groups accessing and progressing in the workplace including their presence within labour market activation strategies;
- Promoting the awareness, interventions and supports for employers to introduce mental health and wellbeing strategies in the workplace.