

## Has Lockdown helped Gender Balance in Irish Organisations?

Like all other sectors in Irish society, the Community, Voluntary, Charity and not-for-profit sector do not escape the issue of gender balance and gender pay gaps. But has there been an unintended consequence in that Covid-19 restrictions and move to remote working has helped to address the issue?

International Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> March provides an opportunity to look closely at the gender balance issues and see what we can do to address some of the issues in getting the balance right, particularly at senior levels.

Research carried out by the [30% club](#) in 2020 stated that while the split when entering the workforce is 50:50, this gradually changes as the levels of management increases. The Central Statistics Office released some very telling information based on a Gender Balance in Business Survey in 2019. It found that just one in nine (11.5%) Irish CEOs were women, two in ten women were on Boards of Directors, less than one in ten were Chairpersons while three in ten women were Senior Executives<sup>1</sup>.

In autumn 2020, The Community Foundation for Ireland and The Wheel launched the 2nd Gender Pay Gap Report for Ireland's Community, Voluntary and Charitable Sector, using the National Pay & Benefits survey data 2019. Both the pay and the gender data collected in this survey provide important benchmarks for the sector, enabling organisations to establish their own position in comparison to other similar charities, and providing data to support operational and strategic decision-making.

This Gender Pay Gap report represents an attempt to understand the experience of the community and voluntary sector in relation to women participation rates at various management levels. This sector is dominated by women, who represent almost seven out of ten (69%) of the almost 1,000 managers examined. It would be expected that, given such a preponderance of women within the sector, the gender pay gap would be minimal and women would be represented at all levels and across all activities within the sector. However, this turns out not to be the case.

This report shows the overall average gender pay gap for management grades is 15.2%, i.e. women are paid 85% of the men rate overall. These figures are an improvement on those of 2017 which was 16.7%. Over six out of ten CEOs in the survey were women, with women predominating at almost all levels of management, including most senior management. However, the highest proportions of women representation were still at middle/lower management level, with men more likely to hold senior management roles in larger organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Office, May 2019 – "Gender Balance in Business Survey"

So why do we not see more women in top positions? There is no getting away from the fact that senior management of organisations in general have historically been seen as male dominated and this has been slow to change. There are a number of reasons for this but the obvious one is family commitments which may impact on a woman's chances of being promoted. There is agreement across the board that more must be done to get more balance, particularly at senior level, but how to achieve this is something that continues to be debated.

### **Gender Balance and Covid-19**

As part of the annual HR Barometer research conducted by Adare Human Resource Management, they asked organisations about their intention to introduce gender balance initiatives this year. Just one in ten (11%) said that they are considering implementing initiatives to address the issue in their organisation. And of those who had introduced measures, the top three initiatives were Awareness Campaigns around Gender, Recruitment Drive and Gathering Gender Pay Data.

One of the main barriers that has been frequently highlighted for more women not progressing in the workplace is flexibility around managing family life with work. If one good thing has come as a result of the current health crisis, it is that employers have had no other choice but to move to a remote working model, thus affording the same level of flexibility that was not there pre-Covid. The last twelve months have demonstrated that remote working can benefit both the employer and employee.

In a submission to the Citizen Assembly last year, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission recommended that the Government implement a system of statutory gender quotas for organisational board membership. This was made against the background of the CSO information mentioned previously. While there are arguments for and against, this idea is in line with other countries such as Norway, which has strict gender quotas for boards.

Regardless of any introduction of gender quotas (or sometimes what is seen as more acceptable are gender targets), organisations need to ensure there are clear pathways for female employees and that they have the necessary supports to succeed and progress to senior levels. However, gender balance is not about getting more women into senior positions; it's about getting the right person with the right skills into the position they deserve, regardless of their gender.

### **Addressing the Gender Pay Gap**

Addressing the gender pay gap has been a topic of discussion for some time and the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill was published in April 2019. The current Minister for Equality had given his commitment to bring the Bill before the Dáil in January of this year but that has yet to happen. When enacted, this will require employers to provide information on their gender pay gap, as well as providing a narrative to explain steps that they have taken to deal with any existing gender pay gap. The Bill initially will apply to organisations with over 250 employees but will extend to all organisations employing over 50 employees within three years of commencement.

Organisations should be addressing any imbalance. Conduct gender pay audits, set gender balance targets and to review HR policies and practices are actions we would advise organisations to do to prepare, while also closely look at how promotions, salary increases, and bonuses (if available) are implemented to ensure gender balance.

This will assist to create a more balanced, inclusive and diverse workforce – which should be at the core of any nonprofit organisation. We need to future-proof the recruitment and promotion eco-system; ensuring there is a balanced pipeline of talent coming through the organisation and ensuring that there is a better balance, particularly at senior levels.

It is not possible to know the extent to which the gender pay gap reflects discrimination, women's under-valuing of their own work, women's pay negotiation approaches/beliefs, or other reasons.

However, given how important equality and having an equitable work environment is to employees in this sector, were women to feel they were being paid less than men, this could give rise to negative consequences such as lower morale, reduced commitment and engagement, and higher turnover. This creates a strong incentive for managers in this sector to design and ensure equitable representation for women and to ensure diversity in recruitment, selection, training, promotion, and opportunity

The Community Foundation for Ireland & The Wheel's Gender Pay Gap report 2020 concludes that it appears some men are still getting the best paid jobs, even in a sector that is woman-dominated and where there are twice as many women managers as men. In addition, the presence or absence of women on boards does not appear to have a positive influence overall on the level of the gender pay gap.

The importance of providing women role models within the nonprofit sector to support the progress of other women in their careers is undeniable, with board representation and senior management representation for women as critical elements of this approach. There are several ways that women's progress into senior management can be stymied. It is critical to ensure that any organisational barriers are minimised or removed, so that women employees can be confident in putting themselves forward for promotion, and be supported in doing so by an organisation that openly values their contribution.

Examining organisational practices to ensure the lack of unconscious bias in recruitment and selection, providing women with both the practical tools and personal skills to progress through the various levels of management, and establishing a culture where the contribution of all employees is equally valued and rewarded, are all pillars of a strong diversity and inclusion strategy.

Understanding the particular challenges that may be faced by women in attaining the most senior management levels and committing to overcome those challenges as an organisation, can be a determining factor in organisational success in reducing gender pay gap, increasing women participation and development, and providing a more equitable, fair and just organisation for all employees.

You can download and read the CFI & The Wheel Gender Pay Gap 2020 report [here](#).

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