

# Diversity & inclusion: Gender diversity

Women comprise around one-third of international assignees. Given that diversity is advantageous for organisations and assignments provide capability building and career opportunities for employees, it is disappointing that women's participation remains lower than men's.

## **GENDERED DIFFERENCES IN ASSIGNMENT TAKE-UP**

Although women's participation in international assignments has risen from 3% in the early 1980s, it now seems to have reached a plateau at 34%. Explanations have focused on women's interest in international careers, host country reception to women assignees and employers' reluctance to send them abroad.

However, research has shown that women are interested in undertaking international assignments, and locals are receptive towards them (even in masculine societies).

## **WOMEN'S SUCCESS**

Female expatriates do well on international assignments. Research indicates that women can achieve even more successful assignment outcomes than men. Increasing gender diversity is therefore advantageous to employers' talent management strategies.

Although historically organisations have been reluctant to send women, recent focus on extending assignee diversity has meant that employers are increasingly looking towards their

assignment policies to see how gender diversity (and other forms of diversity) can be facilitated.

## **SEGREGATED LABOUR MARKETS**

The labour market is segregated both vertically and horizontally and this disadvantages women in accessing international careers

Vertical segregation means that women are concentrated lower down in organisational hierarchies. The concept of the 'glass ceiling' refers to the invisible barrier limiting women's career progression. Horizontal segregation means that women tend to be concentrated in lower status/paid 'feminised' jobs.

Global mobility is both vertically and horizontally segregated. International assignments tend to be offered to more senior individuals and masculine industries (such as the extractive industries) tend to use the largest volumes of assignees. A 'glass border' effect can help to explain women's lower participation in global mobility.

## **FURTHER BARRIERS**

Women's careers are more constrained than men's by dual careers and family relationships. Women tend to hold greater family responsibilities than men. They also hold lower family power if they are the secondary earner. As such, the lead career (often the man's) takes precedence.

## **EMPLOYER ACTIONS**

Approaches to policy design and implementation can reinforce glass ceilings and borders. Employers should therefore review their selection process, assignment types used, and provide assignment support.

Open and transparent selection methods such as advertising vacancies, using structured interviews, and selection

panels representative of diversity, are all beneficial to women's selection.

Women's family responsibilities mean that they prefer less disruptive assignment types. Long-term, accompanied assignments are often preferred as they provide family stability.

Organisational support before, during, and after expatriation is critical for women's assignment participation. Access to networks, mentors, sponsors and role models are helpful interventions for women.

## **ASSIGNMENT POLICY**

Women value particular assignment policy elements and look for these to support their relocation. Emphasis on housing quality and children's education/childcare are of particular value. Medical care and security issues are also of concern.

Women also look for an appropriate work-life balance and flexibility so these are other areas which require consideration. Policy should address home leave, working time, and rest and recreation leave in challenging destinations.

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