

Empowered diplomacy: bridging the gender gap

Executive summary

The joint Icelandic-Slovenian study sought to assess gender equality and equal opportunities in both Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) by identifying key issues that are country-specific, apply to both diplomacies, and are relevant to diplomacy as a profession in general. Building on the results of the 2009 Slovenian study, the project was designed as a reciprocal peer-review exercise, providing an insight into individual good practices while looking into key gender gaps that continue to inhibit progress in achieving gender parity.

The process of preparing the study led through a number of bilateral dialogues between steering groups that were formed in both MFAs within the span of one year, from July 2019 to July 2020. In addition to the consultations held, the study drew on the results of a MFA-wide survey, a set of structured interviews with employees as well as an analysis of gender parity at top-level posts in both MFAs in the past decade.

Consultations revealed a complex nature of the gender gap in diplomacy, with factors such as power, culture, awareness, family/caring responsibilities as well as the prevalence of sexual harassment all playing important roles. The subsequent analysis focused on these five gender gaps in order to frame the state of play and provide a basis for recommendations.

POWER: Mainly visible through the gender gap at high-level posts.

CULTURE: Reflected in perceived stereotypes and biases.

AWARENESS: Assessed through views on gender equality and related aspects.

FAMILY: Reflected in perceived work-life balance and its impact on both genders.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Assessed through the prevalence of experienced sexual harassment.

Through analyzing the results of the interviews, the survey, the organizational pipeline as well as available work-life balance instruments at both MFAs, the following **conclusions** were made concerning each of the five areas.

POWER:

- Women continue to be underrepresented at top levels in both diplomacies, but the pace of progress in the past decade has been remarkable.
- In Slovenia, women apply less to posts abroad, and

particularly less to top-level posts. The key path to reach gender equality at top positions in the Slovenian MFA lies in creating the conditions that would enable more women to apply for these posts.

- The decision to serve abroad is more difficult to make for diplomats with families.
- The main reservations concerning serving abroad for women are connected to their caring responsibilities, while men are generally more concerned with financial reasons.

CULTURE:

- Women are still confronted with barriers resulting from the traditional roles ascribed to them.
- Women perceive that stereotypes and prejudices continue working against them. They feel they have to prove themselves worthy to a greater extent than men, have a larger workload, and are more often in doubt about their performance.
- Women experience that men benefit to a greater extent from informal networking that often shapes decisions.

AWARENESS:

- While men predominantly consider gender equality important for ensuring non-discrimination, they are not as convinced as women are that gender equality actually makes diplomacy better.



- Women feel much more discriminated against than men when it comes to elements concerning their daily work: in assigning workload and tasks, in communications, in talking or being heard at meetings as well as concerning work conditions such as office space.
- In contrast, men feel most discriminated against in areas such as promotions, candidacies for leadership roles, for posts abroad as well as in employee evaluation.

FAMILY:

- Unequal distribution of family and caring responsibilities continues to impact women's career opportunities and choices.
- Men find it easier to use different options provided at work to take care of their family duties.
- Employees are aware of the positive link between measures to enhance work-life balance and gender equality; however, they acknowledge that serving abroad poses a particular challenge in this respect. When assessing which aspects of living abroad need to be improved the most, women particularly highlight measures related to work-family balance, while men are generally less concerned about these aspects.
- Employees of both genders are in favour of positive discrimination based on family circumstances in competing for posts abroad.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT:

- Sexual harassment disproportionately affects women, with high rates of women having witnessed or experienced sexual harassment, including sexual assaults.
- The level of trust in the mechanisms and processes for complaints is relatively low, particularly in Slovenia.
- Sexual harassment continues to be a sensitive or even taboo topic, with many diplomats feeling uneasy discussing it. This inhibits greater awareness and progress in addressing the issue.

The study showed that despite many cultural and organisational differences between the MFAs of Iceland and Slovenia, the challenges that both diplomacies experience in pursuit of gender equality are remarkably similar, highlighting universal difficulties posed to women in pursuit of a successful diplomatic career.

On the basis of the findings, several recommendations were put forward, beginning with a clear commitment to change that needs to come from the top-level leadership of the institutions. The **recommendations** include:

1. Commit to implementation, oversee progress, and enhance transparency

- Set goals and targets concerning the pipeline with the aim to reach gender parity
- Determine performance indicators and monitor progress in additional areas such as recruitment, career progression, applications, and selections.
- Make the data public and visible.
- Actively encourage women's applications for managerial positions.

2. Zero tolerance for sexual harassment

- Enforce zero tolerance for sexual harassment cases.
- Establish and/or enforce a code of conduct or a code of ethics.
- Make complaint procedures clear, trustworthy, and known to all employees.
- Organise workshops and training to raise awareness, especially among management.

3. Establish and/or improve and promote life- and family-friendly policies

- Improve the possibilities of using flexible hours.
- Promote work from home and provide technical equipment and support.
- Collect and disseminate useful information concerning life at a particular post as well as regarding relocation and reintegration back home.
- Establish a focal point for family-related aspects of the diplomatic career at the Ministry.
- Work on improving aspects of life abroad that particularly affect women, such as conditions of maternity and parental leave as well as child-caring arrangements.

4. Raise awareness and promote gender-sensitive organisational culture

- Organise workshops and training.
- Encourage managers and employees to speak out against biases and stereotypes.
- Promote gender-balanced teams wherever possible.

5. Gender mainstreaming

- Integrate a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures, and spending programmes.
- Establish or enhance the work of a dedicated, permanent working body to oversee integrating gender dimensions in all policy areas.

6. Make personnel decisions transparent and merit-based

- Further define and specify criteria and procedures for personnel decisions.
- Enhance the system of employee evaluations with a focus on results.

7. Join forces internationally

- Strive to improve the legal and policy framework on the employment of diplomatic spouses.
- Promote local information-sharing between interested embassies concerning different practical aspects of diplomatic life.
- Collaborate to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality in diplomacy.

