

Private sector and public companies exchange information on gender equality in business during the 2018 WEPs Forum

Seventy experts presented their experiences in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union. During the meeting, two new Brazilian companies - Lee Hecht Harrison Brasil and Sodexo Benefícios e Incentivos - signed onto the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), increasing to 174 the number of Brazilian corporations engaged. Globally, there are almost 2,000 signatory companies to the WEPs.

About 550 business leaders from the private and public sectors as well as authorities from 14 countries participated in the **2018 WEPs Forum: A dialogue between Latin American, Caribbean countries and the European Union**, which took place in São Paulo on August 29 and 30. The meeting promoted the exchange of experiences between corporate initiatives and examples of public policies that support the economic empowerment of women.

In addition to this, the 2018 WEPs Forum was also the occasion for the launch of the Regional Programme **Win-Win: Gender equality means Good Business**, being implemented by UN Women, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the European Union in six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean area: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Uruguay. UN Women Brazil leads the programme's regional implementation.

Another highlight of the 2018 WEPs Forum, organized by the three institutions, with the support of Global Compact Network Brazil and the Women's 360 Movement, was the sign on of two other companies to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs): Lee Hecht Harrison Brasil and Sodexo Benefícios e Incentivos, bringing to 174 the number of signatory companies to WEPs in the country, placing it in third place in the ranking. Developed by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, the WEPs are seven principles that have become a benchmark for companies to implement actions to promote gender equality in the workplace, market and community. Globally, there are almost 2,000 signatory companies.

Gender Equality Agenda - The WEPs Forum brought together high-level authorities committed to women's rights. Also present were: Panama's vice president and chancellor, Isabel de Saint Malo Alvarado, who is also ambassador to the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) - an initiative of UN Women, the ILO and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - and the Minister of Women and Gender Equality of Chile, Isabel Plá.

The challenges of Latin America and the Caribbean in closing gender gaps and promoting equality between men and women in the world of work were highlighted by representatives of the three institutions implementing the Regional *Win-Win Program: Gender Equality Means Good Business*: Luiza Carvalho, Regional Director of UN Women for the Americas and the Caribbean; João Gomes Cravinho, Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union in

Brazil; Martin Hahn, Director of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Brazil; and Nadine Gasman, Representative of UN Women in Brazil. In addition, the Presidents of four companies also participated: Santander Brasil, Sodexo Latam, Sabin Medicina Diagnóstica and Unilever Brasil, reinforcing their public commitment to the economic empowerment of women.

One of the spokespeople - Lidia Abdalla, CEO of Sabin Medicina Diagnóstica - said there is need to transform institutional culture, impact its supply chains and stimulate changes around the company. For Abdalla, the “elements” to accomplish this: clear communication, formalization of agreements and stipulation of goals, “is not always easy. It brings management challenges, but also great wealth for business,” she said. Invited to share the commitments of Santander Brasil, CEO Sergio Rial drew attention to the trend towards compliance in the corporate world. “Companies have to have flexibility and dialogue,” he said, referring to them opening up to the new times.

In her speech, Panama's Vice President and Chancellor, Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado, pointed out that wage differentials between men and women are more pronounced in urban areas of rich countries where there are large numbers of women in informal work and part-time work. This reinforces the need for a united effort between governments, business and society for gender equity. “It is unacceptable that today, after so many years of civilization and society, there are still differences between men and women. Success in the equity agenda is a shared responsibility,” she said.

Inclusion of women is a great business - During the launch of the Regional Programme *Win-Win: Gender Equality means Good Business*, the Regional Director of UN Women for the Americas and the Caribbean, Luiza Carvalho, pointed out the responsibility of companies to accelerate the empowerment of women. “They can promote many actions, either by changing their corporate culture, by eliminating discriminatory practices, by promoting active policies of incorporation and the rise of women in their cadres,” she said.

“It's not possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without unleashing the potential of women. With this project we want to help create conditions for women entrepreneurs from Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean to work together. That's good for everyone and that's why we talk about Win-Win's great potential,” said João Gomes Cravinho, European Union's ambassador to Brazil.

Gender in Business Strategy - Together, the six countries involved in the Win-Win Programme bring together nearly 250 companies that have signed WEPs. With almost 70% of the total signatories, the Brazilian companies represent mainly the electric, banking and financial sectors, technology, supplies, health, food, media and textiles. With the Win-Win Programme, the goal is to significantly expand the number of signatories, bringing gender to the heart of business strategy.

The director of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Brazil, Martin Hahn, noted that more than 90% of jobs worldwide are in the private sector. “The power of business

transformation is huge and very strategic to business. We perceive that there is a direct and very clear relationship in the improvement of the results of companies that have implemented programs that promote gender equality. More diversity creates creativity and improvement in products,” he said.

Privileges and Racial Issues - Committing to inclusion and addressing inequalities in the economy are the basis/approaches for changes for the empowerment of women in the public and private sectors, including those at the bottom of the economic pyramid and those who need to be brought into formal employment and better remuneration. Some of these points were addressed by Isabel Plá, Minister of Women and Gender Equality of Chile. She is confident that gender equality will soon become part of market competitiveness and then commonplace. The Chilean minister questioned a recurring concept in the business world: that of meritocracy. “In Latin America, talent, merit and effort for women are not enough. Today, only 7% of us are in management positions in Chilean politics,” she said. In May, Isabel Plá launched in Santiago the “Agenda Mujer” (“Women's Agenda”), a program with 22 measures that seek to achieve equality of rights and duties for men and women, among them the promotion of greater participation of women in senior positions.

Taking a similar position was Cida Bento, coordinator of the Center for Studies on Labor Relations and Inequalities (CEERT). To a predominantly white audience, she said: “When I look at this room, I almost forget the reality of Brazil. I challenge my colleagues, how can we bring the agenda of equity with more presence at these moments, so that it engages black, indigenous, quilombola(/afro-descendant?) women? Brazilian women are all of us. The reality of business is changing - but for whom?,” she said.

Leadership and gender pay gap - During the 2018 WEPs Forum, not yet published research by the Dom Cabral Foundation on salary differences was also presented in partnership with the Alliance for the Empowerment of Women - which has the support of UN Women. The data indicates that there is still a large gender pay gap in the labour market, which increases considerably as positions become higher. According to the study, while 54% of the administrative posts are occupied by women, only 31% of them hold management positions in companies. This number drops to 26% in posts of presidency and vice-presidency.

Among the various panels of the WEPs Forum, the following themes were discussed: engagement of men in gender equality, role of companies in ending violence against women, gender-sensitive purchasing mechanisms, advertising stereotypes and inclusion of women with and the LGBTI+ community, among others.

Get to know the WEPs

The seven Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are:

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.

Press information

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