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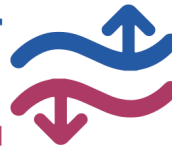
Gender Equity and Egypt's Private Sector: Vodafone Egypt and the Egyptian Gender Equity Seal (EGES)



and the

Egyptian Gender
Equity Seal

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I. BACKGROUND

Within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 5 is dedicated to the fulfilment of Gender Equality and is based on the notion that securing equal rights for women and girls is a fundamental human right and will have a multiplier effect with regards to achieving all other goals and development areas.¹

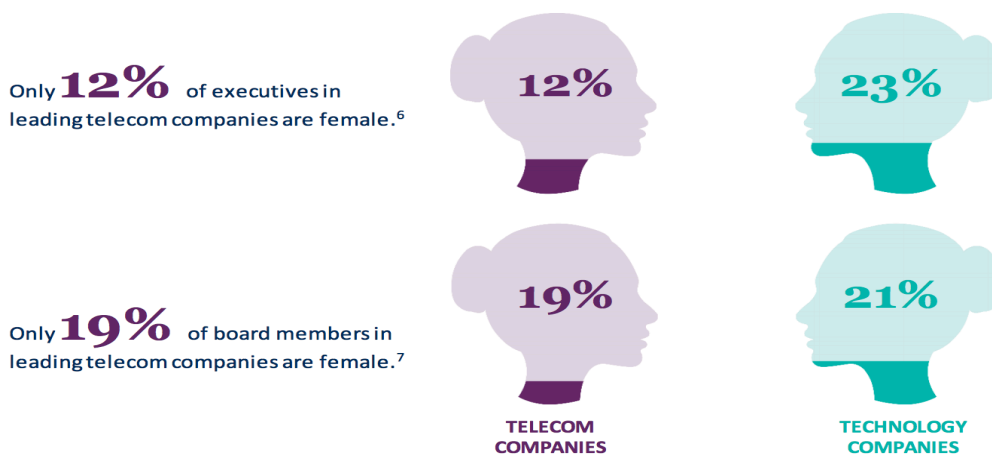


Women's equal labour force participation is a particularly important factor in improving positive outcomes at the national, community and family levels for a comprehensive and critical range of socio-economic indicators, including those related to economic growth, agency, quality of life, health, and education. Efforts supported by national governments and multilateral development organizations globally reflect increased focus on supporting women's employment, and the World Bank continues to spearhead multiple approaches to create an environment that supports women's employment and financial inclusion. The business case for inclusion and diversity has never been stronger and is underlined by a steadily increasing volume of research that demonstrates that women's equal participation in the workplace, and particularly representation on boards, has a positive impact on both company stability and profitability.

Unfortunately, women still make up a very low percentage of the global workforce today. Upper management is drastically under-represented by women, and only 4.8% of Fortune 500 CEO's and five of the FTSE 100 CEOs are women. In the telecommunications industry specifically, only 13% of "the 100 most powerful" people in the industry on the 2020 Capacity (formerly Global Telecoms Business) Power 100 list were women, one point lower than the 14% of the 2019 list. "Women account for less than 40% of the workforce in three-quarters of telecommunications companies surveyed."²

Only 12% of executives at telecommunications companies are women."³ In Egypt, women in the telecommunications sector are "excluded from outdoor functions at the blue-collar level and female managers struggle to obtain managerial positions requiring stereotypically masculine traits."⁴ It is vital for policymakers to contribute to promoting sustainable gender diversity in the telecommunications sector. Females who are highly skilled in STEM will play an enormous role in the success of technology-intensive sectors and investing in the suitable skills will create gender balanced work environments.⁵

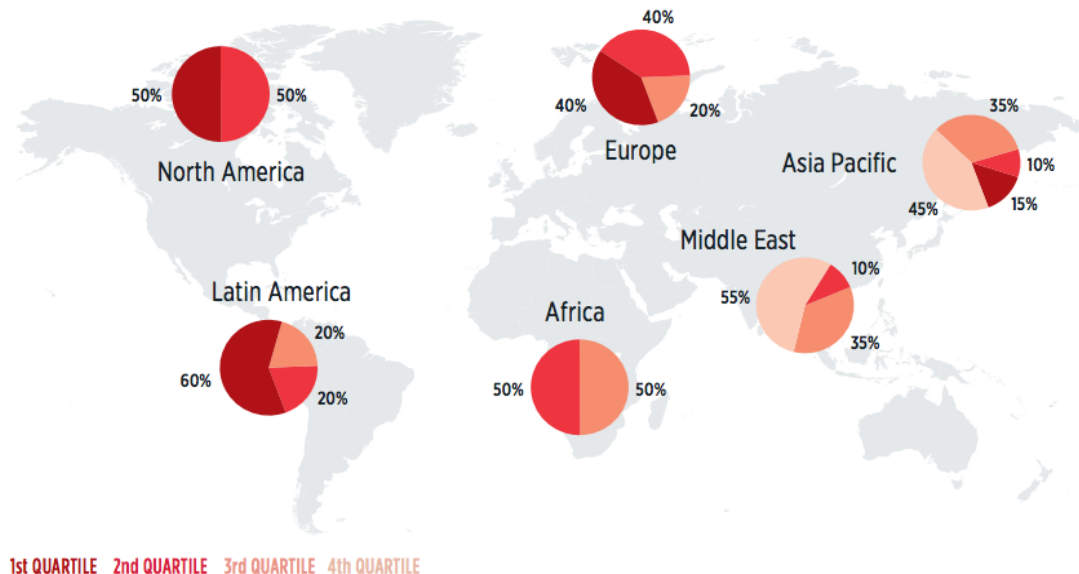
Gender diversity in telecom is even worse than in the technology industry more broadly



Source: Russell Reynolds Associates. *The Gender Gap in The Technology Industry Is Worrying—And Telecom Is Lagging Even Further Behind!*⁸

The business case for women’s inclusion whether as employees, or customers has never been stronger. Since research has demonstrated that women control the majority of household savings; a more diverse workforce would allow for achieving a better understanding of female customers⁷. In parallel, including more women means accessing more untapped talents, which is essential in a world where talent competition is fierce⁸. This is apart from the fact that companies with diverse workforces and leadership tend to outperform their less balanced peers by 21% when it comes to profitability, and 27% when it comes to value creation.⁹

Gender Diversity of Telecommunications Companies Surveyed, by Region¹⁰



1st QUARTILE 2nd QUARTILE 3rd QUARTILE 4th QUARTILE

Source: GSMA Connected Women Survey 2014, Eurostat, UNESCAP, ILO, company CSR reports, European Roundtable of Industrialists, A.T. Kearney analysis

II. ABOUT VODAFONE EGYPT

Vodafone entered the Egyptian market in 1998 as a partner in Egypt’s second Telecom operator, Click GSM. By 2002, Vodafone Group had acquired Click GSM, and it was rebranded into Vodafone Egypt. Today, Vodafone Egypt is one of the country’s four Telecom operators, and holds a significant share of the market. Vodafone International also launched its offshore operations in Egypt in 2007 under Vodafone International Services, which offers outsourced business processes, and information technology services, and has created thousands of jobs for young Egyptians, enabling them to serve more than 80 countries while being based out of Egypt. Today, Vodafone Egypt is a leading player within its sector, and as a thought leader and initiator of good business practice. It serves more than 44 million customers and employs more than 6,500 individuals.

III. VODAFONE EGYPT’S MANDATE

The introduction of Vodafone International Services has been a pioneering step in Vodafone’s journey, and has unlocked this market for many other players. Today, Egypt is a leader in Business Process Outsourcing largely because of Vodafone’s pioneering entry to this market. Vodafone Egypt is also largely influenced by the strategies and vision of Vodafone internationally. Likewise, Vodafone Egypt has pioneered various services and practices in the Egyptian market. Vodafone Egypt introduced Vodafone Cash to the Egyptian market in 2013 and

44,000,000 +
Customers
6,500 +
Employees

has been pushing for the utilization of the technology to promote financial inclusion and empower marginalized Egyptians.

Vodafone Egypt started issuing sustainability reports and sharing its mandate and progress with regards to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) performance in 2013. Workplace diversity and inclusion have been on the top of the company's agenda ever since. According to the company's 2016-2018 sustainability report, Vodafone Egypt prioritizes three core issues in its sustainability strategy: Women's Empowerment, Innovation, and Youth Empowerment through skills and jobs. With regards to women's empowerment, Vodafone's 2025 goal is to "connect an additional 50 million women living in emerging markets to mobile," and it aspires "to become the world's best employer for women."¹¹



Currently, Vodafone Egypt's own business strategy focuses on the following:



Naturally, employee engagement and satisfaction are a top priority within the company's sustainability framework, whereby the company is working to address and enhance multiple practices related to diversity and equity, including:

- Benefit packages, including maternity leave
- Clear career paths
- Work-life balance ¹²

IV. INVESTMENTS IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (D&I)

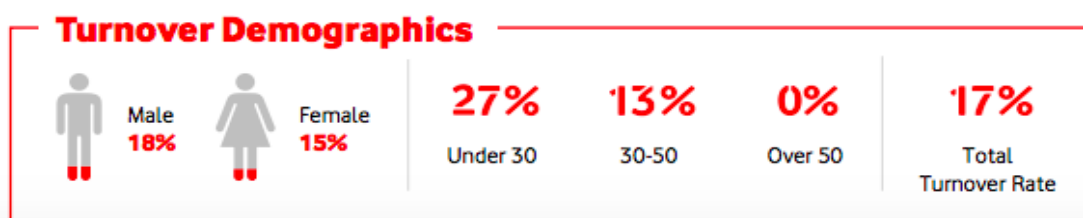
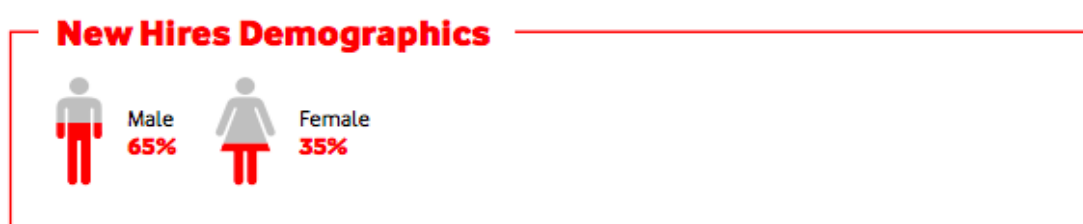
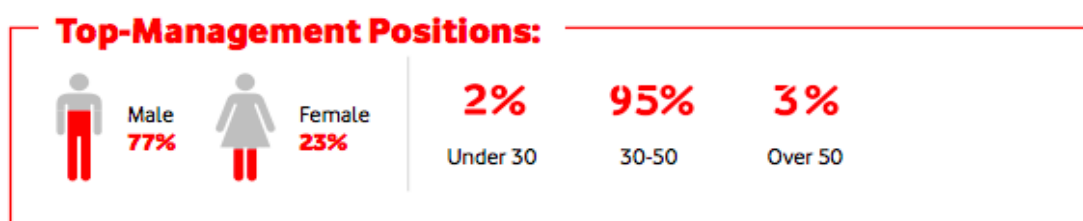
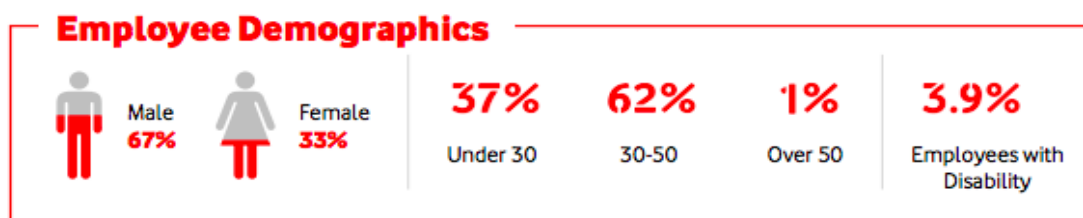
Multiple efforts were introduced over the years to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace. **The year 2013 witnessed the introduction of several efforts, including:**

- **The "Inclusive Leadership"** workshop to enable line managers to foster the approach across the company
- **A companywide internal communications campaign** around the importance of Diversity and Inclusion, and practical tips for embodying its principles
- **"The Women Network, "** which supports women in Vodafone throughout their leadership journey, by availing them with the necessary prerequisites for success, including work life balance, appropriate support and compensation, etc.

In 2013, women’s representation in Vodafone Egypt’s workforce and leadership was as follows¹³:

People at Vodafone		31 March 2010	31 st March 2012	31 st March 2013
	Total Number of Employees	4,199	4,517	7,328
	Total Number of Women Employees	1,438 (34%)	1,460 (32%)	2,304 (31.4%)
	Total Number of Employees in Management Positions	469	472	310
Total Number of Women in Management Positions	82 (17.4%)	59 (12.5%)	64 (20.64%)	

To solidify its commitment to diversity and inclusion, Vodafone Egypt signed on to the United Nations Backed Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPS) in 2015. By 2018, the representation of women within management positions in Vodafone Egypt had in fact increased, reaching the following distributions¹⁴:



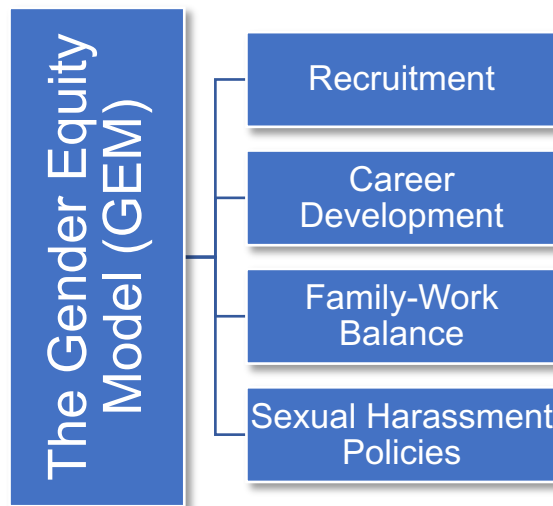
V. THE EGYPTIAN GENDER EQUITY SEAL (EGES)

As a result of its leading role in the Egyptian Telecommunications sector, and its early adoption and advocacy of the cause of gender equality within the sector, Vodafone Egypt was selected to be one of the first two private sector companies to participate in the relaunch of the Egyptian Gender Equity Seal (EGES) certification process in 2019/2020.



The World Bank team in Egypt engaged with the National Council for Women (NCW) to relaunch the Egyptian Gender Equity Seal (EGES) certification process in 2019. The EGES is based on the World Bank Gender Equity Model (GEM), which has been successfully implemented in various countries and aims to promote gender equity and eliminate gender discrimination and practices hindering the promotion of women in companies. The GEM was successfully implemented in Egypt between 2008 and 2010, and ten private sector companies were certified, however the process was put on hold for 10 years due to external circumstances and extensive transitions the country underwent over that period.

The GEM assesses gender equity status in the following four main areas¹⁵:



Based on the GEM model, the EGES aims at enabling companies to understand their strengths and weaknesses in ensuring an equitable workplace, and to develop a tailored Gender Management System within their respective organizations accordingly. The objective of undergoing the EGES process is to enhance the participating companies' understanding of current bottlenecks to creating a more balanced organization, and opportunities for enhanced practice; and to commit to improved gender equity performance with clearly stated indicators for future measurement.

The EGES is a fully participatory process, with each private sector company responsible for leading its own self-assessment and evaluation, developing its own tailored Gender Action Plan, and committing to deliver on the actions identified in its plan, while elevating gender equity performance as a priority and cross-cutting issue in all operations. Once this self-assessment process is completed, and an Action Plan has been drafted, the company is eligible to apply for the initial EGES certification, which is then provided based on the findings of an external assessment conducted by an independent assessor. The independent assessor meets with the Gender Committee and conducts a thorough review of the company Gender Action Plan with them. Based on the recommendations of the external assessment, the EGES certification is

awarded. This preliminary certification is re-validated and renewed after a two to three-year period, through another more extensive external analysis, which measures company performance in achieving the pledges and recommendations that were committed to in the company Action Plan. This assessment includes a review of policies and procedures, as well as field visits, interviews and focus group discussions with staff at different levels. If the assessment is favourable, the company receives final EGES certification, valid for a five-year period.

1. Methodology

Obtaining the certification started with a detailed evaluation of where Vodafone Egypt stands with regards to the four areas of:

- Recruitment
- Career Development
- Family-work Balance
- Sexual Harassment

Specifically, a four-step methodology was adopted:

a. Launching EGES as a Special Project

At this stage, the Vodafone Egypt management team appointed a Gender Committee, a Sponsor, and a Gender Team to manage and govern the required Gender Improvement Plan that will result from the entire process. The company's Talent and Leadership Development Department led the initiative from within the company, and the head of the department was responsible for setting up the Gender Committee, ensuring that all relevant operations were represented including:

- Personnel and Human Resources (including those responsible for staff recruitment, evaluation, and training)
- External Operations (including customer facing functions)
- Internal and Administrative Operations

b. Performance Assessment

With assistance from external consultants, an internal self-assessment of the company's performance in the four EGES areas was conducted. The assessment began with a desktop review of relevant policies, procedures, reports and documents to gather information on how policies, procedures and processes can impact the four EGES areas of focus. Once the desktop review was completed, interviews and discussions were conducted with men and women working at Vodafone Egypt from different departments, and different levels of seniority. These interviews and discussions focused on providing a qualitative assessment based on employee perceptions of Vodafone Egypt's success in mainstreaming gender equity in the company, as well as their views regarding the level of gender sensitivity in company policies and procedures, and how these policies and procedures filter down to both male and female employees at all levels.

The findings of this research phase would allow the company to identify any issues, policies, procedures and/processes which impact gender equity performance within the company's internal and external operations. The ultimate objective is to provide the company with the required information and data to be able to formulate an effective and realistic Action Plan for improving gender equity performance within the company at all levels.

c. Action Planning

Once the research phase was completed, the data analysis was geared to identify both challenges and opportunities for gender equity, the required enhancements and changes to improve performance and align with EGES requirements and formulate recommendations into an Action Plan.

d. External Assessment/Independent Assessor

An external assessor performed an independent assessment on the Vodafone Gender Equity Action Plan. This involved organizing a meeting with the Vodafone Gender Equity Committee, and reviewing all recommended action points, including discussing why they were selected; the plan for implementation; the responsible party for implementation; and the mechanisms that have been put in place to monitor and evaluate both progress in implementation as well as impacts and results.

VI. FINDINGS: WHERE VODAFONE EGYPT IS TODAY

1. The Management Approach

Vodafone's current strategic framework is focused on connection, with customers, and with the planet, under the slogan "We connect for a better future".¹ Vodafone has created a new company culture called the 'Spirit of Vodafone' that inspires employees to earn customer loyalty, experiment and learn fast, and create the future by getting things done together.



Source: Vodafone Group Plc Annual Report 2020

Vodafone Egypt's framework for managing diversity at the company entails a sustainability strategy that focus on three main pillars, one of which is that of women empowerment. While there is no overarching Gender Equity policy that provides all necessary definitions and procedures, Vodafone's commitment to diversity and inclusion is reflected in several statements found in Vodafone Global's Code of Conduct, including:

- We will pursue equality of opportunity and including for all employees through our employment policies and practices;

¹ Vodafone Group Plc Annual Report 2020, p1

- Base any employment decision you make purely on merit; and
- We recognize and celebrate the importance of diversity in our workspaces, so we are as diverse as the customers we serve.

In parallel, Vodafone has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment, is considered to lie under the generic harassment and bullying clause in the code of conduct. The code of conduct includes a major section on Preventing Harassment and Bullying (see Box 1). Additional features of the current context at Vodafone Egypt include:

A Supportive Company Culture, where engaged employees and managers do not perceive any significant barriers to women’s inclusion and leadership within the company. Employees believe that the company’s culture rather rewards skills and merit, and that women are well-integrated within the company.

Strong Diversity and Inclusion Mandate (D&I)

- All D&I objectives and thresholds are promoted by Vodafone Global Group, yet there is no specific strategy for GD performance by the Egypt office.
- The Human Resources department is heavily invested in introducing checks and balances and monitoring efforts by the different departments in terms of recruitment and appraisals.

Parental Leave: All Vodafone Egypt employees are eligible for parental leave. The company also offers pre-school and nursery allowances and up to two years of parental leave to mothers.

Recruitment: a “proactive gender approach” that sets a quota for shortlists is in place; a set of assessment tools that should be utilized in all interviews to ensure “objective unbiased recruitment”. There is a belief by the HR team and gender equity committee that all opportunities in Vodafone are open for everyone and that anyone can be recruited in any vacancy regardless of gender.

Data: Vodafone Egypt collects gender disaggregated metrics about recruitment, retention, and career progression. This is also divided by department and by band level and is used by HR business partners to identify red flags for intervention. HR business partners conduct gender audits on each department to identify gender equality gaps.

Special Initiatives: The Female Development Program is a three-month training program tailored to women, and that aims at preparing them for holding leadership positions within the company. The program was introduced in 2015. Furthermore, the “Women in Development” program includes mentorship activities for women with potential and is designed to evaluate and support their needs. It includes the ReConnect program for women outside of the labor market, and other activities like celebrating the International Women’s Day. This programme offers a great opportunity for Vodafone to push for a fully-fledged programme for female talents in the company, and to expand it to include leadership training, that are not directly linked with performance appraisals.

Box 1: Vodafone Egypt Code of Conduct, on Preventing Harassment and Bullying

Vodafone will not tolerate harassment or bullying. Harassment and bullying can take many forms and have serious repercussions. We are all responsible for ensuring that they don’t happen at Vodafone. We may instigate disciplinary or legal action against people who harass or bully others.

We define harassment and bullying as unwanted behaviour from another person which is intimidating, malicious, offensive, insulting, humiliating or degrading. It may be related but not limited to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or belief, and can be either a repeated or a one-off incident. It can be verbal, non-verbal, physical and isn’t always face-to-face.

2. Workforce Diversity

Vodafone Egypt currently employs 5,969 full-time employees, 1,707 of whom are women. While a supportive company culture, and multiple efforts exist to foster greater diversity, the percentage of women in the workplace has only increased from around 31.4% to 33% between 2013 and today. This is a finding that Vodafone Egypt is working hard to improve. The below table details the breakdown of Vodafone Egypt's workforce by gender for the year 2020:



Table 1: Vodafone Egypt's Core Gender Performance Metrics in January 2020

	Metric	Women	Men
1	Number of Full-Time Employees	1,707	4,162
2	Percent of Full-Time Employees	29%	71%
3	Percent of Entry Level Positions	27%	73%
4	Percent of Department Heads	28%	72%
5	Percent of Most Senior Managers	37.5%	62.5%
6	Percent of Senior Managers	18%	82%
7	Percent of Employees Hired in the Past 12 Months	32%	68%
8	Percent of Employees Promoted in the Past 12 Months	32%	68%
9	Percent of Employee Exits in the Past 12 Months	22%	78%

It is worth noting that women represent 37.5% of most senior managers, 28% of heads of departments, and 30% of team leaders and senior specialist positions. Yet, the tier between team leaders and heads of departments is where women are less represented, and only hold 18-24% of these positions. Engaged employees and managers believe that this gap in performance is caused by a lack of self-confidence among women staff, the need for more women role models, and changing perceptions that equate higher positions with more negative work-life balance. It is important to note that middle management positions coincide with the average age of giving birth, and thus women either exit the company at this age or lack the desire to take on new responsibilities.

As is the case in general in the Private Sector, there is a commonly held perception within the company that managers need to work longer hours or move around more (in case of sales department), and thus their functions are irreconcilable with women's reproductive roles. While most employees perceive the metrics of performance evaluation to be objective and fair regardless of one's gender, multiple employees mentioned that when the functions are not easily quantifiable, performance evaluation or nominations for highest grade in evaluation goes to those who stay longer in the office because it signifies they are more committed and have a better sense of ownership of the work.

For planning purposes, the assessment team categorized the company into five categories according to their women participation ratio, as follows:

Good Performers	Departments currently operating with a ratio that lies at the lower limit of equality or higher (i.e. departments with ratios that are between 44-45%).
Needing Small Effort	Departments with ratios between the median and the lower equality limit (30% - 45%).
Needing Medium to Significant Effort	Departments with a ratio above the 10th percentile and less than 30%, with less than 750 employees.
Needing Special Focus	Departments with a total workforce exceeding 750 employees and employee ratio (16.8% - 30%).
Poor Performance	Departments below the 10 th percentile (below 16.8%).

3. Qualitative Barriers

Discussions with members of Vodafone Egypt’s workforce raised several issues within the company’s culture, and societal norms at large, that can create bottlenecks for enhanced diversity practices within the company. These include:

Cultural Barriers	While Vodafone Egypt’s diversity and inclusion mandate and investments may curb discriminatory practices, the company still operates within a highly gendered society.
Work-life Balance	Current sociocultural realities mean that working women suffer from the double burden of excelling professionally and being responsible for the majority of unpaid domestic work as well. This is likely a major bottleneck in the way of women when it comes to getting promoted to leadership positions. This is especially true in light of the company’s culture which is extremely performance oriented and thus rewards working long hours, regardless of life requirements or societal obligations. While a phased return to work program “Reconnect Scheme” is in place, not all managers are aware of it.
(Un)conscious Biases	While engaged employees and managers are aware of the notion of unconscious bias, they are not necessarily fully aware of how it manifests within their day-to-day experiences. For example, several conscious and unconscious biases are noted, including those related to eliminating women from certain functions, as well as excluding women from certain tasks to “protect” them.
Adverse Reactions to Mitigation Efforts	There is a general confusion between gender sensitive measures and discrimination against men where any gender proactive measures taken that rectify existing gender inequalities can be perceived by employees and management to be discriminatory against men. This needs clear policy formation about the approach of Vodafone Egypt towards gender equality and what it entails and needs, to be included within the gender equity policy, along with more communication of Vodafone’s gender strategic approach.
Overly Positive Perceptions	Both employees and managers believe that Vodafone’s family-like culture, and early-on investments in diversity prevent any discriminatory practices from manifesting. This is true for male and female employees. Yet, the company’s figures have not significantly increased over the past 5 years. This does not undermine efforts and progress made, but rather points to the importance of addressing systemic challenges to more rapid and significant progress.

VII. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

While Vodafone Egypt has been active in promoting gender equality, and has set clear targets, and made some quantitative developments over the years, including introducing several programs focused exclusively on improving women's inclusion in the workforce, the EGES certification process allowed it to recognize that other layers of change and intervention are required.

As Egypt's largest telecom provider, Vodafone Egypt has consistently striven to adopt innovative approaches and international best practices not only in its provision of services to clients, but also in its own internal operations, processes and procedures. It has had – and continues to have – an influential role in in Egypt's telecommunications sector, and has positioned itself not only as a gender equality champion, but also aspires to be 'the best place for women to work'. It has spearheaded underlying gender bias training in its premises and ensured the adoption of gender equal practices and procedures at the organizational level. Undergoing the EGES Certification process is one step in Vodafone Egypt's continuous journey of improving its performance, and economic and social impact.

Notably, despite Vodafone Egypt's active engagement in improving its gender equity performance over the past few years, undergoing the EGES Certification process provided it with critical insights on issues that were impacting not only gender equity performance, but could improve processes, procedures and performance of the company operationally. For example, identifying and finding effective solutions to gender-related issues that negatively impact recruitment, training or staff retention reduce company expenses and losses, and improve operations. Furthermore, introducing measures that improve work-life balance *for both men and women* employees improves morale, loyalty, productivity and performance. This naturally has a positive impact on the company bottom line.

The self-assessment process allowed Vodafone Egypt not only to view its existing gender disaggregated data sets with new perspectives, but also to see the linkages between data, policies, and the perceptions, attitudes and practices of employees at different levels. Vodafone Egypt's active participation in the process itself – which is a core aspect of the GEM methodology – built the capacity of the Vodafone Egypt personnel involved to be able to perform this type of gender assessment independently in the future. Vodafone Egypt is actively pursuing achieving 50/50 gender diversity, and already addresses the issue of gender equality through training and awareness raising for all Vodafone Egypt staff, including on the issue of unconscious bias. Nevertheless, the self-assessment process revealed specific situations where unconscious bias impacts the development, phrasing and implementation of policies and procedures, and affects employees in areas including recruitment and career development, which allowed Vodafone Egypt to identify and develop targeted interventions to respond to these issues.

Vodafone Egypt firmly believes that for any company to achieve tangible changes with regards to enhanced diversity performance, a well-rounded approach that equally engages employees and senior management is required. In other words, interventions that are driven by global mandates alone will not be sufficient, nor will small programs that are at the departmental or individual level. Rather, a comprehensive strategy that acknowledges the complexity of the issue at hand is necessary. A useful framework for developing such a strategy is through treating gender diversity as an adaptive challenge¹⁶, and engaging a broad range of stakeholders from within the company to come up with strategies and solutions for addressing it. This is paired with intensive awareness raiding about the importance of the issue at hand, and its impact on the company's performance, will make the *cause* of diversity owned by all employees, and will ensure more tangible results within culture or actual practices.

At the culmination of the EGES process, Vodafone Egypt played an active role in the development and adoption of the Gender Action Plan that is presented in Table 2, below.

Table 2: Vodafone Egypt Approved Gender Equity Action Plan

Action Item	
Short Term Actions (1 to 3 months)	
1	Develop a dedicated Gender Equity Policy.
2	Institute a procedure for gender-blind CV screening and selection.
3	Institutionalize training on recruitment and unconscious bias for all managers.
4	Develop and implement a recruitment action plan as per the department classification, with varying gender targets in mind and their paralleled recruitment efforts.
5	Develop a communication campaign for female role models in the tech industry that might inspire younger girls to join the field and encourage females in Vodafone to apply for managerial positions.
6	Develop and communicate a clear definition of sexual harassment policy and promote the Speak-Up procedure.
7	Include Unconscious Bias in induction sessions.
Medium Term Actions (3 to 6 months)	
8	Institute gender equity benchmarks/metrics to alert HR business partners when interventions are needed due to gender inequality red flags.
9	Finalize Paternity Leave arrangements.
10	Finalize new 'Returnship' and revamped 'Reconnect' Model.
11	Develop a communication campaign to promote childcare services available to male employees.
Long Term Actions (6 to 9 months)	
12	Extend remote working to mothers in unpaid maternity leave.
13	Institute and communicate new sexual harassment safety measures in stores

VIII. ENDNOTES

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¹¹ 2016-2018 Vodafone Sustainability Report. Available at: <https://internet.vodafone.com.eg/sustainabilityReport/>

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¹⁴ 2019 Vodafone Sustainability Report

¹⁵ Source: Case Study: The Gender Equity Model (GEM) in Egypt: Methodology and Success Stories Pascale Nader & Mohamed El Kalla; Private Sector; Egypt Results-Based Initiative (RBI); November 2010

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