

Equal Opportunities Programme

EBRD has been working with its clients to promote equal opportunities for women and men in the work place, and is offering clients an opportunity to review their HR policies and practices in order to promote good practices as part of the Bank's Equal Opportunities Initiative. The Environmental and Social Policy (ESP) of the EBRD, adopted in 2008, covers both the environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development and includes gender equality as a key investment priority. On 16 April 2013, the Board approved the Strategic Gender Initiative which sets out the orientation for the EBRD's work in promoting and strengthening its approach to leveraging the untapped potential of women in its countries of operation.

The objective of EBRD's Equal Opportunities Initiative is to promote equal opportunities for men and women in the workforce regarding issues such as recruitment, retention, promotion, wages and work-life balance as well as by enhancing women's role on corporate boards. The Bank has to date supported six Equal Opportunities projects, which have been in a number of different sectors and countries. Some have been completed, some are on-going and some are still in the initial stages. Clients include an oil company in Romania, a privatised transport company in Turkey, a municipal company in the Kyrgyz Republic, a power-generating company in Russia, food and beverage producer in Croatia, producer of agricultural commodities in Serbia, and a brewery in Belarus.

For each of these projects, the Bank has worked with the client to design a programme that would be most beneficial and useful for them. Some companies requested assistance with the recruitment of more women, while others requested assistance with supporting women to progress their careers to reach higher levels of management.

The Process

The process generally involves the following:

- Reviewing HR policies and practices in the company, as well as collecting demographic data by gender which might be helpful to identify the relative gender balance in different parts of the organisation and in different geographies. The initial data collection will assist in addressing where there might be opportunities to promote equal opportunities best practices in HR policies and practices and increase the participation/progression of female employees.
- Conducting interviews across a wide range of employees and in some cases a survey to understand employees' perspectives. The intention would be to explore the thinking behind the business culture and priorities and to better understand and clarify the business rationale for the company to focus on diversity (particularly gender diversity).

- Providing recommendations for the client regarding proactive measures to promote equal opportunities, i.e. strategy and actions on how to increase the recruitment and retention of the female employees and how to assist them to advance in the workforce (in terms of career advancement and promotion), as well as measures to protect and prevent harassment,
- The improved collection of sex disaggregated of employment data and analysis so as to ensure that internal HR policies are gender responsive,
- Developing tools including guidelines for non-discrimination at the work place as appropriate and realistic in the operating environment; and
- Providing a detailed implementation plan which includes the expected budget with prioritised and costed recommendations and a set of indicators both to monitor progress and to assess the impact of the recommended measures.

Potential recommendations may include suggestions for amendments to HR policies with respect to equal opportunities and non-discrimination and some proactive support measures that might be adopted, in line with international standards. The support measures would aim to help both women and men balance their work and family commitments. Training and capacity needs would also be identified as well as a set of indicators so that any progress can be measured.