

# Not enough progress being made in gender equality in the workplace

 By [Kay Vittee](#)

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Against the backdrop of Women's Month it is concerning to see how little progress is being made in terms of gender equality in the workplace. Although women make up the larger portion of the South African population at over 51% (over 26.5 million according to the Census 2011), they are still not adequately represented at senior management levels in the country's workforce.



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What is even more worrying is that even when women secure a good job in South Africa, they are likely to be paid far less. According to the International Labour Organisation, South Africa has one of the largest gender pay gaps in the world with an estimated disparity of 35% between the wages of men and women.

It is also evident that this is a struggle facing women across the world when considering that only 26 of the Fortune 500 companies have female CEOs. The recently launched research report by Grant Thornton, titled 'Women in business: the path to leadership', notes that the proportion of women reaching the top tier of the business world has shown little progress globally over the past decade.

## Africa lags on gender equality

Although all women encounter hurdles on their journey to being recognised as a leader in their industry, women in Africa are more likely to be blocked from reaching business leadership positions because of gender bias than anywhere else in the world.

The report highlights that the proportion of business leadership roles held by women in Africa stands at 23%, ranging from 27% in South Africa (marginally up from 26% 11 years ago) to 19% in Botswana. The global average in this regard was recorded at only 22%.

Although we as South Africans are ahead of the global average, women occupy only around a quarter of all business leadership positions, this is not something to take lightly but is rather an indicator of deep-rooted gender bias within our culture.

Gender bias was also noted by 44% of the female research respondents (surveyed for the report) as a barrier facing women to reach leadership.

These are heart-breaking findings, especially during a time when our country is paying tribute to women who have assisted in forming the democracy enjoyed by South Africans today. We can only address these issues if we stand together with a single cause, equality.

## **Mandatory quotas not favoured by South African businesses**

In contrast to the European parliament that voted in favour of mandatory quotas for the number of women on boards (by clear majority), less than half (48%) of South African companies surveyed by Grant Thornton stated that they would support the introduction of such quotas for the boards of large listed organisations.

The proportion of businesses that would support such a move has actually decreased from 52% in 2014 and 60% in 2013. There is no doubt that perceptions in this regard need to be addressed and that government intervention may be the only remaining option.

In terms of Employment Equity (EE) requirements for gender equality, businesses are expected to abide by specific regulations and meet targets in terms of employing women who are as capable and qualified as male candidates are of fulfilling a particular position.

Ideally, organisations should not only enforce policies relating to women empowerment to meet the required target, but should also implement practical steps within their own business plans.

## **ABOUT KAY VITTEE**

Kay Vittee is the CEO of Quest Staffing Solutions.

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