

How can we make the case for women in times of crisis?

For ESCP Business School's Executive Education branch, International Women's Day was the opportunity to bring together a panel of experts dedicated to the advancement of women in leadership, in STEM fields, and in the economy at large for a roundtable discussion entitled ["Making the case for women in times of crisis"](#). The panel included:

- Diana Clarke, Professor of ESCP Business School
Professor Clarke has close to 30 years of experience in executive development as an H.R. and Corporate Communications Manager in banking and in the consulting sector. She actively participated in establishing Women Leadership programmes for various organisations.
- Chiara Corazza, Managing Director of the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society
Women's Forum for the Economy & Society is the world's leading platform to promote women's voices, impact and vision. Following the G7 2019 under the French Presidency, Chiara Corazza was missioned to provide a national action plan to foster the attractiveness of STEM for girls and women, and delivered the report "Women at the heart of Economy".
- Valentina Ieraci (Executive MBA 2022), Chief Operating Officer of Coolshop for BCG Digital Ventures UAE, a UX-centred digital solution provider based in Turin, Rotterdam, Chicago and Dubai. Her goal is to increase the number of women in digital companies, where they are currently underrepresented, and also to enhance their technical role in management and core business.
- Gérald Karsenti, Chairman of SAP France & SVP
He brings with him more than 30 years of experience leading international companies in the new technology sector. He shared his extensive experience of female leadership and spoke about women's ability to provide value in the workplace, their particular strengths in the current digital age and the direct correlation between better gender diversity and better company performance.
- Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke (Executive MBA 2009), Founder & Managing Director of W4.
W4 is a social enterprise dedicated to protecting the human rights of girls and women, as well as promoting their empowerment around the world. W4's focus is on Sustainable Development Goal 5b: harnessing technologies. Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke was named a

“Women in IT Role Model” by the European Commission and one of the “Inspiring Fifty” women leaders in Europe’s technology sector.

Hosted by:

- Véronique Tran, Professor and Academic Dean of the ESCP Executive MBA #7 worldwide (Financial Times)

Professor Diana Clarke opened the discussion with cautious optimism and a collection of key facts and figures that showed the progress we have made as a society. For example, the number of women in management is the greatest it has ever been. However, she pointed out that gender equality across the various levels of management is still not a reality and that the overall proportion of women in the workforce is dropping. Some key figures:

Women represent [40% of the total workforce](#) and hold:

- [37% of middle management positions](#)
- [29% of senior middle manager positions](#)
- [23% Executive positions](#)
- [4% CEO's](#)

Women and Covid-19 (Source: [Women's Forum](#))

- 73% of women in G7 countries are afraid for their future
- 59% of women have experienced burn-out, anxiety and/or depression since the beginning of the pandemic (vs 46% of men) in G7 countries

Beyond being a worthy human rights objective, achieving gender equality should be a global priority because [it could mean unlocking trillions of dollars in global GDP](#), as mentioned by Chiara Corazza and Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke. Within a company such as SAP, Gérald Karsenti explained that gender diversity and inclusion are essential for increasing innovation and creativity while improving the bottom line. Furthermore, the urgent challenges we face as a society, such as climate change and the health crisis, will require the contribution of as many people as possible. As Chiara Corazza said, “men alone cannot build another world. We have to do it together”.

Another focus of the panel was the current megatrend of digital transformation worldwide, specifically how the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields could be detrimental to society in the long run. Advances in technology are transforming the world as we know it and impacting every aspect of our lives. Digital inclusion, whether it be in the form of basic digital literacy, digital governance, or having a role in technology companies’ core business, is essential to reducing the gender divide and addressing vocational segregation. As the fastest growing sector, STEM represents the greatest potential for future employment. If the lack of women in this sector remains unaddressed, we could lose any progress we have made as a society for gender equality.

When it came to proposing concrete solutions, the panel was in agreement that cross-sector and inter-institutional collaboration is indispensable in effecting lasting change. Education from an early age and outreach and mentorship programmes for parents, schools, and companies will be essential for long-term change and to shift limiting mindsets. For quicker results, quotas for executive committees, senior management and employment in technology could accelerate gender equality. Valentina Ieraci and Gérald Karsenti both cited the importance of increasing the recruitment of women and identifying hurdles in retention.

“It’s going to be an effort and an accelerated effort from many sectors... It’s going to be lobbying, influence at all levels. Quotas are also going to be important because they do accelerate change,” concluded Professor Diana Clarke.

Watch a replay of the roundtable [here](#).

Contacts:

ESCP

Emily Olyarchuk
eolyarchuk@escp.eu
+33 (1) 49 23 24 62

BlueSky PR

Olivia Nieberg
olivia@bluesky-pr.com
+44 (0)1582 790 091

ABOUT ESCP BUSINESS SCHOOL

ESCP Business School was founded in 1819. The School has chosen to teach responsible leadership, open to the world and based on European multiculturalism. Six campuses in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Turin and Warsaw are the stepping stones that allow students to experience this European approach to management.

Several generations of entrepreneurs and managers were thus trained in the firm belief that the business world may feed society in a positive way.

This conviction and ESCP’s values - excellence, singularity, creativity and plurality - daily guide our mission and build its pedagogical vision.

Every year, ESCP welcomes 7100 students and 5000 managers from 120 different nationalities. Its strength lies in its many business training programmes, both general and specialised (Bachelor, Master, MBA, Executive MBA, PhD and Executive Education), all of which include a multi-campus experience.

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