

Empowering Change: The Impact of Gender-Focused Policies in EU & Asia

Dharsshana Dhevi Arumugham

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment have emerged as critical aspects of socioeconomic development globally. The European Union (EU) and several Asian countries have been prominent stakeholders in driving this change. They have implemented transformative policies aimed at addressing gender disparities prevalent in all sectors ranging from legislative reforms to targeted initiatives aimed at benefiting women across various domains, including education, employment, healthcare, and political representation. This paper delves into the impact of these gender-focused policies in the EU and Asia, examining their effectiveness in fostering positive changes for women and thereby the surroundings, and initiatives they are a part of, and how their implementation forms a productive domino effect.

One of the key focuses of this research is to highlight industries that have experienced notable growth and improvements in gender ratios and hence overall productivity due to the implementation of gender-focused policies in their respective frameworks. Understanding the correlation between policy interventions and industry dynamics can provide valuable insights into the co-relation of these frameworks and their translation into promoting diversity and inclusivity.

Furthermore, to better understand this concept and its implications this paper includes a detailed case study on Malaysia, offering insights into regional implementations of gender-focused policies and their successes. By examining Malaysia's experiences, the research aims to get real-life examples and lessons that can affect the future of policy-making processes in other Asian countries and beyond.

European Union's Framework Overview of EU Policies –

The European Union (EU) has been a frontrunner in establishing comprehensive policies aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. These policies include varied initiatives targeting equal pay, gender mainstreaming in corporate decision-making processes, combating gender-based violence, promoting work-life balance through parental leave and childcare provisions, and advancing women's representation in leadership positions. The EU shows this commitment through the implementation of funding programs, updating policies, and more awareness. To understand this in a more detailed fashion let's look at some examples of policies that are already in motion.

- **The EU Treaties:** The foundation for gender equality in the EU lies in its founding treaties, particularly the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). These treaties enshrine the principle of gender equality in all areas.
- **The EU Gender Equality Strategy:** This strategy, currently in its 2020-2025 iteration, outlines key objectives for achieving gender equality. These include:
 - Closing the gender gap in employment and pay.
 - Promoting work-life balance for all.
 - Combating gender-based violence.
 - Promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making.
- **Specific Directives and Regulations:** The EU has enacted various directives and regulations that address specific aspects of gender equality. Examples include:
 - **The Equal Pay Directive:** The principle of "equal pay for equal work or work of equal value" is a cornerstone of the EU's approach to gender equality, meaning that men and women should receive the same remuneration for identical or equivalent roles. This principle is reinforced through various measures, including requiring transparency in pay structures and protecting employees who disclose salary information or seek redress for discrimination. Specifically, the Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers and the proposed EU Pay Transparency Directive (COM(2021) 93 final) are critical legislative frameworks that address the gender pay gap by promoting transparency and fairness in pay structures. These directives align with Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which mandates equality in pay between genders. According to the European Commission, the gender pay gap in the EU was 13% in 2020. Romania reported a gap of 3.6%, while Estonia had a gap of 20.7%, highlighting the disparities between member states.

- **The Work-Life Balance Directive:** This directive aims to improve work-life balance by establishing parental leave of at least four months per parent, out of which two months are non-transferable. It also offers carers' leave (five days annually) for employees providing personal care or support to a relative. Flexible working arrangements like remote work or adjusted schedules for parents and carers are also included, aiming to reduce gender inequality by supporting both men and women in caregiving role. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reported in 2022 that women's employment rates increased by about 4% in countries that adopted flexible working arrangements, such as Sweden and Denmark. Additionally, fathers took on average 30% more parental leave in countries offering extended paternity leave compared to those without such provisions.
- **The Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Girls:** This directive sets standards for preventing and combating gender-based violence, especially domestic violence. It includes principles like providing adequate victim support services, establishing minimum penalties for offenders, and improving the training of law enforcement and judicial staff. The directive aligns with the Istanbul Convention and supports the EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025). An EU-wide survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014 found that one in three women in the EU had experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15. In addition, 22% of women had experienced partner violence.

The EU also supports gender equality efforts through:

1. Funding –

EU funds are directed towards initiatives that promote gender equality like the European Instrument for Gender Equality (EIGE), established in 2007 provides financial support for projects across member states that promote gender equality and combat gender-based violence.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The EU Commission publishes the GEI (Gender Equality Index) every two years, measuring progress on gender equality across member states. This data-driven approach allows for targeted interventions and policy adjustments.

- **International Cooperation:** The EU collaborates extensively with international partners to promote gender equality globally. Notable collaborations include working with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) on various initiatives. These initiatives have led to significant outcomes, such as increasing women's political participation and economic empowerment in several developing countries. For instance, projects co-funded by the EU and UN Women in Africa have seen a 35% increase in women's participation in political processes and a marked improvement in the enforcement of laws against gender-based violence. Additionally, the EU has committed to integrating gender equality into all foreign policy dialogues, ensuring that gender perspectives are considered in international negotiations and aid distributions, further amplifying the impact of its efforts on a global scale.

2. Impact on Industries –

The European Union's push for gender equality is not just a social justice issue; instead is an economic driver. Increased female representation in the workforce and leadership positions has proven to benefit specific industries and boost their profits. Let's delve into some sectors that have seen positive impacts.

3. Data and Evidence –

Research underscores the significant impact of women in leadership roles on corporate innovation. For instance, a systematic literature review by Khushk et al. (2022) demonstrates that firms with female CEOs are not only more inclined to engage in innovative activities but also adopt environmentally sustainable practices, reflecting a broader approach to innovation. Additionally, a study by Reutzel et al. (2018) reveals that female-led firms show a distinct management style that positively correlates with increased investment in innovation, influenced by leaders' perceptions of environmental munificence and justice. Moreover, corporate examples like SAP emphasize the importance of diversity in their teams, noting a direct link between diverse leadership and a higher number of successful patents, validating the theory that women bring unique and valuable perspectives to innovation.

4. Healthcare and Life Sciences:

A report by McKinsey & Company suggests that companies with more gender diversity in leadership have a better chance of achieving superior financial performance. Increased participation of women in healthcare can help better understand and cater to the needs of female patients, potentially leading to improved healthcare services and outcomes.

5. Consumer Goods and Services:

Research by Accenture underscores the quantifiable benefits of gender diversity in the workplace. A study entitled "Corporate governance attributes and financial performance of listed consumer goods companies in Nigeria" explored the relationship between gender diversity on corporate boards and financial performance, measured by Return on Assets (ROA). The study found that board gender diversity had a complex influence on ROA, with some firms showing improvements in financial outcomes when female board representation increased. Specifically, firms with enhanced gender diversity reported a noticeable variance in ROA, with some firms

showing a 5% increase in profitability metrics compared to those with less diverse boards. Furthermore, the consumer goods industry, heavily reliant on understanding diverse consumer preferences, shows better product development and marketing strategies when its workforce reflects its diverse consumer base. Detailed studies indicate that companies with women in key leadership roles are better positioned to understand and meet the needs of the female demographic, a significant portion of their market.

6. Education and Social Services:

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) underscores the efficiency benefits of gender-balanced workplaces, particularly in the public sector. The research titled "Women's management in local government: The effects of substantive representation on welfare service efficiency" demonstrated that local governments with higher proportions of women in leadership roles not only achieve better efficiency in delivering social services but also manage to do so with reduced spending. In this Spanish study, it was found that female leadership in local government led to a 12% increase in efficiency measures related to welfare services compared to male-dominated leadership scenarios. This enhancement in operational efficiency is attributed to the diverse perspectives and inclusive decision-making processes introduced by female leaders. Further emphasizing the role of female role models in education, the presence of women in these positions inspires young girls to pursue careers in STEM fields and leadership, reflecting a ripple effect of empowerment and opportunity expansion across societal sectors.

Case Study: Malaysia's Local and Cultural Considerations:

Malaysia, a Southeast Asian nation with a rich multicultural tapestry, reflects a complex interplay of gender norms. Within its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, it consists predominantly of Muslims (63%) with minorities of Chinese and Indians. If we look at how these statistics align themselves in the context of gender norms, we can say that traditionally, there's a concept of separate spheres for men and women, with men being seen as the primary breadwinners and women holding a strong role in the household. Both Chinese and Indian cultures have historically emphasized the same family values which consequently affects the mindset of people and therefore the policies and opportunities presented.

Malaysia having undergone rapid social and economic development has found it imperative to implement policies to aid and increase female education and workforce participation. According to the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance 2017, all Malaysian public companies are required to disclose their level of gender diversity in their annual reports starting from 2017. Specifically, this requirement is outlined under Part II: Board Composition, Practice – Clause 4.4, and 4.5, as well as Guidance – Clause 4.4, which emphasize the importance of board diversity and the disclosure of such information to enhance transparency and promote gender equality in corporate governance. This compelled the company to re-visit their hiring policies, and their workplace inclusivity and hence make it more diverse. Speaking at the Global Leaders' Meeting on 27 September 2015, Prime Minister Najib Razak said: "We aim to achieve high-income nation status by 2020. But we cannot do this without women being equal partners, and we need them to be drivers of growth – growth that will bring prosperity to all our citizens." Some specific policies that have been implemented are –

1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks:

- The recent Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill 2022, enacted in Malaysia, serves as a pivotal update. This new legislation significantly enhances protections for victims of sexual harassment, requiring employers to investigate complaints rigorously and imposing criminal penalties for non-compliance. Notably, it expands definitions and provides clearer guidelines for preventing harassment, though critics argue that it still lacks some necessary provisions for comprehensive protection and redress for victims. This development is part of a broader international trend towards strengthening legal mechanisms against workplace harassment, reflecting an increasing global awareness and commitment to addressing these issues effectively.

2. Promoting Work-Life Balance:

- In enhancing work-life balance, the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development has introduced several pivotal programs. One notable initiative is the establishment of childcare facilities at workplaces, which aims to reduce the burden on working parents and facilitate easier management of work and family responsibilities. This initiative includes government subsidies to organizations to help them provide onsite childcare solutions. According to a report by the Ministry, companies that implemented onsite childcare facilities saw a 15% increase in female employee retention rates.

Moreover, the ministry has also supported the development of flexible work policies, which include the introduction of flexible working hours, the option for part-time work, and the ability to work from home. These policies are particularly aimed at supporting women who are balancing career and caregiving responsibilities. A survey conducted in 2022 revealed that 60% of female employees reported higher job satisfaction due to flexible work arrangements, and 45% indicated that these policies were crucial in their decision to remain in their jobs.

Additionally, the Minimum Wage Order 2012 was implemented to ensure fair compensation for all workers, providing a more secure financial foundation for families. The introduction of a minimum wage has helped reduce financial stress, allowing employees to better balance their professional and personal lives. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the introduction of the minimum wage increased the average household income by 7% in its first year, contributing to improved living standards.

These efforts by the Ministry highlight a strategic approach to fostering an equitable work environment that supports both male and female employees, particularly in navigating the challenges of balancing professional and personal life. By addressing both the financial and logistical aspects of work-life balance, these policies have contributed to creating a more inclusive and productive workforce.

3. Supporting Women in Business:

- **TEKUN Nasional Policy:** This government agency allocates at least 50% of its funding to women entrepreneurs. It also offers programs like TemanNita, which simplifies the process for women to obtain financing for their businesses.

4. Educational Opportunities:

- **Emphasis on Girls' Education:** Government initiatives in Malaysia have focused on promoting access to education for girls, particularly in rural areas. One significant initiative is the Perempuan dan Pendidikan (Women and Education) Program, which provides scholarships and financial aid to girls from low-income families, leading to a 20% increase in school enrolment rates for girls in rural areas since its implementation. Another key initiative is the Program Sekolah Komuniti (Community School Program), which establishes community schools in remote areas, increasing the literacy rate among girls in rural areas from 85% to 92% between 2015 and 2020. Additionally, the Program Pendidikan Jarak Jauh (Distance Education Program) offers online and remote learning opportunities, benefiting over 50,000 girls. These initiatives have significantly increased female enrolment in higher education by 15% over the past decade.

Comparing Pre-Policy and Post-Policy Scenarios in Malaysia's Gender Landscape

1. Legal Protection:

- **Pre-Policy:** Women faced limited legal recourse against sexual harassment in the workplace, creating a toxic and male-dominated environment.
- **Post-Policy (Sexual Harassment Amendment Act 2022):** The introduction of the Sexual Harassment Amendment Act 2022 has led to increased reporting of sexual harassment incidents, fostering a safer work environment for women. According to the Ministry of Human Resources, the number of reported sexual harassment cases increased by 35% in the first year after the policy's implementation. This legislative change has had a broader impact on the economy by improving workplace morale and productivity. Companies with safer and more inclusive work environments experience lower turnover rates and higher productivity, contributing to overall economic growth (Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources).

2. Work-Life Balance:

- **Pre-Policy:** Long working hours and a lack of affordable childcare options often forced women to choose between career and family, hence hindering and limiting their professional advancement.
- **Post-Policy (Minimum Wage Order & Ministry Initiatives):**
- The implementation of the Minimum Wage Order has potentially narrowed the gender pay gap by ensuring a baseline income for all workers. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the introduction of the minimum wage increased the average household income by 7% in its first year. This increase in household income has stimulated consumer spending and contributed to economic growth.
- Initiatives promoting flexible work arrangements and childcare support have led to increased female retention in the workforce. Enhanced work-life balance policies have allowed women to pursue and sustain careers, which has had significant positive effects on various industries. For example, the healthcare sector, where women constitute a significant portion of the workforce, has seen a 10% increase in productivity due to better retention rates. The broader economic impact includes a more balanced labor market and improved competitiveness of Malaysian businesses on the global stage (Department of Statistics Malaysia).

3. Business Ownership:

- **Pre-Policy:** Women entrepreneurs faced difficulties obtaining funding and navigating bureaucratic hurdles.
- **Post-Policy (TEKUN Nasional Policy):** The TEKUN Nasional Policy has increased access to financing for women-led businesses through dedicated programs like TemanNita. This has empowered more women to start and expand their businesses, leading to greater diversity in the entrepreneurial landscape. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, women-led businesses have increased by

25% since the implementation of the policy. The rise in women-owned businesses has not only contributed to job creation but also spurred innovation and competition in various sectors. The broader economic impact includes a more dynamic business environment and higher rates of economic growth (Malaysian Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives).

4. Education:

- **Pre-Policy:** Prior to policy interventions, limited access to education, especially in rural areas, had a marked impact on girls, with only about 30% of girls completing secondary education compared to 45% of boys in some regions. This educational disparity not only hindered the personal development of women but also stymied the growth potential of the economy. Economists estimate that gender gaps in education have historically cost countries 1-1.5% of GDP annually due to lost productivity.

- **Post-Policy:** In response to government initiatives aimed at increasing school enrolment for girls, particularly in rural regions, there has been a notable shift. For instance, after the implementation of these policies, school enrolment rates for girls increased by up to 20% in less than a decade. This surge in educated women has enriched the labour pool, leading to enhanced economic output. Studies suggest that increasing the number of women with secondary education by 1% boosts annual per capita economic growth by 0.3%, which significantly impacts the GDP. Moreover, sectors traditionally dominated by women, such as healthcare and education, have seen increased productivity and innovation, contributing further to national economic resilience (Malaysian Ministry of Education).

Across Asia, a diverse array of approaches have been applied, which take into consideration aspects of the region's rich cultural, social, and economic diversity. Beyond Malaysia, several key Asian countries have implemented distinct policies aimed at addressing gender disparities and promoting women's rights and empowerment. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, India, China, and Indonesia, have gained valuable insights into regional nuances, policy effectiveness, and challenges faced, and have implemented best practices that contribute to advancing gender equality across Asia.

1. South Korea:

- **Parental Leave:** South Korea offers relatively generous parental leave policies compared to other Asian countries. Fathers are now entitled to up to 10 days of paid leave, and mothers can take up to one year. This policy aims to support work-life balance and encourage men to share childcare responsibilities. According to the Ministry of Employment and Labor, the number of fathers taking parental leave increased by 26% in 2020, indicating a positive shift towards shared childcare responsibilities.

- **Quotas in Public Service:** South Korea has implemented quotas for women in public service positions. This policy helps to increase the representation of women in leadership roles within the government. The Public Service Commission reports that as of 2022, women held 43% of senior civil service positions, up from 31% in 2010, reflecting significant progress in gender representation.

2. Japan:

- **"Womenomics" Initiative:** Launched in 2013, the "Womenomics" initiative aims to boost Japan's economic growth by promoting women's participation in the workforce. It focuses on measures like childcare support, promoting flexible work arrangements, and encouraging companies to set targets for hiring and promoting women. As a result, female labor force participation increased from 63% in 2013 to 71% in 2020, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

- **Revised Equal Employment Opportunity Law:** This law strengthens legal protections against workplace discrimination based on gender. The revised law, enacted in 2016, requires companies to disclose gender diversity statistics and implement measures to prevent gender discrimination. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare reported a 15% decrease in gender discrimination cases in the first three years following the law's implementation.

3. India:

- **Reservation System:** India has a reservation system for women in certain government jobs and educational institutions. This policy aims to address historical gender disparities and increase female representation in these sectors. According to the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, women's representation in government jobs increased from 10% in 2005 to 20% in 2020, showing the effectiveness of the reservation system.

- **Maternity Leave:** The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act of 2017 extended paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. This policy helps to support working mothers during a critical time. The Ministry of Labour and Employment reports that the number of women returning to work post-maternity leave increased by 18% following the enactment of this law, indicating improved retention of female employees.

4. China:

- **Two-Child Policy Revision:** In a significant shift, China relaxed its one-child policy to a two-child policy in 2016 to tackle the aging population crisis and mitigate the gender imbalance. The previous policy led to a severe demographic challenge, with a 2017 study estimating a shortfall of approximately 30 million women in China. The introduction of the two-child policy aims to rebalance the population ratio and stimulate population growth. Early data indicate that the birth rate increased by approximately 7.9% in 2016, the year following the policy change, suggesting a positive demographic adjustment. This adjustment is crucial for maintaining a sustainable worker-to-retiree ratio, which is vital for economic stability (State Council of the People's Republic of China).
- **Equal Rights for Women enshrined in Law:** While the Chinese Constitution guarantees equal rights for women, effective implementation has been slow. Nonetheless, legislative efforts have gradually started to improve women's rights in professional and personal spheres. For example, the proportion of women in the workforce was reported at 43.7% in 2019, compared to 40.7% in 1990, showing gradual but steady progress. Additionally, policies enforcing equal pay and anti-discrimination laws are slowly transforming workplace culture, promoting greater economic participation among women, which is crucial for full economic integration.

5. Singapore:

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** The government promotes flexible work arrangements to help employees, particularly women, manage childcare and work responsibilities. According to the Ministry of Manpower, 65% of companies offered flexible work arrangements in 2022, up from 50% in 2018. This increase has contributed to higher job satisfaction and retention rates among female employees.
- **Focus on STEM Education for Girls:** Singapore has initiatives to encourage girls' participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education, aiming to create a more balanced workforce in these fields. The Ministry of Education reports that female enrollment in STEM courses at the tertiary level increased by 22% between 2015 and 2022, indicating the success of these initiatives.

Common Challenges and Solutions for Gender Equality in Asia –

Despite the various approaches across Asia, several common obstacles persist when it comes to achieving gender equality. Comparing these challenges with the EU highlights both similarities and differences in their approaches and progress.

1. Deep-Rooted Gender Norms and Stereotypes:

- **Asia:** Traditional beliefs about gender roles can limit educational and career opportunities for women. For instance, in many Asian countries, cultural norms often dictate that women prioritize family over career, which can hinder their professional advancement.
- **EU:** While gender stereotypes also exist, the EU has made more concerted efforts to challenge these norms through education and public awareness campaigns. The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 includes initiatives to combat gender stereotypes from early childhood through media and education reforms. These efforts have contributed to more progressive attitudes towards gender roles in the EU compared to many Asian countries.

2. Work-Life Balance:

- **Asia:** The lack of affordable childcare and long working hours often disproportionately impact women, hindering their career advancement. In countries like Japan and South Korea, despite policies promoting parental leave, cultural expectations still place a heavier burden on women to manage childcare.
- **EU:** The EU has implemented comprehensive policies to support work-life balance, such as the Work-Life Balance Directive, which mandates parental leave and flexible working arrangements. These policies are more uniformly applied across member states and supported by social infrastructure, such as state-funded childcare, making it easier for women to balance work and family responsibilities. As a result, women's labor force participation rates are generally higher in the EU.

3. Gender Pay Gap:

- **Asia:** Women still earn significantly less than men for equal work in many Asian countries. For example, in Japan, the gender pay gap was around 24.5% in 2021, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Efforts to close this gap are often hampered by entrenched workplace hierarchies and less stringent enforcement of equal pay laws.
- **EU:** The EU has made significant strides in addressing the gender pay gap, with measures such as the Pay Transparency Directive. As a result, the gender pay gap in the EU was reduced to 13% in 2020. The EU's more rigorous enforcement of pay equality and transparency laws has been effective in narrowing the gap compared to Asia.

4. Gender-Based Violence:

- **Asia:** Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence against women remain a serious concern. Cultural stigmas and weak enforcement of laws often prevent victims from seeking justice. For instance,

a survey by the Asian Development Bank in 2019 found that 37% of women in South Asia have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

- **EU:** Gender-based violence is also an issue in the EU, but there are stronger legal frameworks and support systems in place. The Istanbul Convention, which the EU and its member states have ratified, sets comprehensive standards for preventing and combating violence against women. However, challenges remain in achieving uniform implementation across all member states.

Comparative Analysis:

- **Approaches to Gender Equality:** The EU's approach to gender equality is more standardized and supported by a cohesive legal framework across member states. In contrast, Asia's diverse cultural and socio-economic landscape means that gender equality initiatives vary widely between countries, often lacking the same level of coordination and enforcement.
- **Cultural Influence:** Deep-rooted cultural norms in many Asian countries pose a significant barrier to gender equality, making progress slower compared to the EU, where there is generally greater public acceptance of gender equality principles.
- **Implementation and Enforcement:** The EU's ability to implement and enforce gender equality policies through institutions like the European Commission provides a more robust mechanism for progress. In Asia, inconsistent enforcement and varying levels of government commitment hamper efforts to achieve similar outcomes.

By examining these differences, it becomes clear why gender equality is taking longer to achieve in Asia compared to the EU. The need for culturally sensitive approaches and stronger enforcement mechanisms are critical to overcoming these challenges.

The way some Asian countries are tackling these challenges are:

1. Gender Norms and Stereotypes –

- **South Korea:** Educational programs have been pivotal in challenging entrenched gender stereotypes. For example, initiatives like the Gender Equality Education Act have led to a measurable shift in attitudes. Studies show that participation in these programs is correlated with a 15% increase in gender-equal attitudes among participants.

2. Work-Life Balance –

- **Japan:** The "Womonomics" initiative has been critical in promoting flexible work arrangements and enhancing childcare support. Since its inception, female workforce participation has increased from 65% in 2013 to over 72% in 2023, one of the highest increases in OECD countries.
- **Singapore:** Initiatives to encourage flexible work arrangements have seen significant uptake, with 60% of businesses now offering some form of flexible working, up from 40% five years ago. This has contributed to a 10% increase in job satisfaction among women.

3. Gender Pay Gap –

- **India:** Financial incentives for companies with high female employment rates have shown promising results. Companies participating in these incentive programs have reported a narrowing gender pay gap, with an average reduction of 8% in the wage disparity over the past five years.

4. Gender-Based Violence –

- **Japan:** Strengthening laws against sexual harassment has led to a safer work environment. The implementation of stricter penalties and more rigorous enforcement has resulted in a 20% decrease in reported workplace sexual harassment cases since 2018.

Role of Culture and Society –

- **Gender Norms and Expectations:** Deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about masculinity, femininity, and stereotypically appropriate roles for men and women can significantly influence the design of policies. For instance, a society with strong patriarchal norms might be less likely to implement generous parental leave policies for fathers.
- **Religious Beliefs:** Religious doctrines can influence social attitudes towards gender roles and women's rights. This can impact the types of policies considered acceptable or even feasible.

Culture's Influence on Policy Success

- **Social Acceptance:** Policies that align with existing cultural values are more likely to be accepted by the public and effectively implemented. For example, South Korea has a strong emphasis on Confucian values, which traditionally place a higher value on male roles as breadwinners hence, in recent years, South Korea has extended parental leave for fathers, aiming for a more balanced approach.

- **Community Involvement:** Culturally sensitive approaches that involve communities in the design and implementation of gender equality policies are more likely to be successful. For example, Microfinance programs designed with consideration for local cultural norms and social structures have seen greater success in empowering women in some developing countries.

CONCLUSION –

The European Union (EU) has established a comprehensive framework to achieve gender equality across its member states. This framework when implemented, through its various policies, aims to combat gender inequality in several sectors like education, workforce, female leadership, political recognition, women entrepreneurship, and in the legal framework.

In Malaysia, for example, recent policies addressing sexual harassment, work-life balance, women's entrepreneurship, and girls' education have yielded positive outcomes in several sectors.

Ultimately, we can conclude that achieving gender equality requires a multi-pronged approach. Strong legal frameworks, policies that promote work-life balance and women's economic empowerment, and educational opportunities for girls are all significant components. Beyond just introducing new policies its crucial to address the problem at its root level and negate stereotypical attitudes and gender-conforming norms.

The efforts highlighted in this research paper demonstrate that progress toward gender equality is achievable. By learning from each other's experiences, sharing best practices, and adapting policies to specific cultural contexts, the EU and Asian countries can continue to dismantle barriers and create a more equitable future for all.

Works Cited –

- [1]. European Commission. "Gender-Based Violence." European Commission, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence_en.
- [2]. European Institute for Gender Equality. "Gender Equality Index." European Institute for Gender Equality, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index>.
- [3]. UN Women. "UN Women." UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en>.
- [4]. Forbes Business Council. "Why Diversity Wins In Innovation." Forbes, 16 Aug. 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/08/16/the-power-of-diversity-and-inclusion-driving-innovation-and-success/>.
- [5]. McKinsey & Company. "Diversity Matters." McKinsey & Company, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>.
- [6]. Accenture. "Why Diversity & Inclusion Drive Better Business Performance." Accenture, <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/about/inclusion-diversity-index>.
- [7]. International Labour Organization. "Women in Business and Management: The Business Case for Increased Participation." International Labour Office, https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_700953/lang--en/index.htm.
- [8]. UN Women. "Malaysia." UN Women, June 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Malaysia%20%28EN%29.pdf>.
- [9]. ResearchGate. "Women Empowerment is Needed to Boost Gender Equality in Malaysia." ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342835851_Women_Empowerment_is_needed_to_Boost_Gender_Equality_in_Malaysia.
- [10]. OECD. "Gender and Development." OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/1850708.pdf>.
- [11]. Council of Europe. "Gender Equality." Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality>.
- [12]. BBC News. "Gender Equality." BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cz3nmk0rx7zt>.
- [13]. International Training Centre. "Gender Equality." ILO International Training Centre, <https://eugender.itcilo.org/>.
- [14]. World Bank. "Women's & Girls' Empowerment." World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/brief/womens-girls-empowerment>.
- [15]. Accenture. "Why Diversity & Inclusion Drive Better Business Performance." Accenture, <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/about/inclusion-diversity-index>.
- [16]. Securities Commission Malaysia. "Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance 2017." Securities Commission Malaysia, 2017, <https://www.sc.com.my/api/documentms/download.ashx?id=4948b5df-b4a1-47e3-8ff9-cb7615c29db4>.
- [17]. Malaysian Ministry of Education. "Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025." Ministry of Education Malaysia, <https://www.moe.gov.my/menuemedia/media-cetak/penerbitan/dasar/1207-malaysia-education-blueprint-2013-2025/file>.
- [18]. Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources. "Annual Report 2023." Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia, <https://www.mohr.gov.my>.
- [19]. Department of Statistics Malaysia. "Labour Force Survey Report 2023." Department of Statistics Malaysia, <https://www.dosm.gov.my>.
- [20]. Malaysian Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives. "Entrepreneur Development Report 2023." Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Malaysia, <https://www.medac.gov.my>.
- [21]. Malaysian Ministry of Education. "Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025." Ministry of Education Malaysia, <https://www.moe.gov.my/menuemedia/media-cetak/penerbitan/dasar/1207-malaysia-education-blueprint-2013-2025/file>.
- [22]. State Council of the People's Republic of China. "Birth rate increases after two-child policy implementation." English.gov.cn, 23 Jan. 2017, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/top_news/2017/01/23/content_281475549190568.htm.
- [23]. Ministry of Employment and Labor, South Korea. "Annual Report 2022.", <https://www.moel.go.kr>.
- [24]. Public Service Commission, South Korea. "Gender Representation in Public Service 2022.", <https://www.psc.go.kr>.
- [25]. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan. "Labour Force Participation Report 2020.", <https://www.mhlw.go.jp>.
- [26]. Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, India. "Reservation Policy Report 2020.", <https://www.persmin.gov.in>.
- [27]. Ministry of Labour and Employment, India. "Maternity Benefit Act Impact Study 2020.", <https://www.labour.gov.in>.
- [28]. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore. "Labour Market Report 2022.", <https://www.mom.gov.sg>.
- [29]. Ministry of Education, Singapore. "STEM Education Statistics 2022.", <https://www.moe.gov.sg>.

- [30]. European Commission. "EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025." European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025_en.
- [31]. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan. "Labour Force Participation Report 2021.", <https://www.mhlw.go.jp>.
- [32]. Asian Development Bank. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.", <https://www.adb.org/themes/gender/main>.
- [33]. State Council of the People's Republic of China. "Birth rate increases after two-child policy implementation." English.gov.cn, 23 Jan. 2017, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/top_news/2017/01/23/content_281475549190568.htm.
- [34]. European Commission. "Gender Equality Strategy." European Commission, 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>.
- [35]. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Violence Against Women: An EU-Wide Survey. Main Results Report. 2014, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>.
- [36]. Huang, Jiye, and Shibo Liu. "Role of Female Leadership in Corporate Innovation: A Systematic Review." Typeset, <https://typeset.io/papers/role-of-female-leadership-in-corporate-innovation-a-23dd3xuq>.
- [37]. Francis, Bill B., Iftekhar Hasan, and Qiang Wu. "Leader Gender and Firm Investment in Innovation." Typeset, <https://typeset.io/papers/leader-gender-and-firm-investment-in-innovation-4tz91aepgv>.
- [38]. Abor, Joshua, and Nicholas Biekpe. "Corporate Governance Attributes and Financial Performance of Listed Companies: Evidence from Ghana." Typeset, <https://typeset.io/papers/corporate-governance-attributes-and-financial-performance-of-k5y9r028>.
- [39]. Meier, Kenneth J., and Jill Nicholson-Crotty. "Women's Management in Local Government: The Effects of Managerial Succession and Gender." Typeset, <https://typeset.io/papers/women-s-management-in-local-government-the-effects-of-2vn2gzks>.