



## INDUSTRY UPDATE

PRESS RELEASE

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# How Women Are Confronting The Gender Gap At Work

Leading women in real estate share their thoughts on what is needed to address recent impacts on equality

4 min

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Just over a year ago, while steep challenges around gender equality remained, the number of women in the workplace was on the rise.

Fast-forward 12 months and the picture has changed, with the pandemic and ensuing economic slump disproportionately affecting women.

Women this past year have left the workforce at a greater pace than men, while inequalities they already faced have been compounded. Part of this is because women are over-represented in professions like childcare, hospitality and entertainment, which rely on person-to-person contact. And because women still tend to handle childcare and domestic duties, working from home has only added to their daily demands.

While difficulties persist now, the longer-term risk is the rolling back of decades of gender diversity efforts in the workplace.

## So, what's to be done?

For International Women's Day, we spoke with women in leadership positions around the world at JLL. While their views can vary depending on where they live - with policies, social norms, and the number of women in the workplace differing greatly - there is plenty of common ground, too.





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"There needs to be a paradigm shift away from a mindset that does not encourage bringing your personal life into the workplace," she says.

Companies must have more open conversations with employees about their home lives. "Simple steps such as making sure people take breaks during the day, and setting work-life boundaries by not sending emails late at night: these are things all leaders can do."

In the U.S., more than 600,000 women left the workforce last September — eight times more than the number of men, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"More than 11 million women have been impacted by job losses and two million have left the workforce all together," says Jacobs, who lives in Boston. "Companies fighting for women to stay need to be thinking hard about what it will take."

## Giving credit where due

In Europe, where countries like Sweden and the Netherlands are famed for their family-friendly employment policies, women may have fewer adverse impacts than elsewhere, says Sabine Eckhardt, CEO, Central and Eastern Europe, JLL.

But she notes that the work-life balance is still suffering, and employers must allow women space to manage their home lives.

"Women I connect with don't want special treatment," she says. "They want to be rewarded for working hard. We should offer our female employees support but we shouldn't overstep the mark."

Anny Zhang, Managing Director for East China at JLL, agrees. "Initiatives like International Women's Day are all fantastic, but we need recognition for our contributions above anything else," she says. "This means seeing more women in senior positions."

## Greater flexibility

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Many women in China have put the brakes on their careers voluntarily, Zhang says.

"Female clients and friends considered putting a stop to their career for different reasons: to take care of children, or because they're pregnant and want to reduce the risk of getting infected," she says. "It wasn't necessarily due to layoffs."

However, the pandemic has positively impacted China's flexible working culture, which previously lagged behind the West, she says.

"Flexible working was very conceptual for a long while but a lot of companies, like JLL, have launched flexible-work policies applicable to all employees during critical situations to make sure they don't quit their jobs," Zhang says, adding there has been a noticeable improvement in management styles that help facilitate flexibility.

## Education and training

Most discussions about the impact on women in work relates to corporate roles.

"Real estate is on a good path with diversity but we are privileged," says Eckhardt. "The home office doesn't suit most professions."

The crisis has severely affected lower-paid workers, many of which are women in the service sector. New wage gap data shows that those in lower-skilled occupations lost more working hours than higher-paying managerial and professional jobs.

Education and training could prove pivotal. In China, Zhang says the government has already rolled out skills programs for women in service industries.

Despite the headlines predicting the reversal of a generation worth of work, JLL's female leaders are optimistic. They all agree that real estate, a historically male-dominated industry, is not immune to the challenges. But it is well-positioned to weather the storm.

"I don't think this derails everything, but business leaders need to course-correct quickly to avoid long-term damage on female hiring rates," Jacobs says. "Diversity builds better revenues and is a business enabler, so companies who stick to their values during this time will perform well."



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