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## Myth or reality: is there a glass ceiling in Russia?

*Ekaterina Gorokhova, CEO of Kelly Services Russia and Poland and the Association of Private Employment Agencies, Forbes Contributor*

General Director of the company Kelly Services Russia, Ekaterina Gorokhova found out about the inequality in the Russian labor market through her own career development experience.

In 2017, according to a study by the international organization Grant Thornton International, Russia was the leader in the number of women in the management of companies. 47% is the proportion of women among employees holding top managerial positions in the country, a 2017 survey about women in business showed. Interestingly, we are leading this rating for more than a year: the only sphere where women leaders are represented little or not at all, are state structures and state-owned companies.

This news is not surprising. Historically, Russia was one of the first countries where the political and social equality rights of men and women was officially fixed - after the revolution of 1917. We, when planning our research, assumed that the "glass ceiling" is an uncharacteristic phenomenon for our country, that in our business women do not experience discrimination and are equal with men, and restrictions in a career for women are not our realities.

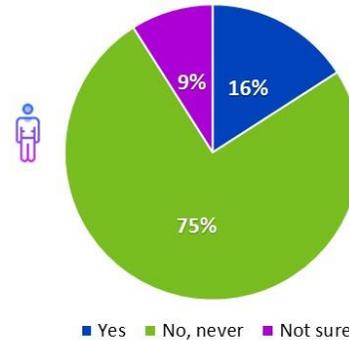
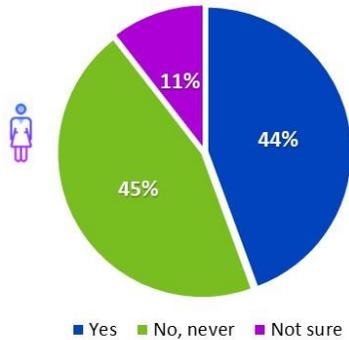
The results of the study struck us. In the period from August to September 2017, we interviewed more than 1,000 representatives of top management and management of Russian and international companies. Both women (65% of respondents) and men are anonymous - and therefore, we hope, as honest as possible - they answered questions about whether companies give preference to employees or candidates on the basis of gender and whether their gender affects the career and self-awareness of employees.

63% of the women we interviewed admit that they feel limited in their careers because of their traditional social role and the need to spend more time with their families. My experience in combining the career of a top manager and family life confirms that the presence of a spouse and children does impose restrictions on women, even those who are proficient in the art of time management. When in 2001 I was invited to take the post of general director for the company in Sweden, I had a very small child - and it was not an easy experience: no matter how much drive you have for your career, or how much satisfaction it brings, it is difficult to not see your child for months.

## KELLY Survey on the Glass Ceiling

Throughout your career, have there been any cases when you were not promoted because the employer preferred a male applicant, while your qualifications and experience were the same or comparable?

Throughout your career, have there been cases when you have not promoted a female applicant and preferred a male applicant, while both candidates' qualifications and experience were the same or comparable?



**KELLY**

In modern society, despite the active propaganda of the equal distribution of "domestic" duties between men and women and the promotion of partner marriages, the upbringing of children nevertheless remains the task of the woman behind the scenes. Men are not often ready to be involved in solving domestic problems, as they are not always fully able to assess the amount of resources a woman spends on raising children and other duties. Our study only confirms this: 68% of male respondents do not believe that the role of caregiver imposes career restrictions on women.

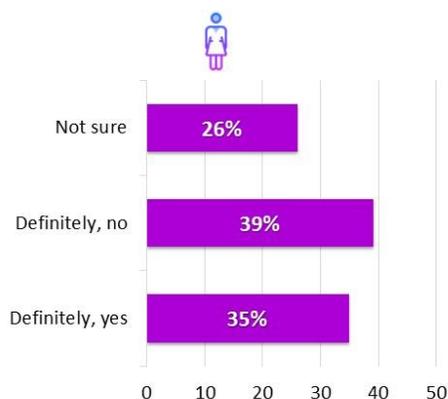
After Sweden, I worked for many years in Moscow, and my husband stayed in St. Petersburg. We were forced to support the so-called commuter marriage, but at the same time the upbringing of our child with all the ensuing responsibilities - school, activities, homework - remained on me.

When there was an opportunity to take the next step on the career ladder, I faced a serious dilemma. I understood that raising a child and moving to another country would be too difficult for me, because I would have responsibility for our child - or have to hire a babysitter while I was on numerous business trips. My friends - the top managers, who were in a similar situation decided to take this step, had some kind of "safety cushion": they either had a husband who did not work and took care of raising children, or simply there were no children.

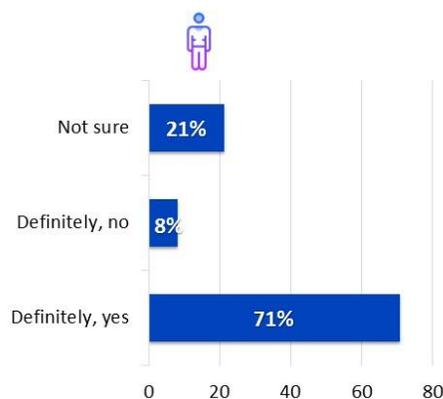
I do not know of a single case where a man is engaged in the upbringing of children in a family where both spouses are building a good career. But I know a lot of families in which the busy mother takes over the entire scope of responsibilities for raising children. Certainly, it has become a little easier due to the development in recent years of flexible forms of employment: remote work technologies already make life easier for women who combine the traditional social role of the "keeper of the hearth" with a successful career. According to our survey, 68% of women and 72% of men believe that it is easier for women to have a career because of the opportunity to work from home or on a flexible schedule.

## KELLY Survey on the Glass Ceiling

In your opinion, does your salary correspond to the salary of male colleagues who are on the same level / position with you?



In your opinion, does your salary correspond to the wages of female colleagues who are on the same level / position with you?



**KELLY**

But maybe the glass ceiling is a problem not only in the distribution of responsibilities within the family, but also as a consequence of the real bias against women careerists, which is not always noticed and which is not always recognized? One-third of the women interviewed (31%) remember cases when they were denied gender-related positions at the interview stage; and 38% of men admitted that they had deliberately refused a female candidate. Almost half of the women, 44%, also remembered how, during promotion, preference was given to their male counterparts with comparable qualifications and experience.

Salary expectations for women are also underestimated: only 35% of women are confident that their income corresponds to the income of male colleagues who are on the same level with them. Men have a different vision of the situation: 71% of respondents consider their salary to be equal with those of women of similar standing. Nevertheless, our practice shows that the opinion that men will pay higher wages than women for the same job is mistaken. If two candidates with the same skills, experience and personal qualities claim for one seat, it is unlikely that their salaries will differ.

At the same time, it is worth noting that both audiences agreed that for a true leader, gender does not matter: 66% of women and 74% of men think so.

The restrictions imposed on women by their traditional social role are still imperceptible to men and very palpable for women. And even despite the legal equality of the sexes in most countries, virtually every woman sooner or later has to make a choice. Either live for a job, but sacrifice something else, or stop moving along the career ladder to meet family demands. In this - and not in the imaginary conspiracies of companies discriminating against women - it is in my opinion, first and foremost where the glass ceiling appears. Will this situation change – only time will tell.

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ekaterina Gorokhova graduated from the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia, and began her career there with Kelly Services in 1999. In 2001, she was appointed CEO of Kelly Services in Sweden. A year later she took the post of general manager of Kelly Services in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) until 2004, when she became vice-president. In 2015, Ekaterina was promoted to Country Group Leader (over Russia and Poland) and in 2017, she assumed leadership over the EMEA permanent (direct-hire) business. She has led the Association of Private Employment Agencies in Russia since 2011.*