RESEARCH EXPERTISE / POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS

Women, Leadership, Human Capital and Public Policy

Dear Research Team,

I am Dr. Mariana Missakian, a Dubai-based researcher with over 12 years of research into women, motherhood, and leadership, and 15 years of corporate experience with multinational organizations.

My doctoral research challenges decades of approaches to closing the gender leadership gap and introduces the **Mother-Inclusive Leadership (MIL) Model**, an original framework examining why existing public and private sector policies have had limited impact on women's advancement into leadership, and what we can learn from those who have succeeded.

The research also examines the economic and strategic value of retaining experienced mothers, shifting the conversation from gender representation to human capital development, organizational responsibility, and long-term economic competitiveness.

I would welcome the opportunity to contribute my research, findings, and expertise to your reports, publications, expert commentary, and conferences, particularly on women's economic participation, talent retention, leadership, and policy effectiveness, both regionally and globally.

I have attached a brief research abstract outlining the findings and relevant discussion areas, and would be happy to be considered as an expert source for your upcoming work.

Warm regards,

Dr. Mariana Missakian

RESEARCH ABSTRACT / AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Mother-Inclusive Leadership: Rethinking the Gender Leadership Gap

Dr. Mariana Missakian | Doctoral Research | 2026

For decades, efforts to close the gender leadership gap have concentrated on getting more women into the workforce. Yet despite gender quotas, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and family-friendly policies, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership. The question is no longer simply why the gap persists, but whether we have been addressing the right problem.

While diversity policies have focused on increasing women's representation, family policies have largely addressed mothers' caregiving responsibilities, overlooking their leadership aspirations and the economic value they bring to organizations. These approaches have had limited impact on women's advancement into leadership because they fail to adequately address the intersection of womanhood, motherhood, and leadership.

This doctoral research challenges the dominant focus on recruitment and representation, arguing that women's retention and progression into leadership require a different lens. Rather than examining why women fail to advance, the study examines those who have successfully reached and sustained leadership positions to understand what works.

The study introduces the **Mother-Inclusive Leadership (MIL) Model**, an original theoretical framework that re-examines the relationship between ambition, motherhood, career progression, and organizational responsibility. It challenges the tendency to locate barriers to women's advancement within women themselves, directing attention instead to the structures, practices, and public and private sector policies that shape their leadership trajectories.

The research contributes a new perspective to global debates on gender equality, human capital development, economic competitiveness, and policy effectiveness, drawing on original research conducted in the UAE.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION AREAS

- **Women and economic participation:** Workforce retention, career progression, and leadership representation.
- **Economic growth and national competitiveness:** The strategic and economic value of retaining experienced mothers and advancing them into leadership.
- **The future of work:** Changing career trajectories, workplace structures, and sustainable employment.
- **Human capital and talent retention:** The loss of experienced female talent and its implications for organizations and economies.
- **Public and private sector policies:** Policy alignment, maternity protection, and the effectiveness of gender diversity and family policies in supporting women's career advancement.
- **Corporate governance and leadership accountability:** Moving beyond diversity targets towards organizational responsibility for retaining and advancing female talent.
- **Leadership and organizational performance:** Structural conditions influencing women's advancement into senior roles.
- **The motherhood penalty:** Career inequality, leadership access, and economic opportunity.
- **UAE and GCC workforce development:** Comparative research across sectors, nationalities, and public and private institutions.

Research applications: Policy papers, economic and workforce reports, expert commentary, executive roundtables, and conference discussions.

For research enquiries, expert commentary, or speaking invitations: mariana@theunmuteproject.com