

# Keep calm and play football

**T**here has never been a more inspiring time for women to take centre stage and recognise their potential. With events like the Women’s FIFA World Cup breaking viewer records, and the spotlight finally being turned on female misrepresentation in the insurance and reinsurance sectors, gender equality has taken centre stage.

There are many parallels between gender inequality in insurance and reinsurance and sports like football. In June 2019, IGI sponsored and took part in Equal Playing Field’s (EPF) Festival of Football which highlighted gender disparity in sport by breaking the Guinness World Record for the largest number of players in a single game. Here, Aaida Abu-Jaber, D&I Champion at IGI who spearheaded the IGI initiative and took part herself in the games, talks about tackling inequality in the workplace.

### How did you get involved with EPF?

We have been involved with the EPF initiative for three years now. EPF was established to challenge gender inequality in sport and to promote female athletic development across the globe, especially in marginalised countries. They approached us to support their efforts to promote opportunity, equality and respect for women in sports. Gender inequality exists in both sports and (re)insurance and that is why we partnered with EPF.

The organisation has been breaking Guinness World Records since 2017 to make noise around the gender issue, and IGI has supported all three successful world record attempts. The first world record was set for the highest altitude (19,341 feet) soccer match just below the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. Less than a year later, they set another world record for the lowest altitude (1377 feet below sea level) match, played by the Dead Sea in Jordan. We also regularly sponsor soccer clinics for underprivileged girls in remote villages of Jordan, where IGI is headquartered.

This year’s Women’s World Cup has been an unmitigated success, breaking records and dispelling myths about the female game. Viewers were watching these games and thinking of them as just football matches. I hope that soon female executives in the insurance and reinsurance industry too will be viewed as just senior employees.

### Why did IGI get involved?

Football and (re)insurance have obvious parallels. In both disciplines gender inequality exists - men out-number, out-represent and out-earn the women. Sport has always been an effective mechanism to unite people in a way that little else does – it’s an international language that everyone can understand and speak. It can be leveraged as a means to open important dialogue, and also to unite and inspire beyond politics or workplace traditions. IGI is an equal opportunity employer, embracing diversity and inclusion and seeking talent, and it is proud to have a 50/50 ratio of men to women in its global workforce. The company firmly believes that diverse and inclusive businesses are more innovative, creative, profitable and fun.



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### How did you get this past the board?

We have been working on many initiatives at IGI to support diversity. From the start EPF was a good fit for us – and the board took very little convincing to agree to us supporting the organisation. Aside from it being fun and visible, working with EPF has given us tangible evidence on the best ways to encourage change and the benefits diversity has on society.

We all know that diversity goes beyond gender, but it is a good place to start. IGI has been a long-time supporter of equal opportunities for men and women in the industry. It is talent focused, and all else blind. So, when we joined the D&I movement with a particular focus on the MENA area we got the backing of the board and were able to get more active around this issue and see concrete results.

Diversity is essential for the success and resilience of a company. Last year, IGI hosted the Lloyd's of London 'Dive In' Festival for Diversity and Inclusion in Insurance in Jordan – where IGI is headquartered - for the first time and we will be hosting it again this year. The company has also recently partnered with 'World of Letters' and 'Women as Partners in Progress', a social enterprise looking to address gender imbalance in the work place. The group is funded by the US State Department and led by Arab women to highlight gender imbalances in the workplace in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

We sponsor the Insider Progress efforts and have partnered with the Insurance Supper Club, all in an effort to push this matter forward.

### Has the industry done enough to tackle gender inequality?

All you have to do is look round at any conference or at any company's senior management and board and realise that much more needs to be done. That being said it is clear that the industry is taking the gender issue more seriously. Schemes to improve Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) are filtering into normal working practises, with mentoring programmes, internships, graduate initiatives and similar initiatives all being introduced to improve cross-industry collaboration.

More women are coming up through the ranks that have opportunities now that just 10 years ago did not exist. Survey after survey has shown that a diverse and inclusive workforce makes for a more profitable company. That is why as an industry it is a "no brainer" to pursue.

I think we also have to be cognisant of the new generation of men and women entering our market. I believe they will expect, let alone demand, equality at all levels – from the boardroom down. But the industry needs to remember that diversity is not just about men and women, it means age, religion, disability, and more. Let's hope we keep up the momentum and within a few years see boards and executive teams becoming more diverse.

### What impact can a company like IGI make?

When you look at the might of large companies in insurance and reinsurance we are a relative minnow, and the resources we have are limited. But we work hard to be a good, profitable company. Part of being a good company is promoting ethical practices – and this is at the heart of our success. Our voice is strong in many regions where

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diversity is, quite frankly, a problem. We will continue to strive to promote fairness and diversity in our offices around the world. We will do what we can. Imagine if everyone did that? Change would be almost instant.

**What can the insurance industry learn from sports such as football?**

There is so much! Co-operation, teamwork, resilience, leadership, loyalty... the list goes on. I think the biggest thing the industry can learn from sport is the benefits of working together. We need to widen the conversation of inequality and learn from each other if we are to make diversity a real thing. What is more we need not to just look at the leaders – the captains, the sponsors, the managers... but to the people on the playing field. Going back to gender – look at how the Women’s World Cup has ignited interest in women’s football this year more than any other year. While equal pay for men and women on the field may be a way away, the kind of ground swell we have seen in France is a game-changer for women’s sport.

It is not just insurance companies that have started to understand that a diverse team and an inclusive culture are intrinsically linked to corporate success. This is a global issue. But there is still work to be done.

