



Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-supported Childcare in Sri Lanka

Case Study

Hemas Holdings PLC

Diversified Business



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ABOUT IFC'S WOMEN IN WORK PROGRAM IN SRI LANKA

The IFC-led Women in Work (WiW) Program, a four-year program valued at US\$11.5mn and funded by the Australian Government, launched in April 2017.¹ It is IFC's largest, standalone country-based gender program, working with private sector companies to close gender gaps while improving business performance. The program, which benefits from multisector program design and works closely with the World Bank on research, tackles women's access to jobs and assets at the same time. It aims to increase women's workforce participation in Sri Lanka's private sector, create more and better jobs for women, and has the potential to increase company profits and drive overall economic growth. WiW also contributes to the vision of the Government of Sri Lanka where all citizens can achieve higher incomes and better standards of living by 2025.²

Access to quality childcare services is a key constraint on women's labor force participation. Following IFC's global Tackling Childcare initiative, this report highlights Sri Lanka-specific data, experiences and resources on employer-supported childcare and may not only be relevant to individual businesses but can also serve as a resource for special economic zones, Information Technology (IT) parks and other consortium models. This case study is one of 10 featured in the report: *"Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-supported Childcare in Sri Lanka"*, available at www.ifc.org/tacklingchildcare.

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Hemas Holdings PLC

KidZone – A Back-Up Care Arrangement



One of Sri Lanka's fastest growing conglomerates, Hemas Holdings PLC, a member of IFC's SheWorks partnership in Sri Lanka, touches the lives of millions of loyal customers with their wellness, leisure and mobility services. Over a span of nearly seven decades, Hemas has delivered an award-winning range of diversified products and services that continue to help enrich lives, empower businesses, and make a positive contribution to the nation's economic development.

Hemas is committed to improving diversity and providing equal employment opportunities for everyone. Retaining and empowering women leaders is part of the group's overall diversity strategy. Currently, out of 6755 employees, 28 percent are women (inclusive of the hospital staff). However, excluding the hospital staff (where the majority of the staff are women) only 17 percent employees are women. The Group has in place a goal to increase the gender balance to 25 percent by 2020 (excluding hospitals). The Group's strategy to meet these targets includes a variety of corporate policies and programs that include childcare support as part of **360You**, the Group's employer value proposition.

Sri Lanka's Health Sector

In Sri Lanka's health sector, women make up the vast majority of those employed. They are respected and accepted as doctors, nurses, midwives and support staff. The nursing profession especially is dominated by women, with only about 10 percent of the nurses being male. The establishment recruits trained nurses and also trains new recruits in its own nurses' training school where more than 90 percent of applications in both categories are from women. The explanation for the low representation of men in this profession is that nursing is perceived by both male and female applicants and patients as a "female job". Moreover, male nurses are not considered to be acceptable to tend to women patients.

Source: ILO. *Factors Affecting Women's Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka*. 2016.
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--asia/--ro-bangkok/--ilo-colombo/documents/publication/wcms_551675.pdf

Employee Profile:

- Total employees: 6755
- 28 percent of Hemas employees are women (excluding Hemas Hospitals: 17 percent are women)
- 68 percent of employees in Hemas Hospitals are women
- 13 percent of Board of Management members are women

Hemas supports working parents through:

- KidZone, a back-up childcare arrangement
- MumZone for lactating mothers
- MedZone for all employees
- Paid Maternity Leave (100 days), Paternity Leave (10 days) and Adoption Leave (same as the maternity and paternity benefits for a child under 1 year, and half the benefit for a child between 1 and 5 years)
- Flexible Work Solutions (such as flex-time and part-time working arrangements)

Key business impacts of offering childcare support:

- Contributing to the broader strategy of being a diverse and inclusive company
- Gender diversity ratio at Hemas Hospitals has increased from 65 percent (2017) to 68 percent (2018)
- Building a company reputation as a family-friendly employer
- Supporting recruitment and retention strategies

“At Hemas we have been making concerted efforts to become a more attractive workplace for women. Interestingly, some of the policy changes made and facilities provided make us a better workplace for men too. As an example, when we introduced an enhanced maternity leave scheme, we also introduced paternity leave and adoption leave. The KidZone hosts children whose mother or father works at Hemas. As a new mom myself, access to the MomZone has improved my working experience, especially when compared with working moms who do not have access to a sanitary space to express milk for their infants.”

Upulka Samarakoon Munasinha, Head of Human Resources, Hemas Holdings PLC

Voice of Women (VOW) Hemas Women's Network

Hemas celebrated 2017 International Women's Day by launching *Voice of Women*, a women's network with representation across all business units and grades. The objective of this network is to support the attraction, retention and advancement of women at all levels within the Group. The network collaborates with both men and women by encouraging employees to be conscious of gender bias in their daily decisions and actions.

VOW identified top three challenges through focus group discussions held across the Group, namely childcare, maternity leave and transport after office hours. Together with the human resources department and management, respective policies were implemented:

- Back-up care facility (as a pilot in the head office)
- Lactation room
- Enhanced maternity leave (from 84 to 100 days), with a further option of 10 working days at half-pay and 10 more working days at no pay
- Paternity leave (10 working days)
- Adoption leave (same as the maternity and paternity benefits for a child under 1 year, and half the benefit for a child between 1 and 5 years)
- Companies within the Group provide reimbursement of cab transport for employees who work late hours, to avoid difficulties associated with using public transport at night.

These efforts have resulted in a more inclusive environment that benefits all employees.

A back-up care arrangement was set up as a pilot initiative at the Hemas House (headquarters of the Group) with a specially designed space for children that can accommodate up to 10 children aged 3 to 12 years old. This age group is considered to be one that can be managed by the parent without supervision by additional staff (such as a crèche supervisor or nannies). This allows parents to "hot desk" from one of the adjoining work stations and have a peace of mind that their children are safe and occupied. This space is not meant to replace regular childcare arrangements but was designed as an option to be used when regular childcare arrangements fail, as they occasionally do. The facility also provides a MumZone for lactating mothers and a MedZone for all employees who are feeling unwell or need to rest during the work day.

Moving forward, Hemas recognizes that its effort to retain working parents is going to be a game changer and the pilot KidZone will help further determine their employees' future demand for other childcare services in other business units and locations. The business benefits extend beyond the comparably small number of employees who directly use back-up care. The KidZone provides access to the talent pool Hemas wants to recruit and retain which also contributes to the broader strategy of being a diverse and inclusive employer.

The Group is also considering collecting more comprehensive gender disaggregated data on the success of its existing back-up care facilities, including data on employee satisfaction and retention, and use this data to further strengthen the case for childcare support. In a regional analysis of diversity in the workplace published by Cornerstone Partners LLP in the UK, 2017, Hemas was ranked amongst the top 10 most diversity-friendly corporate institutes in Asia.³ Hemas is on a quest to build a strong employer brand associated with diversity and inclusion in addition to other areas of a holistic employee experience like wellness.



“Providing a suitable environment for our employees to pursue excellence in their careers whilst balancing their roles as parents is important to Hemas. When in need or in an emergency, our employees have the option of bringing their child to work and keeping an eye on them whilst continuing to work. This gives them greater peace of mind because both work and parental responsibilities can be fulfilled simultaneously.”

Dimuth De Alwis, Group Human Resource Director, Hemas Holding PLC

The First National Center of Excellence for Children with Disabilities: AYATI

Ayati Trust Sri Lanka is a charitable trust incorporated by the University of Kelaniya, a state university in Sri Lanka, Hemas Holdings and MAS Holdings.

Disability includes mental and physical disabilities. Children with disabilities have individual, innate strengths and talents through which they can contribute positively to society. It is with this understanding that Ayati (meaning 'Hope' in Sanskrit) was set up, to help improve children's quality of life and independence, while also providing them with opportunities to develop and blossom into their full potential. This will help these children become included into mainstream society and have a significantly positive impact on their lives, their families and society at large.

Ayati is a long-term national initiative which has three main aims:

- Constructing and operating a national centre for children with disabilities
- Changing the mindset of the public to eliminate any stigma and promote acceptance of children with disabilities
- Extending similar services to the rural areas of Sri Lanka in time to come

Source: www.ayati.lk

1 IFC. 2017. Government of Australia Partner to Support More and Better Jobs for Women in Sri Lanka.

2 Office of the Prime Minister. 2017. Vision 2025. A Country Enriched. See page 26.

3 Hemas Holdings PLC Annual Report. 2016/2017. Engage. Empower

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