



Women and energy: Moving towards a gender balanced energy sector

ESG voices podcast series

Musical intro

Presenter:

Hello and welcome to another episode of ESG Voices. This podcast series addresses the opportunities and challenges within ESG through interviews with ESG specialists from KPMG and beyond. Throughout this series, we will discuss a broad range of environmental, social and governance issues aiming to support governments, businesses and communities in creating an equitable and prosperous future.

In today's special edition podcast, I'll be handing over the mic to Charlotte Dorrington, Manager, Transformation and Sustainability Advisory, KPMG in Denmark, and Chair of Leaders 2050, a KPMG-led, external facing network for young professionals interested in climate, energy transition and ESG.

Charlotte will be sitting down with Wafa Jafri, Partner, Energy Deal Advisory, KPMG in the UK, to discuss a 'just energy transition' and explore some of the impacts of energy on women.

With many important points to cover, I'm going to hand it straight over to Charlotte. Charlotte, thanks for joining us.

Charlotte Dorrington :

Thanks so much and really great to be here. I just want to add a little bit of additional context for the listeners. I myself have sat in Wafa's energy team in the UK before I transferred over to the Danish firm. And so it's really wonderful to get a chance in this forum to sit down together and chat.

I spent three years being inspired by her leadership and saw and learned from her as she grew and cultivated a team from around six or seven when I joined to, I think just over 40 when I left three years later. We recently hosted a Leaders 2050 event here in Denmark, which is my shameless plug at the start of this podcast, but we spoke about what impact a lack of female role models has in certain sectors and in particular in the technology sector, but also the energy sector as well.

And I feel very privileged to have had Wafa as my mentor and guide and now really excited to have the opportunity to share a little bit of her thinking with all of you on a topic that I know is very, very close to Wafa's heart and that you've spoken about lots of times before.

So today we're talking about a 'just energy transition'. And I know this can be seen through many different lenses, but we are going to be talking about it from a gender perspective.

Wafa Jafri:

Thank you for that, Charlotte. I mean, I think I think your introduction made it a little bit emotional for me, if I'm being honest. I think it's been one of my very great pleasures to actually watch you grow and to support your career and genuinely, it's people like you who make it worth it, worth all the pain and everything else that we go through to do that to watch you grow and be a leader in the in the energy space, I mean it's just amazing to see. I think I think the best that we can do as leaders is give you a slight push and then what you're able to achieve can just blow everybody's mind away.

Charlotte Dorrington:

That's a really nice reflection, thanks, Wafa. But this podcast is not talking about ourselves I guess. It's talking about and in particular, this podcast is based on a brand new report that the EU Commission has just released. And it's called Gender and Energy - The Effects of the Energy Transition on Women. And just to add a little bit of context to our discussion, I wanted to provide some of the conclusions that have come out of that report.

But before I do, I just want to say I think it's really fantastic that reports like this are being researched and being published by the EU. It's really, really nice to see. But what's also really important is that it demonstrates that there are still really large issues, even in countries that we typically view as developed or mature in these areas.

So they've come out with four key conclusions.

The first one is that women are more frequently exposed to gender poverty. And when we talk about gender poverty, we mean that household has had to significantly reduce its energy consumption in order to make ends meet. And women tend to be more impacted as they are often the lower earners in households, and they more often form the majority of single parent households as well.

The second conclusion is that because of increased energy poverty within women, they are more exposed to the consequences of it. Such as health risks and social inclusion.

And then thirdly, their report highlights that there are still great gender related inequalities within the energy sector and within people working in it. And I think they had a statistic coming back from 2019 which said that only 32% of the workforce is represented by women within the energy sector.

And then their last kind of overall conclusion point is that further and greater attention should be given to trying to highlight and address the conclusions above. And I guess that's exactly what we're here to talk about today.

And so Wafa so if I wanted to start and pick up on their third conclusion, which is inequality in the sector, and I think it'd be really nice to get a couple of reflections from since you've started working in the energy sector. Have you experienced any changes over time in terms of, yeah, the percentage of women working within energy, but also maybe their experiences in the sector as well?

Wafa Jafri:

Yeah, I mean, I mean, just to kind of start on the facts, you know, I mean, I think it's about 39% of women in the labor force globally and the 32% that you quoted is in the renewables sector, in the, in the low carbon energy space. But if you look at energy as a whole, it's actually about 16% in the traditional sector, right.

And if you then start looking at management levels, the numbers are significantly lower than that. I guess from a barriers perspective, you know, the barriers that you would face as a woman are, tend to be quite similar of elsewhere in the economy. However, the challenge in our sector, I believe, is more pressing because of the transition that we are going through right and we have an opportunity now to make that different. And I guess in a in some way, it is encouraging to see that when we come out, when it comes to renewables and low carbon energy, that the ratio of male to female is a lot higher than it has been traditionally. But like you say, it's not where it needs to be for us to us to progress because in the future there's going to be about... I think I think I was reading that the EIA forecast would 14 million more jobs in the clean tech sector by 2050. So, you know, it is a massive opportunity for us to really create that balance of gender between the within our industry is as we transform a transition away from the traditional sector.

Charlotte Dorrington:

I just want to say some of those statistics are really, really scary. 16% just kind of puts things into perspective a little bit and it's kind of is a call to action almost as itself.

Wafa Jafri:

And I was going to I was going to answer the other part of your question, which I think you were coming on to, which is about my personal experience, I think?

Charlotte Dorrington:

Yes.

Wafa Jafri:

I started in the industry back in 2008, right. I'm basically a dinosaur now. I do notice a difference. I notice a difference in the clients. I notice a difference within, within our own organization but I think I don't I just feel that it's not fast

enough, the thing that has started happening, which didn't happen at the start of my career was you at least have someone in the room that you can kind of just look at and smile and roll your eyes, at, or at least you have some camaraderie. But a lot of the times and this is the sad part of it, like a lot of the times when I go to meetings and I find out, you know, and I take a younger colleague with me, you know, they come out and say Wafa you were the only senior woman in that meeting. I kind of gotten myself to a point where it's like, oh really, I didn't notice. And that's a really sad place to be, right? Because when I would be noticeable, I would try and do something about it. But I think I think the sad part is that we're kind of getting a bit accustomed to it. Probably that's something worth I mean, as a personal reflection for me to be changing in the future to kind of, you know, not have someone come out of a meeting and think, well, this is normal.

Charlotte Dorrington:

I think that point that you mentioned around catching someone's eye across the room kind of, Yeah, hit the nail on the head. It's so nice to have someone else to kind of share those experiences with. And also, when you feel like you're the only woman in a room or in a meeting, you kind of have to feel like you have to fill a particular role to fit in. And when there's someone else there, it's not quite as, yeah, that that need doesn't kind of feel as big and in a way...

Wafa Jafri:

I completely agree. I think I think there are two ways of looking at it, right. And I think there was one point that there was a turning point in my career as well where it was and it's almost like, well, you know, you're the only one of your kind on the table so you must have earned it and you must show that you've earned it or maybe it's pressure that I put on myself to kind of do that and you kind of stick out. So, whenever you...

Charlotte Dorrington:

Imposter syndrome, right?

Wafa Jafri:

It is imposter syndrome, but at the same time you're sticking out like a sore thumb. So, every time you make a noise, it's going to be noticed more than everybody else, right? So, and I don't I don't think that's just imposter syndrome. I think that's just the reality of it. When you are different, you look different, you sound different. You say something, people will take notice of it. And the turning point in my career was when I decided that that is what it was and then what do I want to use it for.

Charlotte Dorrington:

So, turning it into an advantage for you.

Wafa Jafri:

Exactly. I will be different. I will sound different, I will say different things, I will provide a different perspective. Do I just want to take the burden of I don't want to be different, or do I actually use it was a was the turning point and I think if I...and I remember that turning point actually quite well because when that happened, it just it unlocked something which was quite helpful.

Charlotte Dorrington:

Yeah. That's a really nice reflection. I wonder also as a kind of the head of an energy strategy team in the UK, is there anything specifically that you've done to help increase gender diversity within your own team?

Wafa Jafri:

Yeah, I mean, I've been very lucky, touch wood, to work with some really strong women, as well as some amazing mentors who have been men and have given me the freedom and platform to change things. And I think they've just empowered me to do the things and get the outcome which is right for our organization, as well as our industry.

In terms of the kind of things I've done have been more around ensuring positive action and it's been around retaining and developing some of our amazing talent, amazing female talent that we've had coming through, like yourself, Charlotte. Or, by recruiting some in. So I think from an employee retention perspective, you know, it's building that trust, creating a safe space where we can talk about gender diversity, talk about a just transition and what that means, giving you the platform for example, for Leaders 2050 and watching you take it to amazing places.

The second thing I would say is around recognition, recognizing that we have some way to go. As a KPMG-wide thing, we do publish our Gender Pay Gap report, and what that means, again, creating that safe space for people to talk about it and, you know, feel they can be themselves and bring their whole selves to work ensures that we can retain the talent and maintain the diversity we have.

And then I think it's from a learning and development perspective. I've been lucky enough to sponsor some of our learning and development activities targeted towards increasing gender and ethnic diversity within Deal Advisory, but also more widely within KPMG. I think that's been quite a big propellant and I think when it comes to recruitment, we really focus on using the right language so that it attracts the right type of diversity. We've spent quite a bit of time talking to potential applicants about the diversity we have on the team and what we will actually get. I've personally spent quite a bit of time doing that, and I think that is what has made us a little bit successful in terms of maintaining the right kind of diversity of thought, gender, ethnicity and everything, you know, that's transformational for our clients.

Charlotte Dorrington:

Yeah, makes complete sense. On the recruitment piece, I remember we did an initiative where we looked at how you write a job description, and making sure that you're the words, the choice of words that you use appeals to both men, but also women. And also, because men have a tendency to look at kind of the requirements of the job and if they hit half of them, they kind of think, yeah, I'll go for it, I might do it. Whereas a woman might look at it and think, oh I'm nowhere near who they, who they're kind of the profile of a person who they're looking for so I'm just not going to apply. And I think if you approach, yeah, writing job descriptions in that way, it kind of unlocks a lot as well.

Wafa Jafri:

Yeah. I mean, in the kind of initiatives that we debated, you remember this was around, you know, do we go for gender blind CVs. The kind of conclusion that we came to was, no, that doesn't really work because you can always guess who's written it. Yeah. And I think the kind of things that we did was the kind of things that we did were along the lines of making sure if somebody reached out to us on LinkedIn, then we would prioritize the diversity and, and talking to those people as opposed to the others, just to make sure that we were getting the right candidates in. And I think it's a, it's a war for talent, right? It has been a war for talent. So why is the place that you are offering going to be better than others? It just has to make certain adjustments and invest the time really.

Charlotte Dorrington:

Absolutely, absolutely

I want to broaden that discussion a little bit again back to the two other conclusions of the report. And I really want to hone into the term 'a just transition'. And I think often this term is kind of thrown about and it's used by quite a lot of different people, but it's not really defined anywhere. And I was quite keen to hear your perspectives on how you go about defining it and what does it mean for you.

Wafa Jafri:

I think for me it means, I know this is going to say, I don't I don't know how this is actually going to sound, and I haven't said it out loud at work before. For me, it means disagreement. I think where the world is going, I think I look around and people wanting to make a difference and people believing that there is just one way to do things, right, and there is just one way and we're going to focus on that and we're going to convince everyone to follow that. I don't think that leads to just transition. I think that leads to one way of doing the transition. But I think if we're going to deliver it to be just, we're going to have to try different things. We're going to have to try different technologies. We're going to have to try different ways of doing things, and we're going to have to be more diverse than we are, and we're going to have to be open minded. Actually, be open minded. And what that means is disagreement, my way or the way I think about energy transition or what is needed to deliver it may not agree with yours, but if you're really going to be just in that transition, we have to give it equal voice and we have to try that. And so, for me that means disagreement. But I think that you learn so much through that disagreement, through the argument, you might come to a, you know, the same conclusion once you've argued it out, you might actually go for different methods, and you might try them in different countries and different places, and they might work. But you have to have that disagreement because there is that's where the passion is. That is where the will is to try and drive something which is just, and which is going to work for as many people as possible.

Charlotte Dorrington:

I love that thought. It's kind of like we have to have a lot of divergence and lots of diverse ideas to be able to solve this problem and only until we've thought around all the possibilities can we kind of identify which ones they are that's going to work and help us get where we need to be.

Wafa Jafri:

And like you say, it's ones. It's not the one, it is the ones that are going to work. And it just it automatically means disagreement. And I think that, you know, I think we as of maybe a race as human beings. We just we don't like it...

Charlotte Dorrington:

Yeah, it's uncomfortable.

Wafa Jafri:

It's uncomfortable, but I love that right. And you've known that about me, you know, and I think that's just the fun of what we do. And if we don't have those disagreements, whether it's hydrogen versus, you know, electrification or nationalization versus private, we're just not going to get to anywhere. I think it's always going to be both. It's all it's never either or it's and so, yeah, how do we.

Charlotte Dorrington:

There's no silver bullet when it comes to this, these things. Yeah, it has to be a mix of different solutions. I completely agree.

The European Commission's conclusions don't really talk that much around the transition and the journey and the process. They're very kind of static facts and remarks that they give out. So, I wanted to kind of get your thinking on the green transition and the future of the energy market and the journey that we have to go on to get there and make it right. In light of that, what do you think the impacts of that will be on energy poverty and the impacts that it has, particularly on women? Is it an opportunity or do you think maybe in some respects it's going to make things worse for those who are already affected?

Wafa Jafri:

It's a very interesting question. I just from my perspective and again it's a personal opinion, it's more I don't think it's an energy only issue. I think I think I think we have a brilliant opportunity to make a difference. But I don't think it's an energy only issue. I think it's a wider issue that we as society face with regards to equal pay, with regard to, with regard to the fact that, you know, we'll always end up being that women will always end up being the lower earners in a family. And I think it's I don't think we can resolve it for the energy sector or from an energy perspective till we are able to do that in, for wider society.

Charlotte Dorrington:

I was actually also reflecting on, on the face of it, the kind of three top conclusions feel very or at least the first two feel very different from the third one, where the first thing about energy poverty and the third one's talking about the

inequalities with people working in the sector, but actually they are inherently linked. And it goes back to these idea of those systemic problems in the system that impact women because women are always thought or currently thought to be the primary care givers they are responsible to have of how the household funds are being spent, whether they should be spent on food or energy, pay the energy bill, for example. And that adds so much emotional toll and mental capacity and takes up so much mental capacity. They say they don't have time to focus, we don't have time to focus on other things, that maybe men spend a lot more time thinking about, like their careers and their network, a relationship building with their kind of peers, with who they work with. And I think we can't solve the problems within the energy sector if we can't solve these systemic changes and the idea is that are built into you as a child growing up, as a girl and or a woman. Yeah.

Wafa Jafri:

I completely agree with you on that. I think there are some really good advertisements around it, like, you know, like run like a girl, right? If you ask kids to do it, they don't see a difference. You ask teenagers to do it they see the difference. And then you ask adults to do it. They see a difference. And that's not just you know, if you ask somebody to run like a girl, it's not the boys or the men doing it differently. It's actually women doing it, even though their runners or they would run every day. But the moment somebody asks them to run like a girl that didn't do a really silly thing and it's embedded in us and it's just that and the concept of doing a free jo, managing finances for five people in an organization would actually get you paid somehow at home it doesn't. And so again, like all of those concepts that you have that you've grown up with, it's my job as a mother. It's like well, I don't know if you and I have spoken about it, but I've done that with my husband. And I took first couple of years of our marriage he used to help. And it drove me insane, how can you help me around the house like this is your house? And it's only like after quite you know, after we had the MeToo movement and things have shifted significantly that he finally understands my annoyance with the term I help. Yeah. And now I use it with him and it just drives him insane. But that is essentially what people have grown up with, right. Like, the men help in the house. They don't take ownership, accountability or responsibility for it.

Charlotte Dorrington:

It's just a small thing, it's just a word. Right. But if, but if there's a series of those words, they all add up to into kind of a thought process or a way of thinking.

Wafa Jafri:

How can you help right, this is, these are your children, this is your house. You can't you're not allowed to help. You're allowed to take ownership, responsibility and accountability for it. Yeah, I think it's the same thing as doing three jobs. If you can't change that, then how can you change that poverty line?

Charlotte Dorrington:

I agree. I think we have time for one more question, and I want to end on hopefully a bit more of a positive note on what we can do. And I think, in particularly from a policy standpoint, do you have any reflections on how we can ensure that women's voices can be considered or heard when we are taking, we're making policy decisions related to the energy sector and the energy transition in particular. Is there a starting point?

Wafa Jafri:

I think the more people we have setting the policy that are women, the more we've been able to do that, the more we can get people into the workforce, the more we'd be able to do that. And I think in a lot of policy and a lot of health, in a lot of health policies, in a lot of, even something as simple as driving even something as simple as shovelling snow nobody pays attention to women because they're not the ones designing the policy. And I think if you have more women designing the policy, they would be able to tell what actually needs to be done and what actually needs to be thought of. And again, I'll go back to it. We have a massive opportunity as an industry to attract that top talent, if things get more difficult as we solve even bigger and worse problems in the energy transformation, to be able to attract that talent and then reset at least the energy economy, which may then be able to reset the wider economy and create a gender balance.

Charlotte Dorrington:

And this is the thing we always talk about with the energy sector. It has impacts on so many other different sectors, like transport, like heating. It kind of infiltrates a lot of different areas. And so making changes within our sector, within energy. And this also goes back to the idea of a green transition. If we can reduce emissions within the energy sector, it has a knock-on effect, lots of different sectors. So, I really like that kind of continuous feedback loop almost in trying to make changes here that can impact elsewhere.

Wafa Jafri:

And I think lastly, I would say, Charlotte, it's the work that you're doing, right. I think again, like, it's so amazing. Like I gave you a little push, you know, for something to think about and you've created these forums. You keep, you know, you keep pushing the concept of just transition. What does it mean for different people? How do you drive it? and you really want to, and I think that creates a space for people to raise their voices and that creates an environment. And an automatic attraction for people to want to come in and be a part of a movement. And I think I think what you're doing and what you're driving with others is absolutely going to be critical to deliver that.

Charlotte Dorrington:

Thanks, Wafa, really, really kind words and I think we will leave it here. Thank you so much, it's been wonderful chatting with you.

Wafa Jafri:

It's always been a philosophical conversation. So really glad we got a chance to do this again.

Presenter:

Wafa and Charlotte, thank you for this insightful discussion. It was wonderful to hear your perspectives on women and energy.

Join us again next time for more insights from ESG leaders and innovators. You can also find our latest insights covering a range of ESG topics by visiting kpmg.com/ESG.

Thanks for listening.

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