

Driving Change

An Interview with **Sobia Rahman,**
Senior Vice President Account Payout Network, Western Union

EDITORS' NOTE *Sobia Rahman has held her current post since 2017. Prior to this, she held the role of Vice President of Strategic Planning and Regional Vice President, as well as Chief Operating Officer at FEXCO.*



Sobia Rahman

COMPANY BRIEF *The Western Union Company (westernunion.com) is a global leader in cross-border, cross-currency money movement. Its omni-channel platform connects the digital and physical worlds and makes it possible for consumers and businesses to send and receive money and make payments with speed, ease and reliability. Western Union moves money for better, connecting family, friends and businesses to enable financial inclusion and support economic growth.*

How do you define your role at Western Union and how do you focus your efforts?

I lead the development of Western Union's Account Payout Network, a key strategic pillar to extend greater connectivity across the globe, enabling people and businesses to move money anytime and anywhere. We are building a network to give our customers access to accounts around the world in an efficient and cost-effective manner, whether they are banks, cards or wallets.

In a world where individuals from different cities, countries and continents live in diverse economic, financial and technology ecosystems, we make it our mandate to make it easy to send and receive money quickly and reliably wherever people are, in any format – cash or cashless, online or offline.

Would you provide an overview of Western Union's diversity and inclusion strategy?

Western Union is truly a diverse company when it comes to many factors including race, ethnicity, religion and age. This extends from all our employees across all levels to all our agents and partners who represent our services across more than 200 countries and territories across every class of trade – whether that is retailers, banks, postal services or financial services.

When you are as diverse as Western Union, it is easy to display an unconscious bias on the topic and to assume that gender diversity will take care of itself simply because we are already so diverse in every other dimension. If we want to drive change, we need to ensure that the gender agenda is looked

at systematically and in the context of our overall people and business strategy.

Greater parity in our workplace seems a very realistic goal today. We have a chance to set an example to a very broad and diverse audience.

Our overall workplace strategy is focused on: Building leadership confidence – invest in 2020 leadership skills; Connecting people – enhance the employee experience using digital and mobile, but also share our learnings with the outside world; and Evolving our workforce – optimizing our workforce with a focus on women and millennials.

Our North Star aspiration is to grow our women representation across senior ranks and be above the industry average.

How ingrained is diversity and inclusion in Western Union's culture and values?

Diversity is a strength at Western Union, reflected throughout our corporate leadership, our global employee workforce and customers. Even when I look around within the Western Union business unit I work with, among the executives that make up my top leadership team, we have 13 nationalities. These leaders have together worked in more than 40 cities globally – from Kabul to London, from Frankfurt to Riyadh.

Women are also charting a powerful story. Of the 150 million people who send or receive money each year through Western Union, a majority are women. In our payments business, we also note that women are also steadily increasing their presence in the world of small business – paving the way for others to follow.

Across Western Union's global workforce, more than 50 percent of employees are women, and two of the company's nine board members are women, attracting recent recognition by US Organization and 2020 Women on Boards. At the leadership level at Western Union, women head significant roles of legal, technology, and compliance and the company is seeking to drive further balance.

This is a truth that should both inspire us and guide us moving forward. The question to be asked now is how can Western Union play its fullest part in helping these women achieve their potential. More than ever now, we have a rare moment to stand above and lead.

You are the Chair of Women@WU. Would you highlight Women@WU and its mission?

Under the direct stewardship of Western Union Global CEO Hikmet Ersek, the company created

an all-female senior advisory group, Women@WU. Its mandate is to create an action plan to promote women's success at Western Union, through recruiting, mentoring, promoting and measuring progress, while fostering a culture of greater inclusiveness for customers as well as employees.

We are a cross-functional group of female leaders responsible for advising the Western Union Executive Team on gender balance, as well as setting standards, creating transparent measurement tools and ensuring accountability for achieving objectives as these relate to global gender diversity issues.

We have spent a lot of time assessing the importance and impact of a more inclusive environment and understanding the factors that hold women back from putting themselves forward for new assignments or promotions. While our members hold senior roles within the organization, we have experienced some of the challenges faced by many women and have learned from them. We want to make sure we learn from the past and empower people to change the story going forward.

It is important, therefore, to understand the "why." Why is it important to have a more diverse workforce? What are the barriers women face both internally and externally? What are the benefits of having a more inclusive environment other than "it's the right thing to do"? We also try to educate on the meaning of inclusion. I have experienced many discussions, not limited to Western Union, where people will assume they have a diverse workforce. However, when you delve a little deeper and start asking how engaged women are during meetings, or how many have applied for the next level or new opportunities, then the conversation starts to dwindle.

I am currently the chair of this group and it is very exciting to collectively lead a range of game-changing initiatives for the company as well as our customers.

In your role, how valuable has it been to have the commitment of Western Union's board and senior management in these diversity and inclusion efforts?

The commitment of our CEO and Chief Human Resource Officer has been invaluable. One of our board members is now also our sponsor. We have spent time and continue to educate our executive team on the importance of diversity and inclusion, which has now become a permanent item on their agenda.

Dialogue is key to diversity and inclusion. Keep talking and acting, and we will see the benefits. ●