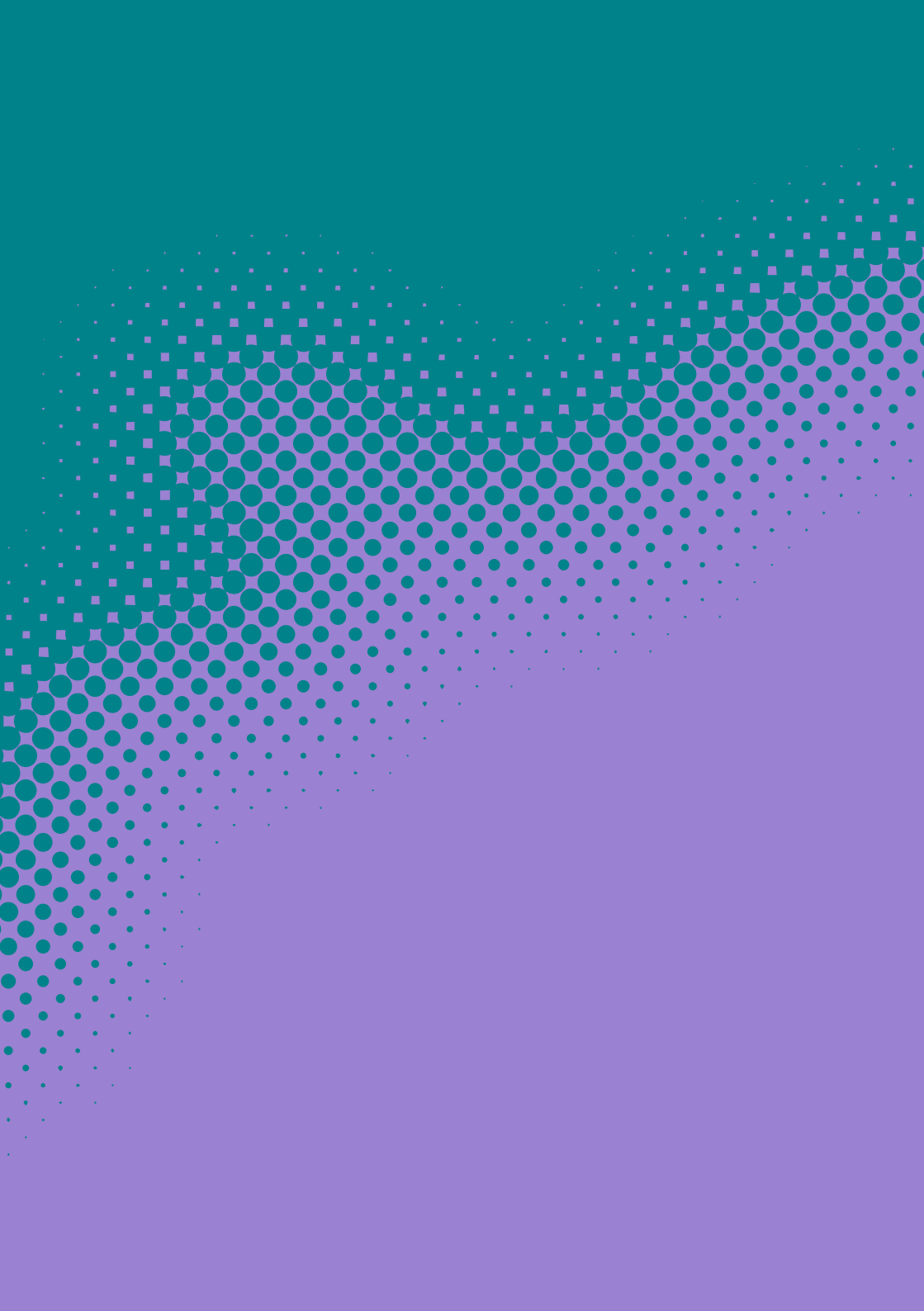


Policies for change: Summary report

*Government levers for enabling
workplace gender equality*

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Summary

Achieving workplace gender equality is a complex and worthy goal. While companies have a significant role to play in addressing this, so does public policy. Indeed, striking the right balance between government policy and corporate action will be critical in driving meaningful and sustained workplace change. But what are those public policies that can help enable this change?

The “Policies for change: Government levers for enabling workplace gender equality” paper developed by the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at King’s College London with the support of Deloitte Global sets out the findings of an analysis of government policies and provisions in 50 countries and territories. It also includes insights gathered through interviews with 19 human resources and diversity, equity and inclusion leaders from 13 multinational companies headquartered across nine countries, from Mexico to Singapore. Each of these companies is considered a global leader in workplace gender equality and well positioned to identify how policy environments can support them. The analysis and interviews explored the relationship between policy environments that support gender equality and progress in driving gender equality in the workplace, identifying those policy elements that are considered by interviewees to have most effectively enabled change.

Gender pay gap reporting

Requirements around transparent gender pay gap reporting and policies promoting boardroom diversity were seen by interviewees to make a tangible difference. Countries with such regulations are more likely to host companies which champion gender equality. When commenting on gender pay gap reporting, many interviewees pointed to how national reporting requirements had highlighted gender imbalances that may not have otherwise been scrutinized and kickstarted their internal efforts to address workplace

gender equality; they also ensured continued engagement on the subject. Importantly, these requirements elevated gender equality as a leadership priority, increased engagement amongst employees and sparked a race to the top among competitors.

However, while such reporting requirements are seen as a catalyst for change, they also bring challenges. Multinational companies are frustrated by the complexities of providing different sets of data for different reporting regimes (where such regimes exist). Interviewees suggested that a more standardized approach across jurisdictions and indexes would free up resources which could be used in tackling the underlying problems identified. Furthermore, standardizing reports would allow multinational companies to be benchmarked against each other more easily, which could drive external pressure from consumers and other stakeholder groups.

Parental leave and care infrastructure and flexibility

Countries whose policies and provisions support work-life balance were also more likely to host companies which are proactive at addressing gender equality. Care infrastructure and more equal parental leave provisions were prominent suggestions for where governments could do more, with these varying in nature across jurisdictions. Women are more likely than men to leave or reduce their paid work to care for children and vulnerable adults (Andrew et al. 2021), and when parental leave is skewed towards the birth parent, that exacerbates this issue. Thus, addressing this through policy was seen as a major lever to drive change. Similarly, the interviews highlighted flexible working as a cornerstone for helping enable work-life balance— though interviewees didn't see a legal entitlement to flexible working as a key area for government support. Nevertheless, a government requirement to provide flexible working could have a positive impact on individuals with caring responsibilities, especially at companies that do not prioritize diversity and inclusion.

Bringing about lasting change

The degree of interplay between companies, governments and wider society was apparent throughout the interviews and policy analysis. Interviewees said that regulators, investors, customers, and employees motivate, encourage, and applaud company efforts to improve workplace gender equality. Yet sometimes the policy environment does not enable such efforts as effectively as it could.

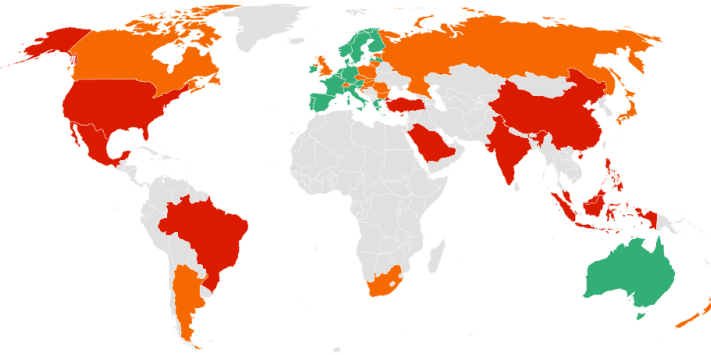
Policy makers have an important role to play in providing a policy environment conducive to making progress on workplace gender equality. This is why the report sets out a set of recommendations for policy makers based on our data analysis and interviews, including:

1. Introduce gender pay gap and/or gender representation transparency measures in jurisdictions where they do not currently exist.
2. Adopt global standardized pay gap reporting requirements with guidelines for multinational companies.
3. Provide adequately paid leave that allows for a fairer distribution of care responsibilities between men and women.
4. Ensure access to affordable care, for children and vulnerable adults.
5. Implement policies that support flexible working for employees to balance care responsibilities.

These key recommendations can make a substantive impact on improving gender workplace equality and this report offers the detail, the means, and the motivation to achieve this outcome.



Figure 1: Map showing three levels of government support for workplace gender equality and typical policies, laws, and regulations based on a policy analysis of 50 countries and territories*



Low support
(scoring 1-5)



Medium support
(scoring 6-10)



High support
(scoring 11-15)

Scoreboard



Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden



Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Japan, Korea (Rep), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland and the UK



Brazil, China, Cyprus, Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Turkey and the US



High support for gender equality at work – Countries scoring 11-15



What are their anti-harassment/discrimination policies like?

Laws in place making harassment & discrimination illegal.



What are the typical reporting and quota requirements?

Companies may be required to report on their gender pay gaps, and indicate actions being taken, may be a 30 percent women quota or target for boards of publicly listed companies or those with government investment.



What support is available for balancing work, care and family?

Tend to require 16 weeks + fully or more than 2/3 paid maternity leave with generous or equal allowances for partners; paid annual childcare leave; subsidised childcare for 1+ year olds; rights to work part time to balance caring responsibilities.



Which countries are in this bracket?

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden



Medium support for gender equality at work

– Countries scoring 6-10



What are their anti-harassment/discrimination policies like?

Usually laws in place making harassment and discrimination illegal.



What support is available for balancing work, care and family?

Partially paid maternity leave for around 16 weeks and some shared parental allowances; unpaid childcare leave; subsidised childcare from three years; right to request flexible work from employer.



What are the typical reporting and quota requirements?

May have gender pay gap reporting but likely no action plans required, unlikely to have gender quotas for boardroom.



Which countries are in this bracket?

Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Japan, Korea (Rep), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland and the UK



Low support for gender equality at work

– Countries scoring 1-5



What are their anti-harassment/discrimination policies like?

Usually laws in place making harassment and discrimination illegal.



What support is available for balancing work, care and family?

Usually some partially paid maternity leave; unlikely to have childcare leave or entitlements to childcare before school age; unlikely to have rights to flexible working.



What are the typical reporting and quota requirements?

Unlikely to have gender pay gap reporting requirements or boardroom quotas.



Which countries are in this bracket?

Brazil, China, Cyprus, Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Turkey and the US

* See Methodology in full report for scoring and Bibliography for sources used to gather data.

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