



# HOW TO CLOSE THE GENDER PAY GAP

A practical guide

# CONTENTS

## 3

### INTRODUCTION →

With Inger Ashing, CEO at Save the Children International, and Dr Tiantian Chen, Chair at Global 50/50

## 6

### THE GENDER PAY GAP →

What is it, why it matters and how to address it

## 9

### RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, PROGRESSION →

Practical guidance on closing the gender pay gap, with examples from global organisations

## 18

### NEXT STEPS & RESOURCES →

What to include in an equality action plan, plus useful tools and references



Cover image:  
*A Man's World*,  
Seldjan Behari, UK

Behari's artwork seeks to shed light on the challenges that women encounter within male-dominated work environments. It is a visual representation of the obstacles and hardships that women often confront, emphasising the need for equality and inclusivity in the workplace.



All images in this guide are from Global 50/50's visual storytelling initiative [This is Gender](#), unless stated otherwise.

Global 50/50 is an independent nonprofit think-tank and registered UK charity (registration number: 1194015) whose purpose is to advance action and accountability for social and gender justice.

# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

From April 2026, the UK Employment Rights Act requires organisations with 250 or more employees to publish annual equality action plans. These plans — voluntary for the first year and then mandatory — must show how organisations are tackling the gender pay gap, and supporting employees during the menopause, as part of promoting a fair and inclusive workplace.

The new requirements push employers beyond compliance towards meaningful action. This guide is designed to help organisations develop plans to reduce the gender pay gap by addressing the workplace barriers that make it harder for women to advance in their careers.

## WHAT ABOUT GLOBAL ORGANISATIONS?

The gender pay gap is not confined to the UK. Differences in average earnings between women and men persist across workplaces globally.

While legal frameworks vary between countries, many of the structural factors that contribute to the gender pay gap — such as occupational segregation, unequal access to leadership roles, and the unbalanced distribution of care responsibilities — are widely shared.

This Global 50/50 guide draws on examples of good practice from organisations operating globally and across diverse contexts. We hope that employers, regardless of where they operate, will find the principles and practices outlined in this guide useful.



*Lunchtime Directions*  
Image by Cynthia Eisenberg



# Gender pay equity isn't just possible, it's essential

**Inger Ashing, CEO, Save the Children International**

Throughout my career, I have seen how power, opportunity, and pay are shaped not just by policies, but by who is sitting at the table. Global 50/50's research reflects something I have experienced repeatedly: increasing women's leadership drives measurable improvements and is not just a fairness goal. Decisions become more inclusive and transparent for collective benefit.

Equality is not a "women's issue" — it is a measure of how well power is shared and decisions are made.

As CEO of a global organisation, I see both the progress we have made and the work still ahead. I am proud that we have significantly narrowed the gender pay gap at Save the Children International during my six years at the helm. Real equality in the workplace is driven by leadership that is willing to look honestly at its own systems. Transparency, data, and clear accountability matter — but so does the willingness to challenge long-held assumptions about roles, value, and reward. What most often holds us back is not resistance, but comfort: the idea that good intentions will lead in time to equitable outcomes.

Global organisations such as ours operate across diverse cultures, labour markets and funding

environments, and so living our values everywhere we work is a serious undertaking. This requires both practical action and collaboration, ensuring all voices are heard. Representation matters if we are to remain a credible child rights organisation for the millions of girls and women with whom we work globally.



**Equality does not happen by accident. It happens when we choose to lead differently.**

The landscape is shifting. Purpose-driven organisations are being held to higher standards, and rightly so. My message to fellow leaders, and to those shaping people and workplace policy, is this: equality does not happen by accident. It happens when we choose to lead differently, measure what matters, and act with courage. Gender pay equity is not only possible — it is essential to the impact we seek to have in the world.

**Inger Ashing**

A handwritten signature of Inger Ashing in blue ink.



# Workplace equality: a right, not a race

Dr Tiantian Chen, Chair, Global 50/50

Researchers placed two signs in a London underground station: Ladies, take the stairs and Gents, take the escalator. Predictably, men reached the top first and women — except those who ran up the stairs — arrived later. The implication? By making more effort, women get to the top ahead of men. If they fail to do so — well, they should try harder. This flawed logic, however, ignores the systemic obstacles women face in their struggle to progress.

Individual effort matters, but so do the rules that shape outcomes regardless of effort. Gender pay gaps reflect decisions on grading, progression, performance and access to influence. They highlight the misalignment between stated commitments to equality and the reality of power and reward.

Closing gender pay gaps requires sustained attention to governance, transparency, accountability and culture. Earnings across a whole organisation often reveal deeper structural issues, such as the underrepresentation of women in senior or highly paid roles, and unequal patterns of progression and opportunity.

Our guide to closing the gender pay gap offers practical tools and resources to help employers assess and transform internal systems and cultures, as well as real-world examples from organisations already creating inclusive workplaces. It shows how gender pay gap data can be used not only to reduce pay disparities but also build inclusive, supportive workplaces where employees feel able to progress.



---

**Earnings across a whole organisation often reveal deeper structural issues.**

---

So, rather than urging women to sprint ever faster upwards, we invite organisations to reflect on the rules that shape the race in the first place.

**Dr Tiantian Chen**

*Tiantian Chen*

# THE GENDER PAY GAP: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS AND HOW TO CLOSE IT



*Ride Out Bullying*  
Image by Marina Trani

## WHAT IS THE GENDER PAY GAP?

The gender pay gap is the difference in average gross hourly earnings between women and men across a workforce before income tax and social security deductions, and is typically expressed as a percentage of men's earnings.

In 2025, the average UK gender pay gap across all sectors, all age groups and all regions was 12.8% — slightly down on the 2024 average of 13.1%. Globally, the UN estimates the average gender pay gap at around 20%.

The gender pay gap is not the same as equal pay (although the two are often connected): equal pay means that people in similar roles and performing work of equal value are paid the same.

---

**Closing the gender pay gap challenges ingrained stereotypes about what 'men's work' or 'women's work' is worth.**

---

## WHY DOES THE GENDER PAY GAP MATTER?

The gender pay gap is not simply a number. It marks a life-long unequal distribution of opportunity, power and privilege. It means women are less represented in higher-paid and more senior roles; that the gap is often exacerbated by race, ethnicity, class, disability or migration status; and that women are at higher risk of poverty in old age due to smaller pensions.

Closing the gender pay gap benefits people of all genders. It corrects historic imbalances, challenges ingrained stereotypes about what 'men's work' or 'women's work' is worth, and ensures that everyone is treated equitably for their contributions.

The impacts of the gender pay gap are felt throughout the entire employment cycle, from recruitment through retention and progression. As a result there are fewer women in senior and higher-paid roles, and disproportionately more in junior and lower-paid positions.



Free Childcare  
Image by Mehreen Zain

## WHAT CAUSES THE GENDER PAY GAP?

The gender pay gap results from systemic, historic, deep-rooted cultural, social and economic factors which reinforce the value placed on different types of work.

### SOCIAL AND FAMILY FACTORS

- Unequal distribution of unpaid care and household work
- Career interruptions associated with parenthood (the 'motherhood penalty')

### LABOUR MARKET PATTERNS

- Higher rates of part-time work among women
- Segregation of traditionally gendered occupations and sectors such as healthcare, education and social work
- Over-representation of women in insecure or lower-paid roles

### WORKPLACE AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- Discriminatory recruitment, promotion and development practices
- Prejudicial pay-setting and grading systems
- Traditional top-down 'command-and-control' leadership practices
- Male-centric workplace cultures

## HOW IS THE GENDER PAY GAP MEASURED?

The gender pay gap is typically measured through pay gap reporting, which has been mandatory in the UK since 2017 for organisations with more than 250 or more employees.

### Required data includes:

- percentages of men and women employees in each hourly pay quartile\*
- mean and median gender pay gap for hourly pay\*\*
- percentages of men and women receiving bonus pay
- mean and median gender bonus pay gap

\* four equal-sized groups based on hourly earnings, ranging from lowest to highest

\*\* mean = average earnings across all employees; median = mid-point (or typical) earnings

Access W Banking

Image by Aderemi Davies "AyaworanH03D"



**Experience from countries that have mandated pay gap reporting shows that greater transparency is associated with narrowing gaps. While the mechanisms are multifaceted, the principle is clear: when inequality is measured, it becomes harder to ignore and more likely to be addressed.**

Helen Clark, former prime minister of New Zealand and former administrator of the UN Development Programme

# RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, PROGRESSION: THREE ROUTES TO CLOSING THE GENDER PAY GAP



Gender Rule  
Image by Anwar Sadat Swaka

# RECRUITMENT

## CLOSING PAY GAPS AT ENTRY

Pay gaps often begin at the start of the employment journey. In the recruitment process, narrow experience requirements, career breaks, opaque pay and bonus practices and reliance on salary history or negotiation can disadvantage women, particularly carers and those from marginalised backgrounds.

### Practical steps toward equitable recruitment

- Analyse recruitment data by gender (and where possible race, ethnicity, disability, class) at each hiring stage to identify barriers
- Set clear, time-bound recruitment targets informed by this insight
- Redesign role specifications to prioritise transferable skills and potential
- Offer returner programmes or 'returnships' for people coming back after parental leave or career breaks

- Make recruitment practices more inclusive for women, and indeed men, returning after periods of childcare — for example, evaluating experience in time units rather than chronologically can reduce bias and has been shown to increase call-back rates
- Publish standardised starting salaries and salary ranges, and clarify whether pay is negotiable
- Advertise roles across multiple, diverse sourcing channels, using inclusive, gender-neutral language
- Promote inclusive and diverse workplace culture across websites, social media, recruitment ads and internal channels
- Take a conscious approach to gender balance in candidate shortlists and interviews, applying clear, consistent scoring criteria to reduce bias
- Ensure recruitment panels are diverse to support fairer decision-making
- Adopt ethical interview techniques and prohibit questions about previous salaries to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities

Mother  
Image by David Martín  
Huamaní Bedoya



**If you want to see change, it will take time, commitment and resources. But taking action to close your pay gap is an investment, not a cost. Understanding the causes of your pay gap will mean that you're better able to allocate adequate resources to targeted activities and initiatives that will ultimately reduce your pay gap.**

Anna Ritchie Allan, executive director,  
Close the Gap Scotland

# RETENTION

## PREVENTING PAY GAPS FROM WIDENING OVER TIME

Fostering a workplace where everyone feels respected, valued and supported is critical for closing the gender pay gap. The gap widens as women leave an organisation, especially those on higher rates of pay or at mid-career and senior levels. Poor culture, lack of flexibility, and unaddressed bullying or discrimination disproportionately affect women and carers.

### Practical steps toward positive retention

- Regularly monitor and assess engagement, retention and attrition data by gender
- Encourage part-time, job-sharing, flexible and hybrid roles
- Promote quality of work rather than long hours or 'presentism'
- Engage the whole organisation in co-creating a workplace culture based on respect, values and inclusive behaviour
- Establish and communicate clear policies on bullying, harassment and discrimination
- Take visible disciplinary action against perpetrators of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, regardless of seniority
- Implement safe reporting and whistleblower channels
- Provide regular compulsory training on power, privilege and unconscious bias for all staff, managers and board members
- Encourage shared care-giving through family-friendly policies such as shared parental leave, equal pay for parental and adoption leave, carers' leave and emergency care
- Monitor and assess effectiveness and take-up of flexible working and family-friendly policies



Take a Break Zoe  
Image by Maisie Broadhead



**We know that what gets measured gets prioritised. Transparency is power: when organisations report, analyse, and act on gender pay gaps, they take a stand for fairness. Data must be the starting point for policies that dismantle barriers to women's leadership and drive genuine gender justice at work.**

Ravi Verma, executive director of [International Center for Research on Women \(ICRW\) Asia](#)



Providing support in Tanzania  
Image: EngenderHealth

## ENGENDERHEALTH DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS HELPS CLOSE THE GENDER PAY GAP

EngenderHealth is a global organisation committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. With its global support team based largely in the US and operating in multiple countries across Africa and Asia spanning different cultures, jurisdictions and economies, how does EngenderHealth close its gender pay gap?

“When we review our pay gap data we engage our global HR team and our country leaders to ensure they are aware of the data for their staff, and the staffing structures that drive the outcomes,” says President and CEO Traci L Baird.

“We look for patterns, which may or may not lead to any specific action but can raise awareness. For example, we have done a race/ethnicity pay gap analysis for our US/global support team, which gave us an opportunity to reflect on our recruitment and hiring practices.”

“I think the more we are aware of our own pay gap data and share with others, the better we can support balance, equity, and opportunity across the global health sector.

“I also think that gender pay gaps are just one thing we should be thinking about in the broader context of equity, and hope we can develop more analyses and strategies to guide us in ensuring opportunities for women and also others who have been held back in their careers and roles by systems that limit their participation.”



**The more we are aware of our own pay gap data, the better we can support balance, equity, and opportunity across the global health sector.**

Traci L Baird, president and CEO, EngenderHealth

# PROGRESSION

## ENSURING FAIR ACCESS TO SENIOR AND HIGHER-PAID ROLES

Lack of progression into senior and higher-paid roles — sometimes known as vertical segregation — remains a major driver of the gender pay gap.

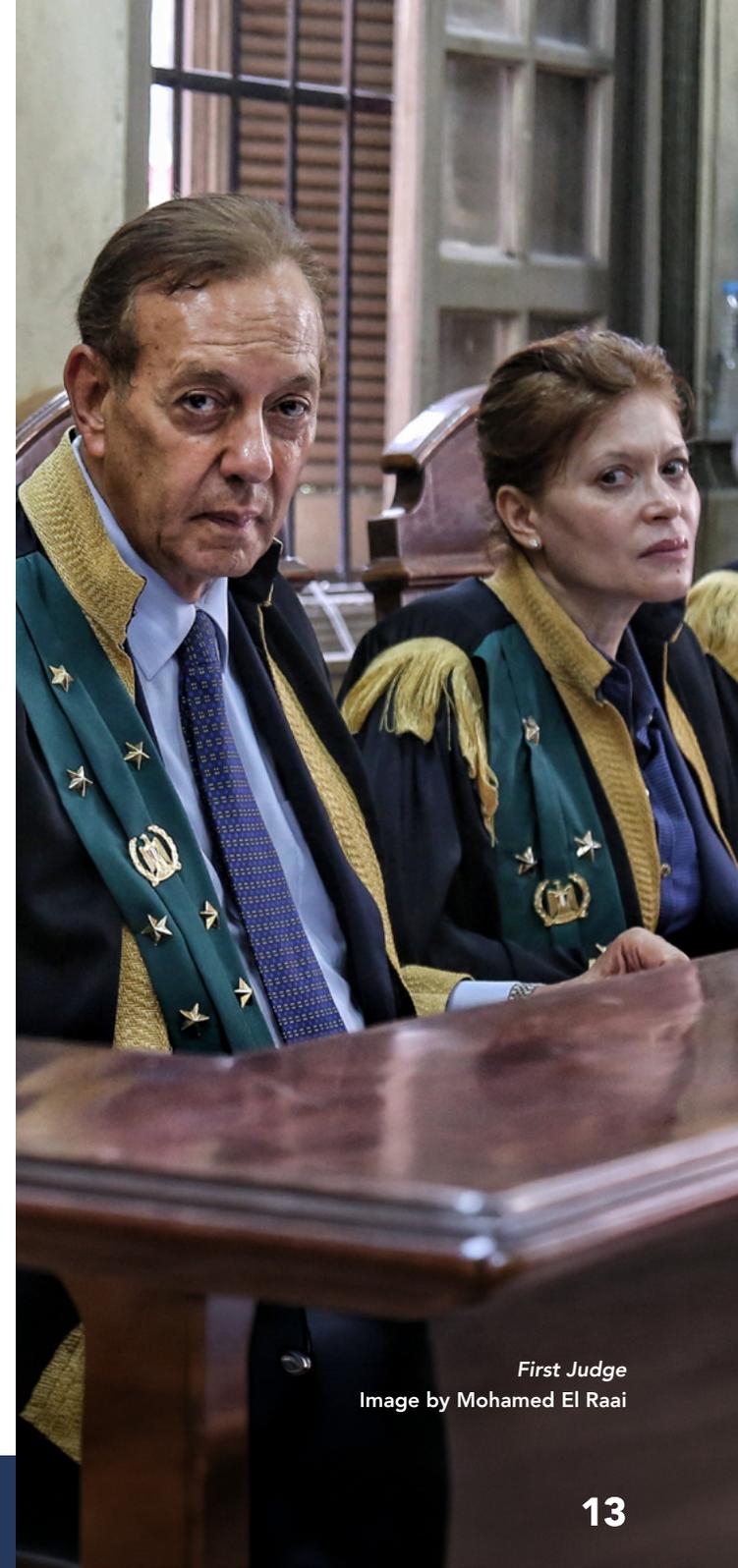
Fair progression requires transparent appraisal processes and clear promotion pathways, performance criteria aligned with inclusive values, and measurable targets for senior representation.

Mentoring, leadership development, and tailored coaching — especially for parents and carers — can support advancement and address structural barriers affecting women, especially those from racialised or lower-income backgrounds.

### Practical steps toward inclusive progression

- Ensure all career pathways and opportunities to progress are inclusive and transparent
- Introduce a democratic or '360-degree' appraisal and self-development process that promotes inclusion, transparency and mutual accountability (bearing in mind that, as research shows, women often rate their own performance lower than men in self-assessments, even when objective performance is similar)

- Offer an inclusive leadership programme that actively supports women's progression, especially where few women are taking up senior roles
- Create career guidance and coaching opportunities tailored to parents, guardians and carers
- Commit publicly to parity targets for women in senior and decision-making roles
- Set measurable, time-bound performance goals for improving gender representation across roles
- Conduct regular pay audits and review progression outcomes by gender
- Establish independent pay equity oversight mechanisms
- Report progression and pay gap data annually to senior leadership and boards, with clear recommendations for action
- Ensure boards recognise their role in fostering a culture of accountability and transparency and in overseeing senior management's progress in closing the gender pay gap



First Judge  
Image by Mohamed El Raai



Save the Children International has significantly reduced its gender pay gap in the six years Inger Ashing, pictured here (centre), has served as CEO. Images by Hamid Abdulsalam for Save the Children

## SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL WHERE FEMINIST APPROACHES ARE CLOSING THE GENDER PAY GAP

While the gender pay gap methodology is less commonly used outside of the UK, narrowing the gap can be an important indicator of representation and power-sharing for global organisations.

With more than 20,000 staff operating in over 100 countries, closing the gender pay gap at Save the Children International was never going to be straightforward.

“Working in diverse contexts around the world means that pay equity (even diversity, equity and inclusion) is conceptualised and measured differently, which presents challenges for cross-country comparisons,” says Save the Children’s global diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) lead.

“Data quality remains a huge challenge for an organisation of our size and complexity. The lack of high-quality demographic data presents real challenges including for wider gender pay gap analyses and additional analyses such as ethnicity and disability pay gaps.”

Undaunted, in 2024 the organisation commissioned a participatory study underpinned by a feminist approach into the underlying causes of their gender pay gap.

The study led to a comprehensive programme of initiatives that are contributing to wider organisational change and a more inclusive workplace for all. “Narrowing the gender pay gap is a key enabler that will help us deliver our goals for children,” adds the global DEI lead.

“Only by diversifying the make-up of our organisation and shifting and sharing power, can we better reflect and represent the children and communities we serve.”



Save the Children's gender pay gap programme, along with wider measures such as flexible working, is yielding positive results across a number of areas. For example:

#### Pay-gap monitoring

As part of periodic data collection and analysis, offices are invited to use the UK government gender pay gap methodology or share relevant methodologies from their context. An actively tracked target of +/-5% has been set for the organisation's UK gender pay gap.

#### Extended maternity leave policy

This ensures all expectant mothers can access 26-week maternity leave on full pay (or more, where local legislation requires it). This aligns with the World Health Organization (WHO) guidance, which emphasises the importance of breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life, wherever possible and our mission as a child rights organisation.

#### Piloting inclusive recruitment practices

A set of practices including a compulsory diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) question as part of interviews, sending interview questions in advance, forming diverse interview panels and rolling

out new *inclusive hiring essentials* training for hiring managers. These benefit both women and underrepresented groups such as non-native English speakers and neurodivergent candidates, and add to existing practices of not asking candidates about previous pay and structuring interviews with clear scoring criteria to minimise bias.

#### Anti-harassment policy

Promoting well-considered principles and processes around diversity, equity and inclusion in itself can help counter discrimination in its many forms. But, as Save the Children International is demonstrating, a clear and accessible anti-harassment policy strengthens its commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive workplace where diverse teams can thrive.

#### Striking a balance across roles

Gender pay gap does not always mean underrepresentation of women — but rather, overrepresentation of women in more junior positions relative to men. Despite there being female-majority teams in some parts of the organisation, female representation tends to taper off at leadership levels. While this may reflect an underrepresentation of women in senior roles, it could also point to a shortfall of men in more junior and middle-management positions. As part of its new recruitment practices, the organisation is learning how to attract and retain men in

these roles, in a sector that has historically attracted more women candidates.

#### Unconscious bias training

For progressive organisations, unconscious bias training is becoming a standard practice toward more diverse and inclusive workplaces. At Save the Children International, this initiative is supporting the organisation's aim of dismantling bias while equipping staff and leaders to give and receive respectful feedback.

Senior management teams and extended leadership teams were among the first to undertake the training, to help minimise the impact of bias on recruitment and people decisions. The organisation is now rolling out an e-learning programme available to all.



**Only by diversifying the make-up of our organisation and shifting and sharing power, can we better reflect and represent the children and communities we serve.**

**Save the Children's global diversity, equity and inclusion lead**

## FEMINIST LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES: HOW A VALUES-LED APPROACH CAN HELP CLOSE THE GENDER PAY GAP

Feminist leadership offers a practical, evidence-based, real-world model to challenge existing structures. It counters hierarchical, command-and-control models and centres on accountability, transparency, care, and shared decision-making.

Evidence from health systems and other sectors shows that leadership practices aligned with feminist principles lead to [enhanced staff wellbeing](#), [better outcomes](#) and [improved organisational performance](#).

At Global 50/50, we are working on a new suite of tools to translate feminist leadership principles into measurable organisational practice across five areas directly relevant to closing the gender pay gap: wages and pay transparency; care and wellbeing; safety and safeguarding; accountability in leadership appointments; and transparency and collaboration in decision-making. While no single measure can fully capture organisational culture, these indicators will provide an entry point for organisations to examine how power, equity and inclusion are embedded in their policies and practices.

[Read more about Global 50/50's research and tools.](#)

### WHEN WOMEN LEAD, EQUALITY FOLLOWS ↗

While feminist leadership principles can be exercised by anyone, research suggests that organisations led by women are more likely to have processes in place to address structural pay inequalities.

Global 50/50's *Closing the Gap?* report finds that, on average across eight years of data, organisations with a woman CEO have a smaller gender pay gap than those led by men. [Read more in the report.](#)

### ACTIONAID'S FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

"ActionAid's transformative vision of a just world free from poverty, oppression and patriarchy requires transformative feminist leaders: leaders who enable others to lead, building power with them instead of over them." These principles apply to everyone in the organisation from board members to the newest hire.

For example, ActionAid believes that deadlines and work schedules should take into account unpaid care obligations and protect women from the dual demands of paid work and unpaid care. The organisation encourages leaders to act as role models by keeping their own working hours balanced and taking enough leave.

[Read more about ActionAid's principles.](#)



*Let us never look down on anyone unless we're helping him rise*  
Image by Jozef Cislo



**Hierarchies, cultures and reward systems often reflect and are based on masculine ideals of work and leadership. The model of the ideal worker — unencumbered by care responsibilities and available at all times — remains embedded in organisational norms. Those who do not conform to these expectations are often viewed as less ambitious or less suitable for promotion.**

Dr Lynsey Robinson, health sector lead,  
Global 50/50



Ramadan distribution, Yemen, 2011  
Image: Islamic Relief



Winter non-food item distribution, Syria, 2017  
Image: Islamic Relief

FINANCED BY: (IR USA, IR GERMANY,

## ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLDWIDE CONCRETE STEPS TOWARD GENDER JUSTICE

“Islamic Relief is committed to gender justice in its humanitarian, development and advocacy work as well as through its institutional arrangements, policies and procedures,” says CEO Iftikhar Shaheen.

“This is clearly outlined in our gender justice policy and our dignity at work policy. Since 2017 we have been publishing our gender pay gap report to hold ourselves accountable and ensure progress in our actions taken to reduce the gender pay gap.”

Leadership is essential for progress on closing the gender pay gap. Islamic Relief Worldwide, one of the world’s leading humanitarian organisations with offices in 40 countries, has launched a range of initiatives to recruit and retain a diverse workforce where women are represented at every level of the organisation.

Initiatives centre on participation as much as policy and procedure, ensuring people’s voices are heard and decisions can be shared. For instance, the introduction of a **gender steering committee** provides a safe space for discussing recommendations.

Meanwhile a training course on **non-discriminatory recruitment practices and selection** supports a new system for blind shortlisting, anonymised applications and inclusive job descriptions free from bias. And a flexible working policy **encourages women to return to work after maternity leave**.

Central to the success of these initiatives is the CEO’s *five steps* commitment to gender justice, which includes concrete actions toward: increasing the representation of women within the workforce, promoting overall diversity, investing in transformational leadership, equal pay, and enhancing a culture of zero tolerance for discrimination.

“However, we recognise that more must be done,” says Iftikhar. “We acknowledge there is no quick fix that will ensure that this gap is plugged, and our solutions will take time to show their impact; but we are determined to see female representation across the organisation grow, especially in leadership positions.”

Making it work  
Image by Nash & Co

# NEXT STEPS & RESOURCES



## EQUALITY ACTION PLANS: WHAT TO INCLUDE

Equality action plans are far more than box-ticking. Employees as well as regulators expect clear, measurable plans to reduce the gap and promote gender equity, and to see real evidence that organisations are embedding inclusivity into their cultures, systems and processes.

Under the Employment Rights Act, organisations with 250 or more employees have one year from April 2026 to publish voluntary equality action plans, after which they become compulsory.

If you have yet to develop an action plan, or if it needs to be updated, then understanding the root causes of gender pay gaps in your organisation would be the best place to start. Forming a clear picture, based on accurate, consistent data alongside insight and lived experiences from across teams, will help you to shape effective targeted interventions.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

As you prepare to develop or evolve your plan, you may want to consider the following steps — in addition to the specific recommendations under Recruitment, Retention and Progression.

- Ensure gender pay gap data is accurate, comprehensive and includes recruitment, promotion and pay trends
- Also evaluate the long-term financial impact of career breaks on pension contributions
- Report voluntarily on ethnicity and disability pay gaps (not yet a legal requirement but expected soon)
- Report on the gender pay gap for contractors and outsourcing providers (again, not yet a legal requirement but expected soon)
- Assess whether existing action plans are evidence-based, measurable, practical and accessible
- Develop or update menopause policies, including awareness training
- Understand how gender, race, ethnicity and disability biases affect AI systems, and introduce measures to counter these biases
- Engage internal stakeholders (eg HR, legal and leadership teams) to ensure they are ready for compliance
- Prepare a clear communication strategy to help embed your action plans and invite discussion and reflection across the organisation
- Anticipate requests from partner organisations for your gender pay gap data and equality action plans



Positive Community shift  
Image by Anwar Sadat Swaka

**Under the Employment Rights Act, organisations with 250 employees or more have one year from April 2026 to publish voluntary equality action plans.**

## EQUALITY ACTION PLANS AND AI

Equality action plans must keep pace with the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace — if they are to prevent new technology widening the gender pay gap.

With AI tools being used more and more in recruitment, workplace processes and career development, employers should consider how these technologies may be impeding their efforts to eliminate pay disparities.

One of the root problems is the male bias embedded in AI-driven systems. “Women make up just 12% of AI researchers and female founders receive only 2% of venture capital funding,” explains gender equality author [Laura Bates in the Financial Times](#). “We are not the ones building this new world. But we will have no choice about living in it.”

If, as evidence suggests, men have been the predominant creators and programmers of AI systems, then it’s likely that male bias, whether conscious or unconscious, will manifest in multiple barriers for women. For example, organisations that use AI tools to sift through job applications [risk perpetuating existing biases](#) through systems that are trained on historical data that favours men.

The discrimination goes further. [One study](#) revealed that some large language models used in hiring processes were advising women to ask for lower salaries than men. There is also [research](#) showing

that some AI tools have automatically ranked women applicants lower than men, while also filtering out older candidates to the advantage of younger ones. Meanwhile other studies show that these tools have discriminated against racial and ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

### What can employers do?

Here are five actions organisations can take to prevent their AI practices from widening the gender pay gap:

1. Ensure that diverse and representative datasets are used in the training of AI models, systems and tools.
2. Maintain human oversight and ensure final hiring and promotion decisions are not made by AI-based processes alone, and that teams are able to explain the basis of those decisions.
3. Introduce clear practices on how, when and where AI tools are used and ensure these practices are transparent to all taking part in AI-supported processes.
4. Regularly test and carry out bias audits across all workplace systems and publicly report on what steps have been taken to identify and tackle discrimination.
5. Train and equip teams to help them understand how AI systems work, so they can identify and address all biases and potential contexts for discrimination.

*Based on the study [Bias in AI-driven HR Systems](#).*



*Disability does not prevent you from being a parent*  
Image by Jacenty



**Research by the Fawcett Society indicates clear evidence that AI tools without necessary safeguards and tests can embed and entrench bias. Large employers should not farm out crucial decisions on recruitment, bonuses and promotions to AI tools which are neither fully understood or tested.**

**Penny East, CEO, [Fawcett Society](#)**

## RESOURCES

The following list signposts a selection of information, guides and tools we hope will help you find and address gender pay gaps in your organisation, whatever the sector. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list and we feature third-party links in good faith.

### EVIDENCE AND INSIGHT

- [↗ Global 50/50's Closing the Gap](#)  
Interactive data dashboard, analysis and the full Closing the Gap report
- [↗ She Leads – Closing Gaps, Opening Doors: promoting inclusive data collection](#)
- [↗ Equal Pay International Coalition. Led by the ILO, UN Women, and the OECD](#)
- [↗ International Labour Organization training module on gender pay gap](#)
- [↗ International Labour Organization guide to understanding the gender pay gap](#)
- [↗ 2025 country by country gender wage gap data](#)

### OTHER POLICY GUIDANCE

- [↗ Close the Gap Scotland's Gender Pay Gap Briefing](#)
- [↗ UK Government guide to closing the gender pay gap](#)
- [↗ UK Government factsheet on equality action plans \(Employment Rights Act 2025\)](#)
- [↗ UN Women: Supplementary guidance on the enabling environment guidelines](#)
- [↗ UN Women: Why women earn less — gender pay gap & labour inequalities in East and Southern Africa](#)
- [↗ World Economic Forum Global Gender Pay Gap report](#)
- [↗ Fawcett Society Equal Pay Day campaign](#)
- [↗ Think Business, Think Equality — a guide on improving workforce equality](#)

### CULTURE AND VALUES-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

- [↗ Global 50/50's tools for organisational change](#)  
Practical tools, guidance and research to support building fair, equitable workplaces.
- [↗ ActionAid's ten principles of feminist leadership](#)  
A framework for leadership that enables and empowers others.
- [↗ How ActionAid works to close the pay gap](#)  
Case studies on how ActionAid supports women in tackling systemic economic barriers in and outside of the workplace.
- [↗ Liberating Structures](#)  
Alternative structures for facilitating meetings and conversations, curated by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was published by Global 50/50, with editorial and design support from Neo.

Thank you to Save the Children International, EngenderHealth, Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Fawcett Society for their contributions to the content.

---

**Suggested citation:** Global 50/50. How to close the gender pay gap: A practical guide. Cambridge, UK, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.56649/OAHT6613>

---

Disclaimer: The views presented in this guide reflect those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect those of Global 50/50's advisors, trustees, funders, or partners. All care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the data reported, including the invitation to organisations to validate their data prior to publication. However, if you believe that an error has been made, please contact: [info@global5050.org](mailto:info@global5050.org)

*How to close the gender pay gap: A practical guide* is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 4.0 International Licence.

All rights reserved. © Global 50/50 2026. No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed without written permission.

Eyes Always Lie  
Art by Silvia Viana



---

**Gender pay equity is not only possible — it is essential to the impact we seek to have in the world.**

Inger Ashing, CEO, Save the Children International

---



READ MORE IN GLOBAL 50/50'S  
CLOSING THE GAP? REPORT



[global5050.org](https://global5050.org)



[globalhealth5050](https://www.linkedin.com/company/globalhealth5050)



[@global50\\_50](https://www.instagram.com/global50_50)