GLOBAL 50 50
Advancing gender justice

Six policies for fair and inclusive workplaces

Policy guidance for board chairs, chief executives, chief operating officers, HR directors and staff representatives. A companion to the 2026 Global Health 50/50 Report.

Every year the Gender and Health Index assesses how 200 organisations active in global health understand and act on gender: who holds power inside them, and who benefits from the work they do. Six of the core variables we score are policies. This brief presents why each policy matters and how to put it in place, drawing on the global standards against which we score and on the practice of organisations that already have policies in place.

Read *Regaining (some) ground* for our latest findings on organisational performance.

How to use this brief

Boards

Make the 6 policies a standing agenda item and table your organisation's Index profile each year.

HR directors

Review what you have against the policy repository, then publish it. A policy nobody can find scores as if it did not exist.

CEOs and COOs

Turn each policy into a KPI with a named owner and a date.

Unions and staff associations

Use the Index and this brief as evidence and ask why peers may have what your organisation lacks.

1 Commitment to gender equality

What it means

An explicit, public commitment to gender equality or equity, stated in the organisation's vision, mission, strategy or core policy. The highest standard is a commitment to gender equality for all, including people of diverse gender identities. Working on women's health, or committing to health equity or social justice in general terms, is not the same thing: we look for the words gender equality, gender equity, gender justice or gender mainstreaming.

Why it matters

Every other policy in this brief rests on a public commitment, because a commitment made openly is one an organisation can be held to by its staff, its partners, its funders and the people it serves. For organisations whose funding or political environment has shifted, it is also the clearest signal of what they still stand for.

How to get there

- Put gender equality into the strategy, mission or vision statement, not only on a web page. Say what the organisation is committing to, and by when.
- Use the right words. Commit to gender equality, gender equity or gender justice explicitly; a commitment to equity in general, or to women's health, does not count.
- Make the commitment inclusive of all people of all genders, including non-binary and transgender people.
- Report against the commitment each year to your board and your staff, and publish the report.

Standards we draw on SDG 5; Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); Women's Empowerment Principles

2 Workplace gender equality policy

What it means

A published policy or plan with specific measures to advance gender equality among staff at the points where careers are made or lost: hiring; promotion; pay; retention; and leadership development. The standard is a policy that names concrete measures and reviews them, not a statement of values.

Why it matters

Legal frameworks protect workers against discrimination, but they do not counteract the everyday bias and structural disadvantage that shape who is hired, who is promoted and who is paid what. Implemented meaningfully, a gender equality policy supports talent development and career advancement, shifts organisational culture and redistributes power. It signals that gender equality is an institutional commitment rather than a matter of individual goodwill, and gives staff and their unions a document to hold management to.

How to get there

- Write the policy around measures, not aspirations. The measures we find in high-scoring policies include: inclusive and structured recruitment; mentoring, sponsorship and leadership programmes for women; targets for representation at each grade; gender and inclusion objectives in managers' performance reviews; and a regular review of progress reported to the board.
- Publish and analyse your gender pay gap, whether or not the law requires it, and set out how you will close it. Our practical guide, *How to close the gender pay gap*, sets out the steps.
- Put in place the policies that keep people in work through the life course: flexible working; sexual harassment policy; and support through menstruation, pregnancy, parenthood and menopause.
- Make the policy explicitly inclusive of transgender and gender-diverse staff.

Standards we draw on Women's Empowerment Principles (UN Women and UN Global Compact); ILO Convention 100 on equal remuneration and Convention 190 on violence and harassment at work; EDGE gender and intersectional equity certification

3 Workplace fairness and equity policy

What it means

A published policy with specific measures to address inequalities among staff beyond gender: race; ethnicity; disability; sexual orientation; age; caste; class; and other characteristics through which people experience a workplace. As with the gender equality policy, the standard is concrete measures, not aspiration.

Why it matters

Nobody experiences an organisation through one characteristic alone. A woman's path to leadership is shaped by her nationality, her race, whether she has a disability. Fairness and equity policies extend an organisation's concern for who holds power to every axis along which it is unequally held. In a year in which such policies have been attacked, a public commitment is also a statement of what an organisation will not give up.

How to get there

- Publish a fairness and equity policy that names the characteristics it covers and the measures attached to each. A list of protected characteristics with a line on non-discrimination is the legal floor, not a policy.
- Collect and report workforce data, with consent and with care, so you can see where the gaps are and whether they are closing.
- Set representation goals for senior management and the board that go beyond gender, including nationals of low- and middle-income countries.
- Build inclusion into the systems that run the organisation: accessible recruitment and workplaces; pay-gap analysis by ethnicity and disability where the data allow; and safe, independent routes to raise concerns.
- Ground the policy in human rights, so its authority is rooted in international commitments rather than from organisational preference or political mood. The organisation becomes a duty-bearer, not a voluntary actor making a strategic choice it can quietly unmake.

Standards we draw on ILO Convention 111 on discrimination in employment and occupation (1958); UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; OHCHR, *Navigating the pushback against diversity, equity and inclusion: a business and human rights analysis* (2026)

4 Board representation and inclusion policy

What it means

A board-level policy, available to the public, that sets out specific measures to advance representation and inclusion on the governing body. We look for three things: targets for who sits on the board; dedicated seats or nomination rules that secure representation; and monitoring of board composition over time. A published list of trustees is not a policy, and a statement that the board values diversity is not a specific measure against which they can be held accountable.

Why it matters

Governing bodies hold authority over leadership, strategy and resources, so who sits on them is the most direct measure of who holds power in an organisation. A written policy captures what the board stands for, guides how it recruits and renews itself, and gives staff, members and the public a basis on which to hold it to account. In some jurisdictions a public policy on representation now carries legal and financial exposure. That pressure makes deliberate governance more necessary, not less: boards can still ask who sits at its table and by what route, and decide which commitments it will defend in public.

How to get there

- Adopt a written policy and publish it with your governance documents.
- Set a target for gender balance and a date to reach it. We treat 45% to 55% women as parity; the UN uses 47% to 53%, and the European Commission's standard is at least 40% of each gender. Extend targets to other dimensions of representation, including nationals of low- and middle-income countries, young people or the communities you serve.
- Where the pipeline will not deliver balance on its own, use dedicated seats, open and advertised trustee recruitment, and term limits.
- Review board composition every year, as a board, record the discussion and publish the results in your annual report.
- Make gender, fairness and equity a standing board item and table your Index results each year.

> **'Let us all acknowledge the transformative power of women's leadership in boardrooms and commit to moving beyond the metrics to redefine leadership and turn the tables on dominant power structures.'**
>
> **Dr Ayoade Alakija**, Chair of the Board, FIND, in the 2024 Global Health 50/50 Report

Standards we draw on UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity (2017); European Commission, gender balance in decision-making; SDG 5.5 on women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making

5 Definition of gender

What it means

A published definition of gender consistent with the WHO and UN understanding: gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women and people with non-binary gender identities. It is socially constructed, varies between places and over time, and is distinct from, though it interacts with, biological sex.

Why it matters

How an organisation defines gender reveals how deeply it understands power and equality, and that understanding shapes its decisions and practice. An organisation that does not define its terms cannot design programmes that respond to gendered needs, defend its policies when they are challenged, or measure whether they work.

How to get there

- Adopt the WHO definition and publish it where people will find it: in your glossary, your gender strategy or policy, and the guidance your programme and evaluation staff use.
- Say plainly that gender is socially constructed and distinct from sex, and use the two terms precisely and consistently, including in data collection and reporting.
- Make the definition inclusive of transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse people.
- Brief staff on the definition and what it means for their work.

Standards we draw on WHO definition of gender (adopted as our benchmark; see global5050.org/glossary); UN Women gender equality glossary

6 Policy on reporting sex-disaggregated data

What it means

An organisation-wide commitment to disaggregate programmatic data by sex and to conduct gender analysis, applied regularly across the work rather than project by project. This is about the people an organisation's work reaches and affects, not its workforce statistics. A single project with disaggregated indicators is a start; the standard is a policy that applies to all of them.

Why it matters

Whether an organisation commits to reporting sex-disaggregated data is the clearest test of whether it is asking who benefits from its work. Without data broken down by sex, organisations cannot know who is being reached and who is being left behind, design gender-responsive programmes, or be held to account for closing the gaps. This is not a new ask: the United Nations first made it in 1975, and SDG 17.18 renews it, calling for data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location.

How to get there

- Write sex disaggregation and gender analysis into your results framework, your monitoring and evaluation policy and your data standards, so that every programme inherits the requirement.
- Disaggregate by sex and age as a minimum, and by the other characteristics in SDG 17.18 where it is safe and feasible to do so.
- Analyse, do not just collect. Build gender analysis into programme design, reviews and evaluations, and use it to change what you do.
- Publish the data in your annual or impact report, and in the research you produce.
- If you are a funder, make sex-disaggregated reporting a routine condition of grants, and resource grantees to do it.

> **'It is only by embedding gender analysis and action deep in the global structures of development cooperation that we will achieve sustainable and inclusive development that leaves no one behind.'**
>
> **Amina J. Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations, in the 2018 Global Health 50/50 Report

Standards we draw on SDG 17.18; the UN's 1975 commitment to sex-disaggregated data (World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City); SAGER guidelines on sex and gender equity in research (2016); WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale

Where to start: tools for organisational change

Workplace Policy Repository

Published policies from high-scoring organisations across global health, grouped by 4 of the policies in this brief: workplace gender equality; workplace fairness and equity; board representation and inclusion; and sex-disaggregated data.

global5050.org/workplace-policies-health

Tools for Organisational Change

A resource bank of more than 120 practical tools, organised by career stage (recruitment, retention, progression) and by feminist leadership, and filterable by topic, including disability inclusion and pay gaps.

global5050.org/tools-for-organisational-change

Self-Assessment Tool

Score your own organisation against the variables in the Index, whether or not you are in our sample.

global5050.org/self-assessment

Gender and Health Index and organisational profiles

Nine years of scores, 2018 to 2026, with a profile for every organisation we track, so you can compare yourself with your peers and follow your own progress.

global5050.org/data-and-tools/health-index