



## GENDER EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

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**Abstract :** Gender equity and workplace inclusion have become central themes in discussions of organizational development and human resource management. Despite widespread implementation of diversity policies and gender equality frameworks, a substantial gap remains between organizational intentions and actual practices. This study examines the factors contributing to this gap and explores strategies to create truly inclusive workplaces. Through a review of existing literature studies, the paper highlights the importance of leadership commitment, organizational culture, and continuous evaluation in translating gender equity policies into actionable outcomes

**Keywords:** Gender Equity, Inclusion, Workplace Diversity, Policy Implementation, Organizational Culture

### I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, organizations across both public and private sectors have increasingly adopted diversity and inclusion policies aimed at ensuring fair treatment, equal opportunity, and representation for all employees regardless of gender. These frameworks often include equal employment opportunity programs, anti-harassment policies, gender pay equity commitments, maternity and paternity benefits, leadership development for women, and work-life balance initiatives. Gender equity and workplace inclusion have emerged as critical priorities in contemporary organizational development and human resource management.

However, despite widespread policy adoption, a persistent gap remains between organizational intentions and actual practices. Many companies publicly commit to gender equity through corporate social responsibility statements, mission goals, or diversity charters, yet the practical implementation of these policies often falls short. This discrepancy arises due to organizational culture, leadership behavior, and structural barriers that continue to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies. For example, while policies advocate equal opportunity, decision-making roles and leadership positions remain predominantly male-dominated in many organizations.

The current study seeks to examine the institutional factors that contribute to this implementation gap. It emphasizes the role of leadership commitment, which is often the determining factor in whether equity policies are embedded into the organization's daily functioning. Leaders who actively promote inclusion—through visible support, gender-balanced teams, and accountability mechanisms—create environments where such policies translate into tangible behavioral and cultural changes. Conversely, leadership indifference can reduce gender policies to mere symbolic gestures without substantive outcomes.

Gender equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, responsibilities, and opportunities among individuals of all genders. Inclusive workplaces ensure that all employees, regardless of gender, feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute fully. Many organizations today have established gender equity policies, yet practical barriers continue to limit their effectiveness.

The present study aims to analyse the reasons behind the gap between policy and practice and to recommend ways to bridge this divide for sustainable organizational growth.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the existing policies on gender equity and inclusion in workplaces.
2. To identify challenges faced during the implementation of such policies.
3. To suggest actionable measures for bridging the gap between policy and practice.

### HYPOTHESIS

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between the presence of gender equity policies and the actual practice of inclusion in workplaces.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between organizations with formal gender equity policies and those without in terms of workplace inclusivity.

H<sub>0a</sub>: There is no significant difference between organizations with formal gender equity policies and those without in terms of workplace inclusivity.

H<sub>0b</sub>: Leadership commitment and awareness programs have no measurable impact on the success of gender inclusion initiatives.

#### **Sub-Hypotheses:**

H<sub>1a</sub>: Effective implementation of gender equity policies leads to higher levels of inclusion and employee satisfaction.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Lack of leadership commitment and organizational support negatively affects the success of gender equity initiatives.

H<sub>1c</sub>: Regular training and sensitization programs reduce gender bias and improve policy implementation outcomes.

These hypotheses collectively examine whether written policies are effectively translated into practice, how leadership, organizational culture, and training influence inclusivity, and what strategic interventions can bridge the gap between policy formulation and actual workplace behaviour.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Gender equity and workplace inclusion are increasingly recognized as essential components of organizational success and social justice. Scholars argue that inclusive workplaces not only enhance fairness but also improve productivity, innovation, and employee satisfaction (Catalyst, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2021). However, despite widespread development of gender equality policies, there remains a persistent gap between policy creation and practical implementation. This literature review explores theoretical frameworks, global trends, barriers, and best practices related to gender equity and inclusion in the workplace.

### **Conceptual Framework of Gender Equity and Inclusion**

Gender equity involves fairness in the distribution of opportunities, resources, and rewards among individuals of all genders (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). It extends beyond representation to address systemic inequalities in power and organizational culture. Acker (1990) introduced the concept of “gendered organizations,” suggesting that workplace structures often reflect and reinforce gender hierarchies. Similarly, Connell (2006) highlighted that gender relations are embedded in workplace institutions, influencing everyday interactions and decision-making.

Inclusion, as defined by Shore et al. (2011), refers to the extent to which individuals feel both accepted and valued for their unique contributions. Their inclusion framework emphasizes two core dimensions—belongingness and uniqueness—both of which are necessary for genuine inclusion within organizations.

### **Importance of Gender Equity in Organizations**

Numerous studies link gender equity to improved organizational performance. McKinsey & Company (2021) found that firms with higher gender diversity in leadership teams are 25% more likely to achieve above-average profitability. Similarly, Catalyst (2020) reported that gender-diverse companies experience greater innovation and employee engagement. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) emphasized that promoting gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also an economic one, contributing to higher productivity and employee retention.

The World Economic Forum (2022) highlighted that gender-balanced leadership enhances corporate governance and stakeholder trust. These findings collectively suggest that gender equity should be viewed as both an ethical and strategic priority for modern organizations.

### **Global and National Policy Frameworks**

Governments and institutions have established extensive policy frameworks to promote gender equity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UN Women, 2023) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted key conventions such as Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration) and Convention No. 111 (Discrimination in Employment and Occupation) to address workplace inequalities.

At the national level, many countries have implemented equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws. In India, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, serve as key legal mechanisms to safeguard women’s rights in employment (Kabeer, 2019). Despite these efforts, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in informal sectors and small enterprises.

### **The Policy–Practice Gap**

Although gender equity policies exist in most organizations, several studies highlight a persistent gap between formal policies and everyday practices. Kalev et al. (2006) found that diversity initiatives often fail when they are implemented as compliance measures rather than cultural transformation strategies. Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) argued that gender mainstreaming efforts sometimes reproduce existing inequalities due to tokenistic practices and lack of accountability.

Rao and Kelleher (2005) emphasized that achieving gender equity requires changing organizational values and power relations, not just formal structures. Similarly, Haq and Nadeem (2020) noted that leadership commitment is the strongest predictor of successful gender inclusion, as policies tend to be ineffective without genuine managerial support.

Organizational culture significantly shapes the success of gender equity initiatives. Schein (2010) argued that culture determines how employees interpret and respond to organizational policies. Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) found that inclusive leadership practices—such as empathy, fairness, and open communication—foster engagement and performance among underrepresented employees.

Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) further demonstrated that diversity in leadership not only provides representation but also influences workplace norms, encouraging broader equity practices. Therefore, organizational transformation requires inclusive leadership models that go beyond compliance to embed equity into everyday operations.

Several studies identify structural and social barriers to effective policy implementation. Unconscious bias and gender stereotyping continue to influence recruitment, promotion, and evaluation processes (Ridgeway, 2011). Women frequently face the “double burden” of professional and domestic responsibilities, limiting their career advancement (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

The “glass ceiling” phenomenon persists, preventing women from reaching top leadership positions despite equal qualifications (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Additionally, a lack of gender-disaggregated data and weak monitoring systems hinder the measurement of progress (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021).

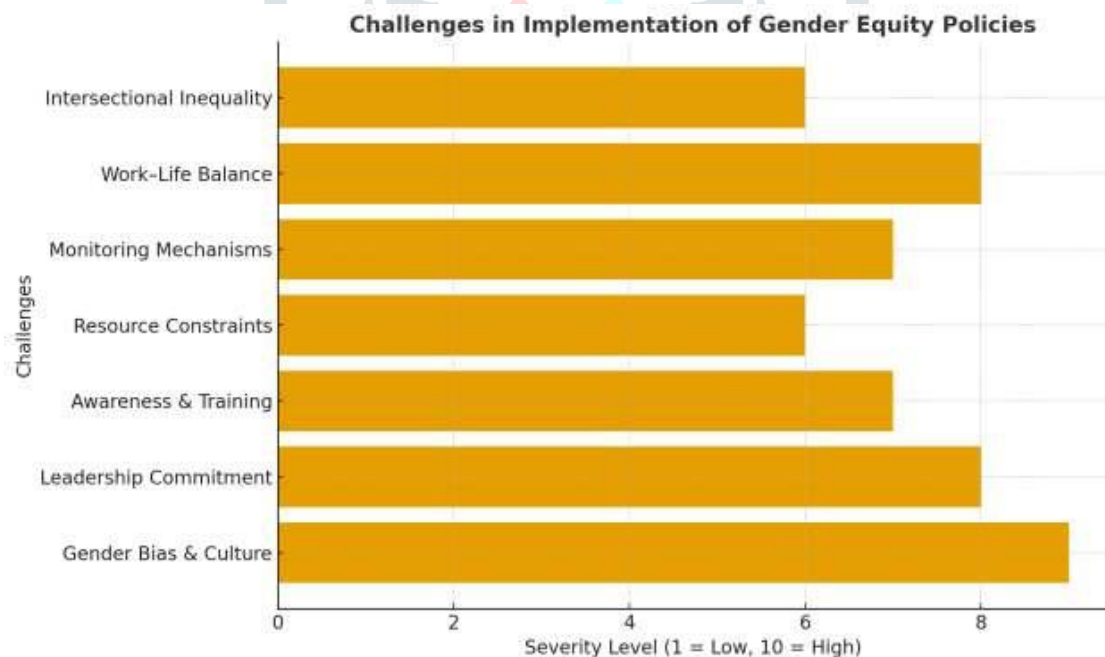
### Emerging Approaches and Best Practices

Recent scholarship introduces intersectionality as a vital framework for understanding inclusion (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectional approaches recognize that gender interacts with race, class, age, and disability, shaping individuals’ workplace experiences.

Organizations have adopted various best practices to foster inclusion, such as mentorship and sponsorship programs (Ibarra, 2015), unconscious bias training (UNDP, 2020), and transparent pay structures (World Bank, 2022). Global corporations like IBM, Accenture, and Infosys have embedded gender equity goals into corporate performance indicators, showing measurable progress when inclusion is integrated into strategic planning.

**Table 1: Challenges in Implementation of Gender Equity Policies**

| S.No. | Identified Challenge                 | Description                                                                     | Impact on Policy Implementation                                 | Possible Solution                                         |
|-------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Organizational Culture & Gender Bias | Deep-rooted stereotypes and patriarchal norms restrict equitable participation. | Discourages women from leadership roles and open communication. | Awareness programs, inclusive culture training.           |
| 2     | Lack of Leadership Commitment        | Management views inclusion as HR responsibility, not strategic goal.            | Weak accountability and poor follow-through.                    | Leadership accountability metrics and gender audits.      |
| 3     | Inadequate Awareness & Training      | Employees unaware of policies and gender laws.                                  | Misinterpretation of gender norms and non-compliance.           | Regular sensitization and diversity workshops.            |
| 4     | Resource Constraints                 | Limited funds and HR capacity for equity programs.                              | Incomplete implementation or token efforts.                     | Dedicated gender inclusion budget.                        |
| 5     | Weak Monitoring Mechanisms           | Absence of gender data tracking.                                                | No evaluation of progress or effectiveness.                     | Gender-disaggregated data collection and periodic review. |
| 6     | Work-Life Balance Issues             | Lack of flexible work options and childcare support.                            | Higher attrition of women employees.                            | Flexible scheduling and parental leave policies.          |
| 7     | Intersectional Inequality            | Policies overlook marginalized groups (caste, disability, etc.).                | Limited inclusiveness.                                          | Intersectional policy design.                             |



**Fig. 1. Challenges in implementation of gender equity policies.**

The graph illustrating the severity of challenges in implementing gender equity and inclusion policies. It visually highlights that gender bias, leadership commitment, and work-life balance are among the most severe issues organizations face.

### ACTIONABLE MEASURES FOR BRIDGING THE GAP

To suggest actionable measures for bridging the gap between policy and practice. While many organizations have adopted gender equity and inclusion policies, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on how well they are implemented in everyday practice. Bridging the gap between policy formulation and practical realization requires both structural and cultural interventions. The following actionable measures are recommended based on research evidence, best practices, and policy frameworks identified in prior studies.

Leadership plays a critical role in transforming organizational culture. According to Haq and Nadeem (2020), gender equity initiatives succeed when top management demonstrates visible and sustained commitment. To ensure this the leaders should set measurable gender equity goals such as achieving a specific percentage of women in leadership roles or reducing gender pay gaps. Regular progress reports on diversity metrics should be presented to executive boards. Inclusion performance indicators can be integrated into leadership appraisals to encourage accountability.

McKinsey & Company (2021) suggest that when leadership holds itself accountable for inclusion outcomes, organizations see tangible improvements in representation and employee engagement.

Gender equity must be evidence-driven. Many organizations lack accurate data on gender representation, pay equity, and promotion patterns. Regular gender audits—a systematic examination of policies, practices, and workplace culture—can reveal hidden inequalities.

The International Labour Organization (2019) recommends that organizations must collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data and evaluate policy effectiveness annually for Publicly share findings to build transparency and trust.

**Table 2: Suggested Actionable Measures**

| S.No. | Measure                              | Action Steps                                            | Expected Outcome                       |
|-------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1     | Strengthen Leadership Accountability | Include gender goals in leadership performance reviews. | Greater top-level commitment.          |
| 2     | Conduct Regular Gender Audits        | Annual review of policies and workforce representation. | Data-driven decision making.           |
| 3     | Inclusive HR Practices               | Gender-neutral hiring, pay transparency, mentorship.    | Equal opportunity environment.         |
| 4     | Capacity Building                    | Continuous training on unconscious bias.                | Behavioral and cultural change.        |
| 5     | Safe Work Environment                | Anti-harassment committees, grievance redressal.        | Trust and psychological safety.        |
| 6     | Government–Corporate Collaboration   | Policy incentives, compliance standards.                | National-level accountability.         |
| 7     | Continuous Evaluation                | Feedback loops and employee surveys.                    | Adaptive, evolving inclusion strategy. |



*Fig. 2. Perceived effectiveness of gender equity strategies (employee perspective).*

Here's the graph showing employees' perceptions of how effective different strategies are for promoting gender equity and inclusion in the workplace.

### Interpretation

Employees perceive Building an Inclusive Organizational Culture and Establishing Safe & Supportive Work Environments as the most effective strategies (ratings ~9/10). Training and HR Policy Redesign are also seen as highly beneficial. Government support and intersectional approaches are viewed as important but less directly impactful unless backed by organizational action. Continuous evaluation and improvement is recognized as essential for maintaining progress over time

### Summary of Literature

The study focuses on identifying implementation barriers and exploring successful strategies from real-world organizations. The reviewed literature reveals a consistent pattern: while gender equity policies are increasingly common, their implementation often fails to produce transformative change. True inclusion requires leadership accountability, cultural reform, and ongoing monitoring. Bridging the policy–practice gap thus demands a multidimensional approach combining legal compliance, organizational commitment, and societal change.

Researchers such as Ely and Meyerson (2000) argue that gender equity requires more than token representation—it needs structural change in norms and leadership practices. Studies by Catalyst (2022) show that organizations with gender-inclusive cultures experience higher innovation and employee satisfaction. However, empirical research (Shore et al., 2018) reveals persistent biases, unequal promotion opportunities, and gender pay gaps.

This indicates that while policies may exist, workplace culture, unconscious bias, and lack of accountability hinder their execution.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### Policy Frameworks and Their Intentions

Organizations have introduced initiatives like gender-neutral hiring, maternity and paternity leave, flexible work policies, and diversity training. Many governments also mandate gender diversity on boards and equal pay policies.

However, these frameworks often remain symbolic rather than transformational when not supported by behavioural change or leadership accountability. And many challenges face like Unconscious Bias Stereotypes about gender roles influence hiring, evaluation, and promotion as well as lack of Leadership Commitment Policies are ineffective when top management fails to

champion inclusion as cultural Barriers Traditional and patriarchal norms affect organizational behaviour and inadequate Monitoring Many organizations lack data-driven tools to measure gender equity outcomes or Work-Life Balance Issues Caregiving responsibilities disproportionately affect women's participation.



Fig. 3. Key strategies for gender equity and inclusion.

### Policy Presence Alone Does Not Guarantee Inclusion

Simply having gender equity or diversity policies in place is not enough to ensure true inclusion. Policies may exist on paper but fail in practice if they are not actively implemented, monitored, and supported by leadership. Real inclusion happens when employees experience fairness and respect in daily interactions, not just through written rules. The culture of an organization—its values, norms, and everyday behaviours—plays a major role in determining how gender equity is practiced. Leaders who demonstrate inclusive attitudes, challenge bias, and promote fairness set the tone for others.

Conversely, if leaders ignore or tolerate discrimination, it weakens the impact of even the best policies. Ongoing awareness programs and regular gender audits help keep equity efforts effective and transparent. Training helps employees recognize and correct unconscious bias, while data-based evaluations (like tracking pay gaps or promotion rates) provide measurable evidence of progress. This ensures accountability and drives continuous improvement.

When everyone feels valued and respected, employees are more engaged, creative, and loyal. A culture of inclusion fosters teamwork and diverse perspectives, leading to better problem-solving and innovation. Moreover, organizations known for gender equity attract top talent and earn a positive public image, strengthening their overall reputation and competitiveness.

### CONCLUSION

The gender equity policies and their practical realization, organizations must move beyond compliance toward cultural transformation. Leadership accountability, data-driven monitoring, inclusive HR systems, and continuous sensitization are essential for lasting change. When equity becomes embedded in everyday behavior and decision-making, workplaces evolve into truly inclusive environments that empower all employees to reach their potential.

### Challenges Faced During the Implementation of Gender Equity and Inclusion Policies

Despite the growing recognition of gender equity and inclusion as critical elements of sustainable organizational development, many workplaces continue to struggle with effective implementation. The gap between policy design and actual practice arises due to several structural, cultural, and operational challenges. These challenges often hinder the realization of equitable workplaces even when progressive policies exist on paper, the implementation of gender equity and inclusion policies is often hindered by a combination of cultural resistance, structural bias, limited resources, and weak accountability.

Real progress requires sustained leadership commitment, adequate resourcing, and continuous education to challenge deep-rooted stereotypes. To overcome these barriers, organizations must treat gender equity as a strategic priority, not a compliance obligation. Only through deliberate, data-driven, and inclusive action can the policy-practice gap be effectively closed. True inclusion arises not from policy documents but from a cultural transformation driven by empathy, accountability, and shared responsibility. When gender equity becomes a lived organizational value, it strengthens not only fairness but also innovation, performance, and overall sustainability.

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