
FROM STATUTE TO WORKPLACE CULTURE: SUGGESTIONS FOR REDESIGNING GENDER-SENSITIVE HR POLICIES TO ALIGN WITH INDIA'S LABOR CODES 2020

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ABSTRACT

Representation of women in managerial and leadership roles is relatively low despite increased participation in the workforce, leading to a gap between the number of male leaders and female leaders. This disparity is often created and sustained by various forms of discriminatory practices, such as biased promotion pipelines, biases, and a lack of institutional support. Among the various initiatives intended to empower women in the workplace, Human Resource (HR) policies have proven to be a critical instrument in shaping the workplace culture. Such policies can either be distorted to reinforce the existing inequalities or be genuinely modified to serve as a means of upliftment. Adapting a gender-sensitive framework is key to fostering a progressive and inclusive workplace environment where such policies actively address barriers to women's progress and create a discrimination-free work culture.

The enactment of the Labor Codes, 2020, marks a significant shift in the Indian Labor landscape by making Labor laws more rational, modern, and inclusive. The paper argues that the objective of the codes to transform the traditional workplace into an inclusive one can be achieved when the gender-sensitive mandates are effectively integrated into workplace culture through HR best practices. These provisions will enable a competent woman to emerge as a symbol of success and leadership in the future. The paper adopts a qualitative analysis to prove the hypothesis that gender-sensitive HR policies constitute a crucial mechanism for advancing women's empowerment and leadership in corporate India.

Keywords: Labor Codes 2020, Gender-Sensitive HR Policies, Women's Workplace Empowerment, Corporate Work Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

The ambition of every corporate worker is to gain recognition for their work and to sit in a higher managerial role. Both male and female employees dedicate themselves to their work, while men are able to get promoted faster, women frequently encounter a glass ceiling that halts their progress. The main suspect of this glass ceiling that stalls women in entry or mid-level roles is the stereotyping and discrimination against them that often emerges due to the societal mindset of misogyny, patriarchy, and sexism. Key inequalities that arise are the gender wage gap, workplace discrimination, and dearth of women leaders, etc¹.

In response, the Indian government has stepped up to enact statutory protections that could tackle these discriminatory practices. This includes the provision of mandatory appointment of at least one woman director in the Companies Act, 2013, and protection through the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. Despite these, significant inequalities remain deeply embedded in the corporate culture.

A 2024 KPMG report² reveals that approximately 56% of Indian organizations have only 10-30% women leaders, while 9% organisations lack any women leaders at all. Only 30% of women hired at entry-level reach leadership roles, a rate significantly lower than their male counterparts. Overall, these data show that there exists a serious gender gap when it comes to leadership roles. Women are able to enter the corporate workforce, but are halted due to systemic barriers that lead to almost no female representation in higher managerial positions, despite legal mandates. These uneven practices of promoting women employees highlight the need for specialized and effective corporate policies to promote diversity.

To further upgrade the Labor Law landscape, the Indian Government has now made effective the four Labor Codes that consolidate and modernize the existing 29 Labor Laws³. These codes contain certain women-centric provisions that can help to eradicate discrimination and promote women's empowerment and a safe workplace. For instance, the Code of Wages,

¹ Cailin S. StamarSKI & Leanne S. Son Hing, *Gender Inequalities in the Workplace: The Effects of Organizational Structures, Processes, Practices, and Decision Makers' Sexism*, 6 FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOL. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400>.

² KPMG, WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN CORPORATE INDIA REPORT (2024), <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/in/pdf/2024/04/women-leadership-in-corporate-india-2024.pdf>.

³ Ministry of Labour & Employment, *Government Makes the Four Labour Codes Effective to Simplify and Streamline Labour Laws*, PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU (Nov. 21, 2025), <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2192463®=3&lang=1>.

2019, prohibits gender-based pay discrimination, upholding the “equal pay for equal work” principle enshrined in Article 39(d) of the Indian Constitution. However, the changes these statutes intend cannot be implemented in isolation; they must be effectively integrated into corporate frameworks through the redesign of HR policies.

HR policies play an essential role in shaping the workplace environment. The policies ensure fair recruitment and promotion guidelines, promote equitable remuneration, and set up a proper and uniform working culture. To target the issue of the lack of women leaders and to eradicate the various barriers, redesigning the HR policies has become the need of the hour. These policies must look beyond compliance and actively operationalize these reforms through “gender-sensitive” measures rather than just “gender-neutral”.

While existing papers have analysed the gaps in HR policies implementation or examined women’s workplace rights under the Labor Codes, limited attention has been paid to how these laws can be made effective by translating them into office culture. This paper fills that gap by mapping specific women-centric provisions of the Labor Code and possible gender-sensitive clauses that can be inculcated in the HR policies. In doing so, it offers a practical roadmap to move beyond compliance and build a framework that transforms statutory reform into real leadership outcomes.

2. GAPS IN HR POLICIES

The functions of the Human Resources (HR) department are to shape an organization’s culture by establishing standardized rules for employees’ 360° cycle from recruitment to onboarding, payroll, training, performance evaluation, and exit⁴.

To show the company’s commitment to non-discriminatory practices, HR policies are often constructed around “gender-neutral” provisions. However, the limitation lies in a “one-size-fits-all” approach that overlooks the unique sets of challenges faced by women. Therefore, it is seen that a significant gap exists between what policy intends and how it is practiced, as it usually fails at the implementation stage. Sometimes these frameworks also often unintentionally favor male trajectories, remaining unresponsive to the discrimination that

⁴ *What Are HR Policies? Definition, Types, Importance*, HIREX (Sept. 9, 2024), <https://gethirex.com/glossary/what-are-hr-policies> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

creates the glass ceiling.

2.1. Structural Barriers to Women's Advancement

There are multiple systemic barriers to a woman's upward trajectory in an organization, and one of them is "broken rung". It is a phenomenon where women are promoted to managerial positions at significantly lower rates than their male counterparts. It is seen that generally for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 93 women (and 74 women of color) get that role. This practice creates a permanent deficit in the talent pool for women eligible for further leadership roles⁵.

This is further intensified by managers who deny women stretch assignments, high-stakes projects, or do not encourage them to adapt to technology like AI. In consequence, women are frequently labelled as "lacking leadership experience" for roles they were never permitted to prepare for, and can also risk the technical obsolescence⁶.

Another form of barrier is seen in promotion criteria, where provisions unfairly benefit men. For example, companies often favor visible "face-time", which is often disadvantageous to women who carry the double burden of work and caregiving⁷. This is worsened by a lack of influential "sponsors" to advocate for their promotions, and it is sometimes linked to unsolicited favors as well. Even with genuine sponsorship, they progress more slowly than their male peers⁸.

2.2. Gendered Role Allocation and Authority Bias

There is a stereotyped segregation in the roles allotted to employees. Women are frequently pushed into support or administrative roles with low ceilings, while men are placed in high-end jobs with better chances of leading to the C-suite⁹. For example, identical resumes

⁵ Samreen & Preety, *Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Reviewing the Role of HR Policies in Women Empowerment*, 3 EDUMANIA: INT'L MULTIDISCIPLINARY J. 189 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9170>.

⁶ Alexis Krivkovich et al., *Women in the Workplace 2025*, MCKINSEY & CO. (2025), <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/women-in-the-workplace#/> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

⁷ Kimberly D. Elsbach et al., *How Passive 'Face Time' Affects Perceptions of Employees: Evidence of Spontaneous Trait Inference*, 63 HUM. REL. 735 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709353139>.

⁸ Krivkovich, *supra* note 6.

⁹ Aparna Kusuma, *Gender Inequality in the Workplace Its Impact on Society*, 12 INT'L J. CREATIVE RES. THOUGHTS b514 (2024), <https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2403188.pdf>.

have been shown to receive more callbacks when bearing male names, particularly in male-dominated sectors, where women are stuck with stereotyped female work¹⁰.

There is also authority bias, where men's expertise is rarely challenged, but women's expert opinions often require a higher standard of proof. For complex problem-solving or urgent decision-making, their authority is frequently undermined, or the question is redirected to male colleagues. Approximately 38% of women have faced judgment within their own area of expertise¹¹.

Adding to the problem of resistance to female authority, people often resist when subjected to a woman leader, as it is generally seen as a masculine domain¹². Many women face the problem of "double bind," where assertive, agentic women are viewed as bossy or unlikable, while those conforming to feminine stereotypes are deemed to lack leadership grit¹³.

2.3. Caregiving Penalty and Work-Family Conflict

Women are frequently looked down on during an interview or professional journey if they want to embrace motherhood, as mothers are viewed as less committed. This leads to recruitment bias or a lack of facilities to accommodate motherhood, like crèches¹⁴. Motherhood is so penalized by corporations that it hinders women's promotion despite their contributions to the organizations. Further, rigid masculine work schedules failing to accommodate caregiving duties take a mental and physical toll, leading to higher turnover and illness-related absenteeism¹⁵.

2.4. Pay Inequality and Economic Disempowerment

The pay gap is the difference in earnings between women and men, where women earn

¹⁰ María J. González et al., *The Role of Gender Stereotypes in Hiring: A Field Experiment*, 35 EUR. SOC. REV. 187 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcy055>.

¹¹ Samreen & Preety, *supra* note 5.

¹² Enkhjargal Galsanjigmed & Tomoki Sekiguchi, *Challenges Women Experience in Leadership Careers: An Integrative Review*, 3 MERITS 366 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits302002>.

¹³ Starnski & Son Hing, *supra* note 1.

¹⁴ Whitney B. Morgan et al., *A Field Experiment: Reducing Interpersonal Discrimination Toward Pregnant Job Applicants*, 98 J. APPLIED PSYCHOL. 799 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034040>.

¹⁵ Y. Bai & J. Zhou, *Coworker Support, Work-Family Conflict, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover Intention: Female Employees in Post-Organizational Socialization*, 16 FRONTIERS PSYCHOL. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1472977>.

less than men, even when both have similar job profiles and put equal effort into the work¹⁶. According to a 2024 TeamLease Digital Study, this gap widens to an average of 16.4% at the senior level. For some sectors like BFSI, the disparity is even more alarming, with a difference of 29.5% gap¹⁷. India also ranked 131st out of 146 at the Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum¹⁸.

2.5. Personal Bias and Institutional Failures

Personal bias of superiors can lead to a competent woman being stripped of opportunities or credit. Male managers, specifically, are seen to show more bias towards male colleagues by undermining women's expertise and credibility. This problem of affinity bias is reflected in contemporary cultural depictions, such as in the series "*Four More Shots Please!*", where a male superior reassigned high-profile clients and complex cases from a successful woman lawyer, Anjana Menon, to male associates despite her proven track record and even promoted her junior before her, as the promotion was in his hands. This mirrors the real-world frustration of women, where advancements depend on the personal whims and fancies of superiors^{19,20}.

The main obstacle to the effective implementation of DEIB policies is that, currently, many inclusion initiatives remain symbolic. Without top-down accountability and resource allocation, the policies will just remain letters²¹.

¹⁶ Understanding the Gender Pay Gap: Definition, Facts, and Causes, EUR. PARLIAMENT (Jan. 13, 2020), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-facts-and-causes> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026); Understanding the Gender Pay Gap: Definition, Facts, and Causes, EUR. PARLIAMENT (Jan. 13, 2020), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-facts-and-causes> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

¹⁷ Tarun Tewari, *Equal Titles, Unequal Pay: Gender Pay Gap Widens in India's Tech Nerve Centers*, TIMES OF INDIA (May 1, 2025), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/news/equal-titles-unequal-pay-gender-pay-gap-widens-in-indias-tech-nerve-centers/articleshow/120794594.cms>.

¹⁸ WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2025 (2025), <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

¹⁹ Devika Bhagat & Ishita Moitra (Writers) & Nupur Asthana (Director), *Love Is a 4-Letter Word*, in *FOUR MORE SHOTS PLEASE!* (Season 2, Episode 2) (Ritesh Sidhwani & Farhan Akhtar executive producers, Apr. 17, 2020).

²⁰ Devika Bhagat & Ishita Moitra (Writers) & Nupur Asthana (Director), *Spring Cleaning*, in *FOUR MORE SHOTS PLEASE!* (Season 2, Episode 3) (Ritesh Sidhwani & Farhan Akhtar executive producers, Apr. 17, 2020).

²¹ Gokul Manoharan & Sumit Das, *Workplace Diversity and Inclusion: India's Evolving Approach Towards Embracing DEI*, INT'L BAR ASS'N (Sept. 24, 2025), <https://www.ibanet.org/workplace-diversity-and-inclusion-India-embracing-DEI> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

Furthermore, despite the POSH framework (evolving from *Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan AIR 1997 SC 3011*), sexual harassment remains persistent. Inadequate implementation creates a hostile climate that drives women out²².

3. WOMEN'S WORKPLACE RIGHTS UNDER INDIA'S LABOR CODES, 2020

3.1. Overview of the Labor Codes Framework

India's labor jurisprudence has evolved from fragmented and outdated, pre-independence statutes like the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, and early post-independence statutes like the Factories Act, 1948, to a modern and consolidated framework. To address the obsolescence of nearly 30 separate laws, the Government of India brought four labor codes that became fully operational from 1st April 2020.

The Four Labor Codes are the Code on Social Security, 2020, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, and the Code on Wages, 2019.

3.2. Women-Centric Provisions

Women are undeniably a crucial component of the modern workforce, and these Codes aim to strengthen women's participation in the corporate sector by expanding opportunities and mandating an inclusive environment.

3.2.1. The Code on Wages

1. **Prohibition of Gender Discrimination and Pay Parity (Section 3):** Gender-based discrimination is strictly prohibited from being practiced in recruitment and wages. This reinforces the Constitutional mandate of "equal pay for equal work". It also defines "similar work" as work using similar skills, efforts, experience, and responsibility, allowing a fairer comparison (Section 2(v))²³.

²² Meena Rajkumar, *The History Behind Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Law*, NYAAYA GUEST BLOG (Mar. 9, 2022), <https://nyaaya.org/guest-blog/the-history-behind-sexual-harassment-at-the-workplace-law/> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

²³ The Code on Wages, § 3, No. 29, Acts of Parliament, 2019 (India).

- 2. Representation on Advisory Boards (Section 42):** Section mandates that one-third of the members of the Central and State Advisory Boards must be women. These provisions ensure that women are well-represented at statutory boards and their problems are heard and resolved²⁴.

Although the code penalizes wage discrimination, it fails to address the informal, hidden pay gaps arising from discriminatory practices. These arise in disguise as bonuses and performance-linked increments that are in the manager's hands and are hardly able to be challenged.

3.2.2. Industrial Relations Code

- 1. Representation of Women in Grievance Redressal Committees (GRCs) (Section 4):** The Code laid down that establishments having 20+ workers must constitute a Grievance Redressal Committee (GRCs) with female representation that should be proportionate to the female workforce²⁵.

This Code provides a step forward by including women in the Committee, but lacks specific protections for whistle-blowers or safeguards against retaliation women may face. The major barrier to filing complaints is the threat of harassment from the accused manager, as anonymity is often a myth. In consequence, even with representation in the GRC, women may remain hesitant to use these mechanisms to challenge senior male leadership.

3.2.3. Code on Social Security

- 1. Maternity Benefits (Section 60):** Chapter VI provides 26 weeks of maternity leave for biological mothers and 12 weeks for adoptive/commissioning mothers. Women who have spent at least 80 days in the preceding 12 months are entitled to maternity benefits. Periodic maternity payments are also provided in cases of miscarriage, illness arising from pregnancy, or premature birth. It simplifies benefit access by allowing certification from ASHA workers or midwives²⁶.
- 2. Flexibility & Support:** Section 60(5) introduces “work-from-home” options post-

²⁴ The Code on Wages, § 42, No. 29, Acts of Parliament, 2019 (India).

²⁵ The Industrial Relations Code, § 4, No. 35, Acts of Parliament, 2020 (India).

²⁶ The Code on Social Security, § 60, No. 36, Acts of Parliament, 2020 (India).

maternity to provide flexibility, rest, and care to the new mothers (via mutual consent). Section 66 mandates two nursing breaks until the child turns 15 months old. These provisions try to balance women's responsibilities as employees and as caregivers without compromising on either.

3. **Medical Bonus (Section 64):** If employers fail to provide free prenatal and postnatal care, then the woman is entitled to a medical bonus of Rs. 3,500²⁷.
4. **Childcare Support (Section 67):** Establishments with 50+ employees must provide crèche facilities, with an option for common crèches to pool resources between companies. Women are allowed 4 visits per day to the crèche²⁸.
5. **Representation on Social Security Board (Section 6):** Women must be adequately represented on the National Social Security Board, State Unorganized Workers' Boards, and Building Workers' Welfare Boards. These provisions ensure women's voices in the administration of social security schemes²⁹.

By not mentioning paternity leave and framing benefits like WFH or crèche visits as “benefits for women”, there is a high risk that the law will reinforce the stereotypes of women as primary caregivers. It implies that childcare is a woman's sole responsibility, rather than a gender-neutral parental duty.

3.2.4. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020

1. **Employment of Women in All Establishments, Including Night Shifts (Sections 43-44):** Women are now entitled to work in all establishments and roles. Employment before 6 am and beyond 7 pm is permitted with the employee's consent, provided the employer ensures adequate safety, transport, and welfare arrangements. Where work is hazardous, employers must provide adequate safeguards before employing women³⁰.
2. **Welfare Mandates:** The employers have to provide gender-inclusive sanitations,

²⁷ The Code on Social Security, § 64, No. 36, Acts of Parliament, 2020 (India).

²⁸ The Code on Social Security, § 67, No. 36, Acts of Parliament, 2020 (India).

²⁹ The Code on Social Security, § 6, No. 36, Acts of Parliament, 2020 (India).

³⁰ The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, §§ 43–44, No. 37, Acts of Parliament, 2020 (India).

restrooms, and canteens, ensuring a prerequisite rather than an afterthought.

The code's intention to allow women to work night shift is a progressive step toward parity. However, the consent clause, combined with the burden of ensuring adequate safety, may increase prejudice against women. Risk-averse employers might prefer hiring men to avoid the increased compliance costs of securing a female at night.

3.3. Limitations of the Labor Codes

Even with these new laws, the workplace is still guided by age-old male-dominated frameworks that a legal code alone cannot change. The laws cover topics like pay and facilities, but they cannot fix how people actually act and are judged in the real world. For example, the law cannot stop affinity bias, where male bosses naturally prefer to promote men. Since it is done by the book, grievances against it will be difficult to prove.

Also, while the rules ask for women to be on committees, many women still feel they cannot speak freely. They fear that if they disagree, they will be seen as 'difficult'. The law provides the basic structure, but real change must come from company policies that fix the work culture itself. The root cause of discrimination should be tackled through strict guidelines that employers will find difficult to bypass, with penalties in case of breach. Otherwise, these steps will again be reduced to being symbolic rather than actually having an impact. These gaps are what HR policies should precisely address.

4. REDESIGNING GENDER-SENSITIVE HR POLICIES

The Labor Codes have given law with certain limitations, and now it is the duty of the organization to bring into effect these provisions by removing those limitations and directly targeting the biases that shape women's everyday work experience.

The change can be brought when organizations acknowledge the unique challenges faced by women, and discontinue the policies implemented for mere tokenism. The reform will follow when HR frameworks focus on intersectional disadvantage rather than treating all employees as similarly placed. Policies should be adopted so that they foster diversity, equity, belongingness, and inclusion (DEIB)³¹.

³¹ Samreen & Preeti, *supra* note 5.

Taking inspiration from the women-centric laws in the Labor Code, the following recommendations illustrate how statutory intent can be operationalized through concrete HR policies.

4.1. Fair Recruitment, Pay, and Performance Systems

To fulfil the Wage Code's non-discrimination mandate, HR should adopt a bias-free requirement process, ensure a gender diverse panel for fairness, and use certain criteria while hiring to ensure competent women are not ignored. For example, HR may use blind resume review to remove gender bias during initial shortlisting³².

For the pay gap issue, an effective way would be to standardize pay bands and role-based salary ranges, therefore complying with the Wage Code³³. Following the model of Salesforce³⁴ organizations may also conduct biannual gender pay audits to identify and rectify disparities, ensuring salaries remain within objective, documented brackets.

The appraisal system should be modified to rely on calculable objective metrics like measurable outcomes, impact on the organization, and peer reviews. This will reduce the managerial discretion on appraisal. Companies like Unilever have shown how structured frameworks reduce stereotyping and align internal culture with statutory wage equality³⁵.

4.2. Leadership Development and Career Progression

To ensure women are not left out to receive stretch assignments or high-stake projects that will prepare them for leadership roles, there should be a proper supervision of work distribution. Implementing a rotation of project leadership opportunities ensures that male subordinates become accustomed to female authority, reducing future resistance.

There can be provisions in the HR manuals that focuses on identifying women employee for C-suite roles based on their performance and talent and a proper leadership

³² Amisha Upadhyay & Manish Singh, *The Role of Inclusive HR Policies in Promoting Gender Equality in the Workplace: A Comparative Analysis of Different Industries*, 7 INT'L J. MULTIDISCIPLINARY RES. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i06.63783>.

³³ Samreen & Preety, *supra* note 5.

³⁴ *Our 2024 Annual Equality Update*, SALESFORCE (Sept. 9, 2024), <https://www.salesforce.com/in/news/stories/annual-equality-update-2024> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

³⁵ *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, UNILEVER, <https://www.unilever.com/sustainability/equity-diversity-and-inclusion/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

succession plan can be created for them to reach managerial roles. To further mend the broken rung, policies should introduce structured sponsorship programs and formalize access to leadership exposure.

4.3. Safety, Accountability, and Representation

HR policies should exceed basic POSH compliance, implement anonymous reporting, and ensure that high-level managerial personnel are not exempt from investigation. Ethics training must strictly prohibit victim-blaming, and grievance mechanisms should remain independent and empathetic³⁶.

To ensure compliance with the Codes, the representation of women in all the committees must reflect the workforce's gender ratio. Women should be included in committees like GRC, internal welfare, policy review, and pay scale, etc. HRs should use higher female representation in harassment cases to enhance trust. May also include an independent external member in investigations to ensure impartiality.

To enforce accountability from managers, DEIB metrics should be integrated into leadership KPIs, as responsibility must move beyond the HR department to the various leadership levels³⁷.

Regarding the night shifts under the OSH Code, there should be a proper written consent protocol, with the employer providing secure transportation, emergency contact systems, and well-lit premises to ensure safety from the workplace to the employee's doorstep. Departments that operate late hours must coordinate with administration for safe commutes and accessible grievance reporting. Any bias shown in hiring an employee due to the night-shift clause should be strictly scrutinized.

4.4. Care Infrastructure and Work-Life Integration

For the most reformative step, HR should introduce menstrual leave policies to acknowledge the biological challenges women face, allowing for rest or remote work. This will

³⁶ Manoharan & Das, *supra* note 21.

³⁷ Ankit Singh et al., Diversity and Inclusion Strategies in HRM Policies of Modern-Day Organisation: An Empirical Study, 4 J. INFORMATICS EDUC. & RES. 896 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.52783/jier.v4i3.1400>.

highly increase women's employee retention, and also ensure this policy does not create stereotypes against women employees.

Further, the process to grant maternity leave should be sensitive, smooth, and with simplified documentation as suggested by the Code on Social Security. To reduce the motherhood penalty and foster shared parental responsibilities, HRs should also incorporate shared parental leave, as by encouraging it, the domestic burden will be shifted away from being seen as a female-only career barrier.

To support and retain women employees who became mothers, HR policies should go beyond basic relief clauses and include structured return-to-work plans. It can include phased work hours, temporary workload adjustments, and should be allowed to opt for hybrid or WFH arrangements until they are physically ready for a full return. It not only aligns with Code's flexibility provisions, but also prevents forced career exits.

Additionally, based on the Social Security and OSH Codes, companies should formalize access to shared or on-site crèche facilities. Innovative "crib-at-desk" workstations would allow parents to supervise their children while working, potentially reducing stress. HR manuals must also include 2 mandatory paid nursing breaks per day until the child reaches the prescribed age.

4.5. Flexible Work and Future-Readiness

Providing flexible arrangements would not be enough; companies should also safeguard them against the flexibility-related stigma that arises. It must not negatively impact performance evaluations or leadership eligibility. Successful models, like those at Accenture, show how flexibility can support women's retention³⁸.

Upper-management personnel must also receive DEIB training to help them remove unconscious stereotypes and biases to adopt inclusive leadership. Further, policies must include upskilling workshops, like courses related to AI tools, to prevent technological obsolescence. SAP Global illustrates how mandatory inclusion training drives productivity and employee

³⁸ Zhang Guoqiang & Anurag Bhaumik, *Work-Life Harmony and Retention of Employees: A Review of the Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements*, 2 INT'L J. ADVANCES BUS. & MGMT. RES. 31 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.62674/ijabmr>.

management³⁹.

Finally, policies must prioritize belonging and psychological safety as core goals. This involves addressing microaggressions through Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and creating safe spaces for dialogues⁴⁰.

When taken together, these measures have the potential to cause realistic yet reformative changes in an organization's work culture as they can successfully dismantle the barriers to women's progression, and also ensure workplace equity, respect, and create seamless pathways to leadership. Such frameworks empower women to ascend into decision-making roles, establishing role models essential for inspiring the next generation.

CONCLUSION

The vision of *Viksit Bharat @2047* envisions India as a global leader with a large economy, social justice, and inclusive growth. One of the fundamental pillars of the scheme is "Women/Mahilaye" and to see the female workforce, not participating merely as beneficiaries of welfare schemes, but as equal contributors to developed India. There is an evident shift in the nation's vision from "development for women" to "women-led development", where women will be at the frontline of the national progress. The vision is very reformative and, if implemented robustly, has the potential to change the whole dynamic of the country and women's position in society and corporations.

However, this will remain aspirational at the ground level. To convert this from vision to reality, women should not just be encouraged to enter the workforce but also empowered to move from entry-level roles to managerial roles without any barriers stopping them. True progress is not just measured by the participation of women, but by seeing milestones achieved by women who can become role models for young girls. A figure of power, authority, and a successful decision-maker.

To make this happen, underrepresentation at the executive level must be tackled by dismantling barriers such as resistance to female authority, biased promotion criteria, the gender pay gap, and caregiving burdens. These barriers create a "leakage" in the leadership

³⁹ Ravindra N. Mareppagoudra, *The Need for Gender Sensitization at Workplaces: An Overview*, 9 RES. REV. INT'L J. MULTIDISCIPLINARY 273 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm.2024.v09.n07.034>.

⁴⁰ Krivkovich, *supra* note 6.

pipeline, a broken rung or glass ceiling, that halts career progression. These obstacles undermine an individual's career and also hinder the national growth, contradicting the goal of the inclusive 2047 vision.

This paper contends that India's modern Labor Codes have tried to integrate women-centric laws for their empowerment and to eradicate discrimination. Incorporating these laws is a golden opportunity for organizations to gender-sensitize their framework. HR policies should be redesigned across different aspects such as recruitment and remuneration, leadership building and performance evaluation, grievance redressal mechanisms, and caregiving support. By doing so, the organizations can actively dismantle the structural prejudice that restricts women's true potential and upward mobility. The recommendations provided here move beyond formal compliance as it focuses on reforming work culture to challenge authority bias and career disruptions.

Companies that prioritize DEIB thrive through higher retention rates, increased employee satisfaction, and more diverse perspectives in leadership. More importantly, such policies create a workspace where women do not have to choose between ambition and caregiving, or visibility and safety. When women feel safe, credited, and heard, they can navigate their professional lives without the weight of bias or harassment. This will help to achieve organizational and, ultimately, national development and reform.