

# Affordable childcare the key to gender equality in workplace, say experts <sup>[1]</sup>

Taoiseach promises Citizens' Assembly on equality will close to the gender pay gap

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Better and more affordable childcare will do more to promote gender equality in the workplace than anything else, a survey of mostly female employers has found.

Attendees at a conference on equality in the workplace listed optional shared parental leave in the first year of a baby's life as the second most important factor in ensuring gender equality in the workplace.

Nearly 90 per cent of delegates to the inaugural #WorkEqual conference said gender inequality existed in the Irish workplace. More than 60 participants from the public and private sector and non-governmental organisations took part in the survey.

#WorkEqual is an annual campaign run by the Dress for Success Dublin (DFSD) charity, which aims to raise awareness about the issue.

Survey respondents were presented with potential measures, and asked to rate them in order of their likely impact.

## Equal society

The third most highly-rated measure was a legal requirement for companies to disclose their gender pay gap. The fourth most popular option was a greater take-up of paternity leave among men and the fifth was career support structures for women during and after maternity leave.

The measure regarded as the least effective in promoting gender equality in the workplace is having more women in positions of leadership in Irish society.

Speaking at the conference Mr Varadkar said Ireland was the seventh most equal society in the EU in terms of gender equality. He likened Ireland's performance to being in the premier league without being top of the table.

He anticipated the Citizens' Assembly on gender equality in the new year will inform future government policy on the issue.

The assembly will be chaired by Dr Catherine Day, the former secretary-general of the European Commission and the first woman to hold that post.

Mr Varadkar said it will specifically examine pay inequalities across the economy because "all too often" women are disproportionately represented in the low-pay sectors.

"I also want it to challenge the remaining barriers and social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender discrimination towards girls and boys, women and men," the Taoiseach said.

The assembly's report will go before an all-party Oireachtas committee as the deliberations of the assemblies on abortion and climate change had done.

Mr Varadkar pointed out that female workers are effectively "working for nothing" from November 11th given the pay gap between men and women in Ireland.

## Practical solutions

He said the Government has brought in better parental leave, greater financial support for childcare and universal early childhood education (pre-school), but there is still a long way to go.

Speaking at the conference Christine Armstrong, the author of the bestselling book *The Mother of All Jobs*, said it was time for a "different conversation about working, parenting and the equal division of labour".

She said working parents everywhere are "tearing themselves apart trying to balance the needs of their families with the needs of their

careers and, too often, feeling like they are failing. This needs to change”.

Event organiser Sonya Lennon said women were looking for practical solutions to the issue of gender equality in the workplace.

“We’ll be working with policymakers and government over the coming years with a view to implementing these, and ensuring workplaces in Ireland become truly accessible and equal for both women and men,” she said.

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