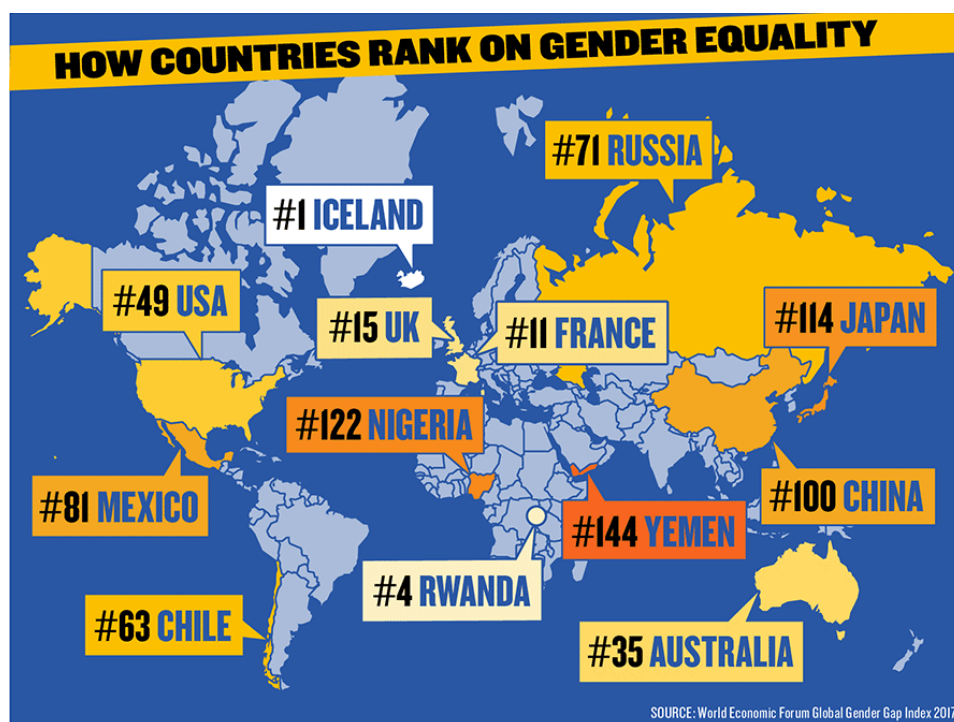


# BBC 'breaking law' with unequal pay for women

Is Iceland right about women? The country has introduced a groundbreaking law to tackle unequal pay between genders. Meanwhile, a BBC employee has quit her job in fury over this very issue...



**Women of the world:** This ranking considers many social and political factors as well as income.

As the BBC's China editor, **Carrie Gracie** was used to reporting on that country's social issues. But this week, she set her sights on her employer. She resigned from her position and explained why in a fiery blog post.

"[The BBC] is **breaking equality law**," Gracie writes. When the organisation disclosed the salaries of its top employees last July, she learned that men doing a similar job to hers were earning "at least 50% more".

Up to 200 female colleagues have complained about pay, Gracie notes. But she argues that the BBC has either tried to buy them off with an inadequate raise or bogged them down in a drawn-out complaints procedure.

Yesterday, BBC staff who supported Gracie were told that they could no longer broadcast about gender pay issues, as they would not be seen as impartial. This only fuelled the controversy.

Gracie's resignation has placed the spotlight back on the gender pay gap. The BBC's disclosures caused a storm last year:

among other examples of inequality, it was revealed that two thirds of the **highest earners** are male.

The Beeb reported these figures as a result of a new UK law, which requires **large companies** to publish data on the gap between male and female salaries. This sort of legislation is **fairly common** in developed nations. (In the USA, President Trump blocked an initiative to make businesses release data on gender and earnings.)

Iceland has gone further. Under a new law its companies do not merely have to disclose their pay gap — a figure that only looks at average earnings, without accounting for the work being done to earn it. They have to prove that men and women **in similar roles** are not being paid differently. The rule addresses the problem, called out by Gracie, of unequal pay for equal work.

This is thought to be the most radical legislation of its kind in the world. Indeed, Iceland is seen as one of the best countries for women. Whereas the gender pay gap is **9.1%**

in the UK and around 20% in the USA, in Iceland it is 5.7%. The new law aims to shrink that to 0%. Should other nations adopt it?

## Payback time

Obviously, say some. As Gracie points out, unequal pay has long been illegal in the UK. Yet it still happens all the time. That is outrageous. A law like Iceland's would ensure that female employees are paid their due. Beyond that, it would send out a clear message: women are not worth less than men.

It's more complicated than that, reply others. Men and women are paid unequally because of ingrained sexist ideas about how well women work. An Iceland-style law would not change that. If anything, it could discourage employers from hiring women, increasing the pay gap. The solution: deeper reforms of areas like childcare.

## Q & A

### Q: What do we know?

A: The gender pay gap may vary by country and trade, but it exists everywhere. What's more, progress toward eliminating it seems to have stalled. The World Economic Forum, which

publishes a major annual report on the subject, predicted in November that it would take 217 years for these disparities to vanish. In 2016, that estimate was 170 years.

### Q: What do we not know?

A: To what extent the pay gap has to do with men holding higher-ranking jobs, and to what

extent men and women receive unequal pay for the same work. It can be hard to identify unequal pay, as two jobs are rarely identical. Gracie accuses the BBC of exploiting this fact. "It said there were differences between roles which justified the pay gap," she writes, "but it has refused to explain these differences."

## YOU DECIDE

1. In Gracie's place, would you have resigned?
2. Do laws lead to social change or vice versa?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Open the ONS link in Become An Expert and complete the quiz on the gender pay gap.
2. The government has asked you to brainstorm ways to reduce the pay gap. In groups, come up with three new policies. Then compare your ideas with those in the BBC article in Become An Expert.

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

*"A gender-equal society would be one where the word 'gender' does not exist."*  
Gloria Steinem

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

## WORD WATCH

**Carrie Gracie** – Gracie is not leaving the BBC altogether. She will take up a job in the TV newsroom, where she expects "to be paid equally".

**Breaking equality law** – The Equal Pay Act (1975), outlawed unequal pay and working conditions between the genders.

**Highest earners** – The BBC's top seven

earners were all male: presenter Chris Evans had the highest salary, £2.2 million. The top-paid woman was presenter Claudia Winkleman, who takes home £450,000-£500,000 per year.

**Large companies** – The biggest pay gap released so far is at women's fashion chain Phase Eight, where females earn 64.8% less than males. In a small minority of companies, women get paid more than men.

**Fairly common** – Two in three of the 35 OECD

(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries have policies on pay equality, according to the World Economic Forum.

**In similar roles** – Specifically, they have to show that differences in pay are based on legitimate factors like experience and performance.

**9.1%** – There are many ways to measure the pay gap. The figures given here refer to average earnings for full-time workers.

## BECOME AN EXPERT

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 Notes

