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How Policies Can Drive Gender Diversity in Denmark



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How Policies Can Drive Gender Diversity in Denmark

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AT A GLANCE

Denmark is at a turning point for business leaders committed to changing the diversity agenda. Now is the time to break the cycle that limits companies and society from profiting from the larger talent pool of highly educated women and men. Companies building diverse leadership teams with an inclusive culture will be able to make better and more nuanced business decisions that will drive growth.

IN THE PAST DECADE, DENMARK HAS FALLEN BEHIND PEERS

Despite many policies in Denmark being on par with Nordic peers, and gender diversity being high on companies' strategic agendas, the share of females in leadership teams barely increased over the last ten years. Denmark is falling behind globally and is far behind its Nordic peers. We need to strengthen the female talent pipeline, from education to executive management, by acting on both the organizational and societal level to enable gender diversity.

LEADERS MUST ACT TO RETAIN AND PROMOTE WOMEN THROUGH POLICY

Policymakers must change Denmark's societal framework to advance gender diversity. While change is needed on every level and at every stage, policy changes can make the biggest difference when they affect the time period of career progression and family expansion.

DELIVERING GROWTH IS AT the top of the strategic agenda for the majority of Danish companies in all industries. However, today's CEOs in Denmark are responsible for steering their businesses in an increasingly multicultural society with the influence of a new digital-native millennial generation with different values and behaviors. As a result, four imperatives are at the forefront of the CEO agenda:

- Win the fight for talent
- Engage in the customer journey
- Embrace industry 4.0
- Stay ahead of the innovation curve

To tackle these four imperatives in the present environment, leadership teams require a wider set of competencies and personality traits. Leaders at all levels should build diverse teams—both in terms of capabilities and personality traits—to ensure the best performance today and in the future.

For Denmark, a country with only about 15%¹ of private companies' leadership teams made up of women and which lags behind its European and Nordic peers, achieving gender diversity is paramount. Driving the agenda forward requires leaders across society to work together to advance gender diversity all along the career ladder from the school years to executive management. It requires universities to succeed in getting gender diversity in leader-generating courses of study. Companies must achieve gender diversity in their recruiting pipeline of future leaders while ensuring females are retained and promoted up the ranks. The underlying enabler for this is cultural change, in both societies and companies, to ensure cultural norms and behaviors do not hamper gender diversity. In this regard, policymakers play a critical role in establishing an environment fostering gender diversity in society, through measures such as gender-neutral family-friendly policy schemes.

This is the third article of a series of BCG Perspectives articles on how leaders in Denmark can advance diversity. This article focuses on what policymakers can do to create the optimal societal framework to foster gender diversity in Denmark.

Improving Gender Diversity is Vital for Danish Society

Unfortunately, unconscious bias remains a fact of life and there are many examples

Policymakers play a critical role in fostering a diverse society.

METHODOLOGY

We surveyed more than 2,500 students across universities and 400 top-leaders across 15 major organizations in Denmark (five companies, five universities, and five societal organizations) to understand their perspectives on gender diversity. The leader survey provided insights on current initiatives, gender diversity in the respective organizations, the requirements to make it to executive management today (both personally and

professionally) and leaders' personal setup (household work, parental leave split, etc.). The student survey sought to analyze how students chose their course of study, their ambition levels, and their perception of leaders today. In addition to the two surveys, the 15 organizations filled out a questionnaire describing their current initiatives to advance gender diversity including potential challenges and areas for improvement.

in arts and cultural institutions, as well as business and education, that prove it. For instance, the top five symphony orchestras in New York had fewer than 5% female musicians in 1970. The administrators wanted to revise their audition policies to overcome any possible biases. The orchestras started using blind auditions to conceal the identity of a candidate from the jury, with the result that these same five orchestras are now composed of approximately 25% female musicians².

Change is needed—on every level. Female students make up 56% of the higher education courses of study in Denmark. Paradoxically, only 15% of Denmark's top leaders are female: Danish society is not capitalizing on the majority of their investment in talent. Advancing gender diversity in leadership will not only improve the return on investment for society, it will also directly benefit the people – both men and women. Danish leaders and policymakers must act today to advance gender diversity to build a sustainable future for companies, society, and the people of Denmark.

Adverse Behavior Hampers Gender Diversity

Culture is dynamic; leaders are shapers. According to 40% of leaders, male-oriented culture is a main challenge in organizations today. At the same time, an inclusive culture is identified by leaders as a top initiative to advance diversity. It is therefore critical to drive a cultural change in organizations and society to build the foundation for diversity and inclusivity. The starting point to change the culture is a deep understanding of the adverse behaviors observed in organizations and society at large. Our study reveals two main areas of adverse behavior hampering gender diversity: *a difference in treatment of males and females dictated by norms and expectations, and decisions of the individual dictated by norms and expectations.*

One of the ways treatment of males and females dictated by norms and expectations differ is through unconscious bias. It has been proven in academic literature² that unconscious bias is a widespread societal problem that limits gender diversity. This conclusion was confirmed in the BCG Global Gender Diversity Survey 2017 (17,500 respondents from 21 countries). Both males and females unconsciously fa-

vor males across society—from primary school to the boardroom². One explanation for this is the cultural legacy of males and females having different roles in the household, companies, and society^{4,5}. In private companies today, females remain a minority group (more so in executive management) and employees are more receptive to male leaders⁴. Gender may also unconsciously (and consciously) be applied as proxy for information, as females in Denmark statistically take approximately 90% of parental leave, a 75% larger share of sick children days, and more family responsibilities overall. This means that the average female will have less time and energy to dedicate to her career, resulting in inferior performance on average relative to males during years of family expansion. One possible outcome is that males will be favored over females in hiring and promotion decisions. While these behaviors and decisions are unfair and potentially harmful for performance in the long-term, they are rational when you consider the short-term implications.

The scorn of outliers is an integral part of the Danish “Jantelov”—a cultural pattern of group behavior, by which people negatively perceive the success and achievement of a single individual as being unworthy or inappropriate. It follows that this pattern would typically affect outliers. Successful female top-leaders might be regarded with contempt from a society that suggests they are neglecting their household responsibilities. On the other hand, males taking a larger share of household responsibilities, which is commonly perceived as a feminine role, are equally belittled for breaking the traditional gender roles. The implication is that a culturally driven group behavior becomes a restraining force toward gender diversity by putting pressure on individuals who are trying to break out of the legacy gender roles.

A gender-segmented workforce and courses of study is an example of how the decisions of the individual are dictated by norms and expectations. Denmark has one of the most gender-segmented workforces in the world and it has seen little change in the past 30 years⁴. Females hold the majority of caretaker jobs (such as teachers and nurses), while males fill the higher paid jobs in the private sector. Even though females entered the job market and achieved a significant share in the Danish workforce earlier than peer countries, Denmark has not been able to break the gender segmentation as others did. One explanation is a strong identification with the belief that females should follow their mothers’ and males follow their fathers’ choices of study and career^{4,6}.

Today, females only make up 30% of the students in leader-generating courses of study (economics, business administration, and engineering), whereas they constitute 70% of students in human and social sciences which typically lead to support functions or positions in the public sector. The gender challenge becomes even clearer when asking students where they see themselves entering the workforce. Male students are 20% more inclined to work in sales or operations functions, while females are 300% more interested in support functions like communication and HR which don’t typically lead to leadership positions. When asked directly about their leadership ambitions, 9% fewer female students see themselves as leaders, and females have 7% less confidence in their own ability than their male peers. The implication is that student decisions on courses of study and career tracks today are highly limiting for gender diversity in the future generation of leaders.

The gender challenge becomes even clearer when students talk about their career expectations.

Stereotypical gender roles are pronounced in Danish households with a tendency toward females taking a caregiver role and males a provider role⁷. Already in their student years, both males and females expect women to take more parental leave and do more household work. Also, when choosing future jobs, male students value salary higher than their female counterparts (provider), while female students value work-life balance (caregiver) emphasizing the skewed gender roles in the Danish households are expected to continue⁸. The effect of the stereotypical gender roles in the Danish society is a gender gap in terms of presence on the labor market during the first ten year of the career. Research shows that these years define the steepness and end-point on the career ladder for employees³. Therefore, the pronounced gender roles in Danish society is a critical limiting factor in gender diversity in leadership.

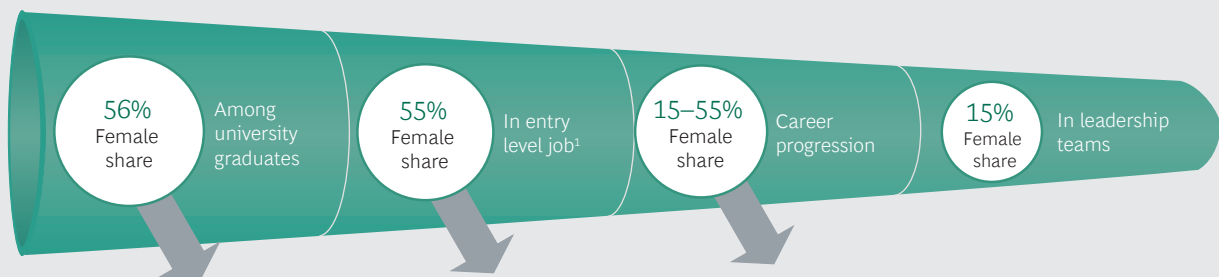
Policymakers Can Change the Societal Framework to Advance Gender Diversity

People are rational, and changing the context drives new behaviors. The challenge of gender diversity is deeply rooted in our society and begins with how boys and girls are treated differently during their school years. Leaders in society must work together to drive sustainable change and address gender diversity along the career ladder from high school to executive management. As such, educational institution presidents, company leaders and policymakers must focus on advancing gender diversity in courses of study, entry-level jobs, and the career track to executive management.

Gender diversity initiatives for educational institutions and companies were detailed in the first two BCG Focus articles in this series. This article will assess opportunities for policymakers to enable gender diversity.

In Denmark, the largest leak in the talent pipeline has been identified as happening during the period of career progression where share of female talent in the pipeline drops from 55% to 15%. (See Exhibit 1.)

EXHIBIT 1 | Largest leak in talent pipeline occurs around period of career progression



Source: Statistics Denmark, Ministry of Higher Education and Science, BCG GDR survey 2017.

¹Based on females with higher education in the 24-30 age group who graduated in 2012 and 2013 and have been employed within 21 months from graduation

INTRODUCING SMART SIMPLICITY

Changing context to change unwanted behavior

Smart Simplicity is a proven BCG approach originally intended to hardwire a cultural change by understanding behaviors negatively affecting outcomes. The idea is that context drives behavior, which then drives decisions and outcomes. It is therefore important to address the contextual elements in a targeted way to change behavior sustainably.

The four-step approach:

- Determine what you want to achieve and the precise and measurable **gap between the current situation and the desired outcome**, such as gender diversity in leadership or in courses of study
- Understand the **unwanted behaviors** causing the performance issues on a micro level, using a sociological analysis of who is involved, what their goals are, what initiatives help achieve the goals (resources), and what hinder them (constraints)

- Identify **root causes in terms of contextual elements** that drive unwanted behaviors
- **Change contextual elements** to shape behavior and reach the goals

Smart Simplicity is a strong tool to help leaders drive a cultural change by focusing effort on a minimal set of interventions to change specific contextual elements. However, to be successful, it is critical to understand in depth the sociological system, which is defined by the behaviors and dynamics within a culture to apply the right interventions. Cultural change is a long-term process requiring the progress to be tracked and ongoing iterations to adjust contextual elements minimizing the impact from unforeseen side effects.

Source: BCG research

The period of career progression usually takes place from age 30 to 40, which also happen to be the age range identified by academics as the years of family expansion—making family policies a critical lever for policymakers. During this time it is also common for females to switch to part-time employment without returning to full-time afterward²⁶.

This is additionally the exact spot in the female career, where the wage gap is created. Reports show that the impact on future earnings could decrease up to 6% per child for females, while men are unaffected²⁷.

Denmark's parental leave policies create a system-based glass ceiling for female progression. Together with the Nordic countries, Denmark has one of the most generous parental leave policies in the world⁹ as measured by public expenditure per newborn child¹⁰. The Danish policy on parental leave reserves 18 weeks of paid leave for mothers and two weeks of for fathers. In addition to this designated leave,

parents can share a total of 32 weeks of paid leave. Despite having the opportunity to share leave equally, males in Denmark take only 10% of total leave, creating a gender gap¹¹. In fact, the gender gap is enhanced by Denmark having a parental leave policy, where a total leave of 52 weeks is offered compared with the OECD average of 18 weeks^{12,4,6}.

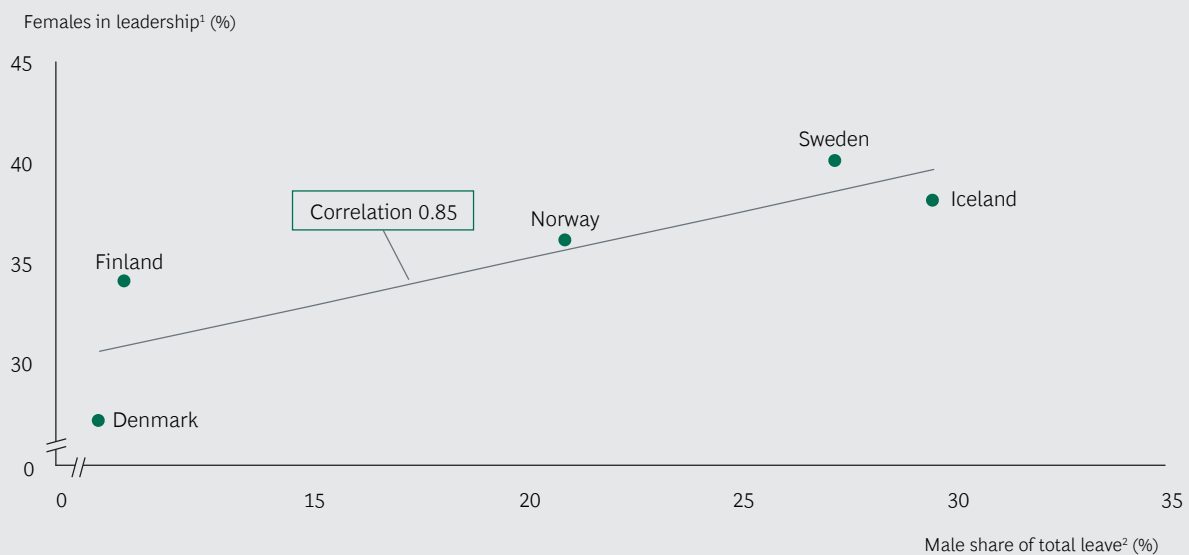
FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP INCREASES WITH MALE SHARE OF PARENTAL LEAVE

From a gender diversity perspective, a well-functioning parental leave policy ensures a balanced distribution of parental leave. A positive correlation between female leadership and male share of total parental leave is evident in the Nordics. In particular, Denmark stands out among Nordic peers by having the lowest percentage of female leaders across sectors (27%) and lowest male share of total parental leave (10%). The highest percentage of female leaders is found in Sweden (40%) and Iceland (38%), which are also the countries with the most balanced split of parental leave (27% and 30% respectively). (See Exhibit 2.)

Benchmarking the Nordic countries shows that the Danish parental leave policy differs by having a very short period of reserved paternity leave—12 weeks less than Sweden. (See Exhibit 3.)

Looking across the Nordic countries, there is a positive correlation between the duration of designated paternity leave and the share of parental leave males actually take. Political reforms that have extended the duration of reserved paternity leave have consistently been followed by increases in male share of leave. For example, a political reform in Iceland in 2000 designating about 13 weeks for each parent and

EXHIBIT 2 | Females in leadership increases with male share of parental leave



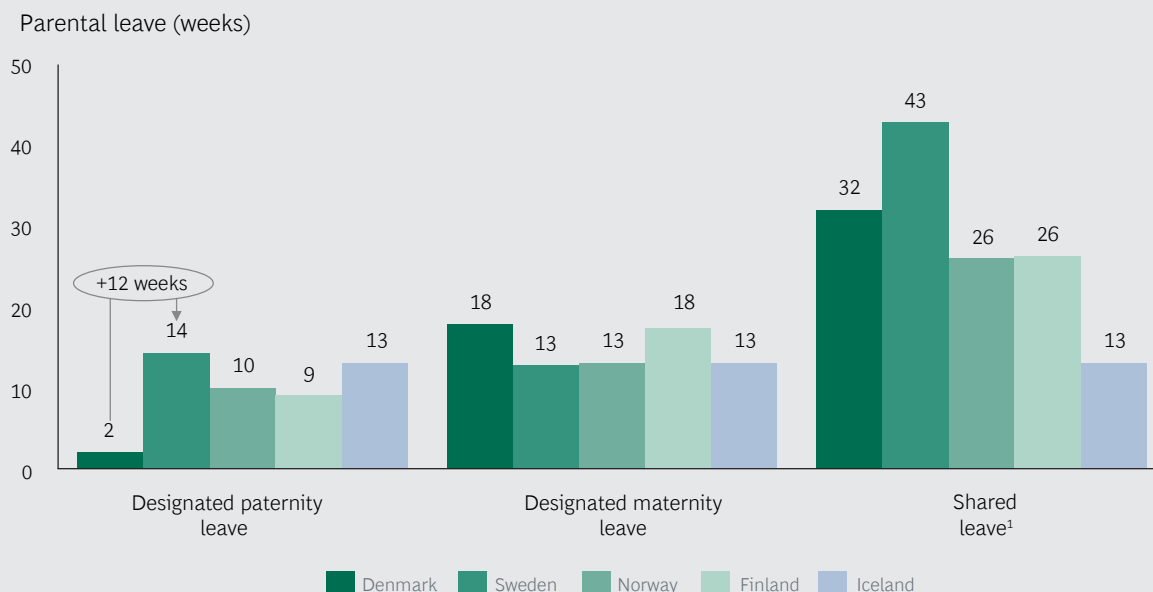
Source: Nordic Social Statistical Committee (NOSOSCO), World Economic Forum.

Note: Male share of total parental leave is from 2015 and female leadership data is from 2016.

¹Leadership positions defined as legislators, senior officials and managers.

²Male share of total leave is the actual take up of leave by males relative to the total take up of leave by males and females.

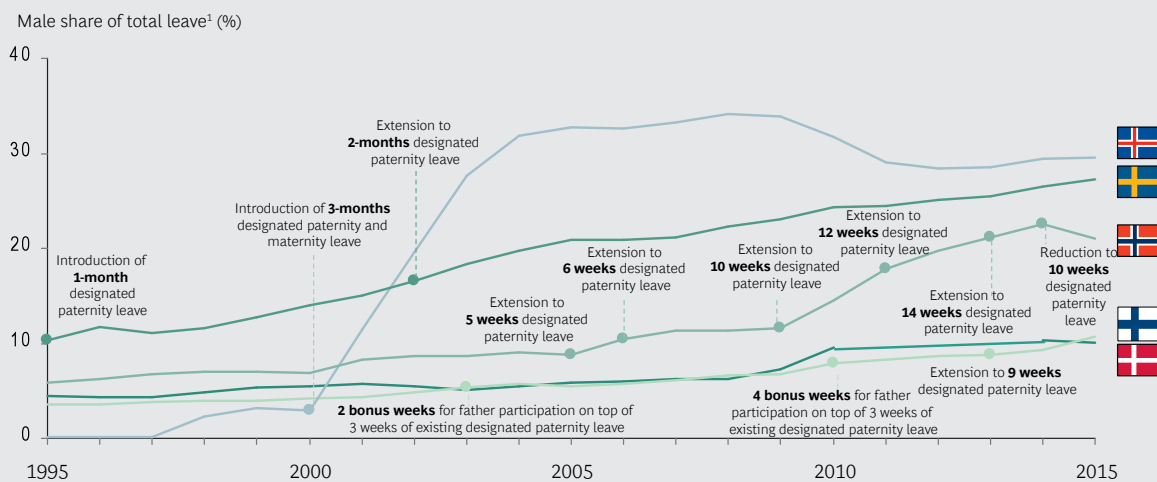
EXHIBIT 3 | Danish model characterized by low designated paternal leave



Source: Nordisk Samarbejde.

¹Weeks of shared leave available in Norway assumes that parents opt for full payment level.

EXHIBIT 4 | Nordic peers increased male share of leave through reserved paternity leave



Source: Nordic Social Statistical Committee (NOSOSCO), OECD, Danish Ministry of Employment.

Note: Sweden increased reserved paternity leave to 90 days in 2016.

¹Male share of total leave is the actual take up of leave by males relative to the total take up of leave by males and females.

about 13 weeks for sharing led to the male share of total parental leave increasing by about 25 percentage points during implementation from 2000 to 2003⁶. Sizeable positive effects have also materialized in Sweden and Norway over the past two decades. In Denmark, where there have been no recent reformations, the male share of total leave has increased very little over the past two decades and is still at a low level of approximately 10%. (See Exhibit 4.)

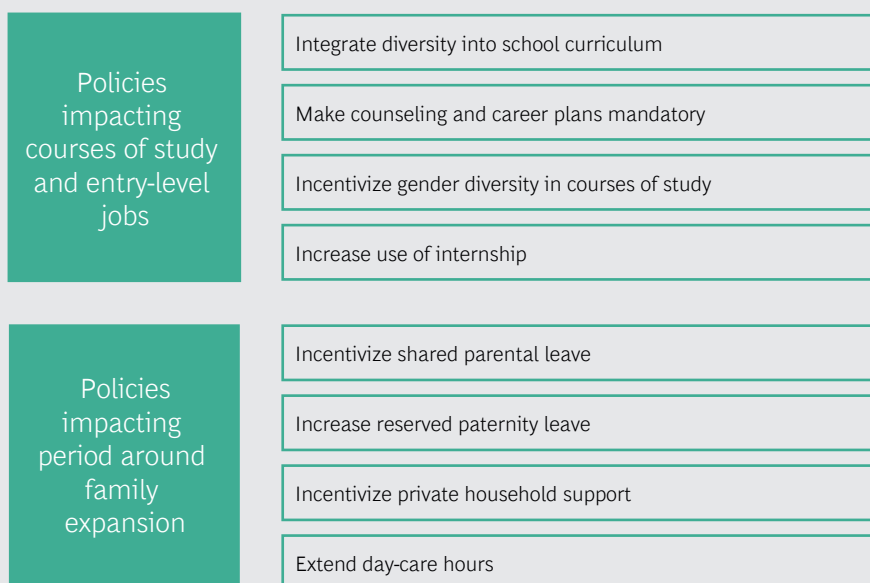
The positive relationship between designated paternity leave and male share of total leave has an economic and a cultural dimension. The non-transferability of designated paternity leave provides males with an increased economic incentive to use the leave. Increasing designated paternity leave has the potential to drive a cultural change where it becomes the norm that males take a more balanced share of the family responsibility starting with parental leave.

Despite the success of designated leave, all Nordic countries struggle with incentivizing parents to distribute the shared leave equally. Sweden and Denmark are the only countries where males on average are taking more leave than what is designated for them. In Sweden, the average use of leave among males was 21 weeks in 2015 (compared with four weeks taken in Denmark), which is six weeks more than the designated paternity leave²². Part of Sweden's success may be due to the use of financial incentives to share leave. For every day Swedish parents use the sharable leave equally, each parent receives a flat-rate bonus of 50 SEK up to a maximum of SEK 13,500¹². Another factor may be that the default allocation of shared leave is 50/50 in Sweden making transfer from one parent to the other an active choice.

Policymakers Can Enable Gender Diversity Along the Career Journey

Policymakers have the opportunity and responsibility to create an environment in society that fosters gender diversity. Policies can drive behaviors and therefore are strong levers of societal change. As such, policymakers should establish policies that enable gender diversity in courses of study and entry level-jobs and in the career tracks to executive management, that focus on the period of family expansion. (See Exhibit 5.)

EXHIBIT 5 | Overview of key initiatives



Source: BCG expertise.

Four policy initiatives would enable gender diversity in the early part of the female pipeline.

1. *Integrate diversity into school curriculum.* Gender diversity could, by policy, become part of the primary and high school curriculum, teaching and initiating school practices to eliminate stereotyping and unconscious biases.
2. *Make counseling and career planning mandatory.* The government could create a central budget for high schools to invest in and improve the quality of career support services to ensure that all students receive adequate guidance and support in making the right career decisions.
3. *Incentivize gender diversity in courses of study.* Setting gender-share targets on courses of study and making universities accountable would drive universities to focus effort on a critical improvement area for gender diversity. Reaching critical mass in terms of a more balanced gender distribution in courses of study will provide a self-enhancing effect advancing gender diversity.
4. *Increase use of internships.* Today, male students spend more time in part-time jobs, internships, and extracurricular activities than their female peers—a key asset for males when applying for jobs after graduation⁸. Accessibility of internships could be improved by better provision of SU (student financial support) and/or university credits (ECTS-points) during internships.

Four policy initiatives have the potential to balance household responsibilities.

In our survey of leaders, we found a clear demand for policy changes when it comes to parental leave policies and household work—more than half of leaders believe policies should be changed. We propose four policy initiatives with the potential to enable a more balanced share of household responsibilities in the period around and after childbirth to enable female career progression toward leadership.

Financially incentivize a more balanced distribution of parental leave. Policymakers have the opportunity to financially incentivize a more balanced use of parental leave under the current policy. The key is to have benefits change depending on how leave is distributed, which can be illustrated by three examples:

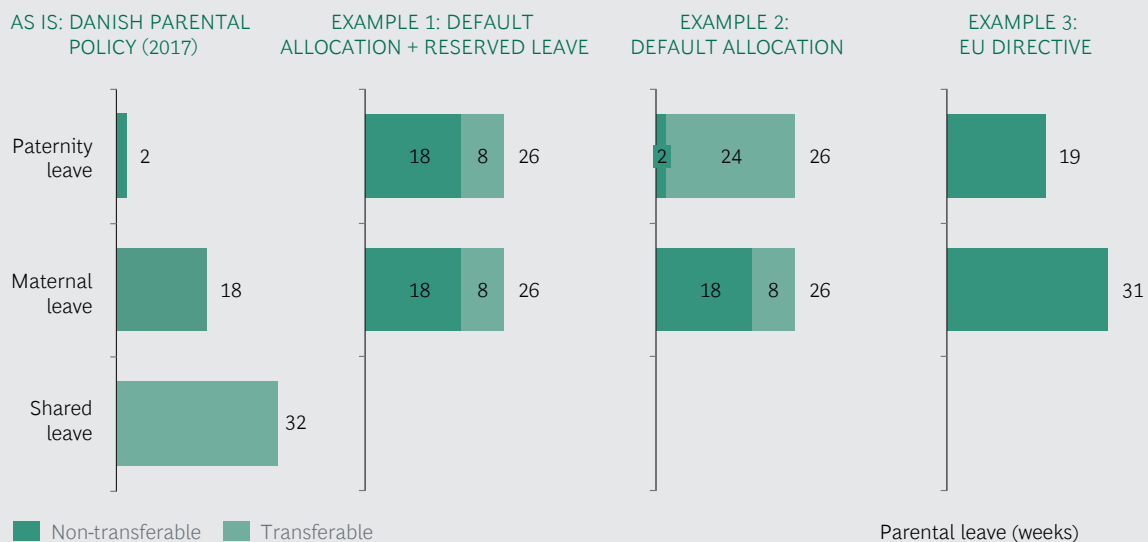
1. *Increase sharing to increase payment:* In Sweden, payment rates increase with degree of sharing to incentivize a balanced distribution between genders.
2. *Longer leave, lower benefits:* Let financial compensation decline with the length of leave for each parent. Similar to the Swedish model, this approach should facilitate sharing of leave.
3. *Bonus weeks for father participation:* Several countries, including Germany, Italy, and Portugal, are trying to incentivize shared leave by giving bonus weeks for father participation. In Germany, if each parent claims at least two months of the ten months shared leave, the benefit period is extended by two months¹². Currently, Danish parents are not using the total leave available to them, so this type of incentive may have limited effect.

Restructure policy to balance parental leave taken. The experience of our Nordic peer countries shows that parental leave policy is a key driver for reducing the gender gap. Best-practice from Nordic peers can be summarized as:

- A balanced split of reserved leave signals that parents have a joint responsibility to take care of their children. This best-practice is seen in Iceland and Sweden.
- An equal pre-allocation will make transfer of leave between parents an active choice as opposed to an option, as it is in the current policy setting. This best-practice is observed in Sweden, and research shows default allocation can drive change^{13,25}.
- Data shows no clear link between the length of parental leave and the share that fathers take. Iceland and Sweden have both succeeded in terms of achieving a more balanced parental leave split despite the fact that the total leave they offer differs by about 31 weeks.

Several parental leave policies could be consistent with identified best practices. (See Exhibit 6.) Example 1 is consistent with identified best practice by making 26 weeks of paid leave available to each parent, of which eight weeks should be transferable while maintaining maternity and total leave as-is. Example 2 shows a moderate change pre-allocating the current shared leave to obtain a balance. However, this solution does not embody all best practice elements, and does not increase paternity leave, which could be a critical element based on analyses of Nordic peers. Finally, Example 3 is the recently proposed EU directive of 19 weeks designated paternity leave and 31 weeks maternity leave¹⁴. The EU directive does not incorporate all best practices as it maintains the traditional gender roles by allocating a larger non-transferable part of the leave to females while not offering any flexibility.

EXHIBIT 6 | Examples of parental leave policies



Source: Danish Parliament (Note 2016–17, E30: Balance i arbejdslivet).

There are two main risks to restructuring the Danish parental leave policies. One is that differences in salary levels and parental leave schemes available to females and males may limit the impact from policy changes. On average, male employees aged 25 to 34 are paid 11% more than females¹⁵. This is partially driven by males holding 70% of higher-paid private sector jobs. Contributing further to the salary difference, the man is often older than the woman in a relationship, and therefore further along in his career. Based on statistics concerning age upon marriage, males are on average three years older than their female partner²³. At the same time, females are three times more likely than males¹⁶ to work in lower-paid public sector jobs with superior parental leave policies. For these reasons, today's couples are often incentivized to have the female take the majority of the parental leave to maximize household income.

Another risk is that the expected short-term economic consequences of a more balanced split of leave is likely to be negative for companies in male dominated industries and positive for companies in female dominated industries. A gradual implementation of policy changes will allow companies to prepare for change and mitigate potential negative consequences.

Make household support more attractive to small-children families. Outsourcing household work provides increased flexibility to families, crucial for dual-career households⁸. However, the high taxes and compressed pay structure in Denmark makes external household support relatively expensive for most families—especially during the first years of a career. Policymakers have the opportunity to offer further tax deductions on household support to make it more affordable for families with small children. Outsourcing household work directly addresses the gender gap, as females take a larger share of the household responsibility⁸. Research from Sweden shows that for a married woman working full-time, approximately 60% of the time saved from outsourcing household work is devoted to labor-market work instead, creating a positive effect on gender diversity¹⁸.

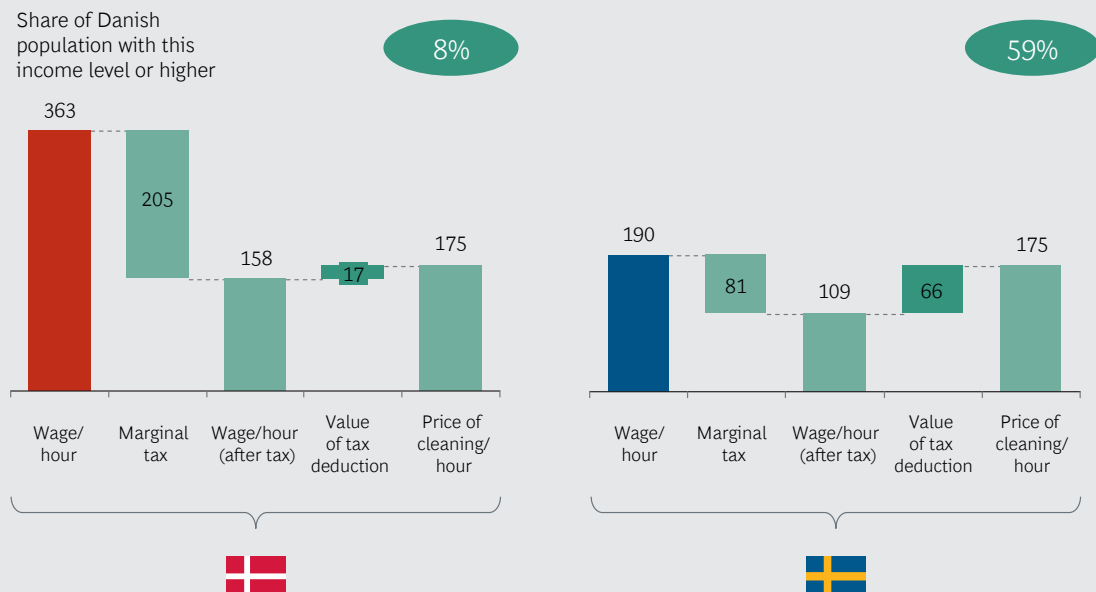
Outsourcing household work directly addresses the gender gap.

In Denmark, BoligjobOrdningen offers a tax deduction of DKK 4,950 per person of which DKK 1,650 is available for household work. In comparison, Sweden offers a tax deduction with a tax value of up to SEK 50,000 per person of which SEK 25,000 is available for household work¹⁹. The tax benefit in Sweden is thus about nine times higher²⁰.

In Denmark you need an hourly wage of DKK 363 to allow one hour more of work to pay for one hour of cleaning service. An hourly wage of DKK 363 corresponds to a monthly income of DKK 58,000, the income of only 8% of the Danish workforce. Under the Swedish scheme, a person has the means to hire a cleaning service at a much lower monthly salary of DKK 31,000, which applies to 59% of the Danish workforce²⁰. (See Exhibit 7.)

A report by the Danish Ministry of Taxation found there are positive economic effects to increasing the tax allowance²⁰, as lost tax revenue is countered by increased tax revenue from converting illegal work to legal work, increased demand for service offerings, and freeing up workforce by outsourcing household work²⁰.

EXHIBIT 7 | In Denmark, a wage of DKK 363/hour is needed to buy external cleaning compared with DKK 190/hour in Sweden



Source: Danish Ministry of Taxation.

Extend day-care opening hours. Dropping off and picking up kids from daycare is an inherently inflexible part of household work. In the municipality of Stockholm, families have the right to childcare from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., and the district administration is also responsible for arranging care at other times if necessary²⁴. Extending daycare opening hours is a key lever for policymakers to help dual-career households to succeed with both family and career.

The Time to Build the Future is Now

Gender diversity is critical for companies to succeed in an increasingly demanding business environment—and paramount for Denmark to stay competitive in the globalizing marketplace. We believe Denmark is at a turning point after a decade where the country has fallen behind Nordic peers. If policymakers, company CEOs, and leaders in educational institutions are committed to changing gender diversity all along the talent pipeline, then it is possible to break a vicious cycle limiting a highly educated female talent pool from rising to leadership.

While individual companies and leaders may take it upon themselves to advance gender diversity in their own organizations, policymakers have the opportunity to modify the societal framework by adapting education, employment, and social policies to foster gender diversity. In this way, policymakers can support and nudge companies, people, and the society at large toward new practices, behaviors, and norms that advance gender diversity. Adjusting the contextual elements today will change the behavior and ultimately shape a more inclusive and diverse culture in the years to come. The future depends on what we do today.

NOTES

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