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Will Iceland's New Law Actually Close the Wage Gap Though?

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With a new year comes an invisible yet very tangible push to improve, and at least one country has promptly made good on those intentions. The first week of 2018, Iceland legalized equal pay, enforcing its current ban on the common discriminatory practice of men being paid more than women on the basis of gender. The law makes the Nordic nation the first in the world to place the onus on both private and public businesses to prove that they are adhering to fair wage practices.

Under the new law, companies and government agencies with at least 25 employees are required to secure a government certification that formally acknowledges their equal pay policies. Organizations must undergo a certification process every three years. Those that don't present proof of compliance with the new policies will be hit with heavy fines and possibly audited. The law comes after a 2012 voluntary proposal for equal pay apparently failed to produce any substantial change. The divisive issue eventually came to a head in October of last year, prompting thousands of women to take to the streets of Reykjavik to protest the gender wage gap.

Despite it being an unprecedented legal move, some have been critical of the equal pay law. According to CBC News, employers' associations balked at the financial requirements needed to obtain the certifications, as well as the threat of Iceland's government becoming too involved in the labor market. Reports also mentioned economists who feel that skewed statistics paint an inaccurate view of factors that cause the country's gender wage differentiation. (One of the factors being that, due to social conditioning, men typically pursue careers in lucrative sectors, while women gravitate toward the care sector, which provides lower wages.) Additionally, Bloomberg writer Leonid Bershidsky highlights concerns that the newly implemented law doesn't address the real culprit causing the pay gap, which is stereotypical gender roles.

Women are frequently seen as the primary caretakers, and this expectation to rear children pushes them out of the labor market. He believes Iceland's law would need to also include parental leave policies for both parents to encourage a more equal division of childcare or household duties. In other words, Iceland's law should be "improved upon" by other nations and not strictly followed.

In 2017, Stefan Olafsson of the University of Iceland's European Social Policy Network authored a report in which he emphasized why the new legislation won't be able to completely merge the pay gap.

While maintaining that the certification requirement may help to advance the "ethos of gender and other equality issues in Icelandic society," Olafsson wrote that there "is still a gendered pay difference rooted in the fact that women take greater responsibility for care tasks within the household, while men spend more time in paid work."

Nevertheless, John Boyd of U.S.-based management consulting firm The Boyd Company is confident that other countries will still follow suit, but not for the reasons we might expect. "I do expect other progressive nations to pass legislation mandating equal pay," Boyd tells *Playboy*. "While this is largely a symbolic gesture, it will have branding value for countries to attract and retain the best talent from around the globe. I would not be surprised to see similar legislation in Canada, led by progressive Prime Minister Trudeau, in the months ahead." "The branding quotient here cannot be understated," he continues. "We are in a global competition to attract industry and jobs—and it's all about talent. Iceland has a growing high-

tech industry and booming start-up culture. This new equal pay legislation is consistent with the type of social policy critical to attracting a young and IT-skilled workforce,” Boyd says.

For now, the northern nation of less than 350, 000 citizens has its sights set on a goal that still feels so far out of reach for other countries: closing the pay gap by 2022. It sounds great in theory, but the Institute on Women’s Policy and Research recently forecast an end to the gender pay gap in 2059. The outlook for women of color is even bleaker, with the institute predicting the arrival of equal pay for black and Latina women in the years 2124 and 2233, respectively.

Figures showing that the global pay divide is growing wider suggest that we still have a long way to go before Iceland’s ruling begins to make tangible, legal waves elsewhere. Hopefully, that won’t discourage those of us who still have to go above and beyond to prove that our gender should have never prevented us from earning a fair living in the first place.