

Research Report

Committee: Economic and Social

Topic: The Question of the Gender Pay Gap

Introduction:

Although notable progress has been made towards achieving gender equality worldwide, as well as reducing the gender pay gap, the UN reports that on average women worldwide are still being paid 23 percent less than men. Despite the misconception that this only affects countries with lower income, more economically developed countries are also struggling to level the wages between genders; this is due to a number of factors that have been embedded in societies for long periods of time, making it very difficult to prompt changes. Male-dominated industries are generally better paid than female-dominated ones, and the traditional role of women as ‘carer’ and ‘homemaker’ means that they are channeled into certain types of job — for women with children, the wage gap is greater still, and the ‘motherhood penalty’ means that women are forced into the informal sector and low-paying jobs. Even though many women have equivalent qualifications to their male counterparts, their skills are less valued and their career progresses at a slower rate. However, there are measures that can be taken in an effort to reverse this divide that has formed over time.

Definition of Key Terms:

Glass Ceiling - A term used to describe the often unacknowledged barrier that prevents women and minorities in particular from advancing in professions. This invisible obstacle functions as a metaphor to describe the extra difficulty minorities face in rising beyond a certain level inside and outside of the workplace.

Glass Escalator - A term referring to the idea that men are put on a ‘fast track’ and promoted into management or higher up positions when entering female-dominated industries.

Glass Cliff - A term used to describe the fact that women are more likely to achieve powerful leadership roles during a time of crisis when the chances of failure are higher.

Gender Pay/Wage Gap - The percentage difference between the average hourly earnings of working men and women.

Feminism - The advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.

Gender Equality - The state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender.

Discrimination - The unjust, prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Informal Sector - The part of an economy that is neither taxed nor monitored by the government, the activities of which are not included in a country's gross national product or gross domestic product. People working in this sector have little or no job security, no pension, insurance, or health insurance scheme, and are not protected by labour laws.

Living Wage - A wage that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

Minimum Wage - The lowest wage permitted by law or by a special agreement.

Contextual Information:

In order to achieve full equality for men and women, it seems obvious that women must receive the same amount of money as men for an equal amount of work. However, across the world, working women only make 77 cents for every US dollar earned by men. Two of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are 'gender equality' and 'decent work and economic growth' — these factors are both restricted by this gender pay gap. Although the UN has made significant progress in empowering women, this issue must be addressed in order to further equal rights, promote inclusive societies, reduce poverty, and create conditions for decent work and gender equality.

As women become mothers, they bear the "motherhood penalty" — in order to balance family responsibilities and paid work, women accept part-time, casual or underpaid jobs, or work in the informal economy; working in the informal sector means that they have no job security, no pension, and no insurance. This means that many women retire into poverty due to the large pensions gap — evidence shows that around the world the number of elderly women living in poverty is increasing, and unless discrimination and inequality in the labour market are resolved, the problem will only grow. In pregnancy, women may also face discrimination, which can lead to them being dismissed, harassed out of the workforce, or demoted on their return; similarly, in the informal economy, women do not receive maternity protection or paid leave. Taking time out to care for children slows women's career progression, meaning that it is more difficult for them to achieve higher positions within an industry, despite having the qualifications.

Overall, women in formal employment are segregated in a narrower range of sectors and occupations. A 2016 study of trends in women at work by the ILO confirms that in high and upper-middle income countries, the female workforce is concentrated in teaching, nursing, health care, office and administrative work, and sales and service industries. These sectors

are the ones that tend to be undervalued and underpaid; jobs in female-dominated sectors are invariably less well paid than a job in a male-dominated sector of similar objective value.

Although women in male-dominated sectors tend to earn more than in female-dominated sectors, there is still a major difference in pay between them and their male counterparts. In the United Kingdom, it is estimated that women in management positions in the financial services sector are paid up to 39.5 percent less than men in equal positions with the same qualifications.

According to the UK Government Equalities Office in 2016, in the UK alone over 1.5 million women already in work would like to increase their hours. If they worked just one extra hour each week, that would contribute almost 80 million more hours a year in productivity; imagine if women were granted the opportunity to voluntarily increase their workload worldwide. Not only would this progress the reduction of the gender pay gap, but lead to an incredible advancement in a country's productivity. The trend of the difference in wages is continued into bonuses — recently, along with salary figures, employers have been made to disclose the bonus gap between men and women. In the UK, the finance sector has the greatest gap, with women's bonuses being on average 35% less than men's. The data published in the UK in 2018 reveals that there are no sectors where women are paid more than men, even industries that are considered to be female-dominated.

The fact that these figures have been published in the UK is a large step towards achieving equality. However, the question of obtaining equal rights for women is one that will prove much more difficult in some countries than others. If historical trends continue, it is estimated that the pay gap would close within twenty years in countries such as Poland, Belgium, Italy, and Greece, but could take up to three hundred years for Germany, Spain, and South Korea. Resolutions should acknowledge that eliminating the wage gap will require different measures and different time periods from location to location.

The Global Gender Gap Index use four fundamental categories to measure the gap between men and women — Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. The 2018 study reports that global gender parity has almost been achieved with regard to two subindexes — Educational Attainment and Health and Survival — but the difference between genders in the other two categories is far from being bridged. The global Political Empowerment figures are by far the worst, reflecting the low representation of women in all political roles. This may have something to do with the 'glass cliff', the theory that women are most likely to be elected in times of crisis, and then blamed when they are unable to fix the problems. This index shows that the difference in wages is not the only problem; promoting women in political roles is also a

priority, and this will likely be an even more difficult task than ensuring women have equal economic opportunities.

The Director-General of the ILO, Guy Ryder, said this at the Equal Pay International Coalition: “the fact that women across the globe are still being paid less than men for work of equal value is one of the most visible, tangible and pervasive manifestations of discrimination. It is a matter of urgency to make sure the message is finally heard and things start to change.” There is no better time to work towards reversing this discrimination than the present.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

UN Women - United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, supporting UN Member States in setting global standards for achieving gender equality. It works with governments and civil society to design the laws, policies, services, and programmes needed to ensure standards are effectively implemented as well as lead and coordinate the UN system’s work on gender equality.

Fawcett Society - The UK’s leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women’s rights; their campaigning led to new gender pay gap reporting legislation, which requires organisations with over 250 employees to publish data on their gender pay gaps, including bonuses. Some of the many goals they aim to achieve by campaigning for employers and the government to make changes are for employers to support women to progress to higher paid jobs and employ the living wage.

UNICEF - A children’s charity created by the UN General Assembly whose Gender Action Plan aims to promote gender equality in everything they do as well as advance the rights of women. This included working towards gender equality in teaching and education systems, the prevention of child marriage and early unions, and ultimately non-gender-discriminatory roles, expectations, and practices.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) - The principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. It is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

International Labour Organisation (ILO) - A UN agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.

Timeline of Events:

Date: **Event:**

1946 The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is established and becomes the first global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to gender equality.

1979 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), dubbed the “Women’s Bill of Rights”, is adopted. The most comprehensive international instrument to protect the human rights of women, it is the second most ratified UN human rights treaty, legally binding signatory governments to end all forms of discrimination against women in public and private life.

1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - a global commitment to achieving equality, development and peace for women worldwide adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women with a road map of actions under 12 critical areas to advance women's rights. This includes many actions to be taken by governments to advance women in the economy, such as eliminate discriminatory practices by employers, promote women’s economic rights and independence, and facilitate women’s equal access to resources, employment, markets, and trade. It highlights the issue of the gender pay gap, pointing out the need to enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.

2000 UN Millenium Declaration highlights that equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured and resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger, and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.

2010 UN General Assembly creates UN Women - the first UN agency to champion exclusively for women’s rights.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

Possible Solutions:

One popular possible solution is to enforce a minimum living wage and universal social protection; women are overrepresented in low paid work so it would benefit them more dramatically. For example, Germany recently introduced a national minimum wage to try and reduce its gender pay gap of 22.4 percent. Universal social protection will lead to income security for the unemployed - most of whom are women - paid maternity leave, and

childcare; it is crucial that this is extended to women working in the informal sector who are often excluded. However, there may be loopholes to this solution. Informal work would most likely find ways around this minimum living wage as the labour is not managed by the government, and employers may be reluctant to enforce the minimum wage as they would no longer be able to pay their workers low wages, reducing their profits.

Additionally, policy measures that encourage men to share care responsibilities, such as paternity leave, may also have a large effect in reversing gender roles and allowing women to continue working instead of being limited to childcare. However, in countries with societies that are still embedded with traditional gender roles for men and women - such as Japan, where women do more than three quarters of the unpaid work and caregiving (OECD 2017 Report) - this idea may initially prove difficult to spread.

Promoting female entrepreneurship, by offering training and encouraging skills development could be another possible solution, giving women increased access to markets and prompting them to set up their own businesses. Additionally, forcing companies to make certain data available for public access and enforcing salary transparency may make it more difficult for discrimination to be hidden by organisations, and lead to the self-correcting of the gender pay gap. However, this could lead to rivalry in the workplace and split the workforce as they compete over the highest salaries.

A combination of these solutions could prove revolutionary in correcting the gender pay gap, but ensuring that all governments and businesses put these into practice is a completely different problem entirely. Although offering an incentive could be an option, the wage gap and gender inequality have been ingrained in societies for so long that without a deadline for change and possible punishments to act upon, many will continue to exploit loopholes that allow them to use cheaper labour and resume underpaying their female employees. The solution must also deal with countries where it is still believed that women are inferior to men and should not be treated as their equals, a major factor that ensures the wage gap remains a prominent problem unless views are rapidly advanced.

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International Labour Organisation - <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>

UNICEF Gender Action Plan -

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Fawcett Society - <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/>

UN Human Rights CEDAW Committee -

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