

Pandemic delays gender parity by a generation: WEF

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Studies have shown that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women

The pandemic has rolled back years of progress towards equality between men and women, according to a report released Wednesday showing the crisis had added decades to the trajectory towards closing the gender gap.

A range of studies have shown that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, who have lost jobs at a higher rate than men, and had to take on much more of the extra childcare burden when schools closed.

The effects will be felt in the long-term, according to the World Economic Forum, which in its annual Global Gender Gap Report found that the goalposts for gender parity appeared to be moving further away.

"There has been sort of a rollback to traditional behaviours inside the home, and that then creates a double shift for women who are working," WEF managing director Saadia Zahidi told a virtual press conference.

The organisation, which usually gathers the global elite in the plush Swiss ski resort of Davos each year, had found in its previous report, published in December 2019 right before the pandemic hit, that gender parity across a range of areas would be reached within 99.5 years.

But this year's report shows the world is not on track to close the gender gap for another 135.6 years.

"Another generation of women will have to wait for gender parity," the WEF said in a statement.

The Geneva-based organisation's annual report tracks disparities between the sexes in 156 countries across four areas: education, health, economic opportunity and political empowerment.



The WEF pointed to a study by the UN's International Labour Organization showing that women were more likely to lose their jobs in the pandemic, in part because they are disproportionately represented in sectors directly disrupted by lockdowns

Workplace equality in 267 years

On the plus side, women appear to be gradually closing the gender gap in areas such as health and education.

But inequality in the workplace—which has long appeared to be the stickiest area to fix—is still not expected to be erased for another 267.6 years.

And the pandemic has not helped.

The WEF pointed to a study by the UN's International Labour Organization showing that women were more likely to lose their jobs in the crisis, in part because they are disproportionately represented in sectors directly disrupted by lockdowns.

Surveys by pollsters Ipsos have meanwhile shown that women were carrying a greater share of the burden of increased housework and childcare during lockdowns.

"We find that women around the world are now spending (the equivalent of) a full-time job doing childcare," Ipsos chief operating officer Natalie Lacey told Wednesday's press conference.

"This has taken its toll. The level of stress that women are feeling is higher than men," she said.



French Junior Minister of Gender Equality Elisabeth Moreno. Women still hold just over a quarter of parliamentary seats worldwide, and only 22.6 percent of ministerial positions

Women were also being hired back at a slower rate than men as workplaces opened up again, according to LinkedIn data referenced in the report.

"It has been a very tough year for working women," LinkedIn vice president Sue Duke told the press conference.

At the start of the pandemic, women "saw a real dip in hiring... (and this) is recovering slower than male hiring," she said, lamenting especially a "marked decline in the hiring of women to leadership roles."

Wednesday's report also highlighted the severe under-representation of women in the ballooning tech sector.

"If we want a dynamic future economy, it is vital for women to be represented in the jobs of tomorrow," Zahidi said.

Political gender gap growing

It was in the political sphere that the march towards gender parity did the biggest about-face, with several large-population countries seeing the political gender gap widen, the WEF study found.

Women still hold just over a quarter of parliamentary seats worldwide, and only 22.6 percent of ministerial positions.



US President Joe Biden speaks during an Equal Pay Day event in the South Court Auditorium of the White House in Washington DC

On its current trajectory, the political gender gap is not expected to close completely for another 145.5 years, the report found.

That marks a 50-percent hike from the estimated 95 years in the 2020 report, released at the end of 2019, WEF pointed out.

Progress across the categories varies greatly in different countries and regions.

The report pointed out that while Western European countries could close their overall gender gap in 52.1 years, countries in the Middle East and North Africa will take nearly 142.4 years to do so.

Overall, the Nordic countries once again dominated the top of the table: the gap between men and women was narrowest in Iceland, for the 12th year running, followed by Finland and Norway.

New Zealand took fourth place, ahead of Sweden.

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