

A: Julie, what are you doing on the 10th November 2235?

B: 2235? I don't think I'll be around then, Eric. Why?

A: UK Labor MP Stella Creasy is organizing a party to mark the end of the gender pay gap.

B: That's crazy. I don't think she'll be there in over two hundred years' time! Why 2235?

A: That is the year in which the World Economic Forum has said the gap will be closed, given the current rate of change. According to their analysis, it will take another 217 years for women and men to earn the same, on average, if things don't change more quickly.

B: But why the 10th November?

A: The 10th November is Equal Pay Day. It symbolically marks the day of the year on which the average female worker 'stops getting paid' so to speak, as a result of the gender pay gap.

B: That's so early! I didn't know the gender pay gap was still so big. Why is that?

A: It's a complex problem. One of the factors driving the UK's gender pay gap is that women are more likely to be in low-paid jobs and sectors, such as in administrative, cleaning and caring roles. According to the Office for National Statistics figures, 3.8 million, or 28%, of all employee jobs done by women, are paid below the real Living Wage, compared to 18% for men.

B: What's the reason?

A: Well, the sectors women tend to work in – such as administration, health and social care and retail – are just not valued and paid as much as they should be.

B: OK, but what about actual pay discrimination?

A: According to the Fawcett Society, a feminist organization, pay discrimination is able to thrive because people are very unwilling to talk about what they earn.

B: Yes, I wouldn't share details of my salary with my co-workers, I guess.

A: You're not alone! 61% of workers say they would be uncomfortable asking a colleague how much they earn, while 52% of managers would respond negatively to more transparency.

B: I guess that means that pay discrimination is more common than people realize.

A: Yes, people simply do not know their basic rights and don't know what their colleagues earn. Although the information was difficult to find, research by the Young Women's Trust has found that one in five young women said they had been paid less than a male colleague for the same or similar work.

B: But that's illegal, isn't it?

A: Yes, it is illegal. But the problem is that less than half of those women were confident they could challenge their employer about the gender pay gap, and oblige them to obey the law. What's more, one in three workers questioned by researchers did not know that it is illegal to pay women and men differently for equal work.

B: That's terrible! Isn't anything being done to change things?

A: The situation is improving a little. For example, companies with more than 250 workers now have to report details of the gender pay gap. The government hopes that greater pressure may come from companies' own employees and scrutiny from competitors and in the media. However, although they have to publish how much men and women earn on average in their company, it turns out that these rules have not removed inequalities in the workplace.

B: I suppose requiring companies to publish data on their gender pay gap is a waste of time if they don't take action to close it. But is there any reason to be optimistic? Can we expect a party before 2235?

A: There are some glimmers of hope. A small sample study from law firm GQ Littler, found that 39% of businesses have revised their hiring procedures recently in an attempt to close the gender pay gap. In addition, 26% had conducted pay audits and 21% had changed pay policy.

B: That's a start! What about the glass ceiling?

A: Well, a survey for Totaljobs found that 46% of organizations who are taking steps to reduce the gender pay gap are actively promoting women into senior roles.

B: Things are going in the right direction, then?

A: Yes, earlier this year the Office for National Statistics revealed that the overall gender pay gap has fallen by half a per cent from 18.4% to 17.9%. But there is still a long way to go!

Outline: UK Labor MP Stella Creasy is organizing a party on 10th November 2235 to mark the end of the gender pay gap, the date at which, with current progress, the gap will be closed. The 10th November is Equal Pay Day, the day of the year on which the average female worker stops getting paid as a result of the gender pay gap. The gender pay gap can be explained by various factors: women are more likely to be in low-paid jobs and sectors, but a culture of pay secrecy allows pay discrimination to thrive. Women are often unaware of the basic rights the law provides. New regulations are, however, encouraging change, but slowly.

1. **Questions:** What can be done to solve the gender pay gap? Are there any circumstances in which men and women should be paid differently? Would you share details of your salary with your co-workers? Can changing the law change the culture inside companies?