

Robots and lack of child care leave women's wages centuries behind^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Women must wait 202 years before they can earn the same as men and have equal job opportunities, according to a global report released Tuesday, which said the rise in robots and the lack of child care were keeping many women out of work.

Women earn about half as much as men, said the World Economic Forum (WEF), reporting a gender pay gap of 51 percent in 2018.

"It's still a long way from parity, and it's still a long way from reaching a point where women and men are being paid the same for the same job," said report co-author Saadia Zahidi, head of WEF's Center for the New Economy and Society.

There were fewer women working this year than men, mostly due to the lack of child care which kept women from jobs or from progressing to senior roles, according to the annual index ranking 149 countries on their progress to close the gender gap.

"Most economies still have not made much progress in providing better infrastructure for child care," said Zahidi in a phone interview.

"This continues to be a major source of why women don't enter the labor market at all or aren't able to progress as much as they should given the talent that they have," she added.

Women were missing at the top, the report found, with only a third of all managerial roles taken by women.

There were also just 17 female heads of state this year, with women occupying 18 percent of ministerial positions and 24 percent of parliamentary roles globally, it added.

Robot takeover

Zahidi warned that emerging technology like robots and artificial intelligence (AI) were also taking jobs traditionally occupied by women, including administration, customer service and telemarketing.

"While a lot of the narrative in the past tended to focus on men in blue collar work in factories, there are a lot of women in blue collar or service work that are also being displaced — and that trend is starting to become more marked," she said.

The WEF report found that only 22 percent of people working in AI worldwide were female.

According to a 2017 study by the Brookings Institution, a U.S. think tank, the use of digital tools has increased in 517 of 545 occupations since 2002 in the United States alone, with a striking uptick in many lower-skilled occupations.

As technology advances, experts say women and girls with poor digital skills will be the hardest hit and will struggle to find jobs.

Although the number of women in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) has increased in recent years, they still only account for about 30 percent of the world's researchers, the U.N. cultural agency UNESCO says.

"More than ever, societies cannot afford to lose out on the skills, ideas and perspectives of half of humanity," said Klaus Schwab, executive chairman of the WEF.

No country has closed the pay gap yet, WEF said, using data from institutions such as the International Labour Organization, United Nations Development Programme and World Health Organization.

Top spots

Iceland, for the tenth year in a row, held the top spot across all indicators that measured gender equality including social, economic and health, according to the WEF report.

Nordic countries Norway, Sweden and Finland were among the top scoring countries, followed by Nicaragua, which ranked fifth.

Meanwhile Yemen, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria were the worst performing countries.

Last year, WEF said women would achieve economic equality in 217 years, the widest gap in almost a decade.

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