

International Equal Pay Day: Transcript

Commissioner Ward:

Welcome to “Level the Paying Field.” My name is Kadie Ward and I am Commissioner and CAO of Ontario’s Pay Equity Commission. Over the past few months, I spoke with economists, policy makers, activists and global thought leaders in the equity space. And we wanted to share those conversations with you. So, we’ve launched this series, “Level the Paying Field” to share what we learned about economics, equity, women, work and money.

Part of our inspiration for having these conversations was how, in the midst of a global pandemic which disproportionately impacted women around the world, global multilateral organizations came together to inaugurate the first ever International Equal Pay Day on Sept. 18th, 2020.

This was an initiative led by United Nations members including Australia, Canada, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Panama, South Africa and Switzerland with a total of 105 UN member states co-sponsoring the resolution to establish September 18th as “International Equal Pay Day.”

We wanted to know more about pay equity’s resurgence as an imperative to economic recovery.

We don’t need to read the reports to know that women at work and women at home have been disadvantaged since the start of the pandemic.

At the same time, never we have seen so many stories about women and work. And so many reports looking at the economics of equity. Over the past year we have coined the terms, “she-session”, “she-covery” with governments and agencies talking about a “feminist post-COVID recovery.”

In Ontario, my home province, the government has established a Task Force on Inclusive Economic Growth, with a mandate to address the unique and unfair economic barriers women face.

This series is intended to keep the conversation going so policy makers at both the federal and provincial levels continue enforcing and creating legislation or programs that address women’s economic justice and support closing the gender wage gap.

To begin this series, I spoke with my colleagues at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Both organizations were instrumental in inaugurating International Equal Pay Day.

Together, in collaboration with UN Women, the OECD and the ILO make up the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC). EPIC advocates and organizes for equal pay globally.

In this first part of this conversation I spoke with Monika Queisser. Ms. Queisser is the Head of the Social Policy Division and Senior Counsellor to the Director of The Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Directorate at the OECD.

She and I discussed OECD's motivation for supporting International Equal Pay Day, what the OECD is doing to support equal pay, and how their gender data portal is transforming what we know and how we think about the gender wage gap.

Commissioner Ward: OECD, as you know, leads the Equal Pay International Coalition, together with the United Nations Women, and the International Labour Organization. And although the OECD members have seen progress in closing the gender wage gap, though, the gap does persist across OECD members. So, I wanted to ask you, why does that gap persist from what you've learned through research? And what needs to be done to continue to close the gap?

Monika Queisser: So, the Equal Pay International Coalition is indeed a very interesting initiative that the OECD, the ILO and the UN Women together founded, and we are so delighted to have many countries on board, Canada is a big player in the EPIC, as we call it. And there is companies there, there is trade unions there, countries like I said it is an international organization. So, we are really happy that this is taking off and that we are building truly a coalition that is fighting this gender pay gap. I think, we have to work on different areas. First of all, we have to understand it better. And unfortunately, despite data, despite the best analysis, when you do the calculations and you decompose, you look at, here's the gap - full gap-, and then you chop it up into little pieces, what we call decompose and say: this part comes from the fact that girls are going into different occupations; this part comes from the fact that they have children.

[...] Then there is different sectors in which women work. So, it's not only the education but even we looked at women, who were going into STEM, and who were trained to be scientists, oftentimes they ended up in schools teaching science, in stead of being in a lab or being in an innovative company doing science there. So, it's not only what you study but then where you go: do you go to the private sector, do you go to the public sector, do you work full hours, or do you spend a lot of time working shorter hours because you are trying to combine it with school time of children. So, these are all factors. But then there is a huge part of this gender wage gap, which is called unexplained. It means we don't really know where it comes from. And what is that? Those are the more nasty things like discrimination. These are things we all know exist. But you can't really measure them. So, there's other factors that come into play, which we really have to know more about,

and we have to get a better handle on and we have to continue to push hard and explore further how to do this.

Commissioner Ward: Can you tell us how the OECD's Gender Data Portal helps policymakers and leaders better understand the gender gaps?

Monika Queisser: Sure, um, the OECD Gender Data Portal is a collection, it's like a platform where we collect lots of different things, as the name says data is of course a really important part of it and data is what drives policy. So, that's why we have at the OECD really place so much emphasis on data. If we don't know what's really going on, it's going to be very hard to convince anybody to change anything. So, it's not enough to say, oh, but women are disadvantaged in the labor market and they don't get nice jobs. So, no, we really have to document it, and to say how much is the gender wage gap, in what sectors is that happening, at which ages is it happening, when does it kick in. Where does it come from, hence education. You mentioned that we have at the OECD education, employment, and entrepreneurship, and those are what we call the three E's.

[...] So, we have all these data, and we put them there and the data portal enables everybody - whether they are researchers, students, policymakers, anybody who visits this data portal - to select indicators and to choose their comparator countries. So, it's very easy thing to use. And I was told actually that journalists love it because if you want to go and fight you know write an article and find how does Canada compare, how does another country compare, and then you say "I don't really want to be compared to Japan, I'd rather be compared to the Americas."

So, you click on the countries you want to look at, and you get it all. So, it's a very easy and accessible way to get a very clear picture and a quantitative picture on what is going on. And not only that, beyond data, you will find links to videos to ongoing work, to events, to blogs, and many other things. And in the last 10 years the OECD has expanded beyond those three E's or the education, employment and entrepreneurship, into many other areas, so you will find many other topics, digitalization and women, women in agriculture, women in trade, women in environments. So, we have many other topics now that are also covered by our work.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is another multilateral organization using research and data to understand how the gender wage gap is closing so we can better understand what is yet to be done.

Next, I spoke with Emanuela Pozzan, a Senior Specialist on Gender Equality with the ILO. In our conversation, we examined what data tells us about global trends in wage equity, women's employment and how the care economy impacts both of these spheres.

Commissioner Ward: So, September 18th, 2020, marked the inaugural International Equal Pay Day. And this day of recognition was launched in the middle of a global pandemic that we know disproportionately affected women in the workplace. What was the impetus that made recognizing the state so compelling at this time?

Emanuela Pozzan: International Equal Pay Day last year and this year as well, is a reminder of the inequalities that persist in the world of work, but it's also a call to action. It's a moment to celebrate and to call all actors in the labor market or anyone that can do something to address to address the issues of gender equality in the world of work, and to address the issue of equal pay for work of equal value. So, we, the EPIC, Equal Pay International Coalition, we are very proud to be part of celebrating international Equal Pay Day, and we look forward to the next one, which will be on the 18th of September.

Commissioner Ward: In 2019, your team did some really exceptional research on women at work called the Quantum Leap for Gender Equality, which highlighted some persistent barriers for women. What barriers were identified related to the gender wage gap?

Emanuela Pozzan: Thanks for this question and, you see, when we look at the gender pay gap, we are confronted with a very uncomfortable data, because the gender wage gap remains 18.8% throughout the world, ranging from 12.6% in low-income countries to 29% in upper middle-income countries. So, it is an issue that is widespread, it's in pretty much everywhere, every country. And, and it's something that calls for clearly some clear answers, but you're asking me about the reasons and the barriers, and the gender wage gap is, is the result of compounded inequalities that accumulate over women's time, of their lifetime.

And so, you will need a compass, you know, to navigate all of this because these are just some of the reasons as I said it's very complex. The gender wage gap is the result of many, many different factors. And so, the compass is the international treaty, the International Convention of the International Labour Organization - Convention #100, which is on Equal Remuneration. This is very important, because it is essential to address the conscious and unconscious biases in the determination of the value of the work that is performed by women relatively to the work performed by men. And here I would just like to underline that when we talk about the right to receive equal pay, this is not confined to equal or similar work. So, we're not talking just of the two people doing the same or similar job and being paid equally. But here we are also talking about extending, about the work that may be of an entirely different nature - so two people doing different jobs, but when you actually evaluate these jobs, their value might be very similar.

Commissioner Ward: You know, another thing that - or compounding factor I should say - is unpaid care work. And in the ILO Care report the magnitude of unpaid work globally

was highlighted. And in many ways, we've already said that COVID shone a light on the ways in which unpaid labor actually undermines our economy. And you said it in an earlier interview that - I love this quote - "the heart of change in care work is a change in the power relationship between men and women and unpaid work, so women can be present in the workforce." So, how is that power relationship between gender and unpaid work, different across developed in developing countries, you've hit on this a little bit but, and in what way, if any, shifts are you seeing in the division of unpaid labor?

Emanuela Pozzan: This is a very important question, because you're touching on one of the key issues that we need to address when we, when we want to advance the discourse on gender equality and which is the heavy amount of unpaid care work that women and men, but women in particular do on daily basis for no remuneration and this is work that is necessary, essential for any progression of the society because it's an extremely important part of the normal functioning of societies. And so, here we have quite disturbing data in reality, because across the world and there is no exception women perform three quarters of unpaid care work. 72% of the total amount of hours dedicated to unpaid care work, which goes from taking care of yourself, or taking care of your children, of your family members, etc. is provided by women. And in no country in the world do men and women provide an equal share of unpaid care work. So, this is not happening anywhere, not even in those countries that have advanced tremendously on trying to redistribute unpaid work. So, women globally, every day, perform 4 hours and 25 minutes of unpaid work compared to 1 hour and 23 minutes for men. And if we were to do some, you know, if we were to play around with these numbers, we would be talking of 2 billion people working eight hours per day for free, with no remuneration. And if we were to give a value to these hours, we would be talking of approximately 11 trillion US dollars, 9 percent of global GDP. So, we are talking of, you know, an important share that goes completely invisible, and that is not remunerated, and that is distributed in a very unfair way. Now you were asking me about the differences. There are certainly differences in countries, but in reality, the differences are very little. We can say for instance that women spend more time in unpaid care work than men in every region, ranging from 1.7 times more in the Americas, to 4.7 times in the Arab States.

So, here the question is: what shifts are we seeing in terms of division of unpaid care work? And we can say that there is certainly more attention to the issue on a global scale. And also, at country levels, because there is an understanding of the fact that being productive also means to have, to be able to take care of where you need to take care, without too much stress, and to be able to dedicate more time to be productive. But in the current organization of societies there's quite a lot of work that needs to be done to redistribute unpaid care work.

But reconciling the world of work with the world of care is one of the key challenges that we really need to actively, you know, attack, and try to work on it and to do that we need

reliable gender disaggregated data, that certainly is an aspect. But what we need the most is well designed, care infrastructures, care services, care leave policies, and combined flexible working arrangements. And I think COVID has advanced a little bit this discourse.

Commissioner Ward:

Both conversations with Monika and Emanuela are reminders of the inequalities that persist for women in the world of work and that International Equal Pay Day is a call to action to address the issues of gender equality, and to continue striving for equal pay for work of equal value.

For our part at the Pay Equity Commission of Ontario, we focus on compliance with Ontario's Pay Equity Act, education, and outreach to close the gender wage gap.

The Pay Equity Commission is an Agency of the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development in Ontario, a Ministry that is vital to supporting a vibrant and cared for workforce across the Province.

As we think about the intention behind International Equal Pay Day and move into economic recovery, I think all of us would agree that a significant contributor to an economy's wellbeing is employment. Employment that pays well and offers new opportunity for personal and professional self-actualization.

The "pays well" part is central to our work. We focus on women and work and inequalities that persist in the labour market based on the devaluation of work historically or typically done by women, or worse, work stereotyped as "women's work. Our office addresses this by making sure that work of equal value is compensated for equitably within an organization.

We hope through a series of conversations published at LevelThePayingField.ca you will gain a greater understanding of how discrimination more generally is linked to pay inequity, how common myths about the gender-wage gap enable it to persist, what policy makers, leaders, activists and women globally and here at home are making progress, and how advancements in technology and software may actually help us evolve past constructed inequitable norms and into equality to finally level the paying field.

This conversation is part of a series published by the Pay Equity Commission of Ontario to examine economics, equity, women, work and money. You can learn more at LevelThePayingField.ca. Please share this video on you social platforms like twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn - so we can elevate the equity conversation.

