

Is covid-19 making the workplace more unfair for women?

The Economist, a British international weekly newspaper, November 2020.



It's the law that men and women should be paid the same for doing the same, or similar, jobs. It began with the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and was confirmed in the Equality Act of 2010. However, in 2020 the gender pay gap still exists - women are being paid an average of 15% less than men and research suggests that the covid-19 pandemic might make it worse.

The gap had been narrowing¹. But during lockdown, many families reverted back to the traditional set-up of mothers doing more childcare than fathers. Research shows that the gap between the amount of time men and women spent on childcare grew - with mothers doing around one-and-a-half hours a day more than fathers.

Experts believe that we are at a "coronavirus crossroads": unless more is done to support working mothers, the gender pay gap could widen² too. The Fawcett Society, a gender equality charity, says that the pandemic could have a "devastating" impact on equality in the workplace.

In October, a MP for the Labour Party, Stella Creasy, led the call for change by presenting a new bill³ to parliament. If it is passed, businesses with over 100 employees will have to publish information about how they pay men and women. This would stop businesses from keeping their gender pay gap a secret and may prompt them to fix it if they have one.

"While women first started asking about equal pay in 1883, they still don't have it. We have started the conversation and now we need action," Ms Creasy said. "It is better for everyone in society when we go to work with a fair wage."

The Equal Pay Implementation and Claims Bill will be discussed in Parliament on January 15th, 2021.

¹ To narrow = réduire, limiter

² To widen = s'élargir, s'accroître

³ A bill = A proposal for a new law = un projet de loi

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