

Equal Pay Day 2026: Men are more optimistic about workplace equality than women. But why?

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Progress or perception? New global findings from WIN reveal that while belief in workplace equality is growing, men and women increasingly disagree on how much progress has actually been made.

The **Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WIN)** has released new findings for International Equal Pay Day 2026, revealing that while perceptions of pay equality have improved globally over the past seven years, women remain significantly less likely than men to believe equality has been achieved. Based on the responses from approximately 43,000 people across 43 countries, the research suggests that progress is being recognised unevenly, with women's experiences continuing to paint a more cautious picture.

Global improvement in equality perception hides widening gender divide

Globally, 45% of people now believe men and women earn about the same for the same job, up from 39% in 2019. At the same time, the proportion who believe men earn more has fallen from 50% to 44%, indicating gradual improvement in perceptions of pay equality worldwide. However, beneath the headline figures lies a widening gender divide, with more than half of men (51%) believing pay is equal, compared with just 38% of women. Conversely, a majority of women (51%) believe men still earn more for the same work, compared with only 36% of men. While men's perception of equality has increased considerably by 8% since 2019, women's views have changed only marginally at just 3%, suggesting that we may still have a way to go before we can close the gender pay gap.

The research also finds that concerns extend beyond pay alone. Globally, 40% believe women and men have the same opportunities for career progression, while 42% believe women continue to face fewer opportunities. Once again, perceptions differ sharply by gender: 52% of women feel they are more disadvantaged than men, versus just 32% of men agree – a 20-point gap. This finding illustrates a trend the study has seen since 2021, with men's optimism around career opportunity growing from 42% to 46% this year, and beliefs that 'women have fewer opportunities' dropping by 5-points. The opposite has happened amongst women: perceived equality has barely moved (32% to 34%), and pessimistic views remain essential stagnant (54% to 52%). It's clear that men's outlook on the topic is improving noticeably faster than women's.

A generational and geographic divide in workplace equality

One of the study's most striking findings is that perceptions of equality become less positive with age. Belief in equal pay steadily declines amongst older generations, while women with higher levels of education are increasingly likely to believe men earn more and have greater career opportunities. The findings suggest that greater exposure to the workplace may reinforce perceptions of inequality rather than reduce them.

Regionally, Europe remains the most sceptical market. Just 34% of Europeans believe men and women are paid equally, while 55% believe men earn more for the same work. By contrast, perceptions of equality are highest in Vietnam (81%), Venezuela (79%), the Philippines (77%), Indonesia (68%) and Malaysia (64%) - with Southeast Asian countries taking 4 of the top 5 most optimistic countries from this study. The same pattern occurs in perception of career opportunities: 3 out of 5 countries with the highest equality perception are from Southeast Asia, while 4 of the 5 most critical countries are from Europe.

Richard Colwell, President of WIN International Association, said:

"The findings show that while perceptions of equality are moving in the right direction globally, there remains a substantial gap between how men and women view progress. Equal Pay Day is a reminder that discussions around equality do not end with pay alone. Career opportunities, advancement and lived workplace experiences continue to shape how people assess true workplace equality."

About the research

The findings are based on approximately 43,000 interviews conducted across 43 countries as part of the WIN Worldviews Survey 2026, exploring how people around the world perceive equality in pay and career opportunities, revealing a growing disconnect between overall perceptions of progress and women's lived experiences.

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About WIN

The Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WIN) is a global network of independent market research and polling companies. WIN brings together a number of entrepreneurs and thought leaders in the industry together, to work together to ensure insight driven decisions and innovation bring prosperity to business and society. The network also conducts multi-country

surveys and opinion polls since 2018, with the purpose of measuring people's opinion on current topics, such as gender equality, health, climate change and sustainability.