



# In Focus

## International Women's Day 2017 Debate on 9 March 2017

### Summary

International Women's Day (IWD), which celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women, is marked on 8 March each year. The House of Lords is scheduled to hold a debate to mark the day, focused on the role the UK plays in promoting gender equality globally, on Thursday 9 March 2017. Ahead of the debate, this House of Lords Library briefing provides background information on IWD; summarises the most recent World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index report which ranked the UK twentieth internationally for gender parity; presents a selection of information on the situation in the UK in relation to the four criteria used in the WEF report—economy, education, health and politics; summarises recent government statements on how the UK is working to promote gender equality globally; and recommends sources of further reading on the subject of gender parity, both in the UK and internationally.

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### Background

IWD, which has been marked for over 100 years, emerged from the activities of labour movements in North America and Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Events were held in several European countries in 1911, two years before 8 March was chosen as the global date for IWD—in 1913.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations (UN) first celebrated IWD on 8 March 1975 and began adopting an annual theme in 1996.<sup>3</sup> Today, no one government, NGO, charity, corporation, academic institution, women's network or media hub is solely responsible for IWD, and the day is marked in a great variety of ways worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

The international theme for 2017 is '[Be Bold for Change](#)', which aims to promote the acceleration of gender parity globally.<sup>5</sup> The UN, which marks IWD with its own theme each year, has designated its theme for 2017 as '[Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030](#)'. With this campaign, the UN aims to raise awareness of issues relating to ensuring women's economic empowerment in particular.<sup>6</sup> Other organisations and bodies have also chosen themes this year, for example Manchester City Council is supporting a programme of events as part of its '[Our Manchester Women](#)' festival.

In the UK, IWD is usually marked by a range of events and exhibitions—such as those in Manchester—details of which are available on the [IWD website](#). Since 2008, debates have been held in both Houses of Parliament to recognise IWD and raise issues relating to women in society. Last year, the debate in the House of Lords focused on the progress made in the areas of women's representation and empowerment 150 years after the 1866 petition to the House of Commons for women's suffrage.<sup>7</sup>

## International Situation

In October 2016, the World Economic Forum—an international organisation for public-private cooperation based in Geneva, Switzerland—published the most recent edition of its [Global Gender Gap Index](#). First compiled in 2006 as a “framework for capturing the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress over time”, the Index is an annual benchmarking exercise which measures national gender gaps on economic, education, health and political criteria.<sup>8</sup> The most recent 382-page report found that, on average:

[...] the 144 countries covered in the report have closed 96 percent of the gap in health outcomes between women and men, unchanged since last year, and more than 95 percent of the gap in educational attainment, an improvement of almost one full percentage point since last year and the highest value ever measured by the Index. However, the gaps between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment remain wide: only 59 percent of the economic participation gap has been closed—a continued reversal on several years of progress and the lowest value measured by the Index since 2008—and about 23 percent of the political gap, continuing a trend of slow but steady improvement. Weighted by population, in 2016, the average progress on closing the global gender gap stands at a score of 0.683—meaning an average gap of 31.7 percent remains to be closed worldwide across the four index dimensions in order to achieve universal gender parity.<sup>9</sup>

These figures are illustrated in the table below:

<b>Overall index</b>	<b>68</b>
Economic participation and opportunity subindex	59
Educational attainment subindex	95
Health and survival subindex	96
Political participation subindex	23

(Source: World Economic Forum, ‘[Global Gender Gap Report 2016: Results and Analysis, Country Coverage 2016](#)’, October 2016. Figures are percentage values)

The authors of the report contended that if all things held equal, the overall global gender gap would be closed in a weighted average of 83 years across the 107 countries covered since 2006.<sup>10</sup> This, they noted, is just within the statistical lifetime of girls born today. However, this forecast included the estimated 170 years it would take to eliminate the economic gender gap and the 10 years or fewer in which the education gender gap could be phased out. In respect of the economic gender gap, the authors noted that the 170-year estimate for parity—meaning global equality in the workplace would not be reached until 2186—represented a “dramatic slowdown in progress”.<sup>11</sup> The authors also estimated that, should current trends continue, the political participation gender gap would be closed in 83 years.

Across the four criteria measured in the report, the five top-ranked countries comprised Iceland, in first place, followed by Finland (2), Norway (3), Sweden (4) and Rwanda (5).<sup>12</sup> The UK ranked in twentieth place, behind Denmark (19) and ahead of Mozambique (21). At the bottom of the table, Yemen ranked in last place (144), behind Pakistan (143), Syria (142), Saudi Arabia (141) and Chad (140). The UK’s ranking in twentieth place out of 144 countries for gender parity across the four areas—economy, education, health and politics—represented a fall from the country’s position as compared with 2006, when the UK was ranked ninth out of 115 countries.<sup>13</sup> In the latest edition of the report, the UK was

ranked fifty-third for ‘economic participation and opportunity’; thirty-fourth for ‘educational attainment’; sixty-fourth for ‘health and survival’; and twenty-fourth for ‘political empowerment’. These rankings represented a fall across all four scoring criteria from the UK’s positions ten years ago.

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## United Kingdom

### Economy

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has estimated that in April last year, the gender pay gap (for median earnings, excluding overtime) for full-time employees was 9.4 percent, a decrease from the 9.6 percent recorded in 2015.<sup>14</sup> When part-time employees were included, the gender pay gap was 18.1 percent, a decrease from 19.3 percent estimated in 2015 and the largest year-on-year drop since 2010. According to research by McKinsey and Company—a consultancy firm—eliminating this gender pay gap could add an extra £150 billion to UK GDP by 2025, and could translate into 840,000 additional female employees.<sup>15</sup> The Government cited this estimate in documentation relating to the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, which the House approved on 24 January 2017.<sup>16</sup> The regulations, scheduled to come into force on 6 April 2017, will require employers with at least 250 employees to publish annual information to show whether there is a difference in the average pay of their male and female employees.<sup>17</sup> The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, which were considered in Grand Committee on 28 February 2017, would introduce gender pay gap reporting requirements on certain public authorities.<sup>18</sup> These Regulations were approved on 2 March 2017.

Companies listed on the FTSE 100 reached the target of having 25 percent of their board positions filled by women in 2015.<sup>19</sup> The Government has since supported the setting of a voluntary target for such companies to have 33 percent of their ‘executive pipeline’ positions filled by women by 2020.<sup>20</sup> According to the Professional Boards Forum’s ‘BoardWatch’ index, 24 companies on the FTSE 100 have 33 percent or more women directors (24 percent); 46 companies on the FTSE 250 have 33 percent or more women directors (18.4 percent); and 70 companies on the FTSE 350 have 33 percent or more women directors (20 percent).<sup>21</sup> The same index notes that 12 companies on the FTSE 250 have all-male boards (4.8 percent), a fall from the 17 companies with such boards (6.8 percent) as at February 2016.

### Education

According to the Department for Education, girls continue to do better than boys at the early years foundation stage of education (from birth to five years old), but the gender gap has decreased from a year before.<sup>22</sup> In 2016, 75.4 percent of girls achieved at least the expected level in all early learning goals compared to 59.7 percent of boys (a gap of 15.7 percentage points). This compares with 72.6 percent of girls and 56 percent of boys achieving this level in 2015 (a gap of 16.6 percentage points).<sup>23</sup>

By the end of primary education—when students are typically age 11—the gender gap in the expected standard for reading, writing and mathematics was 8 percentage points in favour of girls, calculated from unrounded figures, with a rounded 57 percent of girls achieving the expected standard compared with a rounded 50 percent of boys in 2016. In the same period, a rounded 6 percent of girls achieved the higher standard for reading, writing and mathematics compared with a rounded 5 percent of boys—a gap of 2 percentage points calculated using unrounded figures.<sup>24</sup>

At GCSE level, girls continued to do better than boys in the most recent period for which data is available. In terms of attainment in English and Maths, 67 percent of girls and 59 percent of boys gained grades between A\* and C.<sup>25</sup>

## Health

The ONS has calculated that a new-born baby boy could expect to live 79.2 years and a new-born baby girl 82.9 years if mortality rates remain the same as they were in the UK between 2013 and 2015 throughout their lives, a gap of 3.7 years.<sup>26</sup> According to the same source, baby boys can expect to live 63.1 years in good health, 0.8 years lower than baby girls, if they experienced the same health status rates as observed between 2013 and 2015. However, men live a higher proportion of their lives in good health and disability-free as compared with women due to the difference in life expectancy between the two genders.

The Mental Health Foundation—a charity—has noted that, in England, women are more likely than men to have a common mental health problem and are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders.<sup>27</sup> It has also noted that 78 percent of the 6,233 suicides recorded in the UK for people aged 15 and older in 2013 were committed by males; 10 percent of mothers and 6 percent of fathers in the UK have mental health problems at any given time; and 19.1 percent of women and 12.2 percent of men in England had symptoms of common mental disorders. This last statistic was sourced from the results of the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014, which also found that women were more likely than men to have severe symptoms of common mental disorders.<sup>28</sup>

## Politics

The current head of state (HM Queen Elizabeth II) and Prime Minister (Theresa May) are both women. Of the 23 positions in the Cabinet, eight are held by women (34.8 percent).<sup>29</sup> In Parliament, 196 of the 649 MPs in the House of Commons are women (30.2 percent); while 207 of the 804 Members of the House of Lords eligible to participate in proceedings are women (25.7 percent).<sup>30</sup> In Scotland, 45 of the 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament are women (34.9 percent); 25 of the 60 Members of the National Assembly for Wales are women (41.7 percent); and 30 of the 108 Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly elected in 2016 were women (38.5 percent).<sup>31</sup> In addition, 30 of the 73 Members of the European Parliament elected from the UK in 2014 were women (41 percent); 10 of the 25 Members of the London Assembly are women (40 percent); and 8 of the 40 Police and Crime Commissioners elected in England and Wales in 2016 were women (20 percent).<sup>32</sup>

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## Role of the UK in Promoting Gender Equality Globally

The Conservative Party committed to promote gender equality globally in its manifesto launched ahead of the general election held in 2015.<sup>33</sup> Since then, the Government has undertaken a variety of activities relating to this commitment—details of which can be found via the [women and girls in developing countries](#) and [sexual violence in conflict](#) policy pages of the Government's website.

Most recently, on 27 February 2017, the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, announced at an event held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that Joanna Roper would serve as the first Foreign and Commonwealth Office Special Envoy for Gender Equality.<sup>34</sup> In this role, Ms Roper will lead the FCO's work relating to the rights of women and girls and will be charged with helping to deliver a “more robust and coherent approach to promoting gender equality at country and international level”.<sup>35</sup> Ms Roper has featured in an [FCO video](#) in which she commented on her new role, stating that gender inequality was “still too common” and that the “barriers that hold women back” must be broken down.<sup>36</sup>

On 28 February 2017, following a visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the International Development Secretary, Priti Patel, welcomed the progress Afghanistan has made on women's rights and girls' education but warned that countries could only achieve security and prosperity if women had the

opportunity to play a full and active role in business, politics, peacebuilding and shaping the future of their country.<sup>37</sup> Following her visit, Ms Patel stated: “women and girls are key to delivering real and lasting peace and stability in countries like Afghanistan—and that is clearly in the UK’s interests as well”.

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## Further Information

House of Lords Library briefings:

- [International Women’s Day 2016](#), 15 February 2016
- [Women’s Economic Empowerment](#), 27 February 2015
- [Debate on 6 March: The Contribution of Women to the Economy of the UK, to Mark International Women’s Day](#), 3 March 2014

House of Commons Library briefings:

- [Women and the Economy](#), 1 March 2017
  - [Women Around the World: International Women’s Day 2017](#), 27 February 2017
  - [Women in Parliament and Government](#), 27 February 2017
  - [Women Members of Parliament: Background Paper](#), 24 February 2017
  - [Gender Pay Gap](#), 27 October 2016
  - [Diversity in the UK’s Democratic Institutions](#), 28 September 2016
  - [Diversity in Broadcasting](#), 12 April 2016
  - [All-women Shortlists](#), 7 March 2016
  - [Women in Combat](#), 4 March 2016
  - [Women Around the World: International Women’s Day 2016](#), 22 February 2016
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<sup>1</sup> UN Women, ‘[International Women’s Day 2016](#)’, accessed 27 February 2017.

<sup>2</sup> International Women’s Day, ‘[About International Women’s Day \(8 March\)](#)’, accessed 27 February 2017. This page contains a timeline providing further information on the development of International Women’s Day.

<sup>3</sup> UN Women, ‘[International Women’s Day 2016](#)’, accessed 27 February 2017.

<sup>4</sup> International Women’s Day, ‘[About International Women’s Day \(8 March\)](#)’, accessed 27 February 2017.

<sup>5</sup> International Women’s Day, ‘[IWD 2017 Campaign Theme: #BeBoldForChange](#)’, accessed 27 February 2017.

<sup>6</sup> UN Women, ‘[International Women’s Day 2017](#)’, accessed 27 February 2017.

<sup>7</sup> [HL Hansard, 7 March 2016, cols 1100–52](#).

<sup>8</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘[Global Gender Gap Report 2016](#)’, October 2016.

<sup>9</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘[Global Gender Gap Report 2016: Results and Analysis, Country Coverage 2016](#)’, October 2016.

<sup>10</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘[Global Gender Gap Report 2016](#)’, October 2016.

<sup>11</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘[Beyond Our Lifetimes: Prospects for Workplace Gender Equality Slip to 2186](#)’, October 2016.

<sup>12</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘[Global Gender Gap Report 2016: Results and Analysis, Country Coverage 2016](#)’, October 2016.

<sup>13</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘[Global Gender Gap Report 2016: United Kingdom](#)’, October 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Office for National Statistics, ‘[Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: 2016 Provisional Results—Gender Pay Differences](#)’, 26 October 2016.

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- <sup>15</sup> Government Equalities Office, [Mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting](#), December 2016, p 3; and McKinsey and Company, [‘Power of Parity: Advancing Women’s Equality in the United Kingdom’](#), September 2016.
- <sup>16</sup> [HL Hansard, 24 January 2017, cols 633–7.](#)
- <sup>17</sup> Department for Education, [Explanatory Memorandum: Equality Act 2010 \(Gender Pay Gap Information\) Regulations 2017](#), 17 February 2017, p 1.
- <sup>18</sup> [HL Hansard, 28 February 2017, cols 199–208GC](#); and Department for Education, [Draft Explanatory Memorandum to the Equality Act 2010 \(Specific Duties and Public Authorities\) Regulations 2017](#), 18 January 2017, p 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Hampton-Alexander Review, [FTSE Women Leaders](#), November 2016, p 9.
- <sup>20</sup> Government Equalities Office and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [‘FTSE 100 Executive Pipeline Needs More Women, Say Top Business Bosses’](#), 8 November 2016.
- <sup>21</sup> Professional Boards Forum, [‘BoardWatch’](#), accessed 28 February 2017.
- <sup>22</sup> Department for Education, [Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Results in England, 2016](#), 20 October 2016, p 1.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Department for Education, [National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England, 2016 \(Revised\)](#), 15 December 2016, p 16.
- <sup>25</sup> Department for Education, [‘Revised GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2015 to 2016’](#), 19 January 2017, p 24.
- <sup>26</sup> Office for National Statistics, [‘Health State Life Expectancies, UK: 2013 to 2015—Main Points’](#), 29 November 2016.
- <sup>27</sup> Mental Health Foundation, [‘Mental Health Statistics: Men and Women’](#), accessed 28 February 2017.
- <sup>28</sup> NHS Digital, [Mental Health and Wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014](#), 29 September 2016, p 44.
- <sup>29</sup> HM Government, [‘Cabinet Ministers’](#), accessed 27 February 2017.
- <sup>30</sup> UK Parliament, [‘Lords by Party, Type of Peerage and Gender’](#), accessed 1 March 2017.
- <sup>31</sup> Scottish Parliament, [‘Current MSPs’](#), accessed 27 February 2017; National Assembly for Wales, [‘Your Assembly Members’](#), accessed 27 February 2017; and Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, [Election Report: Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 5 May 2016](#), 12 May 2016, p 3.
- <sup>32</sup> European Parliament, [‘Men and Women Distribution’](#), accessed 28 February 2017; House of Commons Library, [European Parliament Elections 2014](#), 11 June 2014, p 31; London Assembly, [‘Assembly Members’](#), accessed 28 February 2017; and House of Commons Library, [Police and Crime Commissioner Elections: 2016](#), 19 May 2016, p 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Conservative Party, [Manifesto 2015](#), April 2015, pp 78–9.
- <sup>34</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [‘Foreign Secretary Announces New Foreign and Commonwealth Office Special Envoy for Gender Equality’](#), 28 February 2017.
- <sup>35</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [‘Joanna Roper CMG’](#), accessed 1 March 2017.
- <sup>36</sup> YouTube, [‘FCO: Joanna Roper, Foreign Office Special Envoy for Gender Equality’](#), 28 February 2017.
- <sup>37</sup> Department for International Development, [‘Patel: Women are Key to Building Post-conflict Stability’](#), 28 February 2017.

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