



Advocacy Update

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On International Women's Day, Step it Up for Pay Equity!

March is a very exciting month for women. **Not only is it [Women's History Month](#), but today, March 8th, people all around the world are celebrating [International Women's Day](#).** International Women's Day is a time to reflect on the progress that has been made, call for further change and improvements, and celebrate acts of courage and determination by women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities. The day first arose in the context of North American and European labor movements at the turn of the 20th century. Since then, International Women's Day has taken on a new, more global dimension and is celebrated in both developed and developing countries. [Learn more about the chronology of International Women's Day.](#)

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it Up for Gender Equality." This theme asks us to consider how to accelerate two particular goals out of the 17 illustrated in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#): to [achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls](#) and to [ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning](#).

Core aspects of these goals include:

- Ensuring that all girls and boys receive and complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education.
- Ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education.
- Ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- Eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- Eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

[Learn more about the 17 different sustainable development goals.](#)

As we focus on women and girls internationally, it is also important to remember that **there is still work that needs to be done to end discrimination against women living in North America.** One issue of particular concern to WRJ is [women's pay equity](#).

Last fall, [new data was released by the U.S. Census Bureau](#) announcing women are only paid 79 cents for every dollar paid to men. At this rate, women will not reach full pay equity until the year 2059. The wage gap is even greater for women of color: African American women are paid only 60 cents and Latinas are paid a mere 55 cents for every dollar paid to white men. Pay equity also varies by state, ranging from 65 cents for every dollar in Louisiana to 90 cents for every dollar in Washington D.C. [See the gender wage gap in your state.](#)

Women's pay equity is a problem that affects us all, because when a woman loses income, not only does her economic security diminish, but also that of her family. Women are the heads of more than 15 million American households, and around 30 percent of those households have incomes that fall below the poverty line. Decreasing the wage gap and achieving pay equity for women would mean that fewer families would live their lives in poverty, and would ensure a better future for millions of children.

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This is why it is so important that legislation be passed to provide effective protection against sex-based pay discrimination. The Paycheck Fairness Act ([H.R. 1619/S.862](#)) is a bill that would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and would allow women in the United States to receive the same remedies in court for pay discrimination as those subjected to discrimination based on race or national origin.

Pay equity is also a Canadian social justice issue. Even though women now account for roughly half of the Canadian workforce, [the gender pay gap in Ontario is 31.5%](#), which is one of the largest reported gaps in the world. Of the ten provinces, six have pay equity laws: Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Each law is slightly different and applies to different people. For example, Manitoba's law applies only to public employees, as does New Brunswick's law and Prince Edward Island's law. Quebec's law covers public employees and private, and Nova Scotia's covers all public and some workers employed by corporations. Similar to the United States, although specific legislation exists to combat wage discrimination, the persistent gap between men's and women's salaries indicates that action is still needed.

The [Pay Equity Task Force Recommendations Act \(C-389\)](#) would require the Canadian government to implement the recommendations of the task force report "[Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right](#)," which was issued in May 2004. Recommendations include: creation of a new Canadian Pay Equity Commission, a Canadian Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal, a pay equity adjudication system, advocacy services, and a deeper commitment to research.

Within your sisterhood, there is also so much that can be done to help educate and improve the lives of women in your congregation and local community:

At the [WRJ Assembly 2015](#) in Orlando, FL, after [hearing from WRJ Jane Evans "Pursuit of Justice" Award winner and equal pay advocate Lilly Ledbetter](#), our members [passed a resolution on women's pay equity](#). This was in addition to resolutions on [paid family and medical leave](#) and [distracted driving](#). Earlier this winter, we published a new [programming and advocacy guide](#) on all three of these resolutions to help your sisterhood take the resolutions from the Assembly and put them into action. It has program ideas and advocacy suggestions to involve your members in our newest areas of social action.

Here are some additional things you can do to help women in North America achieve pay equity in honor of International Women's Day:

- **Mentor female colleagues:** By mentoring women entering the workforce, we can share our experiences to help them strengthen key skills and expand their professional networks. Mentorships can benefit women of all ages, helping them to improve negotiating skills and to learn ways to navigate biases against women who negotiate.
- **Research your congregation's policies on employee compensation:** WRJ women can take the lead in their communities by ensuring their congregations examine their own paycheck fairness, and they can extend that investigation into other, local Jewish institutions. Develop a plan to investigate your congregational practices and address any inequities you uncover.