

International Women's Day

March 8 is International Women's Day, but the global campaigns for equal rights for women continue all year round. Read more about it in this article.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercise.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. equality
2. a march
3. a leadership role
4. harassment
5. a strike
6. inequality
7. momentum
8. to campaign

Definition

- a. an event in which a large number of people walk through a public space
- b. the force that keeps something moving
- c. repeated annoying, unpleasant or aggressive behaviour towards someone
- d. having the same rights, opportunities or social status between groups of people
- e. difference in wealth, opportunity or social status between people or groups
- f. to organise a series of activities to try to achieve something
- g. a protest in which workers stop working
- h. a position in which someone is responsible for managing a group of people or an organisation

International Women's Day

International Women's Day on 8 March is a day to celebrate the social, economic and political achievements of women, reflect on progress and demand gender equality. For over a hundred years, International Women's Day has put the spotlight onto issues affecting women all over the world. Today, International Women's Day belongs to everyone who believes that women's rights are human rights.

Why do we need an International Women's Day?

In recent years, progress has been made towards gender equality. There are now more women in leadership roles, politics, business and science than ever before. Many countries have introduced laws to support equal pay and protect women's rights at work and at home. These changes have happened because people have raised awareness, campaigned and taken action.

However, inequalities still exist, and even in the world's wealthiest countries, women and men do not have equal opportunities. Most countries are still led by men, and women continue to be under-represented in senior positions in business and government. Globally, women earn less than men on average for the same work – a difference known as the gender pay gap. Women are also more likely to take on unpaid responsibilities such as housework and childcare.

In many parts of the world, women have less access to good-quality education and healthcare than men. Access to reproductive care varies widely between countries. Although maternal health has improved in many areas, women in lower-income regions still face serious risks during pregnancy and childbirth. Violence against women remains widespread, with domestic violence and harmful practices affecting millions of women and girls worldwide.

International Women's Day is a chance to celebrate women's achievements and recognise how far things have come. But it is also a reminder that continued progress depends on effort and awareness.

The history of Women's Day

In 1908, 15,000 women in New York went on strike because of low pay and terrible conditions in the factories where they worked. The following year, the Socialist Party of America organised a National Women's Day, and one year after that, there was a conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, about equality and women's right to vote. In Europe, the idea grew and became International Women's Day (IWD) for the first time in 1911 and the United Nations declared 8 March International Women's Day in 1975.

What happens on 8 March?

In some countries, children and men give presents, flowers or cards to their mothers, wives, sisters or other women they know. But at the heart of International Women's Day lies women's rights. Across the world, there are protests and events to demand equality. Many women wear purple, a colour worn by women who campaigned for women's right to vote. Recently, marches and protests have gained force thanks to the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements against sexual harassment. There is still a lot of work to be done for gender equality. But women's movements all over the world are ready to do that work and are gaining momentum.

What are you going to do to celebrate or demand change on 8 March?

Tasks

Task 1

Choose the correct answer.

1. How long has Women's Day been celebrated?
 - a. Less than 50 years
 - b. Less than 100 years
 - c. More than 100 years
 - d. More than 200 years
2. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Women are equally represented in senior positions.
 - b. Women are still under-represented in senior positions.
 - c. Gender equality exists in the world's richest countries.
 - d. None of the above
3. What signs are there that, globally, women still do not have real equality?
 - a. On average, men and women don't get equal pay for the same work.
 - b. Women are more likely to do unpaid work like housework and childcare.
 - c. Millions of women suffer from domestic violence and harmful practices.
 - d. All of the above
4. What did women NOT protest about in 1908 in New York?
 - a. Low pay
 - b. Bad working conditions
 - c. The right to vote
 - d. None of the above
5. What was the focus of the conference in Copenhagen in 1910?
 - a. Bad working conditions
 - b. Low pay
 - c. Sexual harassment
 - d. The right to vote
6. What colour is associated with IWD?
 - a. Purple
 - b. Pink
 - c. Black
 - d. White

Discussion

How have things changed for women in your country? What still needs to change?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. a
3. h
4. c
5. g
6. e
7. b
8. f

Task 1

1. c
2. b
3. d
4. c
5. d
6. a