The Generational Wage Gap: Pay Equity Decades Away for Women Overall, Centuries Away for Women of Color

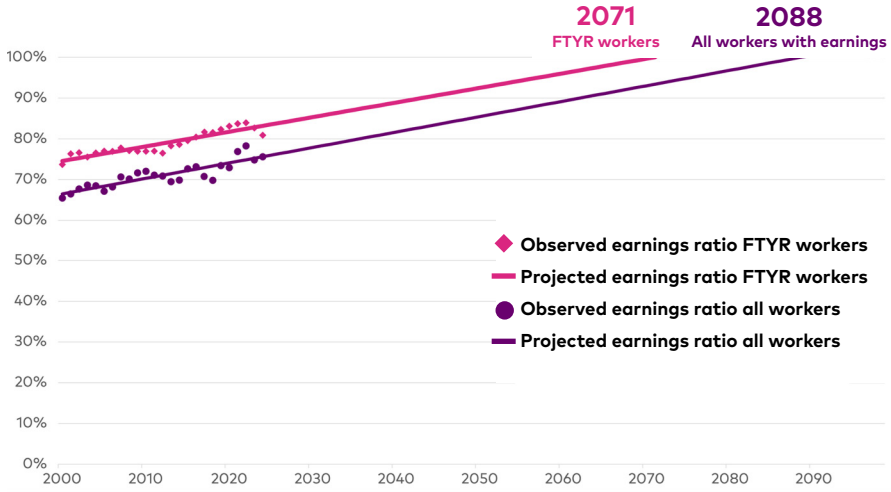
Since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, women have made incremental gains toward achieving pay equity. However, this progress largely stalled in the mid-1990s and has remained stagnant since the 2000s.[1] If progress toward closing the gender earnings gap continues at the same pace as it has since 2000,[2] **it will take more than four decades—until 2071—for women working full-time year-round** to reach pay equity with men, and **even longer—until 2088—to reach pay equity between all working women and men** (Figure 1).

The gender wage gap for women working full-time year-round rose to 19.1 percent in 2024, increasing for the second consecutive year,[3] and pushing the projected year for gender equal pay an additional three years into the future.[4] **This means most women in the workforce today will not see pay equity in their lifetimes.** We need accelerated action to close the gender pay gap and guarantee pay equity for future generations of women entering the workforce.

For women of color, pay equity is a dream deferred even longer. Not only is the gender wage gap in earnings compared to White men[5] starker for Latina and Black women,[6] but the rate of progress in closing that gap is also slower. If progress continues at the same rate as it has since 2002, **it will take more than a century for Latina and Black women—until 2160 and 2183, respectively—to reach pay equity with White men**, even when working full-time year-round (Figure 2a).

For American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women, progress is slower still. The rate of progress since 2006[7] predicts that it will take more than 350 years—until 2393—for AI/AN women to earn the same as White men, even when working full-time year-round (Figure 2a). **More than 11 generations[8] of AI/AN women will need to work full-time year-round before reaching pay parity with White men.**

Figure 1. Forecast for Achieving Pay Equity for Women: Full-Time Year-Round and All Workers with Earnings, 2000–2024



Source: IWPR calculations based on Melissa Kollar and Zach Scherer, "Table A-7. Number and Real Median Earnings of Total Workers and Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Sex and Female-to-Male Earnings Ratio: 1960 to 2024," *Income in the United Sates: 2024* (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2025), https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2025/demo/p60-286.pdf.
Notes: Estimates are based on the ratios of median annual earnings of all women and men with earnings (whether they work full-time, full-year, part-time, or part-year) and of full-time year-round women and men workers aged 15 years or older, from 2000 to 2024. Full-time is defined as working at least 35 hours per week, and year-round as working at least 50 weeks per year.

If progress continues at the same rate as it has since 2002, it will take until 2178 for Latina women, 2214 for AI/AN women, and 2224 for Black women to close the earnings gap with White men for all with earnings (including full-time, part-time, full-year, and part-year workers; see Figure 2b). **These projections are not only well past the careers of women in the workforce today, but also those of their daughters, granddaughters, great-granddaughters, and great-great-granddaughters.**

In contrast, Asian and White women are on course to achieve pay equity sooner—by 2028 and 2076, respectively, for full-time year-round workers (Figure 2a), and by 2045 and 2075, respectively, for all Asian and White women with earnings (Figure 2b).

Figure 2a. Number of Generations It Will Take to Reach Pay Equity for Women Working Full-Time Year-Round, by Race/Ethnicity

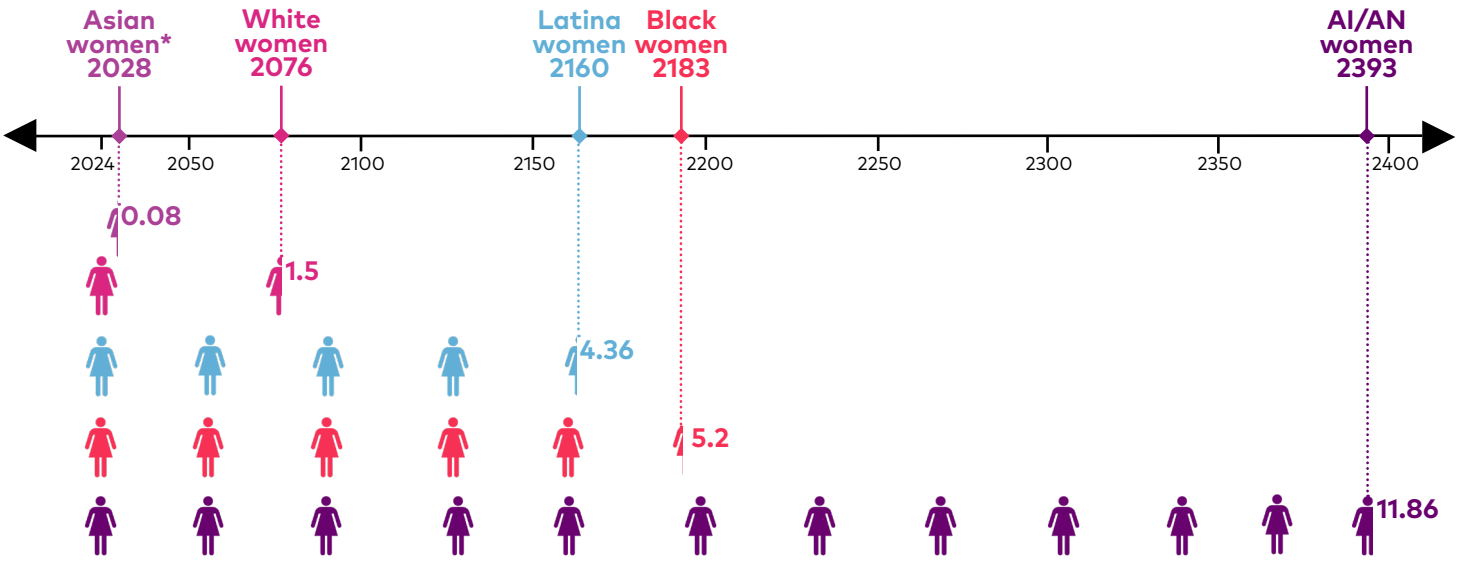


Figure 2b. Number of Generations It Will Take to Reach Pay Equity for All Women Workers, by Race/Ethnicity

Source: IWPR calculations of the US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2025, "Historical Income Tables: Table P-38. Full-time, year-round workers by Median Earnings and Sex," accessed September 9, 2025, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html, and US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2025, "Historical Income Tables: Table P-41. Work Experience—Workers by Median Earnings and Sex," accessed September 9, 2025, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html. IWPR calculations for AI/AN women for past years are from American Community Survey microdata 2002–2023, as made available by Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood,

Matthew Sobek, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Renae Rodgers, and Megan Schouweiler, IPUMS USA: Version 15.0 (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025), https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0. For 2024 numbers, due to the government shutdown between October 1, 2025, and November 12, 2025, making Census data inaccessible, we use the values for the gender earnings gap calculated by Sara Estep at the Center for American Progress using the Equal Pay Today methodology with 1-year American Community Survey data summary tables B20017C and B20017H on data.census.gov, and shared with IWPR on September 11, 2025.
Notes: To calculate the number of generations for each group, we base the average career of a woman to be 45 years, with her child entering the workforce 30 years after she does. So, starting in 2024 with the first generation, a woman enters the workforce at age 20, has a child at age 30, and retires at age 65. The second generation begins when this child enters the workforce at age 20 in 2054, and so on. Estimates are based on the ratios of median annual earnings of women of each race/ethnicity category and White alone, not Hispanic men for all workers with earnings (whether they work full-time, full-year, part-time, or part-year) and for full-time year-round workers aged 15 years or older. Full-time is defined as working at least 35 hours per week, and year-round as working at least 50 weeks per year. We define the race/ethnicity categories for women as White alone, not Hispanic; Black alone; Asian alone; Hispanic/Latina(o) (may be of any race), and American Indian and Alaska Native alone, not Hispanic.
*We report Asian alone here rather than Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI); in 2023, the gender earnings ratio for AANHPI women compared to White men was 92.9 percent for FTYR workers and 80.4 percent for all workers with earnings.[9]

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Endnotes

1. Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, "The US gender pay gap in the 1990s: Slowing convergence," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 60, no. 1 (2006): 45-6, https://doi.org/10.1177/001979390606000103.

2. Our latest projections estimate when the wage gap will close for women working full-time year-round and for all earners using data from 2000 onward to capture the newest trend in earnings ratios between women and White men. Our projections by race and ethnicity are based on data starting in 2002 to incorporate the most recent racial and ethnic categories available in Census data.

3. Ariane Hegewisch, Miranda Peterson, and Mrinmoyee Chatterjee, "Gender Wage Gap Worsens for Second Year in a Row," IWPR fact sheet #C536 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2025), https://iwpr.org/iwprs-new-national-annual-womens-wage-gap-analysis-shows-second-consecutive-year-of-decline/.

4. Martha Susana Jaimes, Cristy Mendoza, and Ariane Hegewisch, "Forecasting Pay Equity: Women Are Expected to Wait over 50 Years to Reach Parity with Men," IWPR Quick Figure #Q112 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2024), https://iwpr.org/women-are-expected-to-wait-over-50-years-to-reach-parity-with-men/.

5. In this fact sheet, White men and women are defined as White, non-Hispanic.

6. Hegewisch et al., "Gender Wage Gap Worsens."

7. Projections for American Indian and Alaska Native women relative to White men working full-time year-round are based on data starting in 2006, as earlier estimates from 2002 to 2005 showed significant volatility for this group.

8. To calculate the number of generations for each group, we base the average career of a woman to be 45 years, with her child entering the workforce 30 years after she does. So, starting in 2024 with the first generation, a woman enters the workforce at age 20, has a child at age 30, and retires at age 65. The second generation begins when this child enters the workforce at age 20 in 2054, and so on.

9. Melissa Holly Mahoney, Cristy Mendoza, and Miranda Peterson, "Breaking Barriers: Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Women and the Fight for Equal Pay," IWPR fact sheet #C533 (Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2025), https://iwpr.org/breaking-barriers-asian-american-native-hawaiian-and-pacific-islander-women-and-the-fight-for-equal-pay/.