

Recognizing International Women's Day



Why do so many nations recognize International Women's Day? The short answer is: to promote gender equality around the world.

In fact, gender equality doesn't exist anywhere in the world. From a global perspective, women continue to face discrimination and unfair treatment – legally, economically, educationally, socially and even in access to basic health care. Consider these realities:

- Only 10% of the world's heads of states are women.
- Women have only two-thirds the legal rights of men.
- The gender pay gap is 20%, meaning that, on average, women earn 20% less than men.
- 33% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence.
- A woman or girl is killed by a family member every 11 minutes.
- 800 women die daily from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

While these statistics highlight global issues, the challenges and injustices women face daily are real and vary greatly, affecting individual women differently across the world.

International Women's Day serves as a demand for women's rights and a call to action for individuals, communities and organizations. From celebrating women's achievements to advocating for justice through grassroots efforts and protests, the day aims to inspire change and progress.



March 8

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International Women's Day

International Women’s Day was first held in March 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, and the United Nations officially recognized it in 1977. The day’s origins, however, go back even further, with grassroots movements fighting for women’s rights. Although some accounts vary, the United Nations traces the roots of International Women’s Day to activities in the United States in the mid-1800s. After being barred from speaking at an anti-slavery convention, a group of women in New York organized the first women’s rights convention in 1848, focusing on civil, social, political and religious rights. Decades later, a strike among women garment workers in New York helped propel the movement forward, with the Socialist Party of America observing the first National Women’s Day in 1908.

From there, the women’s rights movement gained momentum in Europe and Russia through various coalitions and events. In Europe, 100 delegates representing 17 European nations agreed at the International Socialist Women’s Conference in Copenhagen to create a “Women’s Day” to promote women’s rights.

In Russia, a series of labor strikes and anti-war protests by women in the 1910s led to a pivotal moment in 1917 during the Russian Revolution. On March 8, women fought for – and won – the right to vote.

Accelerate Action

Today, UN Women, an entity within the United Nations dedicated to gender equality and empowerment, chooses the theme for International Women’s Day. This year’s theme, Accelerate Action, emphasizes the need to act quickly and decisively to tackle the barriers and biases women face in their personal and professional lives worldwide. Key areas of focus include:

- Better legal protections for women
- Equal pay for the same work
- Equal access to quality education
- More women in politics and leadership roles
- Challenging harmful gender stereotypes and social norms

While much progress has been made since the historical origins of the day, the women’s rights movement still has a long way to go. At the current rate of progress, experts estimate it will take more than 130 more years to achieve gender equality worldwide.

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Get involved

You can help make a difference. Read “Empower the women in your life” in this month’s toolkit for some ways you can get started.



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