

## Opinion

# Purplewashing and Gender Parity: Break the Bias

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**Abstract:** Gender parity, is an important standard to be achieved by a society in which men and women are treated equally. The distinctions in the treatment may arise from psychology, biology, or cultural norms constructed by society. Studies show the different experiences of genders across many areas including health, education, personality, life expectancy, sports, interests, political empowerment, and careers. However, we are still far from reaching the objective, because there are conducts such as gender discrimination and expressions such as the purplewashing. In relation to feminism, purplewashing is used to define a diversity of marketing and political strategies intended at promoting people, companies, associations, and other organizations through an appeal to gender equality: they use only some of the feminist values at their convenience and in its actions, they are not really supportive of gender equality. In this opinion we aimed to address some of the reasons for inequality of opportunities based on gender; purplewashing is described as an expression that takes away the visibility of women's struggle. Additionally, we touch on some actions that promote gender equality in the family, educational, and work environments. Global leaders have an unprecedented opportunity to build gender-sensitive societies and economies. The challenges facing women today are essentially the same as they were a long time ago. It is time to break the bias.

**Keywords:** Purplewashing; gender equality; quality of life for women; International Women's Day.

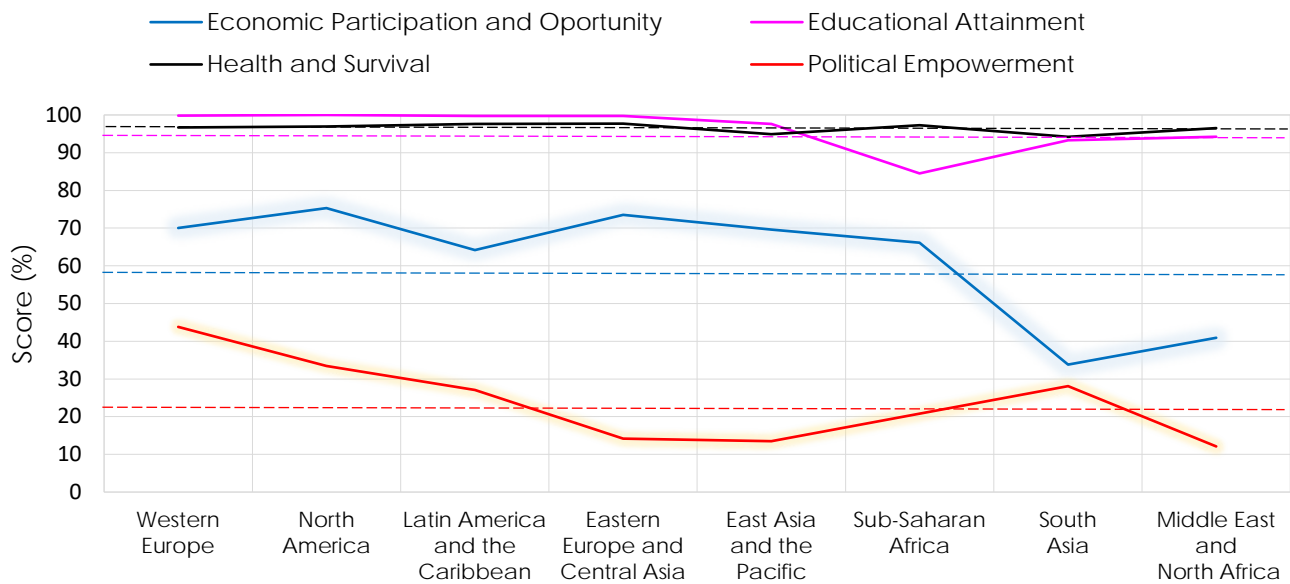
## 1. Introduction

The entire participation covered by conditions of parity of women in social, cultural, civil, political, and economic life, at the local, regional, national, and international levels, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on sex, are priority objectives of the international community. All those women's rights were recognized in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action since 1993 [1]. However, almost 30 years after, there are no woman that in one moment of her life can experience how difficult it is to deal daily with the inequalities that being a woman represents in a system where the rules have been made and are executed mainly by and in favor of men.

### 1.1. Gender parity: a global context

Gender parity concerns relative to equal opportunities in terms of proportions and numbers of men and women, boys and girls, is often calculated as the ratio of female-to-male values for a disposed indicator. The World Economic Forum (WEF), published the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, which analyzes the evolution of the gap in gender parity since 2006, considering four key dimensions: political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, and educational attainment. The 2021 WEF report showed that globally, the average distance completed to parity is at 68%, which represents -0.6% points less than 2020. From 156 countries analyzed, the top 5 most gender-equal country includes Iceland, Finland, Norway, New Zealand, and Sweden. Only two gaps tracked (Educational Attainment and Health and Survival), are close to gender parity with more than 95% of the gender gap closed. The gender gap in Political Empowerment

continues being the largest of the four with 22% closed (Figure 1). On its present trajectory, it will take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide [2].



**Figure 1.** Regional description of the global gender gap index 2021 by sub-index. Four sub-indexes: political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, and educational attainment. The plot show population-weighted averages for the 156 economies included. Dotted lines represent the global average for each sub-index. The highest possible score is 100% and the lowest 0% (0 - 1.0). Data source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index, 2021.

In Mexico, the Political Empowerment score fell 4 places to 18<sup>th</sup> position in the sub-index ranking. The proportion of women in ministerial and in parliament positions remain at 42.1% and 48.2%, respectively (as of 2019), and Mexico has never had a female head of state. In the same way, a pressing priority for Mexico is to boost women's Economic Participation and Opportunity, where only 59% of the gender gap has been closed to date, ranking the economy 122<sup>nd</sup> globally [2].

1. 2. *International Women’s Day*

The fight for gender parity and the science, social, culture, art, political, and economic achievements of women are memorialized in the International Women's Day (IWD), a large-scale global collective action commemorated annually on March 8, since 1911 [3]. The IWD directs the spotlight to important issues such as women's rights related to health, reproduction, gender equality, non-discrimination, zero tolerance of violence, and the fight against sexism, among others [4]. In this year, under the theme “Break the Bias”, women call for action to break the bias in communities, workplaces, schools, colleges, and universities. Is time to recognize that without gender equality a sustainable future remains out of reach [5].

1.3. *Purplewashing: a well know expression form of patriarchal culture*

There are several actions and politics-focused to close gender gaps and they differ by each country [6]. However, because we are still far from reaching the objective, IWD issues a call to action for accelerating gender parity, with significant activities done mostly by women, to celebrate women's achievements or rally for women's equality. In recent years, the fight of women for gender parity, mainly through the IWD, has been targeted by the patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is a structure of ideology, relationships, and conduct embedded in social, economic, and political systems that construct gender inequality between men and women [7]. Patriarchal relations configure both the public and private spheres, guaranteeing that men dominate both. As an analytical tool, patriarchy has been considered as too generalized and universalizing in its conception of the uneven relations between men and women. One of the well know of expressed form of patriarchal culture

is through the Purplewashing, a word compound by the prefix “purple” which is associated with feminism, and the verb “wash” as a reference to the embrace procedures that use minority rights to preserve or enhance structural forms of discrimination [8]. In relation to feminism, purplewashing is used to define a diversity of marketing and political strategies intended at promoting people, companies, associations, and other organizations through an appeal to gender equality [9]. The popularization of the fights has meant a fragmentation of the unit in which each movement focuses solely on its own subject. And the neoliberal elites use this division for their own interests [10].

Capitalism has been able to take in feminist, anti-racist, or ecologist discourses, saving from them the least problematic elements for neoliberal development, distorting the pillar arguments of the target system, disabling it, and make a business of their own stories [10].

#### *1.4. How to identify purplewashing and why it is offensive?*

Because society likes inclusion, it is easy that politicians, promoters, or other institutional leaders, use only some of the feminist values at their convenience and refrain from expressing anti-feminist and anti-women opinions (although they have them) since they want the support of society. This is generally seemed to be used by marketers and politicians, who in order to show that “they work for the public interest and believe in gender equality”, start campaigns and make speeches about feminism where in reality, their personal opinion, actions, and/or their institutions, companies, or foundations are not so supportive of gender equality.

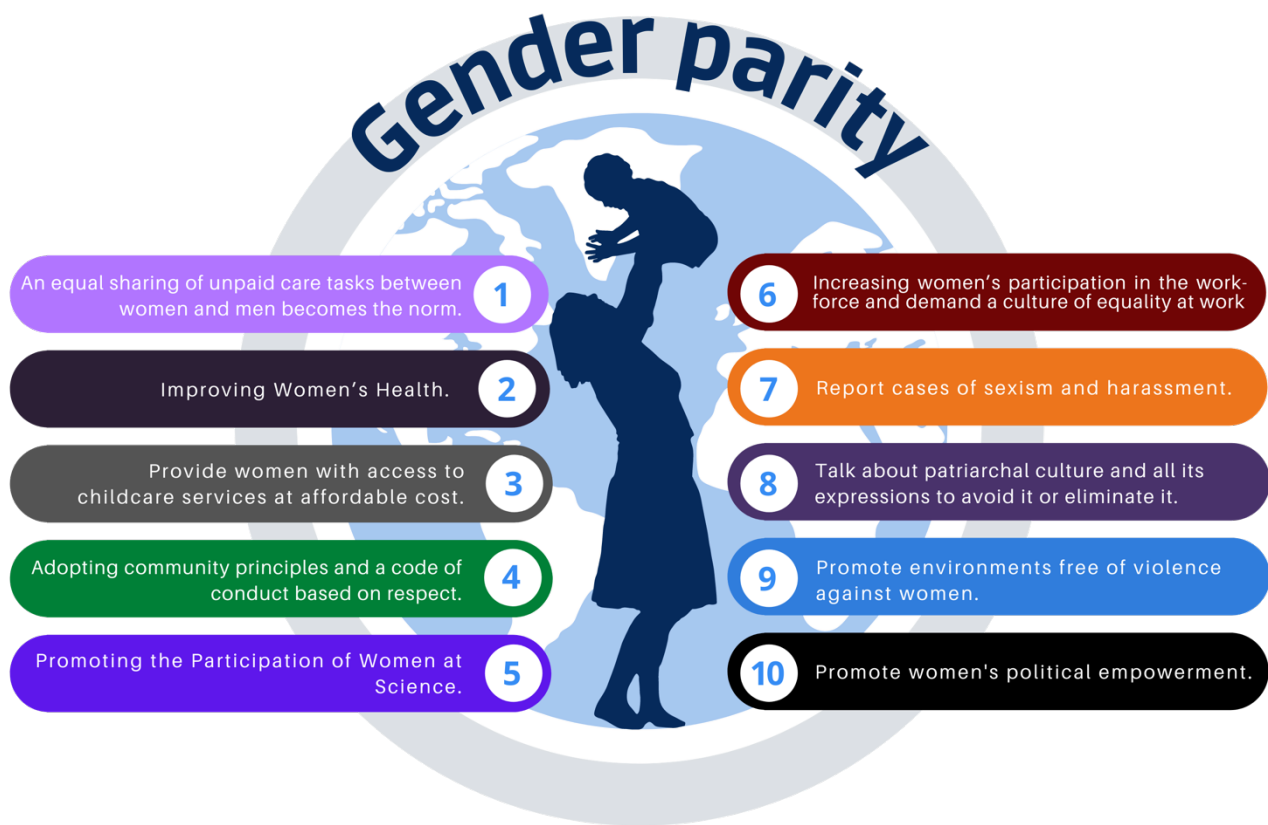
Is very frequent to see in all levels of organization, how institutional leaders and politicians, use “only one time” meetings and speeches about gender parity and equality. In most cases, the improvised and unofficial invitation arrives a few days in advance or a few hours before the meeting - with an implicit obligation for women to attend them- and after the event, they take a picture of them with the invited group of women. Is an offense to see in the newspapers and in social media their pictures as the central part of the discourse when the really important is the women and their daily struggle for equal conditions in an unequal world: these forms of purplewashing must stop now.

The simple practice of purple washing shows the hypocritic and double standard attitudes of many organizations, politicians and political groups. It should how they choose to support feminism when it is convenient. Since society demand inclusion, no entity can deny it. However, purplewashing organizations, politicians, groups, identify inclusion as a marketable idea, which can definitely buy them audience or voters. But on the institutional level and in its actions, they do not really believe in adhering to the basics of feminism and women empowerment.

IWD is a day of women for women, but there will always be the man who feels with the moral right to take the place of women, and give his opinion on reproductive life of women, in their clothing, and how a woman should do science, taking her time and shine in its only one day to obtain his own visibility and glory. Moreover, is unacceptable that leaders invite men to talk with women about “the virtue of being a woman”; or like the classic disguised discrimination, -very much in the style of the for dummies series of instructional books-, by launching courses such as 'mechanics for women' as if the cars were different by gender. Those kinds of actions make it clear that “they do not understand that they do not understand”. These, are only examples of the gender discrimination which demonstrates that an educational environment regarding gender parity and equality is an issue that must be promoted and encourage no just for women but also for men.

#### *1.5. Time for action: what we can do?*

Not all must be a criticism. There are many activities and strategies that may useful to reduce the gender gap. Figure 2 summarize some of these strategies and it is described in the following paragraphs.



**Figure 2.** Actions to close the gender gap.

1. An equal sharing of unpaid care tasks between men and women grow into the norm. It should be implemented first at home and then at work level, companies with a more equal sharing of unpaid care between genders, trend to have higher employment rates for women and lower gender gaps in salary. Agreed to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), there is a explicit link among the uneven division of unpaid care in households and gender imparity in the labor market, a study published by them shows that the bulk of unpaid care work is done by women, with 92 % providing unpaid care several days a week in contrast to 68 % of men [11].

2. Improving Women's Health: to provide access to affordable, professional care services that can help tackle the rising care needs of diseases and health challenges common to women, including access to care and effective treatment, and strategies to prevent conditions and health problems before they become problematic and expensive [12].

3. Providing women with access to childcare services at affordable cost, leading to higher financial returns for women, compared to men. Women with children under 12 years using childcare services at least 14 hours a week are estimated to earn 4.8 % more on an hourly basis, compared to women who do not outsource childcare. The estimated difference for men is 2.6 % [11].

4. Assume community principles and a code of conduct based on respect.

5. Promoting the Participation of Women at Science: giving benefits for participating in diversity programming, offering a mentorship program, assisting with child care, organizing focus groups, randomizing the conference program, providing badges on lanyards, and proffering travel grants [13].

6. Increasing women's participation in the work-force and demanding a culture of equality at work, closing the gender pay gap, and helping more women advance into leadership roles (senior positions and boards of directors) and develop in demand skills. From sexual harassment to the gender pay gap, women face a whole list of discriminatory practices when it comes to the workplace. The provision of training courses on gender equality on scholar or work spaces may make a difference.

7. Report cases of sexism and harassment. We can be active observers by breaking the status quo and challenging our peers. We can start by reporting any inappropriate behavior in a safe and respectful way. Let's challenge any stereotypical notions of gender, through open dialogue. If you witness a case of harassment, report it and take a step forward. Seek help from other people if you're afraid to do it. Take the time to listen to the victim and ask how you can help them may do a big difference in any work environment or at schools.

8. Talk about patriarchal culture and all its expressions. Establish talks in the family, school and work environments about this topic and all its expressions: the first step to solve the problem is to identify it and its resolution comes from knowing it and establishing strategies to avoid and eliminate it. Behaviors such as purplewashing must not continue to exist. Let's show those who have such behaviors and expose them in a respectful way. If someone has decided to fight for a right, it is unfair for someone to take away visibility just for the sake of gaining economic advantages or individual sympathy, audience and/or voters.

9. Promote environments free of violence against women and if there are forms of violence, denounce them. Women have the right to live a life free of violence in all spheres: family, educational, work, community and institutional. Violence is an abuse of power against women that limits access to their rights. No one has the right to mistreat, assault or physically, sexually or emotionally harm a person.

10. Political women empowerment. We require 100% population to solve global challenges. Increasing women's political participation and leadership are vital mechanisms that support women to realize their human rights. Expanding women's presence in decision-making and leadership has demonstrated to be good for social and economic improvement around the world [6,14]. When the women work, they will make differences.

## 2. Concluding remarks

Gender equality is not just about economic empowerment. It is a moral imperative. Political empowerment of women is needed for a sustainable future. Purplewashing and all expressions of patriarchal culture have a negative influence on multiple aspects of the women's life and her struggles to achieve gender parity and equality and they must be avoided. We intend for this document to be a point for discussion and for action to improve gender inequalities. We must think what we can do from this moment on to create an environment of respect, understanding, solidarity, parity and equality, for those who gave us life and those who are our sisters, daughters, friends, partners, and companions. Gender-sensitive recovery strategies will be critical in closing the gender gap and helping more women advance into leadership roles and develop in-demand skills. We hope that this opinion serves as a call to action to leaders to embed gender parity as a central goal of policies and practices to the benefit of our economies and societies. Listen up the call that let us to build a world in which every woman is respected and treated with dignity: we together can help to break the bias.

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