



## BUILDING A FAIRER SOCIETY REQUIRES A NEW KIND OF LEADERSHIP

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*Switzerland has made encouraging strides since embracing gender equality laws in 1981, but it is time to pick up the pace in the fight for fairness – starting with executive leadership*

Today, hundreds of thousands of women and men will [take to the streets](#) in Switzerland, united in the call for an end to gender inequality. The Women's Strike is a necessary wake up call for business leaders, policymakers and communities.

The journey towards gender parity has been slow because inequality runs deep and complex within the fabric of our societies. Unpicking systemic bias from parliaments to playgrounds requires a collective will to change, binding legislation and, above all, leadership.

One area where swifter gains seem possible is in the corporate world – equal opportunity, access to childcare, parental leave, and equal pay. These are, after all, HR matters that can be enforced through laws, institutional policies and practices.

However, the World Economic Forum's recent [Global Gender Gap Report](#) estimated that it could take more than a century before women and men reached pay parity, and about 200 years to embed true equality in the workplace.

According to Switzerland's [Federal Office for Gender Equality](#), there is an 18.3 percent gap in average pay between men and women, with female workers earning on average CHF 1455 less than their male counterparts each month.

Gender inequality in work has been associated with the legacy of traditional gender specific roles, different approaches to education, negotiation and career choices, and prejudices and biases that will take time and effort to exorcise.

Advocates for reform have responded by talking in a language that all executives can understand: profit and productivity. This business case for greater diversity uses research to show that greater inclusion equals better corporate performance.

This argument has its merits and has had an impact, but diversity must always be seen as more than just making good business sense. Equality is a fundamental human right and a crucial pillar of social justice.

The struggle goes to very heart of the challenge we are facing in navigating a rapidly evolving world. What kind of society do we aspire to? What is the role of business? What does it take to lead and shape a brighter future?

At IMD, our leadership programs encourage executives to ask these questions: to challenge their prejudices and to look at leadership as a personal, collective, business and social responsibility. As such, we seek to develop leaders that can not only transform organizations but also deliver positive and lasting social impact.

By forging this kind of corporate leader, we believe the future of our economies can be shaped with different values and attitudes. In turn, this can help to create a world where everyone in our society is treated equally.

Just like Switzerland, IMD has made some progress in living the values it extolls, but we still have a way to go. We offer more than CHF 1 million in scholarships to female MBA participants. The number of female applicants for our programs has risen steadily since 2011. We run a dedicated women's leadership [program](#), and organize an annual LGBTQ inclusion and empowerment in the workplace event.

While IMD has been working on increasing our gender balance for the past several years, figures show we still need to do more. Women make up 18% of our Foundation Board, 37% of senior staff, and 16% of our faculty.

The Women's Strike represents an opportunity for us all to renew our commitment to equality for everyone and to work harder to deliver it. That means government introducing and enforcing the right legislation and regulations, and businesses fulfilling their responsibilities to society.

Other European nations are already taking bold steps forward; companies are required by law [to publish](#) gender pay gaps in the UK, and Sweden offers generous, shared [parental leave](#). Switzerland must also be bold.

Through stronger and committed leadership, we believe an equal society can become a reality – and it won't take 200 years.

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