ROYAL ECONOMIC SOCIETY

UK WEN
UK WOMEN IN ECONOMICS NETWORK



UK Women in Economics Network Career Conversations Event

Women and the Labour Market in 2050:

Health, Social and Technological Drivers

Weds 4 November 2026
12:30 – 16:30

SOAS
University of London

timberlake

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Welcome & opening remarks



Yannis Dafermos

Head of Department of Economics, SOAS



Imran Rasul OBE FBA

Professor of Economics, UCL and RES Past President

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Programme

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12:30 – 12:45 **Welcome and opening remarks**

- ***Yannis Dafermos,*** *Head of Department of Economics, SOAS*
- ***Imran Rasul OBE FBA,*** *Professor of Economics, UCL and RES Past President*

12:45 – 13:30 **Keynote speech *"Gender Gaps in the Labour Market"***

- ***Monica Costa-Dias,*** *Professor of Economics, University of Bristol*

13:30 – 13:45 **Introduction to Scenario Building & Breakout Discussions**

13:45 – 14:40 **Breakout sessions:** *What needs to change now in Health, Society, and Technology to create the workplace we want to have in 2050?*

HEALTH	SOCIETY	TECHNOLOGY

14:40 – 15:15 **Networking Break**

15:15 – 16:00 **Panel discussion: *Women's Work in 2050: Shaping the Future We Want***

Ana Andrade *(Chair) Europe Economist, Bloomberg Economics,* ***Annette Reid -*** *Consultant Gynaecologist,* ***Joanna Brewis*** *- Professor of People and Organisations The Open University,* ***Jacqueline Koay*** *- Founder & CEO, SOFIAA Health*

16:00 – 16:20 **Reflections**

- ***Hiba Sameen,*** *Lead Economist, The Health Foundation*

16:20 – 16:30 **Closing remarks**

- ***Misa Tanaka,*** *Chair of UK WEN, Senior Resident Fellow of the NIESR, Associate of the Centre for Macroeconomics, LSE*

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We **all** have to take collective **and** individual responsibility for making economics open and inclusive to all. We can help with this **in each of the sessions** we attend.

As a chair of this session, I will:

- Be active and challenge individual behaviour – you can do the same!

As a participant, please:

- Ask questions in the same respectful way regardless of the presenter's background, their gender, ethnicity, language, perceived age or seniority;
- Ask from genuine curiosity;
- Do not be patronising, hostile, demeaning or disruptive.

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Keynote speech:

Gender Gaps in the Labour Market



Monica Costa Dias

Professor of Economics, University of Bristol

Gender inequalities at work: where are we and where are we heading?

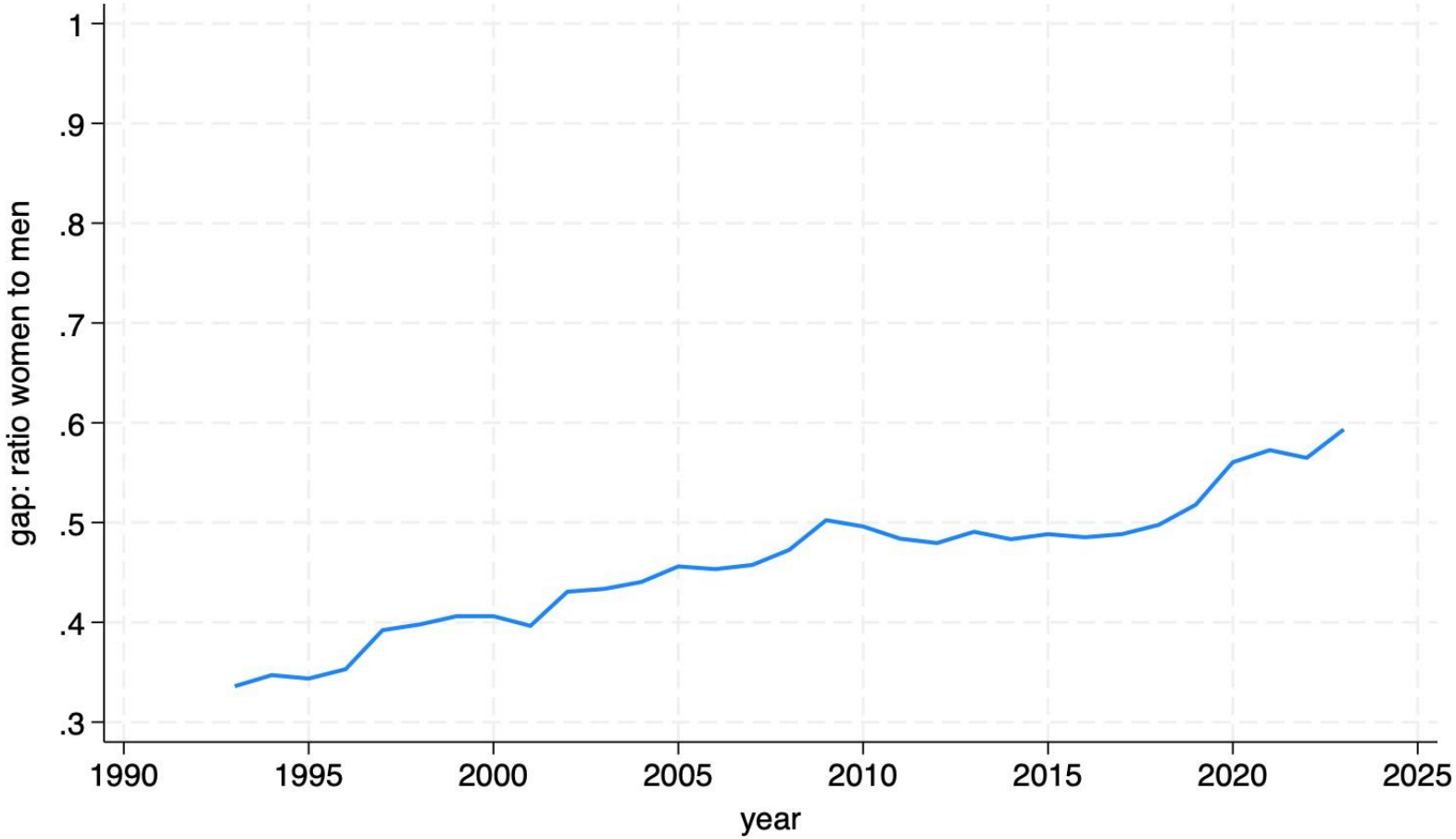
Trace recent trends in gender inequalities in earnings

Unpack this gap to understand sources of inequality

Compare cohorts to question what the future may unfold

Combine data from various sources – LFS, UKHLS, Vital Statistics, covid survey – to gather latest evidence of of where we are

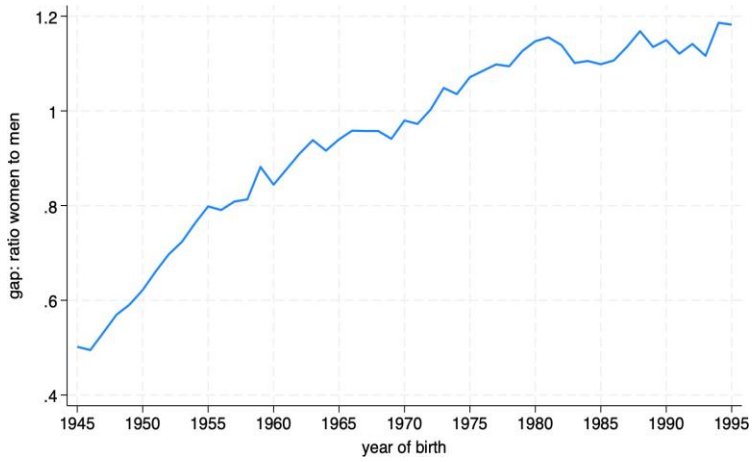
The gender earnings gap is gradually closing, but remains far from parity

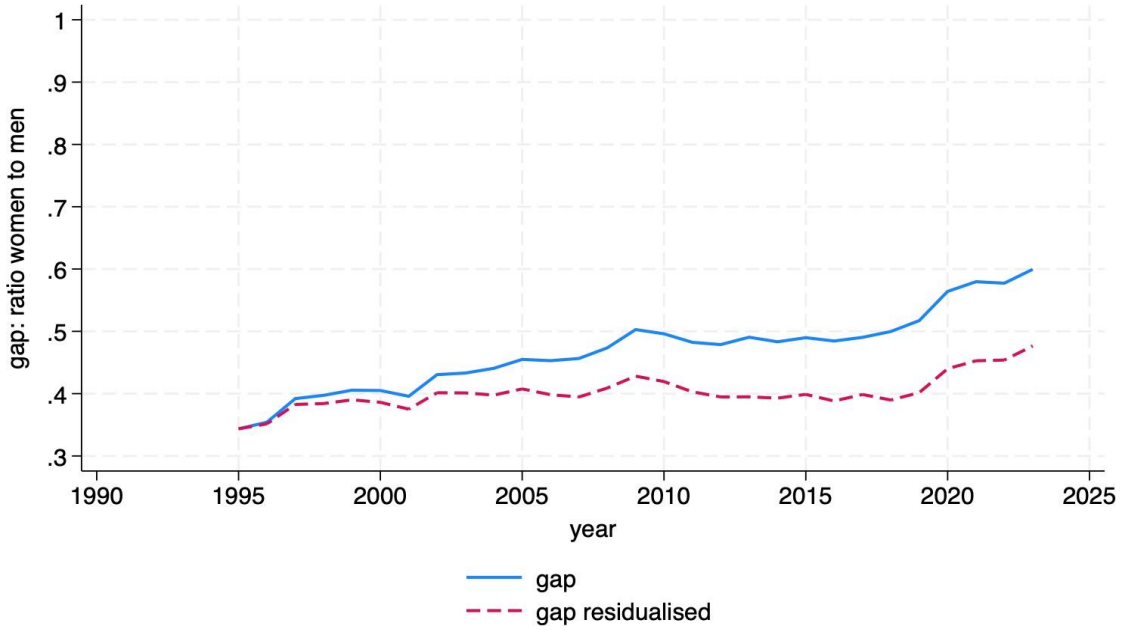


(Source: LFS)

Convergence strongly linked to rise in female education

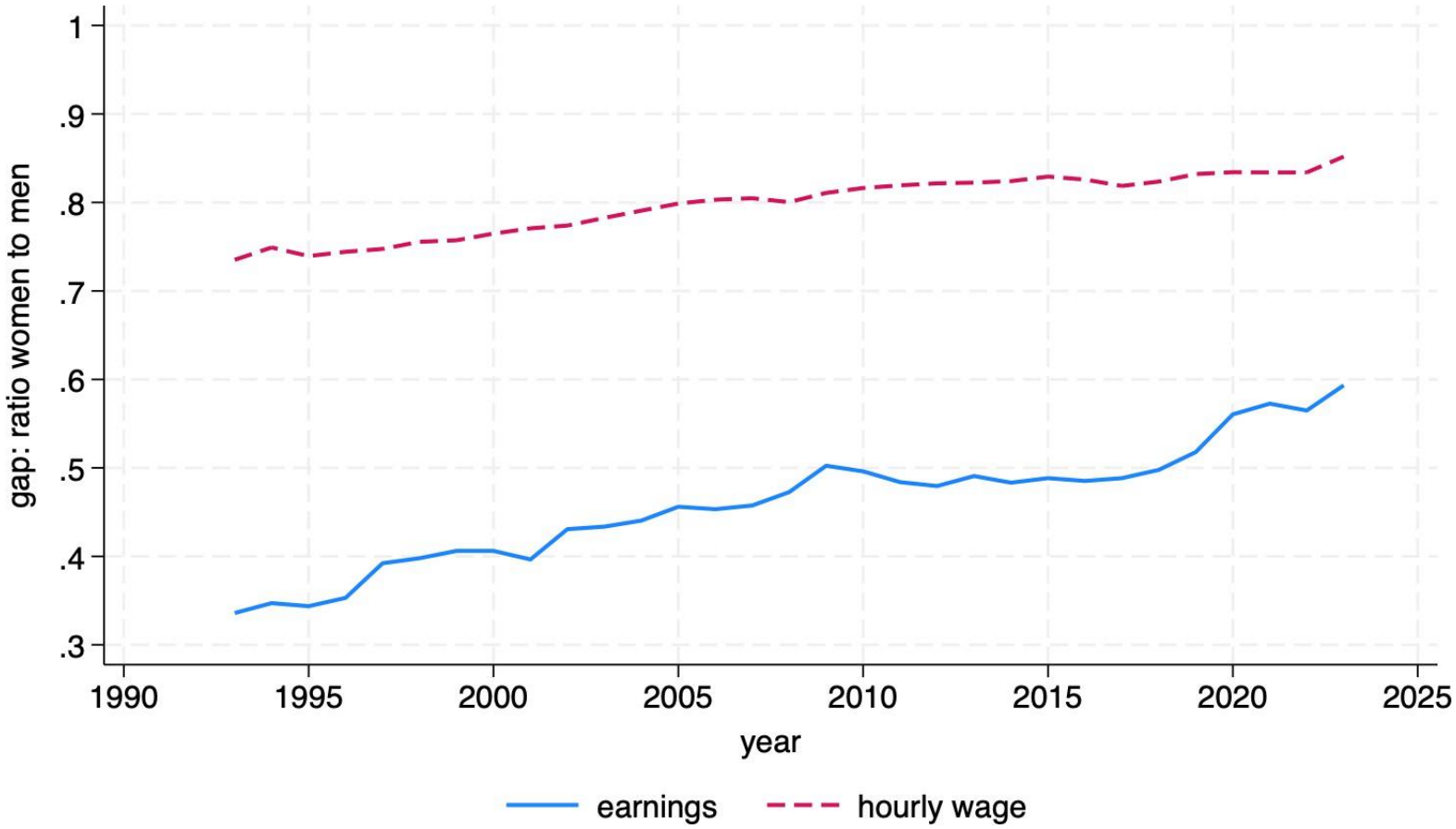
University graduation: women vs men





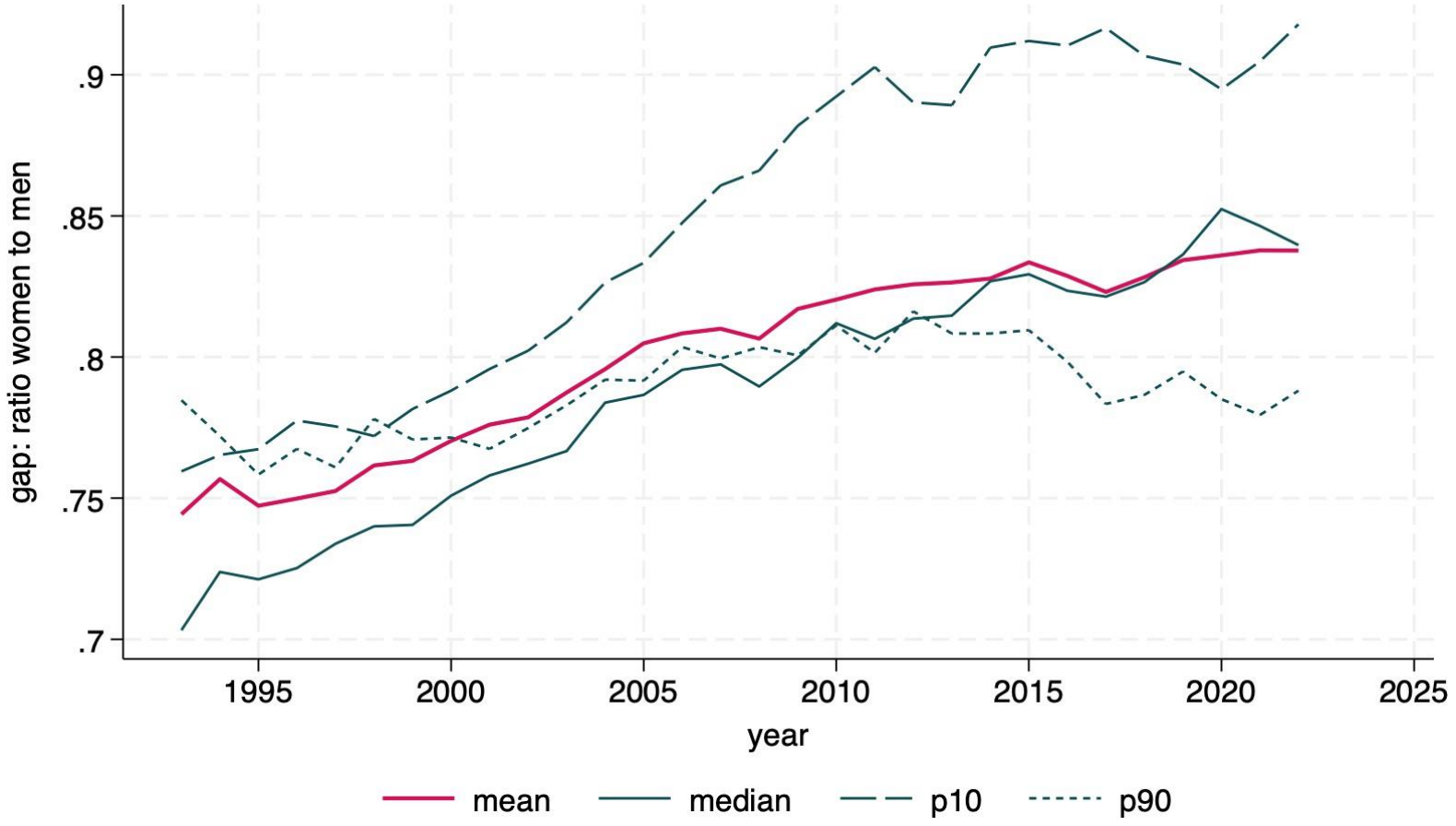
Gap accounting for education attainment

Hourly wages of men and women also converged, but at a slower pace



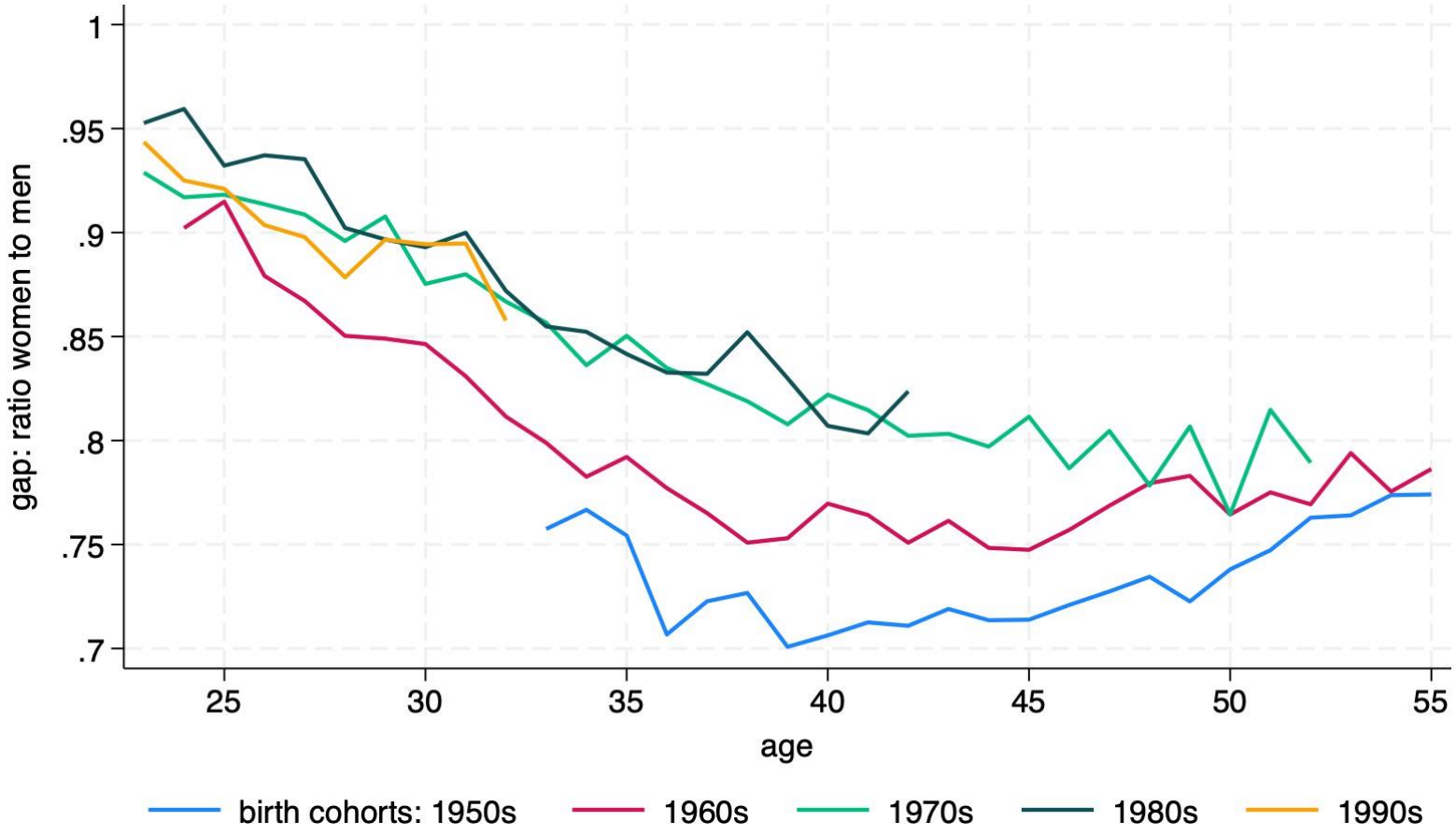
(Source: LFS)

Wages converged mostly at the bottom of the skills distribution



(Source: LFS)

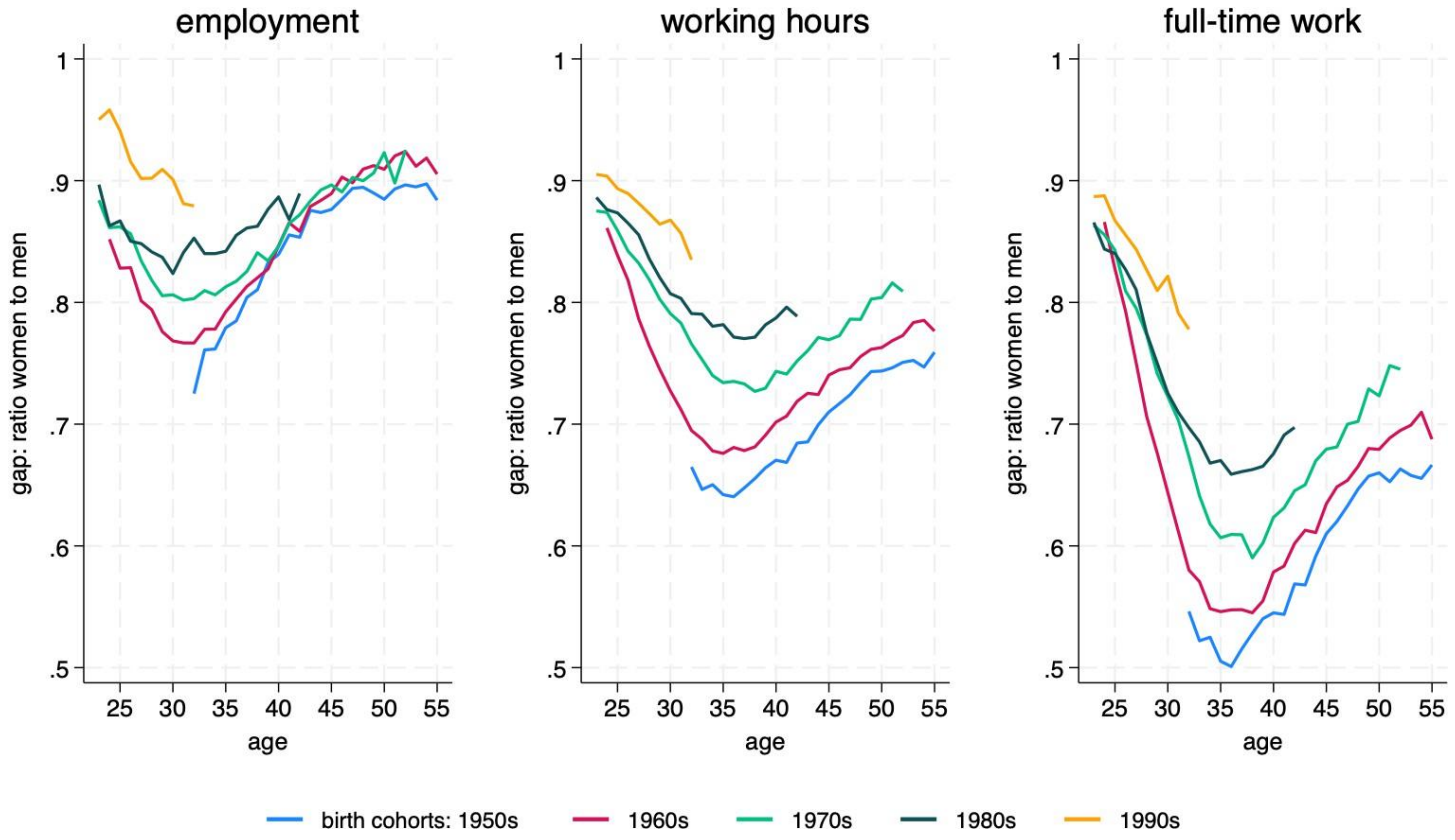
Expected gradual progress across cohorts but progress stalled with the 70s cohort



Hourly wage by birth cohort and age

Source: LFS

And yet younger women work increasingly more



And made massive gains in education, but are not benefiting from the additional HC from work and education

Source: LFS

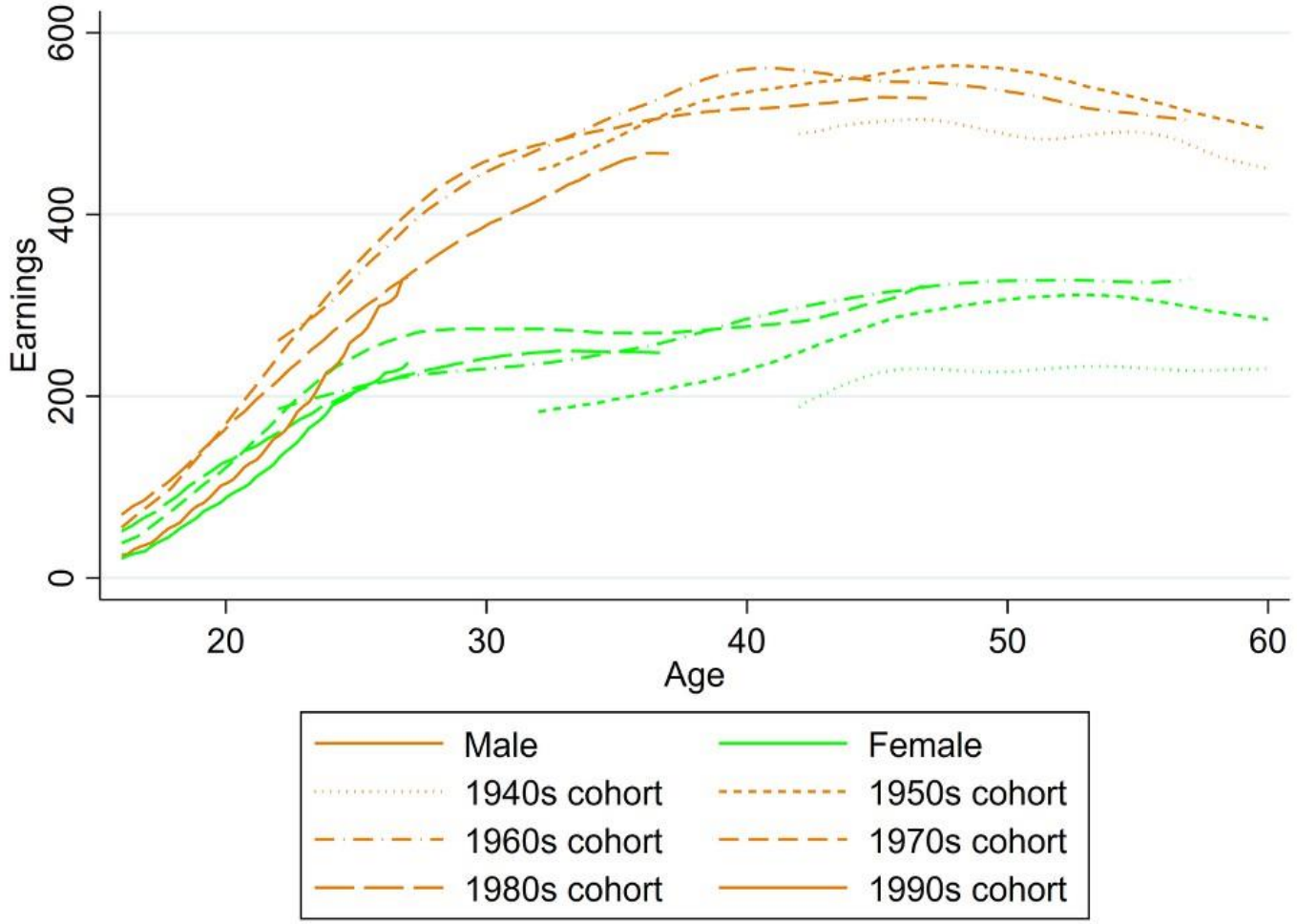
What could explain the sluggish progress in gender pay inequalities across cohorts?

Recent studies highlight growing importance of child penalties (Kleven et al 2019)

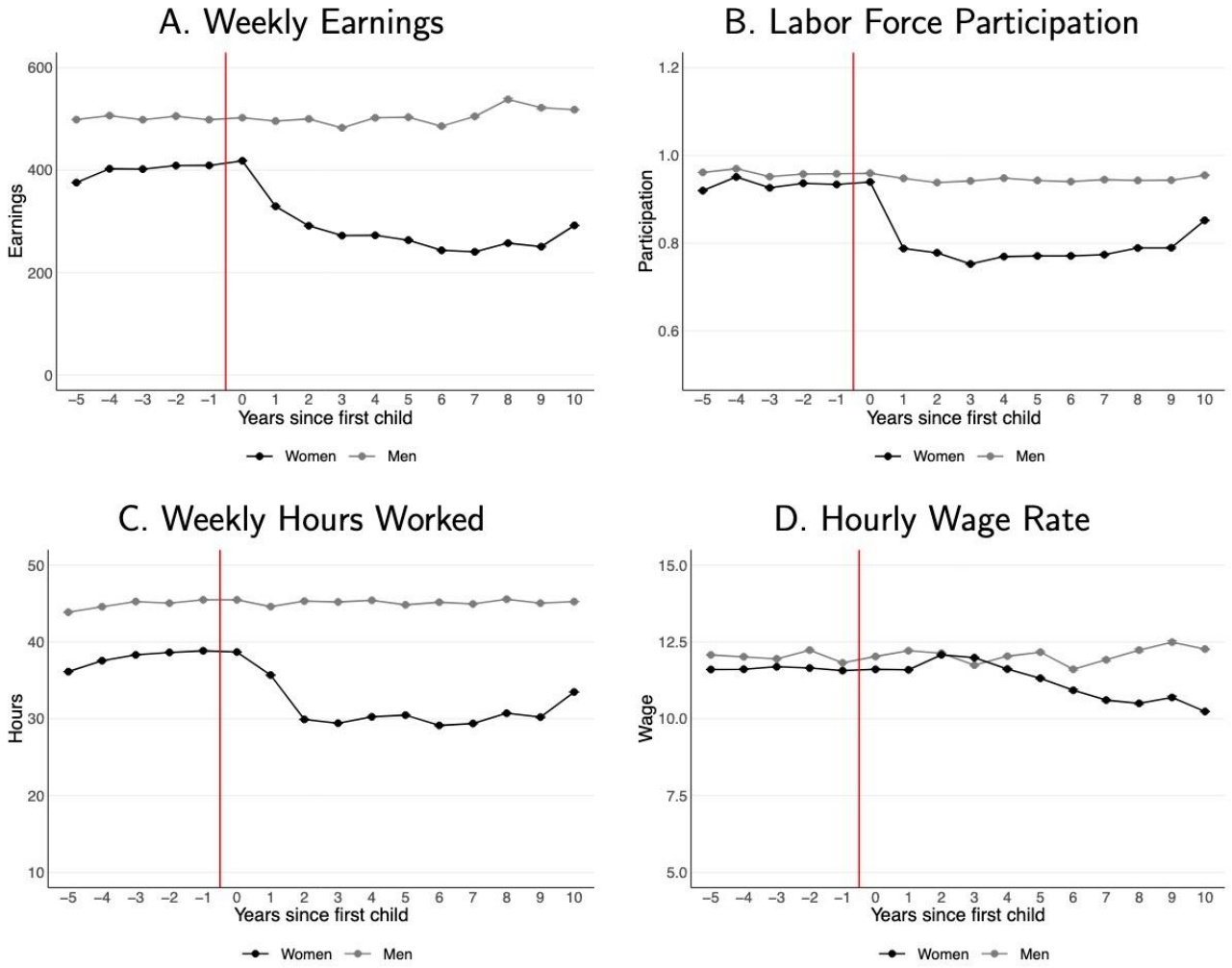
- Reward for long and inflexible hours fall hardest on mothers (Goldin, 2014, 2021)
- Narrower differences in human capital (education, experience) explain less of the gap (Blau and Kahn 2017)

Child penalties are large and systematically impact women

We know that gender pay gaps widen during working life



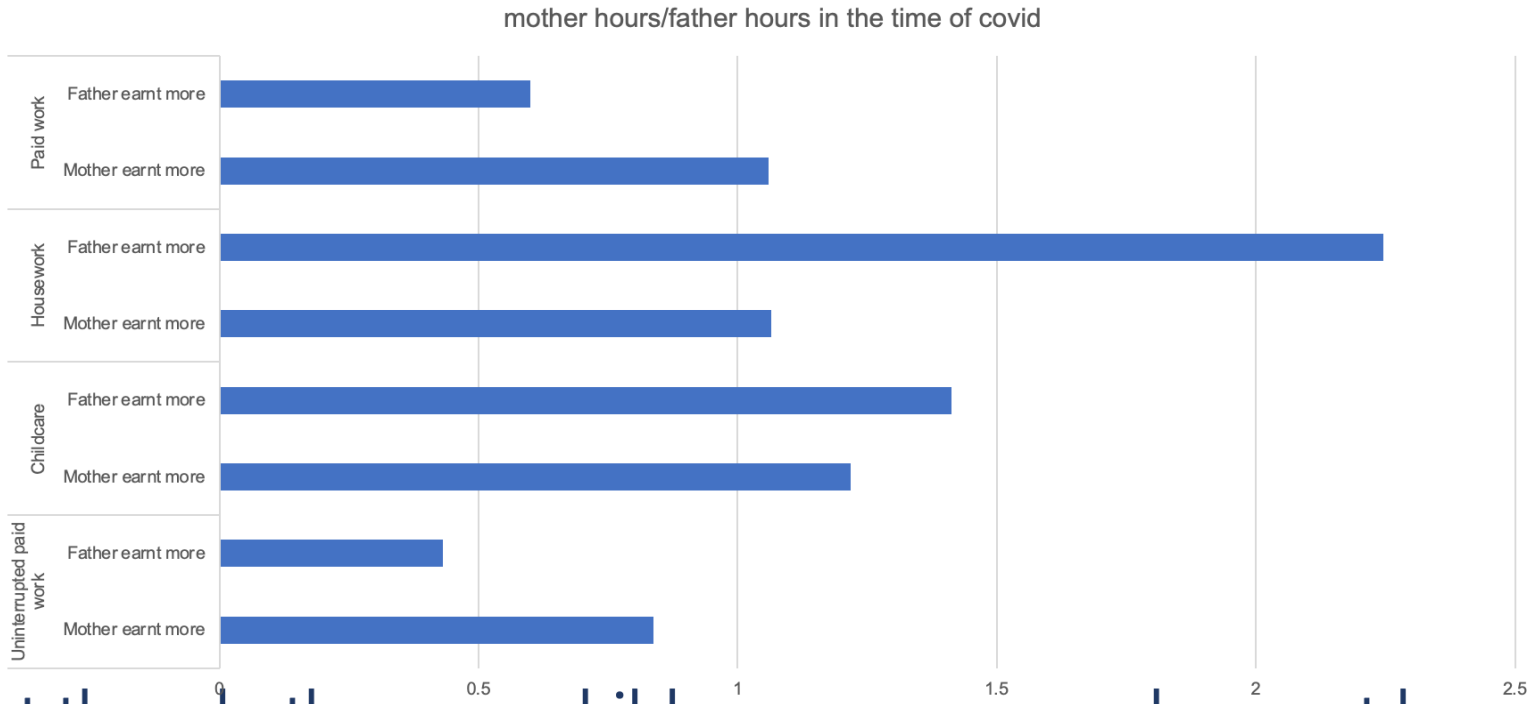
And are closely linked to child penalties



Notes: UK-HLS data 1991-2017. All panels control for age and year fixed effects. Hours worked in panel C are conditional on participation.

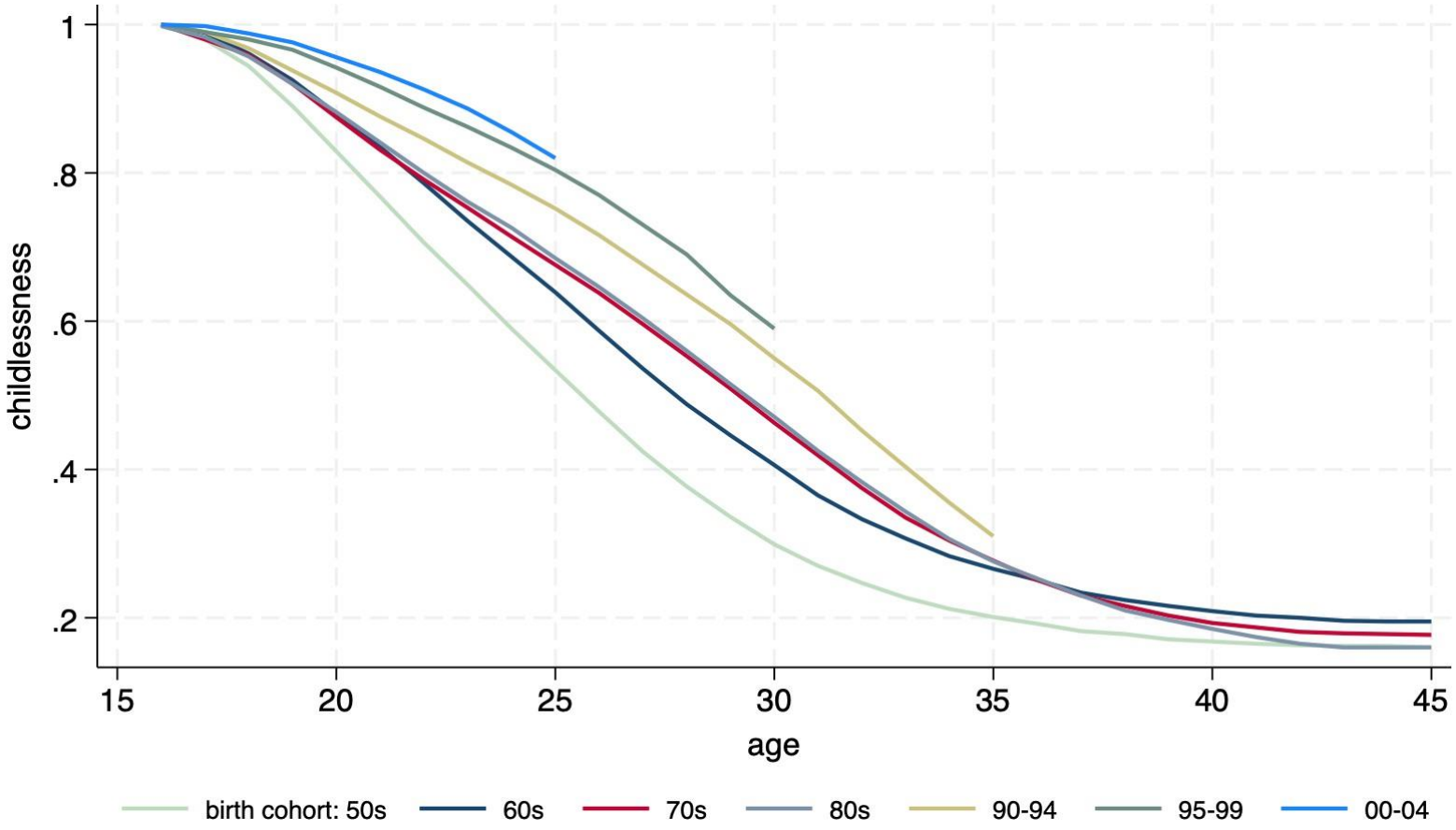
Covid provided an opportunity to understand the family source of child penalties

Women who earnt more do the same paid work and housework as their husbands



But they do the same childcare as women who earnt less

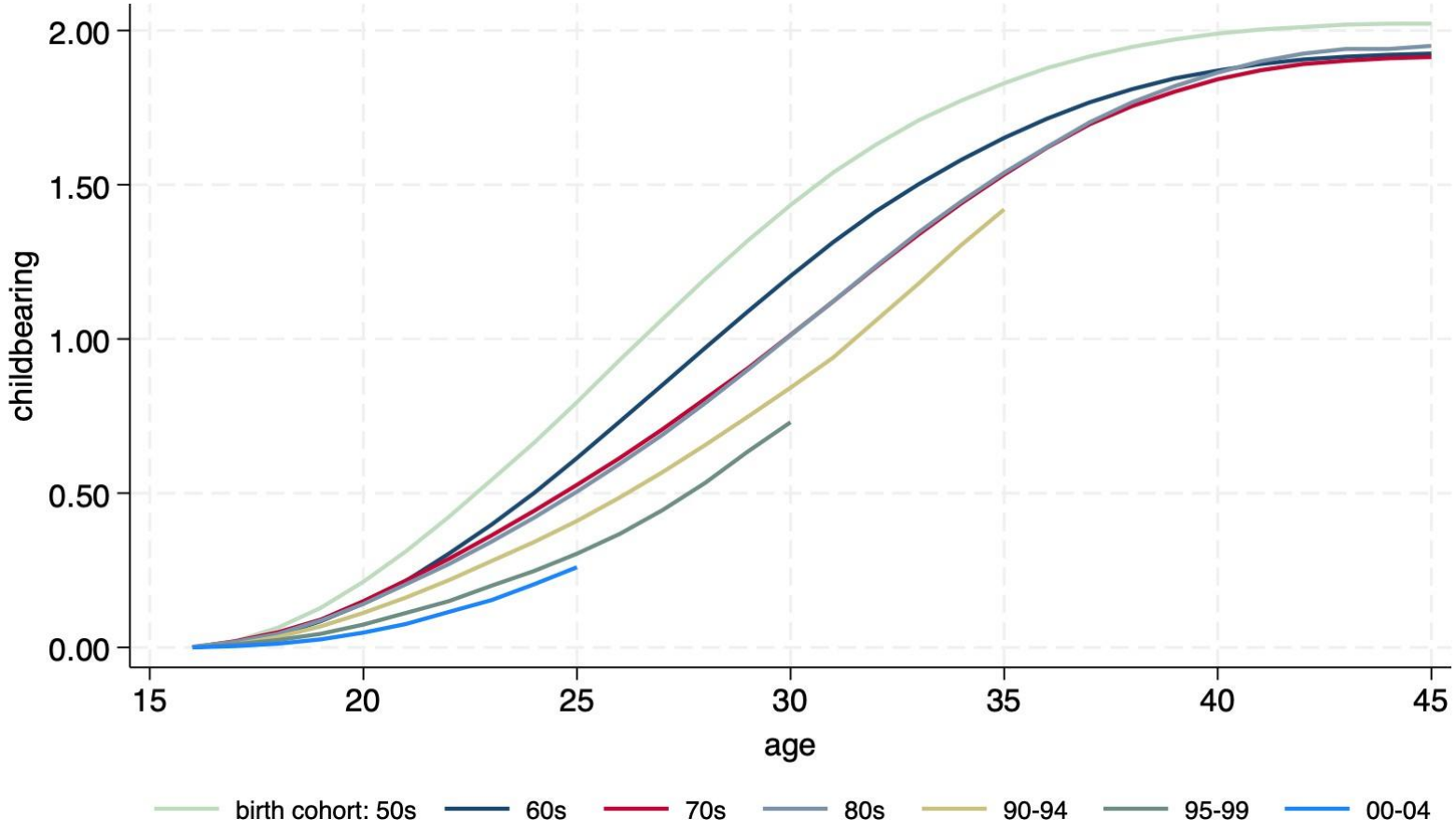
However, fertility is changing fast: fewer women are having babies



Childessness

(Source: ONS vital statistics)

And they are having fewer children and later



Childbearing

(Source: ONS vital statistics.)

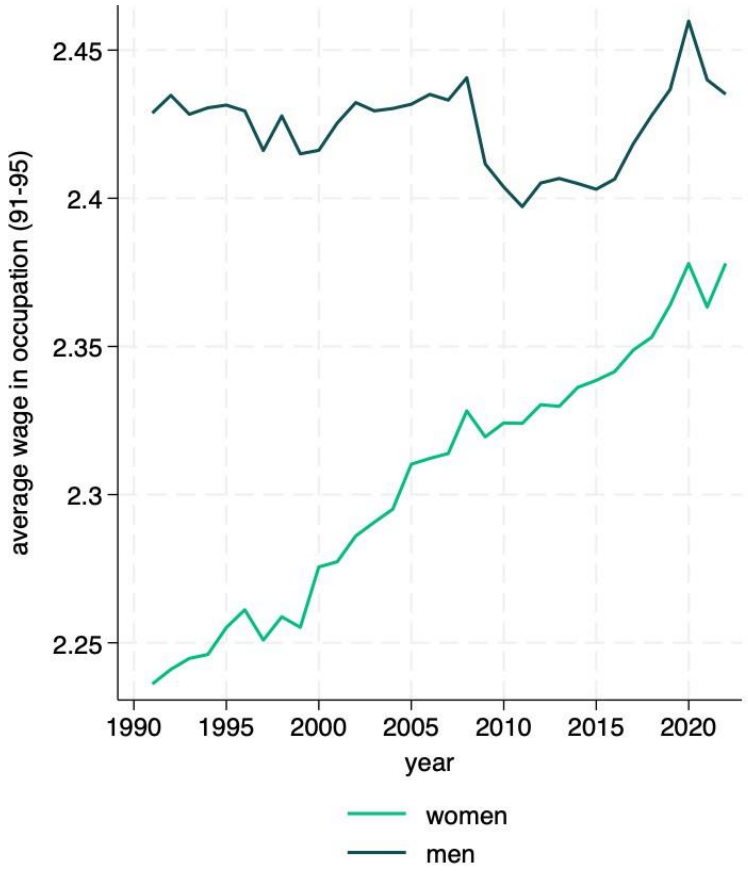
Desire to have children

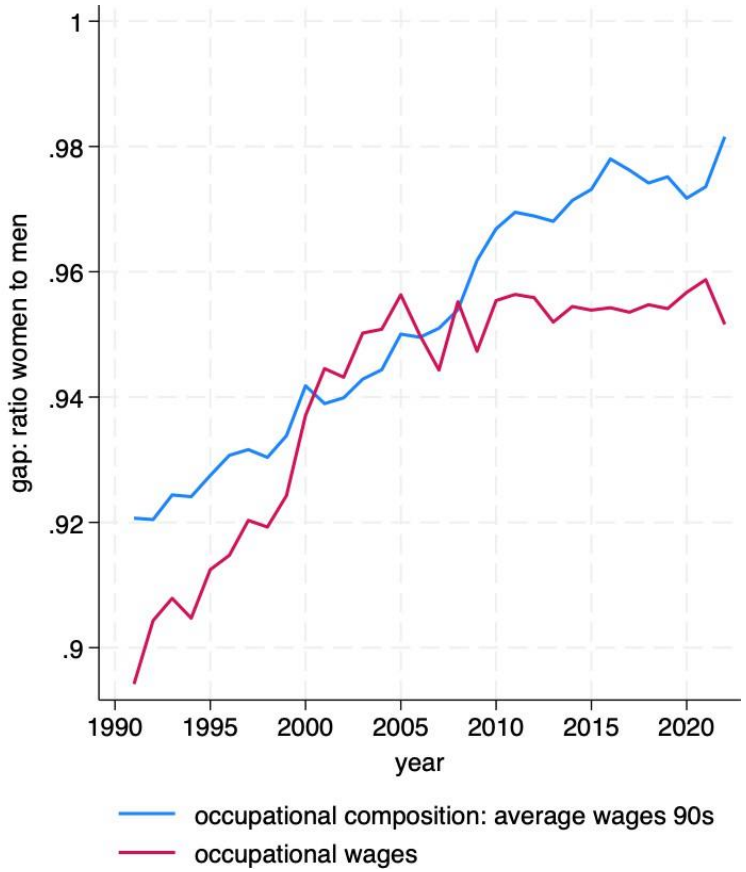
birth cohort	Prefers no kid (%)	Desired nr kids	Obs
1960s	7.8	2.3	331
1970s	5.7	2.2	637
1980s	9.3	2.3	5,302
1990-94	14.4	2.3	2,694
1995-00	24.1	2.3	2,052
2001-05	33.4	2.3	844

Notes: UKHLS several waves, women aged 20-29.

Yet these changes in fertility and fertility plans
don't appear reflected in wage gaps across cohorts.

Gaps in careers
Women moved to better paid occupations

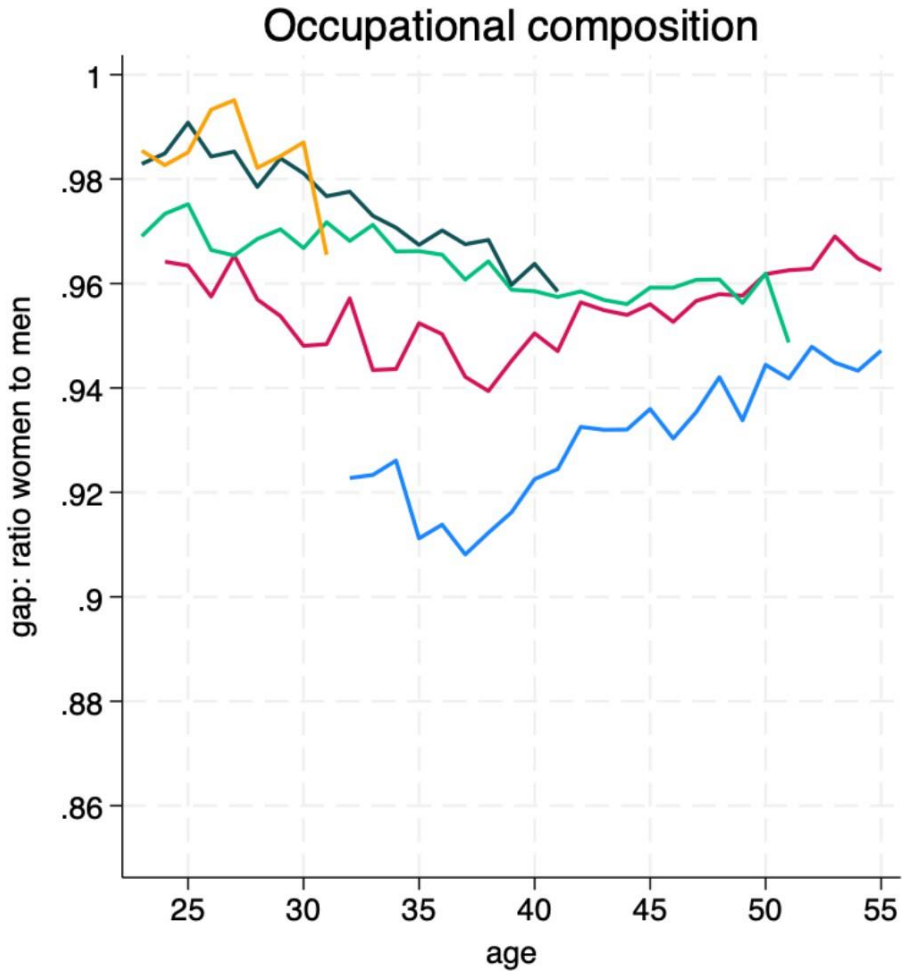




But wages of receiving occupations grew comparatively slower.

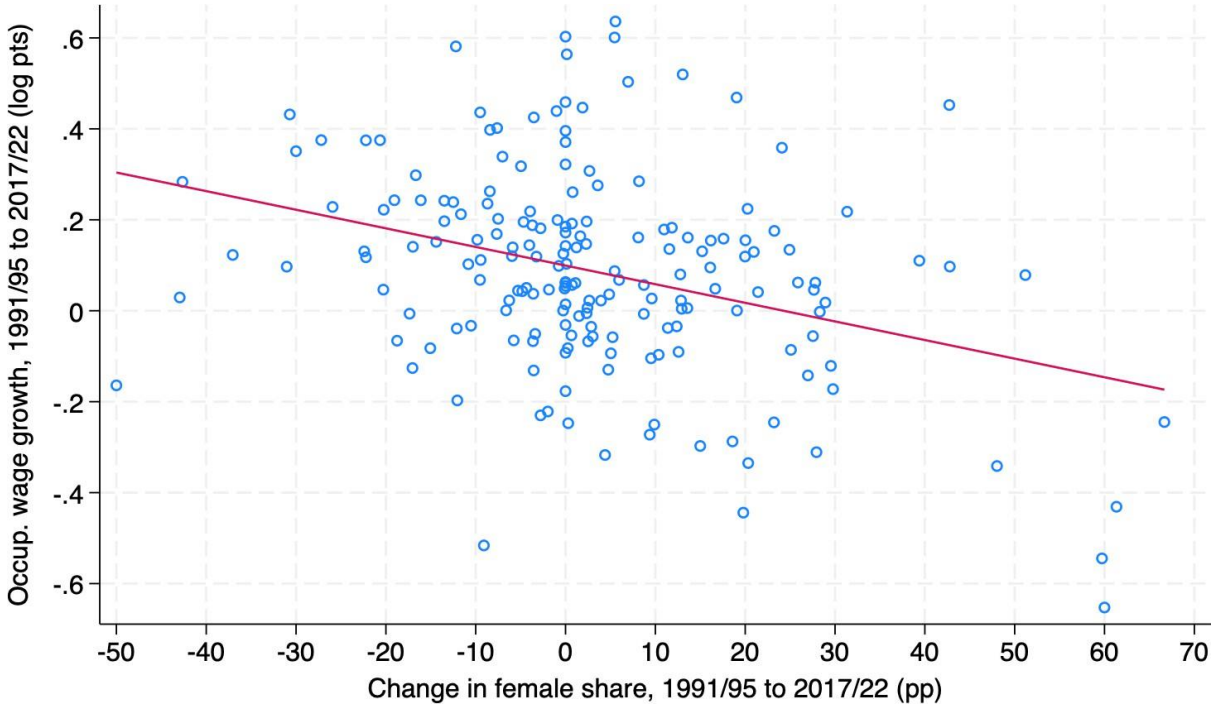
Source: UKHLS. Average wage in occupation in 1991-95 (blue), and by year (red).

Career gaps are also closing across cohorts



Source: UKHLS. Average wage in occupation in 1991-95.

Female share and occupational pay growth



Occupations gaining female share experience lower wage growth (Goldin 2014): 10pp increase in female share reduces pay growth by 4 log points over 25 years.

(Source: UKHLS.)

Next chapter in gender inequalities at work

Family and career demands remain hard to combine

Falling fertility may partly reflect the hard-to-achieve balance

Other fault lines

- Women are climbing the occupational ladder, but into slower-growing pay
- Gaps are stickiest among top earners
- Later life events may shape next chapter: elder care, menopause

Thank you!

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Introduction to Scenario Building



Jacqueline Koay

Founder & CEO, SOFIAA Health

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Ellie and Amahle

A Strategic Foresight Approach to Economic Futures

Jacqueline Koay

"Scenarios for Good" · 4 November 2026

Agenda

13.30-13.45: Brief Introduction to Strategic Foresight (Jacqueline Koay)

13.50-14.40: Breakout Groups

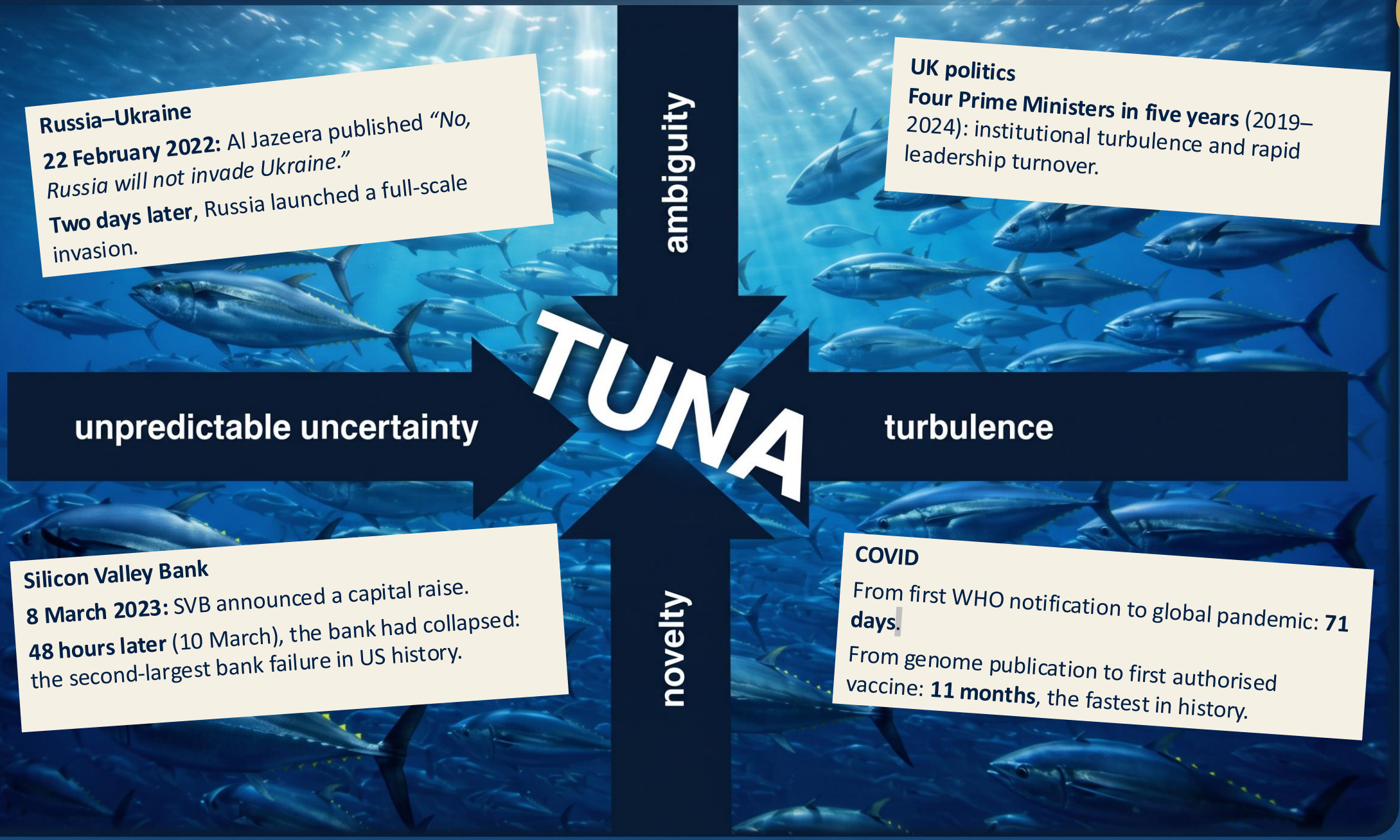
14.40-15.15: Networking break (R101, first floor)

Theme	Facilitator (scenario-building lead)	Expert speaker	UK WEN lead in room
Health	Valerie Nolens (Becobra)	Annette Reid, Consultant Gynaecologist	Misa Tanaka
Society	Julia Giese (Bank of England)	Joanna Brewis, Professor of People and Organisations, The Open University	Sofia Izquierdo Sanchez
Technology	Helena Fornwagner (University of Exeter)	Jacqueline Koay, Founder & CEO, SOFIAA Health	Donald Cranswick

“

The future is the *hardest* thing to predict.

TUNA: the future is unpredictable



Russia–Ukraine

22 February 2022: Al Jazeera published *"No, Russia will not invade Ukraine."*

Two days later, Russia launched a full-scale invasion.

UK politics

Four Prime Ministers in five years (2019–2024): institutional turbulence and rapid leadership turnover.

Silicon Valley Bank

8 March 2023: SVB announced a capital raise.

48 hours later (10 March), the bank had collapsed: the second-largest bank failure in US history.

COVID

From first WHO notification to global pandemic: **71 days**.

From genome publication to first authorised vaccine: **11 months**, the fastest in history.

© Jacqueline Koay 2026



Forecasting

is necessarily rooted in historical data, yet the periods of greatest uncertainty often arise when the future is least like the past on which our models depend.



Strategic foresight

is not a substitute for forecasting and modelling; it is a complementary toolkit for navigating uncertainty when the future may not resemble the past.



Nelson Mandela Memorial Sculpture
Howick, South Africa
Marco Cianfanelli



Nelson Mandela Memorial Sculpture
Howick, South Africa
Marco Cianfanelli

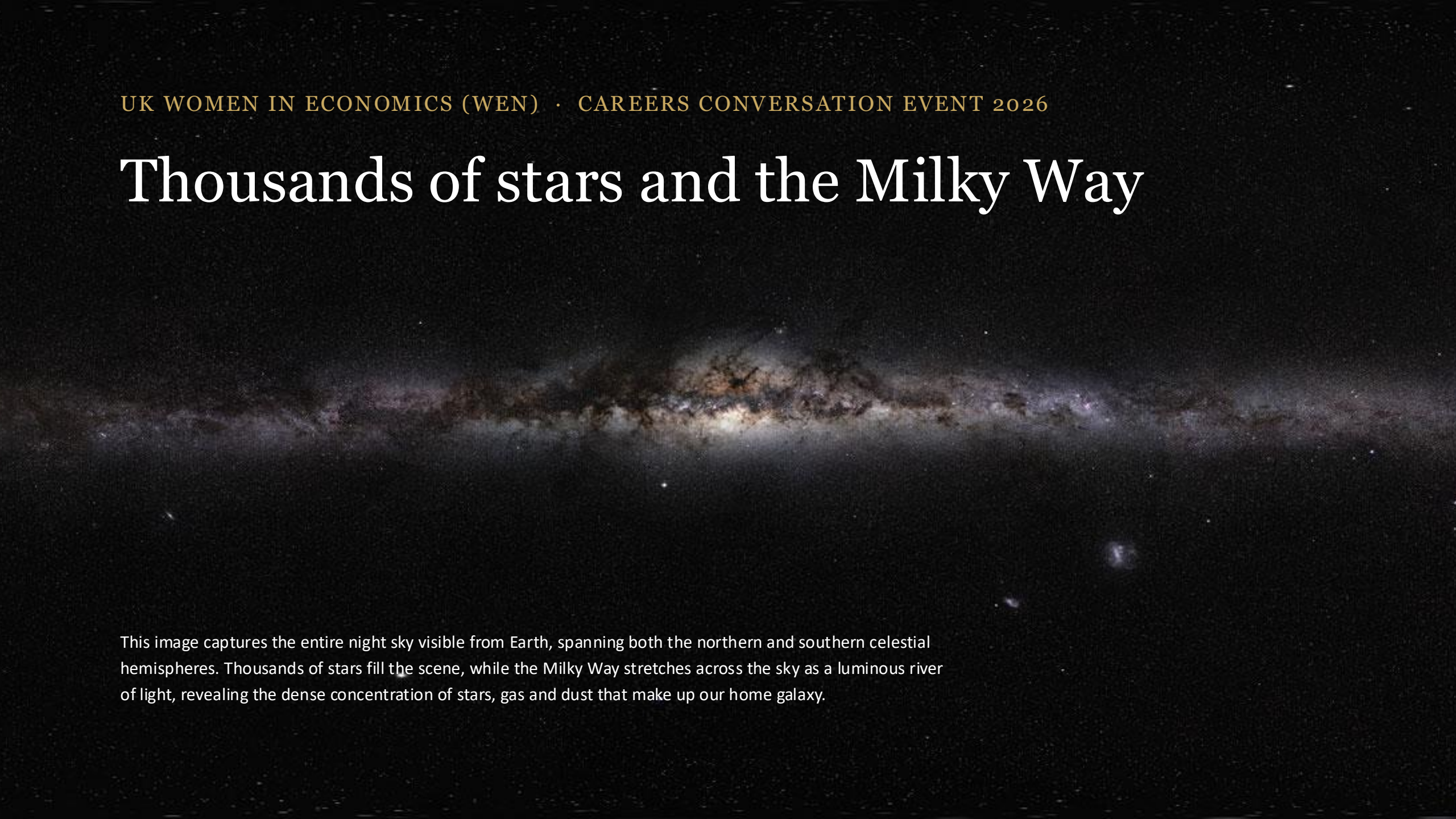
Strategic foresight allows us to step back far enough from the present to see the bigger picture.



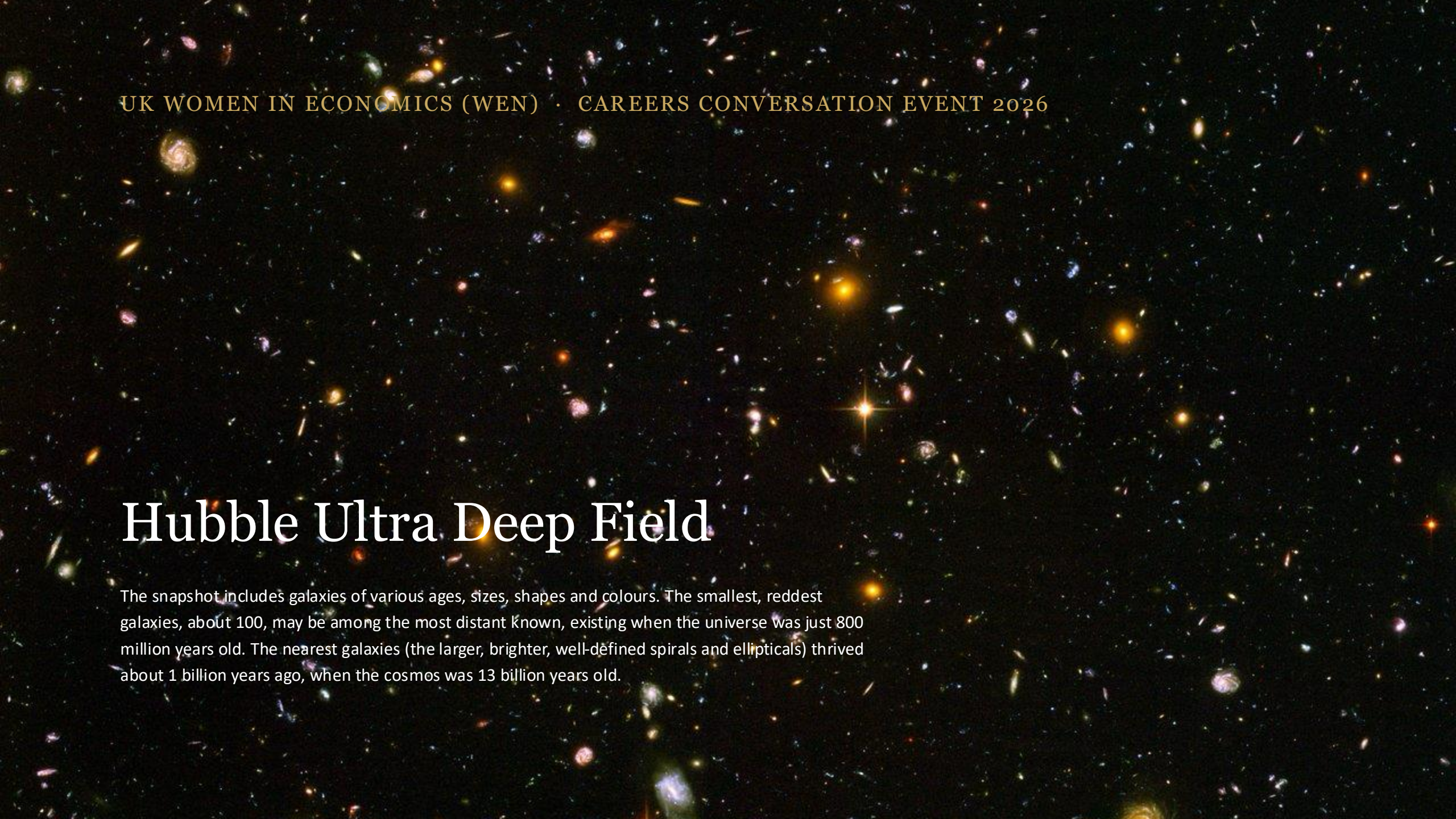
With that fuller view, we can make better decisions today about the future we want to create tomorrow.

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Thousands of stars and the Milky Way



This image captures the entire night sky visible from Earth, spanning both the northern and southern celestial hemispheres. Thousands of stars fill the scene, while the Milky Way stretches across the sky as a luminous river of light, revealing the dense concentration of stars, gas and dust that make up our home galaxy.



Hubble Ultra Deep Field

The snapshot includes galaxies of various ages, sizes, shapes and colours. The smallest, reddest galaxies, about 100, may be among the most distant known, existing when the universe was just 800 million years old. The nearest galaxies (the larger, brighter, well-defined spirals and ellipticals) thrived about 1 billion years ago, when the cosmos was 13 billion years old.

Once, we looked into the night sky and saw stars.

Advances in technology revealed galaxies.

The universe had not changed; our capacity to perceive it had.

Strategic foresight is a similar technology of perception.

By combining weak signals, disciplined storytelling and scenarios, it expands our field of vision, enabling us to see the wider systems within which today's decisions shape tomorrow's outcomes.

The technology and the lens



THE TECHNOLOGY

Strategic foresight

expands our field of vision



THE LENS

Scenarios

bring emerging possibilities into focus

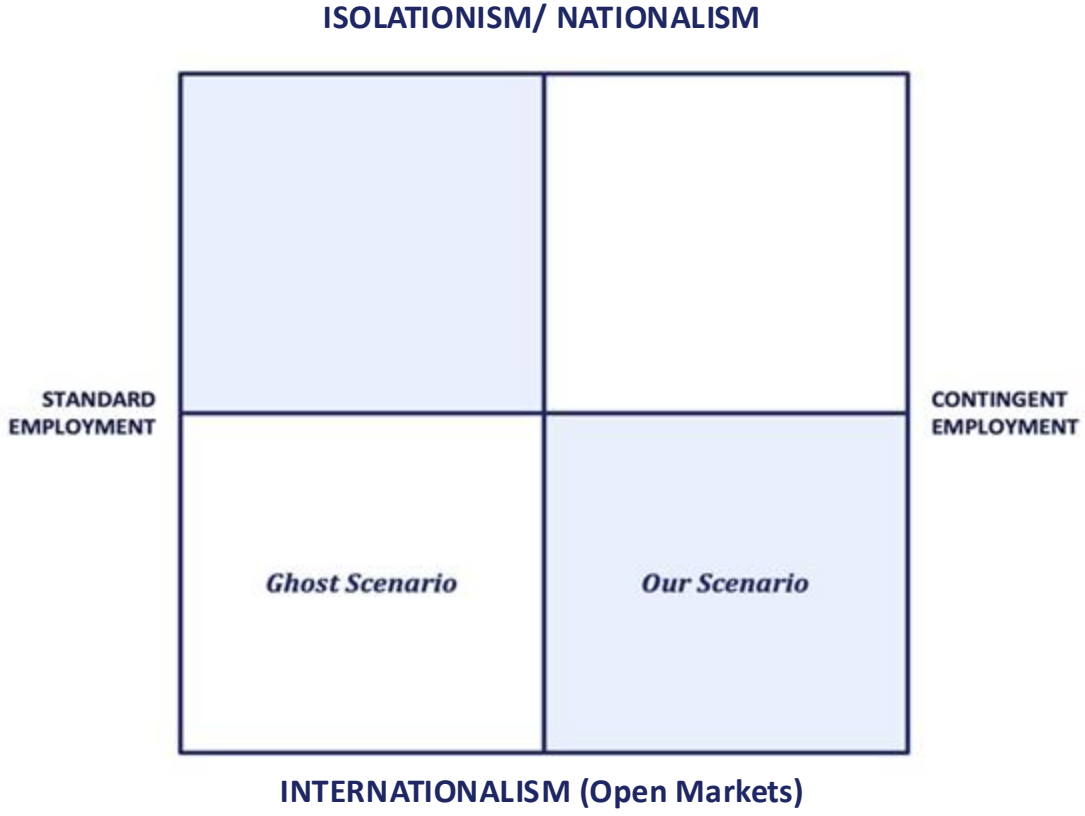
Through a disciplined framework, strategic foresight:

01 Challenges assumptions

02 Tests decisions across multiple plausible futures

Ellie & Amahle

Scenario Framework & Assumptions



Assumptions our scenario challenges

1 Data privacy stays fiercely protected — by individuals and by UK/EU regulation — and existing protections are trusted to hold.

2 Employment stays largely "standard": AI reshapes roles more than it grows the gig economy.

3 Self-employment remains the default for platform work, underpinned by regulation such as the Employment Rights Act; social media stays an open route to market.

4 Government protects the corporate tax base and the employment status quo, as gig/cross-border work is harder to tax and public funding is under pressure.

5 AI lifts solo-worker productivity and grows demand for oversight/verification faster than it destroys routine tasks; expert roles (e.g. "the economist") stay valued.

6 Digital infrastructure is universal, and cross-border digital services remain lightly regulated.

7 Working from home is the norm, generally easing women's path to full-time work and career progression — though its effect on sectors' gender mix is unclear.

8 The gender pay gap persists, with women still clustered in less financially rewarding sectors.

9 Labour participation is dampened by health issues (especially mental health) and continued climate stress.

10 Formal care exists but is costly; a migrant care workforce continues to cover domestic demand.



GOING DEEPER INTO THE SCENARIO

The Focal Statement for the Ellie & Amahle Scenario

01

The Focal Statement anchors the entire scenario process.

FOCAL ISSUE

Drivers shaping women's economic participation and wellbeing in the year 2050

Ellie & Amahle's focal issue centres on the long-term futures shaping women's economic participation and wellbeing in the year 2050: a domain marked by uncertainty, structural change and profound policy significance. This framing guides the deductive logic, the uncertainties we explore, and the strategic conversations the scenarios are designed to support.

Breakout groups

Join one of three groups focused on **Technological**, **Societal** or **Health** transformations.
Consider the key drivers of change, critical uncertainties and potential implications for Ellie and Amahle in 2036:



POTENTIAL

What opportunities might be found in this scenario?



DANGERS

What are the risks in this scenario, and who might be affected?



KNOWN UNKNOWNS

What are the uncertainties, blind spots and knowledge gaps?



SIGNALS

What signals are we seeing that challenge the assumptions made?



TODAY

What does this mean for our work today, and how do we prepare for this scenario?

TECHNOLOGY BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

Who owns the economic value *created by technology?*

Provocation: AI, robotics and digital platforms have dramatically increased productivity, but who captures the benefits?

01 **Does AI create widespread prosperity or concentrate wealth?**

02 **Who owns the productive assets of the future?**

03 **Does access to technology matter as much as ownership?**

04 **What happens to labour markets when talent competes globally?**

ELLIE & AMAHLE

Ellie has exceptional education and access to advanced technology, yet remains economically insecure. ***Why?***

SOCIETAL BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

What makes people *economically resilient?*

Provocation: The scenario challenges the assumption that resilience comes primarily from individual achievement and income.

01 **What matters more in 2050: personal wealth or collective resilience?**

02 **Can communities outperform markets during periods of uncertainty?**

03 **How should risk be shared between individuals, employers and society?**

04 **What happens when public services become private purchases?**

ELLIE & AMAHLE

Why does Amahle's community appear more resilient than Ellie's ***highly educated household?***

HEALTH BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

Is health becoming *economic infrastructure?*

Provocation: Longer lives and medical advances create new opportunities, but also new economic burdens.

01 **If people live significantly longer, who pays for those additional years?**

02 **How do healthcare and care responsibilities affect women's participation in work?**

03 **Is care now as important to economic growth as energy, transport or digital infrastructure?**

04 **Could medical breakthroughs widen economic inequality?**

ELLIE & AMAHLE

How does the organisation of healthcare, eldercare and childcare ***shape economic opportunity*** in each future?

Thank you

Scenarios for Good

Strategic Foresight for Public Benefit

www.ScenariosforGood.com

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Breakout sessions: Scenario discussions

Society		Main room (DLT)
Health		Room E36
Technology		Room E37

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14:40 – 15:15

COFFEE BREAK (R101)

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Panel discussion: *Women's Work in 2050: Shaping the Future We Want*



***Chair:* Ana Andrade**

Europe Economist,
Bloomberg Economics



Annette Reid

Consultant
Gynaecologist



Jacqueline Koay

Founder & CEO,
SOFIAA Health



Joanna Brewis

Professor of People and Organisations,
The Open University

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Reflections



Hiba Sameen

Lead Economist, The Health Foundation

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Closing remarks



Misa Tanaka

Chair UK Women in Economics Network

Senior Resident Fellow of the NIESR,

Associate of the Centre for Macroeconomics, LSE

Please complete the feedback survey!

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Or complete the feedback form with your contact details.

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