



WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE: The facts reveal it's an urban myth

Did you know ...

- On average, full-time working women get \$156.50 a week less than men ¹
- Australian women are significantly over-represented in low-paid, low-status work ³
- The labour force participation rate for females aged 15-64 is 66.1% compared to males at 81% ⁴
- Australia has one of the lowest workforce participation rates in the OECD for women with children under the age of 6 ⁵
- There are more female casual workers than men ⁵
- Women are significantly under represented in leadership roles. Of the top 200 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange, only one CEO is a woman ⁶



On average full-time working women get \$156.60 a week less than men.



Issues that affect women's rights to equality at work

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that the cost of child care had risen 30 per cent in the two years between 2002 and 2004.

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Pay Equity:

On average full time working women get paid 15.2% less than their male colleagues and earn on average \$156.50 a week less than men. ⁷ If you take away the difference in hours worked, women still earn 8% less than men. ⁸ This figure has changed little over the past decade. Improving pay equity is fundamental to women's equality since it increases women's labour market involvement

financial independence & life choices.

Low Pay:

1,589,000 women earn less than \$500 a week. ⁹ In the last three years alone, of the net new women's jobs created, more than half paid less than \$500 a week. Research shows that it is low paid women who will inevitably reduce her commitment to the paid workforce when a couple are struggling to balance work & family demands. ¹⁰

Casualisation:

31.2 % of all female employees are casual, with no access to paid sick leave or annual holidays or public holidays, with little job security. ¹¹ They are often required to work uncertain hours, are less likely to access training, are unable to save, unable to secure a home loan and face difficulties balancing the responsibilities of work and family.

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ISSUES THAT AFFECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Low Workforce Participation:

Women in Australia have lower workforce participation than men, and Australia has one of the lowest workforce participation rates in the OECD for women with children under 6.

Key reasons are that women who want to return to work struggle with the lack of accessible and affordable childcare, and have limited access to secure flexible jobs.

Workplace Flexibility:

Women who have caring responsibilities need access to flexible work practices to balance their caring and work responsibilities. Yet only 42% of federal workplace agreements contain one or more family friendly provisions. There were fewer agreements in 2001 compared to 1999, that had family/carer leave provisions, paid maternity leave, all purpose paid leave, or home based work provisions. Across the workforce 2.2 million female employees did not have the option to work extra hours in order to take time off¹², and 70% of all working men and women have inflexible start and finish times.

Access To Childcare:

Our society still views women as the primary care

giver, therefore accessibility and affordability of childcare are critical issues for mothers who want to return to the workforce. Yet in 2003, waiting lists grew by nearly 40%.¹³

In 2004, more than 160,000 women were interested in working but had not looked for work because of lack of access to affordable childcare.¹⁴ And, ABS figures show that the cost of child care had risen 30% in the 2 years between 2002 and 2004.¹⁵

Superannuation:

Spending less time in the workforce due to caring responsibilities (both for children and ageing parents) women typically need to make extra contributions to their super at more than twice the level of men if they are to retire comfortably.

Unpaid Maternity Leave And Government Funded Paid Maternity Leave:

Approximately two thirds of working women do not have access to paid maternity leave, forcing many women to use annual leave, long service leave, or to return to the workforce earlier than they should.

Permanent workers with less than 12 months' service and casual workers do not have access to maternity leave.



About two-thirds of working women do not have access to paid maternity leave.

¹ Selection of OECD indicators: How does Australia compare?
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/9/34545940.xls>

³ http://www.eowa.gov.au/About_Equal_Opportunity/Where_Are_We_Now.asp

⁴ OECD Employment Outlook 2004.

⁵ Selection of OECD indicators: How does Australia compare?
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/9/34545940.xls>
"There are more female casual workers than men" - ABS, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership* (Cat. No. 6310.0)

⁶ http://www.eowa.gov.au/About_Equal_Opportunity/Where_Are_We_Now.asp

⁷ Selection of OECD indicators: How does Australia compare?
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⁸ ABS, *Australian Social Trends 2005*, 4102.0 pg 150.

⁹ ABS, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership* (Cat. No. 6310.0)

¹⁰ Todd, T and Evenline, J. (2004) Report on the review of the gender Pay Gap in Western Australia.

¹¹ ABS, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership* (Cat. No. 6310.0)

¹² ABS (2003) Cat no. 6310.0

¹³ ACOSS (2004) *Children's Services On The Edge – Survey Report*

¹⁴ ABS (2004) *Persons Not in the Labor Force*, 6220.0.

¹⁵ ABS (2004) *CPI - Australia March 2003 and 2004*. 6401.0



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PROPOSED IR REFORMS WILL MAKE THINGS WORSE FOR WOMEN

The Democrats held the balance of power in the Senate and had been the honest brokers on industrial relations, working hard to find a balance between employer flexibility and employee rights.

The Government's IR reforms will excessively tip the balance of workplace relations in favour of employers, leaving many workers, especially women, vulnerable.

The Democrats ameliorated the 1996 reforms with 176 amendments, but now there is no-one to stop the Government's industrial relations reforms and ensure balance and fairness.



Only 42 per cent of federal workplace agreements contain one or more family friendly provisions.

Reform threatens gender pay equity

The Government proposes to take the responsibility for setting the minimum wage away from the independent Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) and replace it with a body of economic experts.

The aim of this reform is to reduce the amount and frequency by which the minimum wage increases. This government has opposed every increase in minimum

wages sought by the ACTU since 1996 and if it had had its way, workers on the minimum wage would be up to \$2,500 a year worse off than they are now.¹⁶

Despite a significant gender pay gap in Australia, it is actually narrower than other countries and many attribute this to Australia's relatively high minimum wage. There is no evidence that the Fair Pay Commission will address gender pay

equity issues. The AIRC will no longer have that ability. An assumption made by the Government is that low wage jobs will stimulate employment.

Researchers argue that low pay policy impacts negatively on the gender pay gap, and is likely to result in new forms of gender stratification and continuing disincentives to female participation in the Labour Market.¹⁷



Establishment of a Fair Pay Commission, changes to the "No Disadvantage Test" and push to inferior AWAs will see more women with less pay and worse conditions.



¹⁶ ACTU http://www.actu.asn.au/public/news/1118118002_28835.html

¹⁷ Todd, T and Evenline, J. (2004) Report on the review of the

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DEATH KNELL FOR 'NO DISADVANTAGE TEST' AWA's will now dominate job market

The Government will legislate five minimum conditions of employment: annual leave, personal/carers leave, parental leave, and maximum ordinary working hours, and in combination with the minimum wage these will form the fair pay conditions and standards.

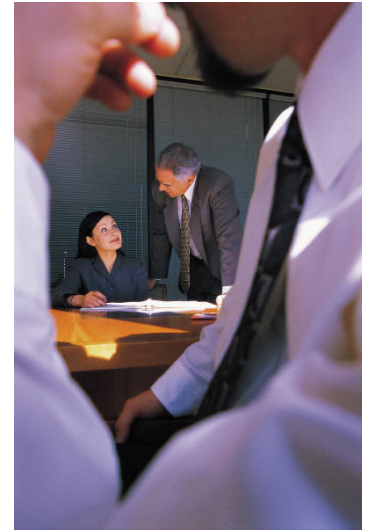
This will replace the current "no disadvantage test" which requires that agreements must not, on balance, reduce the terms and conditions of employment. The "no

disadvantage" test is based on awards, which currently include up to 20 conditions and minimum award skill classifications. Conditions such as redundancy pay, overtime, shift rates, casual loadings, notice of roster, public holidays, & allowances will no longer be minimum conditions.

The old no disadvantage test had been a disincentive to adopting Australian Workplace Agreements (AWA), but with the

changes, employment lawyers are likely to recommend AWAs to employers, meaning more and more Australians will be put on minimum conditions.

New inferior AWAs are more likely to be implemented in areas dominated by women where there are low levels of collective bargaining and union representation. Women move in and out of work a lot more than men & so will come under more pressure to sign individual employment contracts.



Women will come under more pressure to sign individual employment contracts.

Maternity payment fails needs of working women

The Government's \$3,079 Maternity Payment as a welfare payment does not meet the needs of working women.

Australia is one of only two countries without Government funded paid maternity leave. The UK has six months. The Democrats advocate a dual track system of 14 weeks government-funded maternity pay: one administered through employers to guarantee leave, access to superannuation, and ability to negotiate top ups; and one administered through



the family payment system paid fortnightly. There should be a minimum of 14 weeks leave for all working women. For further information click here.

Focus on unfair dismissal laws

Exempting businesses with less than 100 employees from unfair dismissal laws will mean that women workers can be unfairly sacked.

On a daily basis women are discriminated against in the workplace for pregnancy and family reasons.

While it is unlawful to dismiss workers for discriminatory reason such as pregnancy or family reasons, proving discrimination is often very difficult and many employees are not aware of their rights.



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CHILDCARE SYSTEM NEEDS CASH INJECTION: Urgent public demand for more places

The Government's response to the childcare problems has been poor.

The Government cut funding to childcare in 1996 and has spent the last 8 years trying to catch up.

The child care tax rebate is seriously flawed with families having to wait two years for the rebate; families need to manage their budgets today, not in two years' time, and it does not address the shortages of places.

The Government is also now forcing single mothers into the workforce without adequate out of hours

care (92% of parenting payment, single, recipients are women).

The Democrats argue that significantly more funding should be put into childcare and pre-school, with studies showing the benefits outweigh the cost.

The Democrats advocate up to 30 hours free childcare for all, combined with the existing childcare benefit system which would 'kick in' once the free hours have been used, plus a range of other critical initiatives.

For further information click here.



The need for quality childcare is a critical issue that demands urgent Government attention. The Democrats advocate up to 30 hours free childcare for all.



Tax free threshold is too low

The Democrats believe the tax free threshold is too low.

Those on the poverty line, and casual and part-time workers (the majority of whom are women), need not pay income tax at all, which would assist struggling families and mothers enormously.

The Democrats advocate for the tax free threshold to be increased to \$10,000 in the first instance, increasing it to \$20,000 in the future.

For further information please refer to our Fairer Tax Cut campaign.



It's time for Government policy to get family friendly

The Government argues that bargaining at the workplace level is the best way to provide flexible work practices.

The Democrats argue that the majority of women are missing out.

The Democrats believe that the time is right for more family friendly provisions to be legislated and, like the UK and other European countries, advocate for the right to part-time work, flexible work hours, increase paid family leave and unpaid carers leave, and allow casual workers after 12 months the choice for permanent employment or access to leave.

For further information click here.

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WE NEED YOUR HELP: Things you can do

1. Tell us about your experience in the workforce and what impact you think the IR reforms will have on you and your family, email your story.

2. Write a letter to a local newspaper in defence of the minimum wage, current award conditions and unfair dismissal protection. Send a copy to your local politician.

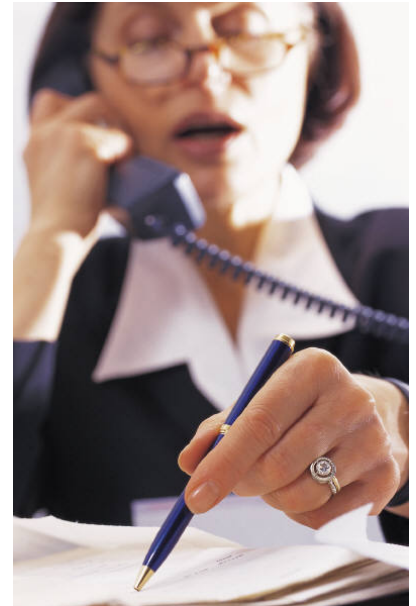
3. Write or ring Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews and Minister for the Status of Women, Kay Patterson plus a Senator from your state National or Liberal party, demanding an independent inquiry into the gender pay gap. Ask them whether they support gender pay

equity, equality for women in the workforce, and women's choice to combine care and work responsibilities and if so ask how they are going to address the current gaps that exist and have been persistent throughout the Coalition's governance.

4. Subscribe to the Democrats women's rights watch

5. Visit the ACTU's "your rights at work" webpage to find out about activities that you can go along to and protest against the reforms and remind people of the Democrats ameliorating role in industrial relations.

6. Pass on this fact sheet to 5 of your friends.



Women need to pick up a pen and pick up a phone to voice their concerns.

further reading ... further reading ... further reading ... further reading ...

See our IR campaign "Democrat's Fair Go for All on IR"

For further information about Democrats work and family policies click here.

Latest press releases for Workplace Relations

Latest press releases for Status of Women

Latest press releases for Work and Family

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www.democrats.org.au