

A Pink Recession... so why the Blue Recovery Plan?

COVID19 – IMPACT ON WOMEN

The need for effective and equitable recovery policies and interventions.

Gender Equity doesn't just happen – it must be designed in.

GENDER EQUITY IN AUSTRALIA IN DECLINE

Australia is not performing well when it comes to gender equity. *The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Index* ranks Australia 44th out of 153 countries. NZ ranks 6th¹. Australia fails to rank in the top 10 in East Asia and Pacific, sitting below the Philippines and Laos.

Australia has dropped 5 places in 2 years and in 2006 Australia was ranked 15th².

Australia is ranked number 1 for educational attainment, a ranking which has not changed since 2006. Despite maintaining this ranking over this period, we have seen a worsening in our overall ranking from 15th to 44th and our ranking on labour force participation and female representation in leadership.

The 2018 Global Gender Index Report found that *'Australia (39) records a slight widening of its gender gap on legislators, senior officials and managers as well as some reversal of progress on wage equality, resulting in a slight drop in rank'*³.

If education is not the issue, the key factors contributing to our worsening gap are most likely structural barriers and discrimination.

Looking closer, Australia ranks 49th on the economic participation gap, which measures wages, employment and workforce participation⁴. In 2006 Australia was ranked 12th.

Australia has also fallen further behind in representation of women in politics; from 32nd in 2006 to 59th in 2020 and also in health outcomes from 57th in 2006 to 104th in 2020.

¹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, p 9

² World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, p 9

³ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, p 21

⁴ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, p 12

[ACOSS's 2018 report](#) shows that in Australia, more women than men live below the poverty line and statistics from the [ABS last December](#), found women were the majority of those receiving long-term Newstart or Youth Allowance and the majority of those [receiving parenting payments](#), making them more vulnerable as poverty and economic vulnerability makes it harder to build capacity to absorb further economic shocks likely during a pandemic⁵.



In 2016, KPMG released a report *She's Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap*, prepared for the Diversity Council of Australia (DCA) and the WGEA. The report found that *'Despite significant advances in lifting women's participation in the labour force and women's pay across industries, and an increased recognition of the value of diversity in the workplace, the gender pay gap continues to persist.'*⁶

There are many factors driving the persistent gender pay gap in Australia, but the key one is discrimination. The KPMG report showed that sex discrimination not only continues to be the single largest factor contributing to the gender pay gap, but it is worsening with systemic discrimination

⁵ Amy Haddad, *COVID-19 is not gender neutral*, Broad_agenda 17 March 2020

⁶ KPMG, *She's Price(d)less: The economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, October 2016, p 2

remaining a persistent feature of the workforce. The proportion of the gender pay gap that is attributable to gender discrimination increased from 35% in 2007 to 38% in 2014.⁷

The report also found that career and work interruptions are responsible for 21% of the proportion of the gender pay gap which is the largest changing factor increasing from 9% in 2007.⁸

The next most significant contributing factor in the gender pay gap is industrial and occupational segregation, collectively representing 30% of the gap.⁹ The report found that the representation of men in particular industries and in occupations continues to have an effect on wages, with earnings in occupations and industries with a larger share of males being higher than wages for female dominated industries and occupations.¹⁰

While the report suggests that occupational segregation has decreased slightly, industrial segregation has increased. One reason given for the increase in the gender pay gap resulting from industrial segregation, is the increase in the proportion of males working in traditional male dominated industries which attract higher rates of pay and the simultaneous increase in the proportion of women working in female dominated industries such as health care and social assistance which traditionally attract lower pay.

Gender Equity in our Industrial Relations system

The Fair Work Act 2009 at s.3 does not contain an overarching objective of gender equality. There is currently no framework for the achievement of gender equality in the industrial relations context. The Fair Work Commission should be required to promote gender equality and strengthen minimum employment rights for women in all its functions and powers.

Modern Award Objective

The current Award system is not achieving the outcomes necessary to address the unacceptable and persistent issue of gender inequity in the workforce, including the gender pay gap. Pay equity needs to be an objective of the Fair Work Act and at the forefront when wages are set.

The Modern Award Objective at s134, includes an equal pay principle but there is no gender equity principle which underpins the operation of this section. A broad review of the current Award wage setting system and its impact on the gender pay gap, is necessary to correct the undervaluation of

⁷ Ibid, p 13

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, p 13.

work in female-dominated industries. The occupations and industries which have traditionally attracted women were relatively low paid when classifications in Awards were established.

There needs to be a review of the historical gender-based undervaluation which persists in Awards.

Much has changed in female-dominated occupations and industries including the introduction of educational and training requirements which are not reflected in the wages set in Awards. The failure to recognise accredited training and skills development in wage setting in feminised industries results in a persistent gap in the wages in female-dominated industries and occupations compared to male-dominated occupations and industries where wages are set at higher rates.

The mechanisms which are currently provided in the Fair Work Act 2009 (FWA) to remedy pay inequity are not working to close the gender pay gap. Significant changes to the FWA are required to achieve positive equal remuneration outcomes.

COVID-19 EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS

Exposure to the virus

Women are more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their economic insecurity, over representation in certain sectors of the economy, their caring responsibilities, and the feminisation of the education and healthcare sectors. As women have a higher representation in roles such as health care, retail, child-care and education – more women have been exposed to the virus as a result of their work.

Healthcare workers are predominately female so the burden of risk is highest on women in those sectors. Women make up 80% of hospital workers, 83.9% of the general medical practice workforce, including the professionals, and clerical and administration staff. 77% of pathology and diagnostic imaging workforce are women, and women make up 81.8% of residential aged care workers.¹¹

Therefore, the risk and the work involved in responding to this crisis is a female one. It has also created a tension between the need to ensure the health workforce is at peak capacity and the considerations around school closures because caring for kids and caring for the community comes back to women.

¹¹ ibid

Other health implications for women include impacts of COVID-19 on pregnancy and reproductive health. While the WHO and others are still unclear on the risks to pregnant women and their unborn child, it has raised concern and anxiety for pregnant workers and the need for additional protections for those workers.

Pregnancy and COVID-19

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) which is advising the Federal Government considers that, based on the limited current evidence, the following people are, or are likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they are infected with the virus:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions. 5 Conditions included in the definition of 'chronic medical conditions' will be refined as more evidence emerges. The most current list can be accessed on the Department of Health [website](#)
- People 70 years and older
- People with compromised immune systems (see Department of Health [website](#))

Pregnant women are not included in the AHPPC list of high-risk workers at this stage, but we believe they should be included, and risk assessments should be conducted for pregnant employees.

The WHO advice is that although there has not yet been enough research done on the risks for pregnant workers, they are generally considered to be more immuno-compromised than other workers.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) believes that pregnant women should be considered a vulnerable group.

The UK government has recently updated their advice in relation to pregnant employees and decided that they should be included in the vulnerable workers group and that employers should be conducting risk assessments. Their [advice](#) relates to health workers, but they say this could be applied to other workers who may be at risk:

There is as yet no robust evidence that pregnant women are more likely to become infected than other healthy individuals, however, it is known from other respiratory infections that pregnant woman who contract significant respiratory infections in the third trimester (after 28 weeks) are more likely to become seriously unwell. This may also lead to preterm birth of their baby if they need to recover through improving the efficiency of her breathing or ventilation.

Given these additional considerations for pregnant women who become seriously unwell in the later stages of pregnancy, the Government has taken the precautionary approach to include pregnant women in a vulnerable group.

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 causes problems with a baby's development or causes miscarriage. With regard to vertical transmission (transmission from woman to baby antenatally or intrapartum), emerging evidence now suggests that vertical transmission is probable. There have been case reports in which this appears likely, but reassuringly the babies were discharged from hospital and are well.

Increased exposure to workplace violence during COVID-19

Workers in the retail sector are exposed to extremely high levels of abuse and violence from customers and the evidence shows that women are at greatest risk.

A SDA survey of over 6000 workers in 2016 found;

- **Verbal abuse** – 89.91% of females experienced verbal abuse compared with 82.35% of males
- **Sexual harassment** - 13.56% of females who experienced customer violence or abuse in the last 12 months said it was of a sexual nature compared with 4.87% of males
- **Physical abuse** – this was experienced more by men, 15.79% of males indicated they had been a victim of physical violence compared with 13.98% of females

Over the past few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a very hostile environment in retail and fast food and increased the prevalence and severity of abuse and violence. This was particularly heightened in the period of panic buying, followed by low stock levels, purchase limits, customer limits and changes to service required to implement the COVID-19 health measures.

Retail workers have also experienced deliberate actions such as being spat at and coughed on by customers claiming to have the COVID virus, prompting the union to ask state governments to extend fines to individuals who spit or cough on retail workers.

This type of violence is also being experienced by workers in other sectors such as the health sector, which is also female dominated.

In a **recent survey of more than 500 members** in the SDA WA Branch survey, 76% of respondents said customer behaviour got worse since the pandemic began. It also found that **22% of retail workers had been deliberately spat on or coughed on during the pandemic.**

Retail trade losses are greater in areas dominated by women

The gender breakdown across retail is varied. Data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency shows women make up 57.7% of retail workers. But they make up the majority of retail workers in fashion (84.2%), department stores (66.1%) and furnishings and homewares (71.3%) – all sectors of retail hardest hit by COVID-19 and experiencing more closures and reductions in trade.

Supermarkets have a much more even gender breakdown but fashion and department stores have a much higher proportion of female workers. For example, from last year's WGEA reports;

- Coles: Females sales assistants make up 57%, males 43%
- Myer: Females 82%, males 18%
- Just Group: 93% females, males 7%

Even within industries, such as retail, which is female dominated, the impact across the sector for women is even worse than we would assume. The gendered impact is worse within retail. Parts of the sector, such as supermarkets, technology sales and hardware remained open and indeed traded strongly, whereas other parts, particularly fashion retailing which has a higher proportion of female workers have a more even gender breakdown of employees and the part of the sector which closed employ many more women than men.

Casual and insecure work

There are more women than men [working in casual employment](#) without sick leave entitlements. Women are also over-represented in the industries both heavily reliant on casual workers and likely to be hit hard by the restrictions, closure of businesses and economic downturn. The Retail industry employs a significant number of casual workers.

This crisis has magnified the industrial and social issues that already disproportionately impact women in insecure work as they are more vulnerable to losing employment, financial insecurity, domestic violence and homelessness.

200,000 Australian women who work in the accommodation, food services, and retail trade sectors alone missed out on the JobKeeper payment due to its design flaws around casual employees.

Job losses across the economy

In April, more women lost their jobs and more women were impacted by a reduction in hours:

- 350,000 women became unemployed compared to 270,000 men (5.3% of employed women have lost their jobs compared to 3.9% of men)
- Payroll jobs for females went backwards 8% compared to 6.3% for males from the middle of March to the end of May
- 11.5% of women suffered a reduction in hours compared to 7.5% of men
- Job keeper – failure to include casuals
- Women are twice as likely as men to be on zero-hour contracts
- Unemployment figures significantly underestimate the job losses

Data released on 5 May 2020 by the ABS shows that the accommodation and food sector has been most impacted, with about one third of jobs in the sector lost between mid-March and mid-April 2020. This was followed by the arts and recreation services sector with a decrease of 27% in employee jobs. Across sectors, jobs decreased by 7.5% and wages decreased by 8.2% between mid-March and mid-April 2020.[57] Over this same period, jobs held by women saw a larger decrease than jobs held by men, while wages paid to men decreased more. Jobs held by women decreased by 8.1% and wages paid to women decreased by 7.0%; whereas, jobs held by men decreased by 6.2% and men’s wages decreased by 8.9%.[58] 12

There is also some evidence to suggest that women-led small and medium enterprises may be more impacted during COVID-19. This is because women-owned businesses are generally operating with less capital and relying more on self-financing.¹³

Decline in incomes and financial insecurity have ongoing effects for household members.[61] Loss or reduction of women’s incomes affects families because women often invest their earnings into the household.[62]¹⁴

Increased risk of family and domestic violence

Increased time at home due to social distancing and isolation measures is placing women at greater risk of family violence. The economic pressures created by the pandemic and restrictions has also

¹² Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gendered Impacts of COVID-19*, May 2020

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid*

increased the risk and will continue to do so well beyond the end of the pandemic as those economic consequences persist. *'In April the United Nations raised the alarm over what it called "the shadow pandemic": a marked increase in violence against women during the COVID-19 lockdowns taking place across the globe*¹⁵.

The increase in domestic violence also comes at a time when access to services are impacted by restrictions.

Almost 60 percent of the 166 support practitioners surveyed in Victoria by Monash University said the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the frequency of violence, half of respondents said the severity of violence had increased, the number of first-time family violence reports had gone up 42 per cent, and practitioners themselves were struggling working from home, which was "wreaking havoc" on their boundaries and mental health¹⁶.

A recent survey by the Centre for Women in Queensland indicated that frontline domestic violence workers had seen a 20 per cent increase in family violence incidents related to COVID-19 financial stress and a near 40 per cent increase in the levels of violence and severity¹⁷.

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency has reported that *'Women's Safety NSW is seeing the impact of COVID-19 through an increase in violence, an increase in the number of clients and an increase in the complexity of cases, among other issues, and data from Google shows a 75% increase in searches about family and domestic violence. There is concern that victims of domestic violence may not receive much-needed support during COVID-19 with essential services disrupted, and individuals unable to make calls to helplines while in the same space as an abusive partner.'*¹⁸

While additional funding has been provided to the family violence sector at both federal and state levels, this may not be enough to meet the demands that existed prior to COVID-19, let alone the significant increases since the emergence of the pandemic. Comprehensive funding and resourcing to prevent and respond to family violence will be critical over the coming years.

¹⁵ Editorial, The Sydney Morning Herald, *How to stop the shadow pandemic of domestic violence*, 10 June 2020

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Baz Ruddick, ABC News, *Domestic violence removalist says coronavirus isolation has increased workload by 60 per cent*, 5 May 2020

¹⁸ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gendered Impacts of COVID-19*, May 2020, https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Gendered%20impacts%20of%20COVID19_0.pdf

The Federal government has not provided any additional funding to assist those experiencing family and domestic violence or provided additional funding to emergency accommodation services.

Lockdown restrictions have left millions of girls, women, and people of all genders vulnerable to a growing [shadow pandemic](#) of violence — including [cyberviolence](#) and exploitative grooming of children — and with limited access to help. For these people, technology can be a lifesaving line of defense, whether via instant messaging services with a geolocation function, free calls to domestic abuse hotlines, or discreet apps that provide disguised support and information to survivors in case of surveillance by abusers.

The Digital Gender Divide - Access to technology

Women, girls, and marginalized groups are the least likely to have access to technology, and COVID has highlighted this lack of connectivity.

The internet has evolved from being a luxury asset to a key utility and public good, yet [3.6 billion people](#) remain offline. Digital disparities reflect the inequality and discrimination that exist in wider society, with access lowest for the least privileged.

In low- and middle-income countries, [433 million women](#) are unconnected and [165 million fewer women](#) own a mobile phone compared with men. Boys are [1.5 times more likely](#) to own a phone than girls in many countries, and among those who do own phones, boys are more likely than girls to own smartphones. The global internet user gap is [17%](#), and the digital gender gap exists in all regions of the world — and continues to grow.

Online commerce and [mobile money](#) is now a growing phenomenon, with over 1 billion registered accounts and close to \$2 billion in daily transactions. Digital products are reaching the screens of increasing numbers of low-income users, including young people. Yet 1.7 billion people, [more than half of whom are women](#), remain financially excluded from the digital economy. This can mean that essential cash transfer programs do not reach women in times of crisis.¹⁹

¹⁹ UN Women. 'We cannot allow COVID-19 to reinforce the digital gender divide.' *UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Plan international CEO Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen*. Online. Wednesday, May 6, 2020

Several key Australian government policy initiatives, announced in response to COVID, relied on the use of, and access to, technology such as the transition of school students to home learning and the use of the ATO to access online support systems.

Online learning of students highlighted the technological divide. Professor Natalie Brown, Director of the Peter Underwood Centre at the University of Tasmania, was the lead author on a paper that found 46 per cent of all children could suffer.

"We're seeing an increase in families that are struggling in terms of being able to cover the basic needs — food and shelter and pay rent and all of those kinds of things, so that covers quite a number of young Australians," Professor Brown told the ABC.

Professor Brown said that while the initial research focussed on traditionally vulnerable students, the cohort had expanded because of rapid job losses and limited home internet access — circumstances exacerbated by the rush to remote learning.

"[It includes] all of the complexities of being at home — so some people not having a home, some people in economic disadvantage at home, others trying to balance work, multiple children," Professor Brown said.

But for those without access to devices such as phones and tablets and quality internet access the disadvantage experienced is significant

Policy responses to the economic crisis and their impact on women

The research into the impact of financial market crashes, such as Black Monday (US) 1987, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and the GFC in 2007, shows that existing inequalities are only exacerbated by an economic crisis.

The impact of an economic crisis is most acutely felt by women at year 3 and is felt for approximately 7 years.

Women's unpaid work is a significant contributor to economic growth yet is not counted or recognised. As a result of COVID-19, mothers are spending an extra hour each day on unpaid housework and four extra hours on childcare.

Fiscal policy has the biggest impact on gender equality outcomes and austerity policy does not achieve job creation or gender equity.

To date, there has been no gender analysis of policy decisions and no discussion about addressing the impact on women.

International research shows that investing in social infrastructure provides a greater return on investment and creates more jobs than investment in the construction sectors. Investment in the 'care' sector creates twice as many jobs as that in construction.

Policy development is still premised on the assumption of the male breadwinner model – which we see playing out with the construction jobs/ shovel ready narrative.

The economic recovery response and 'plan' to date has had, and will continue to have, a disproportionately negative impact on women.

As the economy starts to reopen, we need a strong plan to support an economic recovery from the pandemic. Australia's economy is underpinned by consumption. We need strong consumer spending to support our economic recovery. To support a consumer led recovery people need to have money in their pocket to spend.

Fiscal stimulus should be directed towards the retail industry not only to both support and recognise the valuable contribution of these low paid workers. The government should provide frontline workers with a low-income tax rebate or direct payment up to the value of \$1,500. The estimated fiscal stimulus to the NSW economy from this proposal is between \$1.2bn to \$2.8bn. Proposals to provide a combination of direct payments and/or low income tax rebates to low income earners and frontline workers up to the value of \$1,500 would cost \$3.4bn whilst providing up to \$8.7bn of economic activity (see McKell, *A COVID-19 Tax Rebate for Frontline Workers*)

[Childcare package](#)

Childcare is a key piece of infrastructure and impacts significantly on women's workforce participation.

The introduction of free childcare during the COVID pandemic was a welcome addition to families and children.

Childcare attendance among disadvantaged, vulnerable and Indigenous children increased with this initiative. Richard Weston, chief executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's advocacy body SNAICC, said many Indigenous community services had reported increased enrolment after the abolition of fees, with vulnerable children attending for more hours and some families accessing early learning and care for the first time.

Accessible, affordable quality childcare is an important enabler to women's workforce participation.

The Federal government has chosen to discontinue free childcare. This decision was accompanied by the removal of JobKeeper for those working in the Childcare sector; a sector with a female workforce of 96%.

Superannuation

Current research shows that 90% of women will retire with inadequate retirement savings and that in 2010 one in five women yet to retire had no superannuation at all.²⁰

In Australia;

- Women currently retire with 47% less superannuation than men
- Women live five years longer than men on average
- Women only receive 1/3 of the government tax concessions on super (men receive the other 2/3)

Quick stats

- 40% of older single retired women live in poverty and experience economic insecurity in retirement
- 46.9% of the workforce are women
- 44% of women rely on their partners income as the main source of funds for retirement
- 8.5% of women between 65 and 74 still have a mortgage
- The average female salary is \$44,000 (including part-time workers)
- Female graduates earn \$5,000 less than male graduates in the same role
- Women spend on average five hours more per day caring for children than men

Key factors behind the gender super gap

- 43% of women work part-time
- Women working full-time earn 18% less than men

²⁰ KPMG, She's Price(d)less: The economics of the Gender Pay Gap, October 2016, p 2

- Women take on average five years out of the workforce to care for children or family members which can cause their super savings to stagnate and begin to fall behind those of men
- The current 9.5% Superannuation Guarantee does not enable most women to accrue sufficient savings for a comfortable retirement
- An estimated 220,000 women miss out on \$125 million of superannuation contributions as they do not meet the requirement to earn \$450 per month (before tax) from one employer (as many women work more than one part-time job)

[Access to Early Release of Superannuation](#)

One of the first policy responses of the government was to amend the 'hardship' provisions to allow access to superannuation prior to the retirement age.

Analysis from AMP, one major superannuation fund, found that 21% of women were withdrawing their starting super balances, compared to 17% of men. Further, Female AMP clients were also withdrawing a larger proportion of their super than men, and were more likely to clear out their entire super savings (14%) compared to their male counterparts (12%). With the average superannuation balance for a woman in her early 40s at just under \$62,000, a withdrawal of the maximum is likely to wipe out the compound interest on their superannuation.

Women's ability to make up for their decreased superannuation through future earnings has also been reduced with 55% of jobs lost in Australia held by women. Female work hours also reduced by 11.5% in April, compared to a 7.5% reduction suffered by male workers⁴.

Women's Legal Service Victoria has also warned that women experiencing family violence almost always experience economic abuse, which could take the form of being forced into accessing their super early by violent partners.

So far, 581,000 women have accessed the superannuation early release scheme.

Superannuation is not a bank account and Superannuation is not social security, yet this policy has made it both. Women have had to fund their own COVID recovery which will have significant impacts on their ability to retire with dignity and security.

Home Renovations Package

The Government's \$150,000 renovation plan announcement will have little, if any impact on job creation for women. Unlike childcare, this initiative was **not** accompanied by the removal of JobKeeper for those working in the housing and construction sector.

Paid Parental Leave (Flexibility Measures)

The Paid Parental Leave (Flexibility Measures) Amendment Bill introduced by the government earlier this year was passed in the Senate on Thursday 11 June and will become effective for babies born on or after 1 July 2020.

In response to the adverse outcomes for women due to COVID-19, the ALP moved an amendment to the Bill that would have enabled expecting parents who have lost their job or work hours because of coronavirus to continue to meet the work activity test so they can access the Paid Parental Leave scheme, as they had planned. The amendment called on the Government to use the extraordinary regulation making power granted to the Minister for Families and Social Services under the coronavirus laws to prevent families from being excluded because they don't meet the work test due to COVID-19. The Government did not support the amendment.

Unfortunately, this is one of many measures which has had an adverse impact on women. The Government failed to amend eligibility for JobKeeper payments to parents who would, if it weren't for COVID-19, have continued to work prior to the birth of their child and families who are now missing out on paid parental leave and JobKeeper and may also have missed out on JobSeeker payments if they have a partner who has kept their job. The failure to fix this problem will force parents especially mums, back to work, before they and their babies are ready, as they won't get the paid parental leave they were expecting.

In 2005, prior to the introduction of the Government Paid Parental Leave scheme, the SDA surveyed members who had recently had a baby and asked them when they returned to work after the birth of their baby. The responses were;

RTW after birth of baby		Cumulative
1 week	7%	7%
2 weeks	7%	14%
3 weeks	5%	19%
4 weeks	0%	19%
5 weeks	2%	21%

6 weeks	3%	24%
2 months	2%	26%

The government’s decision to ignore the impacts of COVID on the Work Activity Test for those who are ineligible for JobKeeper or have lost their job, will mean that women, who miss out on the government paid parental leave payment will be forced to return to work early. This not only negatively impacts their health, but also the health of their baby.

Industrial Relations Working Groups - Awards

The Federal government review of Awards is limited in scope to only 3 Awards; Retail, Hospitality and Restaurants.

These three industries are characterised by low paid workers, women and young people. These three industries have been acutely impacted by COVID in terms of job losses.

More women are on the minimum Awards than men and will be greatly impacted by cuts in the wages and conditions of employment.

Award Reliance and Gender²¹

In 2020, women now make up 61% of award reliant workers.

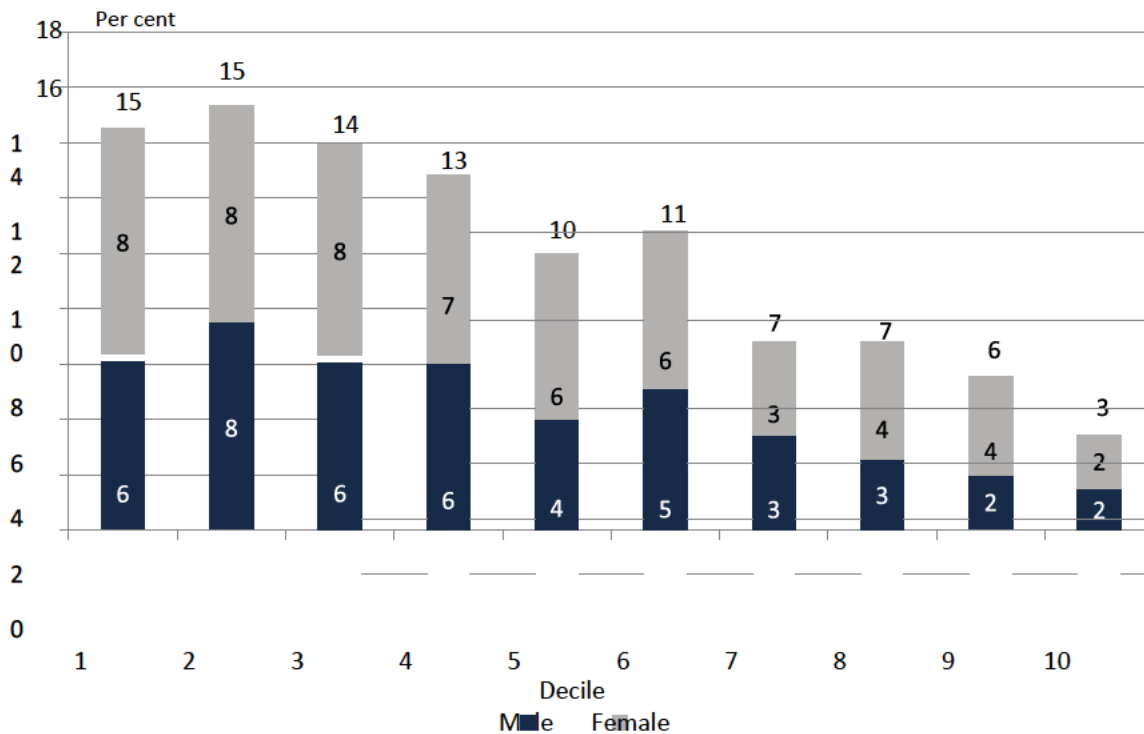
In 2017, the distribution of award-reliant employees by gender across the household income distribution is shown in chart below.

Among this sample, 56 per cent of award-reliant employees were female and 44 per cent were male. The proportion of males and females located across the bottom half of the household income distribution was relatively similar.

At the higher end of the distribution, a relatively higher proportion of females were located across the highest three deciles, however, this comprised less than 10 per cent of all award-reliant employees.

²¹ Research Report 1/2017 Award-reliant workers in the household income distribution
Carlos Jimenez and David Rozenbes February 2017

Distribution of award-reliant employees by household income and gender



Note the early comments regarding the Fair Work Act and the Modern Award Objective not requiring gender equitable outcomes when making changes to the award.

COVID-19 RECOVERY – A Pink Recession – so why the Blue Recovery?

The COVID-19 response and recovery provide us with an opportunity to reset our economy and fix some of the inequities and unfairness built into the current structure of our economy and society. The measures being considered and implemented must not exacerbate the existing gender inequalities but instead should aim to ensure a more equal outcome for women.

Research comparing the employment effects of increased public investment in construction with the same investment in the care sector, which includes health, education, childcare, aged care and disability care in seven advanced nations including Australia found that the employment gains from investing 1 per cent of gross domestic product in the care sector would generate more total employment than an identical investment in construction, especially for women, and almost as much employment for men.

In Australia the rise in the employment rate after investing 1 per cent of GDP in the care sector would be nearly twice that of the same investment in the construction sector, including direct, indirect and induced employment.

Women in Australia would gain well over half the new jobs created under the care sector scenario but less than one third of total new jobs generated if the investment was in construction.

The construction sector scenario was shown to widen the existing gender employment gap in favour of men in all seven nations studied. "Investment in construction increases the gender employment gap, while investment in care decreases it," says the study titled *The gendered employment gains of investing in social v physical infrastructure: evidence from simulations across seven OECD countries*.

The researchers also found additional investment in the care sector was much more likely to draw new people into paid employment and, therefore, increase the overall number of workers in the economy. This is not a feature of most physical infrastructure investment, the study notes.

There is overwhelming evidence that investment in health and childcare, especially high-quality childcare, lifts the productive capacity of the economy over time.

The researchers conclude that "social infrastructure investment policies should be considered on an equal basis with physical infrastructure programs" when economic stimulus is required.

Politicians seem to favour spending on building schemes during a downturn because the construction sector is a major employer accounting for about 9 per cent of jobs and has well-resourced, vocal advocates and big projects allow politicians to make grand announcements. But the retail, health care and social services sectors employ far more Australian workers, many of them women. Australia's workforce has been transformed since the last time we had a recession and policies to stimulate the economy need to adapt.

For every million dollars the government spends on education, it would create 10.6 direct jobs for women and 4.3 direct jobs for men. For every million dollars they spend on construction, it would create 0.2 jobs for women and 1 jobs for men.

SDA's 10 Point Plan for Gender Equity in a COVID-19 recovery and beyond

1. Gender analysis at the design stage as to the impact of policy decisions and interventions
2. Gender impact statement in the Federal and State budgets
3. Women at the table on all decision-making bodies and institutions
4. Ensuring that tax and social security measures do not continue to disadvantage women
5. A public policy response to ensure investment in modern work and workplaces
6. Economic investment (both public and private) and job creation which targets the whole economy and particularly the female dominated industries such retail and the care sector (health, education, childcare, aged care, disability care), hospitality and tourism.
7. Industrial Relations framework which addresses the issues for working women including the historical undervaluation of work, pay equity, flexible work and discrimination
8. Proactively address the gender retirement gap – super on every dollar for every worker
9. Flexible work rights
10. Access to training and skills development