



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE F WOMEN & THE ECONOMY

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES F

Objective F.1 Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment and appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.

Objective F.2 Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade.

Objective F.3 Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women.

Objective F.4 Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.

Objective F.5 Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.

Objective F.6 Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

'(150)Since it is often within the framework of such policies that individual men and women make their decisions, inter alia, on how to divide their time between remunerated and unremunerated work, the actual development of these economic structures and policies has a direct impact on women's and men's access to economic resources, their economic power and consequently the extent of equality between them at the individual and family levels as well as in society as a whole.'

(Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA))

OVERARCHING CONCERNS

The challenges to productive economic engagement of women continue in spite of a great deal of advancement for women in areas such as education and government /organisational initiatives. There continues to be a disparity between lifetime earnings between men and women, with superannuation being almost half that of men, though women have longer life-spans. The amount of liveable income required by women varies according to a multiple of factors and while Australia has legislated for a minimum wage, many women continue to struggle to live with dignity and security over their lifespan. Women's economic empowerment is the biggest social change of our times; however it presents social consequences particularly for families.

Discriminatory compensation occurs across employment sectors for women who continue to earn less than men, with pay differentials being more evident for Baby Boomer women and those in undervalued female dominated fields. Indigenous professional earn 28% less than their non-indigenous counterparts. Mothers earn significantly less than childless women. While women's earning capacity peaks in their mid 20's, men's earnings continue to increase. Pay in this context includes contractual benefits, e.g. bonuses and commissions. The disparity of lower pay

impacts on all areas of women's lives, such as, the cost of living, child-care, housing, medical and education and penalises their retirement security.

Special populations like single mothers, pregnant women, displaced homemakers, rural and regional women, CALD women, older women, indigenous women and women with disabilities continue to experience specific challenges additional to the cumulative effects of advantage and disadvantage on the economic security of women and their families throughout their lifetime. Contingent events (loss of a spouse or illness) are experienced differently depending upon one's economic condition just before the event. These factors also help explain why a large number of non-married women, who make up the majority of elderly households, are poor or near poor.

Recognition of overseas qualifications, affordable, mutual cultural understanding, culturally appropriate child care and an understanding of government benefits, are barriers to finding paid jobs for migrant and refugee women and may constitute a significant number of the hidden underemployed and unemployed. Women with disabilities face barriers to participation, access and suitable disability employment support agencies. Lesbians are economically worse off than either gay males or heterosexual couples, particularly single lesbians. Indigenous women in the Northern Territory are facing challenges in relation to the quarantining of their funds with many who travel out of the state being denied access to their pension. This severely limits travel to funerals or events out of the state.

Women predominate in underemployment and casual and contract jobs with unpredictable income. Approximately 70% of all part-timers and 80% of hidden unemployed are women. Many women cannot escape low-paid work due to insufficient access to affordable further education, a rich enabler to assist lifelong economic wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable where costs preclude them from participation. Isolation is growing as a challenge to employment and training, particularly by women in rural and regional areas, while older women face multiple barriers; age, physical health and low technical skills, leaving them vulnerable to low paid casual/contract work with no bargaining power. The indigenous unemployment rate is 5 times greater than for non-indigenous.

Paid Parental Leave will assist in more equitable workplaces and is a cornerstone in giving parents the time to care for their babies at this important stage of their lives. However, working families are struggling to balance their responsibilities on the job and at home.

People are working longer hours, affordable child care is hard to find and more working families are caring for older relatives. School going teenagers, particularly girls, with working parents, are at loose ends and vulnerable after school and in school holidays, as there is a lack of 'safe spaces' for this cohort. Child-care services and a school day/term that bears no relationship to their working lives, makes it difficult to balance work, life and family, with families bearing the brunt of the pressure, particularly for women, who continue to do the 'triple shift' of the added primary care and home duties.

Affordable and accessible child care and after school care, particularly in rural areas, exacerbates problems related with workforce participation. Child care places are often limited and services are quite expensive, with many women barely making an income after child care cost, and which can discourage many women from returning to work. Child care workers continue to be undervalued and underpaid. Professionalising this crucial sector would greatly enhance the quality of early

childhood development, however, the inevitable rise in related childcare costs would further challenge for women in the workforce.

A culture of silence exists in relation to workplace bullying and sexual harassment, with women continuing to be the most vulnerable. A large percentage of cases go unreported, often because women fear the impact it would have on their positions and chose job security rather than having to prove suffering psychological injuries.

GAINS

- ✿ There is an increase in the rate of growth of women moving in to more skilled occupations than ever before as professionals and associate professionals.
- ✿ Women have exploited their economic power over the past 5 years, with many women choosing professional career sacrifice to form successful companies or work-from-home businesses that better meet their personal needs over corporate workplace cultures and expectations, at a rate faster than men.
- ✿ The proposed introduction of a Paid Parental Leave scheme (begins on or after 1 January, 2011) and parents will be able to lodge claims from 1 October, 2010.
- ✿ A review of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 & the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency in a consultation process with community, business, trade union and higher education sectors, employees, expert academics, practitioners and women's organisations across Australia.
- ✿ The House of Representatives Standing Committee for Employment and Workplace Relations will report on an inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce. In 2010, the first federal test case on pay equity for community sector employees under the new Fair Work system will be heard.
- ✿ As of January 1st 2010, the federal industrial relation law Fair Work Act, requires employers, to provide upon request, greater flexibility to parents, not just the 'primary' carer, to care for their infant children. The employer can only refuse on 'reasonable' grounds. Employees can also apply for 2 years unpaid maternity leave (up from 1 year).
- ✿ Pay equity continues to be a significant inhibitor to women's full participation in the nation's economy, the fulfilment of their economic potential and their lifelong economic security.
- ✿ The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Status of Women, has made 'Women and the Economy' one of her three priority areas.
- ✿ The Australian Government is currently conducting a broad ranging review of Australia's future tax system which includes equity as a key principle and a comprehensive review of the pension system. The Pension Review will investigate measures to strengthen the financial security of seniors, carers and people with disability. Long term pension reforms will be delivered through the 2009-2010 budget contexts. The \$4.8 billion package builds on the \$7.5 billion in support provided in the Government's first budget, bringing new spending on pensioners, seniors and carers to \$12.3 billion. Payments will be non taxable and not included for income testing purposes. The Government's Economic Security Strategy also

includes help for self-funded retirees, who are eligible for a Seniors Concession Allowance or hold a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.

GAPS

- ✿ Women working full-time, year-round in Australia are paid approximately 83 cents for every dollar earned by men. The 17.3% gender pay gap is a national average which can be up to over 30% in some industry sectors.
- ✿ Unpaid work is not part of the workplace economy, being rendered 'invisible' to economists, politicians and policy planners.
- ✿ There is an urgent need to assist women with developing negotiation skills to achieve equal pay, promotion and improved working conditions, particularly those groups that may face any additional barriers.
- ✿ Some state governments have protected the rights of religious organisations and services, to refuse to employ or provide services to people who they believe may undermine their beliefs, such as lesbians, allowing the continued discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexuality, marital and parental status and gender identity.
- ✿ The undervaluing and underpayment of workers in the child-care sector continues.
- ✿ There is a lack of affordable and accessible child care and after school care facilities, particularly for after school care for young school-age youths, particularly girls, to ensure their safety and security.
- ✿ Workplace bullying and sexual harassment remains significant with a growing number of female toward female incidents occurring.

EMERGING ISSUES

- ✿ Increased incidents of bullying and harassment in the workplace, including an increase of female to female bullying.
- ✿ The demands of the growing expectations of working longer hours is having a detrimental effect on working families, particularly women as primary carers.
- ✿ Approximately half of young women 18-24 have consumer debt, such as loans and credit cards and are unable to pay the full balance every month.

SUGGESTED UN LANGUAGE FOR KEY PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

- ✿ Calling on governments to enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.
- ✿ Urge governments to improve the development of, and access to, technologies that facilitate occupational as well as domestic work, encourage self- support, generate income, transform gender-prescribed roles within the productive process and enable women to move out of low-paying jobs.

- ✿ Calling on governments to take measures to ensure equal access of women to ongoing training in the workplace, including unemployed women, single parents, women re-entering the labour market after an extended temporary exit from employment owing to family responsibilities and other causes, and women displaced by new forms of production or by retrenchment, and increase incentives to enterprises to expand the number of vocational and training centres that provide training for women in non-traditional areas.
- ✿ Urge governments to examine a range of policies and programmes, including social security legislation and taxation systems, in accordance with national priorities and policies, to determine how to promote gender equality and flexibility in the way people divide their time between and derive benefits from education and training, paid employment, family responsibilities, volunteer activity and other socially useful forms of work, rest and leisure.
- ✿ Calling on governments to provide affordable support services, such as high-quality, flexible and affordable child-care services, that take into account the needs of working men and women.
- ✿ Urging governments to enact and enforce laws against sexual and other forms of harassment in all workplaces.
- ✿ Calling on governments to seek to develop a more comprehensive knowledge of work and employment through, inter alia, efforts to measure and better understand the type, extent and distribution of unremunerated work, particularly work in caring for dependants and unremunerated work done for family farms or businesses, and encourage the sharing and dissemination of information on studies and experience in this field, including the development of methods for assessing its value in quantitative terms, for possible reflection in accounts that may be produced separately from, but consistent with, core national accounts.

UN REFERENCES

BPFA

Strategic Objective F.1 Action 165 (a) (f) (g)
 Strategic Objective F.2 Action 166 (g) (j)
 Strategic Objective F.3 Action 173 (b) (c) (f) (g); Action 176 (f)
 Strategic Objective F.5 Action 178 (g) (h) (j) (k) (o)
 Strategic Objective F.6 Action 179 (a) (e) (f) ; Action 180 (c)

B+5 OD

B+5 IV Action 53, 58, 60, 82 (a)

CEDAW

Article 11, 13

MDGs

MDG Goal 1, Target 1B, Indicator 1.4

Reference in other documents

E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/CRP.1 para 33

CSW Outcomes Documents 2005 – 2009

E/CN.6/2008/11 para 21 (z)(aa)(bb)
 E/CN.6/2009/15 para 15 (t) (u)