



Australian Council of Trade Unions

MEDIA RELEASE

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Women workers are losing out: new global report on gender gap is a wake up call for Australian employers

Australian employers must do more to encourage women's participation in the workforce and close the gender pay gap, following a major international report showing Australia is slipping further down world rankings on some critical indicators, say unions.

Australia lags behind developing nations such as South Africa, the Philippines, Lesotho and Sri Lanka on the overall rankings, according to the World Economic Forum's annual *Global Gender Gap Index* released this week.

On the critical measure of labour force participation, Australia has fallen from 40 to 50, with the female-to-male ratio stagnating at 0.84.

And on the measure of wage equality for similar work, Australia ranks only 60th in the world.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the results indicated that the global economic downturn had halted progress on equality in the workplace for Australian women.

A recent report by The Australia Institute found that women's participation in the workforce and their financial position was likely to worsen as a result of the downturn.

"It is a sorry state of affairs that one of the wealthiest nations in the world should be so far down the rankings for women's workforce participation and earning capacity," Ms Burrow said.

"It is clear that employers are not doing their bit to close the gap.

"In 1998, the Coalition Government drastically weakened the then-Affirmative Action Act by watering down obligations and accountability of employers.

"It is time for tougher monitoring and enforcement of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act, including naming of employers who fail to comply and an enhanced role for the Fair Work Ombudsman to investigate breaches of the Act.

"The disadvantaged and precarious position in the workforce that women have makes them particularly vulnerable to lay-offs in economic downturns.

"Over the course of her career, an Australian woman will earn \$1 million less than a man, and will retire with less than half the savings in her superannuation account.

"The financial crisis has further slowed any progress to achieving true equity in the workplace, and the great risk is that inequality for women and girls will become embedded.

"Closing the gender gap will produce a more prosperous and cohesive society."

A full copy of the report is available at:

<http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/GenderGapNetwork/index.htm>

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