

## Recommendations for new reforms to improve women's pay are long overdue, say unions

Australian employers must do more to close the gender gap or face tougher legal requirements and obligations, say unions.

Unions have welcomed proposals from a Parliamentary inquiry for action to improve women's pay, but say it is long overdue.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said it was a source of international embarrassment that in a wealthy country like Australia, the average female pay was at least 17% lower than for men.

"The former Howard Government's WorkChoices laws were a set back for women workers, with many being sacked unfairly or pushed onto low-paid AWA job contracts," Ms Burrow said.

"In recent years, corporate Australia dropped the ball on gender equity and stronger legal obligations need to be imposed to make sure business lifts its game.

"On many indicators – pay, participation, or senior executive positions - the place of women in the workforce has stood still or gone backwards over the past decade.

"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. This simply has to change."

The World Economic Forum's annual *Global Gender Gap Index* recently revealed a disturbing trend for Australia women, who are slipping further down world rankings on key indicators of labour force participation and wage equality.

Unions have raised concerns that the global financial crisis will further slow progress towards gender equity in the workplace.

Ms Burrow said recent comments from Workplace Relations Minister Julia Gillard, and its support for an equal pay test case to be run by the Australian Services Union, showed the Federal Government was serious about reducing inequity between men and women.

Unions are calling for tougher regulations on business to lift women's pay and career opportunities to prevent unequal remuneration, including performance improvement notices and mandatory action plans.

A specialist Pay Equity Commissioner should be established to gather data, monitor and investigate equity in pay, conditions and benefits.

The ACTU is backing the major new test case in Fair Work Australia that could lift the pay of workers in the female-dominated social and community services sector by more than \$100 a week.

Workers in the sector have historically been underpaid because their jobs were undervalued as "women's work".

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