

Secure Jobs. Better Future.

Organising Women in Unions

Developments since Congress 2009

In 2010, the ACTU Women's Committee conducted a survey of women's representation in unions to see whether it reflected the increased participation of women in the workforce and union membership.

The findings of the 2010 survey were presented in the Women in Australian Unions (2011) Report, which was tabled at the July 2011 ACTU Executive.

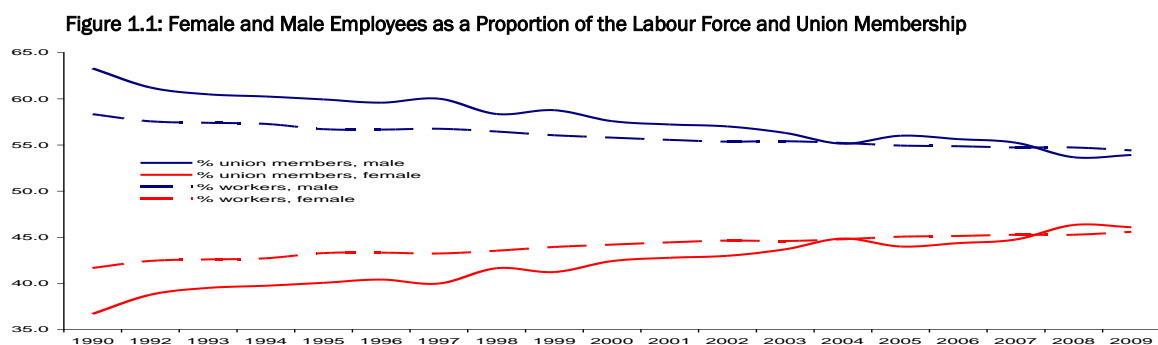
Noting that a significant number of affiliates had not completed the survey, the Executive resolved to re-distribute the survey. This was repeated in November 2011 and March 2012. A table of unions who completed surveys is attached.

Executive endorsed:

- The Recommendations of the Women in Unions Report 2010 and confirmed ongoing commitment to funding and participating in the survey; and
- Regular, streamlined surveys to be conducted every three years, the results of which are to be reported to each ACTU Congress.

Key issues

Women now make up almost half of the paid workforce and half of total union membership¹ and represent a significant growth potential for unions, as indicated in the chart below:



Source: ABS 6310.0 - Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, August 2009.

¹ ABS Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union membership, August 2010.

The Report commended unions for significant progress in increasing the female membership of unions overall.

However, the Report found that:

- a) Women's increased union membership has not equated to increased influence with respect to union policies and activities, as they are still not proportionally represented within the formal decision making structures of unions, whether as employees or elected officials.
- b) Whilst women tended to be very active in workplaces, their participation in union activities tended to drop off in formal union structures linking the union to workplaces. For example:
 - Women made up 49% of delegates, an astonishing 66% of deputy delegates and 63% of branch committee members; but
 - Only 33% of presidents or vice presidents were women; and
 - Only 26% of secretaries or assistant secretaries were women.

Impact for workers

Unions employed a range of practices to facilitate women's participation both as members or employees, but there was scope for improvement.

- Just under half of unions had a National Women's Committee;
- 21% of unions had affirmative action positions for National / State Executive and 14% for Congress delegates;
- Only 12% set targets for representation of women at this level;
- Less than half had equal opportunity, work and family or childcare policies for employees; and
- Approximately one third of National Offices and one half of state branches did not provide employees with paid parental leave, part-time or flexible work arrangements, leadership and development training and support for women or regular women's conferences.

Of those unions that did employ these practices, most rated them as effective or very effective in addressing women's capacity to participate in their union.

Around half of all unions had standard bargaining claims for a variety of issues important to women members, such as personal / carer's leave (71%), paid parental leave (60%), access to part-time work (54%) and flexible work arrangements (43%).

One third of unions had mechanisms in place (such as surveys or regular reviews) or monitored bargaining outcomes to ensure women's issues were adequately represented in bargaining processes and outcomes. One quarter had mechanisms in place to ensure women members were represented on bargaining committees or in the bargaining process.

Agenda 2012-2015

Organising women should be part of every union's growth strategy.

In order to organise women into unions, their issues need to be addressed in all union organising and bargaining practices and women need to be represented across key positions within the union.

Supporting and developing women's influence in unions will help ensure the union's priorities reflect that of its female membership and potential membership.

Removing barriers to women actively participating and reaching senior levels within the union will improve the union's ability to attract the best possible leadership talent.

The Report noted there was scope for improvement within the union movement to ensure women's industrial needs are adequately represented and removal of barriers women face in accessing senior and elected roles within their union.

The Women in Unions Report (2011) is a vehicle for all unions to assess their activities and practices in relation to women members and employees and to encourage proactive strategies to improve those practices where possible.

Recommendations of the Women in Unions Report 2010

2.1 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN UNION STRUCTURES

Encourage women delegates and employees to participate in union structures by:

- 2.1.1 Setting appropriate goals, actions, resources and timeframes to increase women's active participation in the union;
- 2.1.2 Ensuring women members are consulted and their issues addressed, when developing union industrial priorities and growth campaigns;
- 2.1.3 Removing barriers which discourage the participation of women in union activities by taking into consideration the availability of employees and delegates with family responsibilities;
- 2.1.4 Identifying and sponsoring women delegates to move in to roles including elected positions;
- 2.1.5 Encouraging and supporting women employees to take on more senior roles within the union;
- 2.1.6 Ensuring women employees are afforded equal opportunities to access career development such as acting in higher duties and board positions;
- 2.1.7 Developing policies for union employees including the right to part time work following parental leave, flexible work arrangements, protection against sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination. Provide mandatory training for all officials and union employees regarding these union policies;
- 2.1.8 Consider establishing dedicated positions for women on union Committees of Management, Executive, Council, Congress, and other high level union committees;
- 2.1.9 Ensuring there is a union official(s) who has responsibility in the union for women's issues and reports at each union executive;
- 2.1.10 Establishing a women's committee and regular women's conference;
- 2.1.11 Monitoring and reporting to the union executive annually on the representation of women at all levels within the union; and
- 2.1.12 If not already required by legislation, considering submitting EEO reports annually to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA).

2.2 PEAK COUNCIL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Ensure peak council leadership and representation of women by:

- 2.2.1 Ensuring women members' issues are included in industrial, growth and campaign priorities, actions and resources set at Union, TLC, ACTU Executive and Congress level;
- 2.2.2 Ensuring all unions have a representative on the ACTU Women's Committee and integrating the work of the Committee into other recognised priorities of the ACTU, including in education, industrial and campaigns;
- 2.2.3 Funding and participating in the ACTU Women in Unions survey which is to be conducted 12 months before each ACTU Congress with the findings to be reported as part of the formal Congress Agenda;
- 2.2.4 Ensuring that women remain proportionately represented at ACTU Congress and include consideration of women's issues in each item at Congress; and
- 2.2.5 Continuing to promote and support the Women in Male Dominated Occupations and Industries (WIMDOI) network by encouraging members to attend and actively participate in the biennial conferences.

2.3 BARGAINING AND INDUSTRIAL AGENDA

Ensure women members' issues are included in the bargaining and industrial agenda by:

- 2.3.1 Developing bargaining claims in consultation with women members including consideration of the suggested provisions contained in the ACTU Work and Family Bargaining Guide;
- 2.3.2 Bargaining for appropriate facilities and conditions for women workers in male dominated workplaces, and removing barriers which unfairly discourage women's participation;
- 2.3.3 Ensuring women representatives are on all bargaining committees; and
- 2.3.4 Implementing a bargaining checklist to ensure that women's claims do not "drop off" and review achievement of women members' bargaining priorities.

Advancing the representation and participation of women in unions

The Women in Unions research project was conducted by the ACTU Women's Committee with assistance from Dr. Rae Cooper. The survey followed on from the inaugural survey conducted in 1999. The 2010 survey was distributed to all unions to ascertain the level of participation of women across all levels and aspects of the union movement. The results were presented to the July 2011 ACTU Executive. Consequently, the Executive passed a resolution:

- Endorsing the recommendations of the Women in Unions Report 2010 and confirming its ongoing commitment to funding and participating in the survey;
- Supporting the proposal for a regular, streamlined survey process which is to be conducted every three years with the next one in 2014, prior to Congress 2015; and
- Proving that results be regularly reported as part of the formal ACTU Congress agenda.