

## Women's job security, pay and conditions likely to worsen because of GFC

A new push is needed to achieve gender equality in the workforce with evidence that on most measures, Australian women have gone backwards over the past decade, says the ACTU.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said there was a risk that the gender disadvantage would worsen because of the Global Financial Crisis.

Ms Burrow overnight delivered the keynote address to the First World Women's Conference, *Decent Work, Decent Life for Women*, hosted by the International Trade Union Confederation in Brussels.

The conference, attended by 450 women trade union delegates from 100 countries, will analyse the impact of the global jobs crisis on women and map out international trade union action to improve women's job security, pay and conditions.

The conference will hear that around the world there has been a steady rise in precarious work for women in recent years, leaving many women in short-term jobs with low pay and little protection from exploitation, and lacking social security and pension entitlements.

Australia ranks a lowly 41 in the global index of women's workforce participation.

Women in full-time paid work earn 17% less than men, amounting to more than \$1 million less over a lifetime, and will retire with less than half the amount of savings in their superannuation accounts than men. In the past few years, the gender wage gap has grown from women earning 87 cents for each dollar earned by men in 2004, to 84 cents in 2007.

And a recent report by The Australia Institute found that women's participation in the workforce and their financial position will worsen as a result of the downturn caused by the Global Financial Crisis.

"Almost 40 years have passed since the Australian Industrial Relations Commission awarded equal pay for work of equal value, yet pay and workplace inequity has remained a stubborn feature of our labour market," Ms Burrow said.

Ms Burrow said lack of progress on women's rights in many parts of the world was a clear indictment of the free market model. Women's disadvantaged and precarious position in labour markets makes them particularly vulnerable to lay-offs in economic downturns.

"There is now a danger that because of the financial crisis, we will see inequality for women and girls become embedded for generations to come.

"This will result in precarious work becoming the norm, more women dropping out of the labour force, and a widening pay gap.

"When security of work and incomes for women declines, family vulnerability rises dramatically."

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