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Breaking down the gender divide: workforce segregation driving inequality

Entrenched division between male and female-dominated industries is perpetuating gender inequality in the Australian workforce and must be tackled, the ACTU said.

ACTU president Ged Kearney will today speak at the Fifth International Community, Work and Family Conference and the 25th Women, Management and Work Conference about how the law can help break down the gender gap at work.

“Australia has one of the most sex-segregated labour markets among the OECD countries with women’s and men’s work being clearly separate in many sectors. And we know that so-called ‘women’s work’ remains much lower paid than ‘men’s’,” she said.

Ms Kearney said women were over-represented in administrative and caring roles and under-represented in skilled trades. For example women represent 79 per cent in health care and social assistance and only 14 per cent of technicians and trades workers.

“We need to recognise the value of the work many women do in caring roles and service industries,” said Ms Kearney.

“We need to provide more opportunities for women to enter male-dominated industries that tend to be better-paid and have more opportunities for training and promotion.

“We also need to keep fighting the discrimination many women face due to their caring responsibilities.

“We need continued government policy and regulation because it is very clear that letting the cards fall where they might produces inequitable outcomes,” Ms Kearney said.

“Employers are applying the one-size-fits-all approach which is only fair to those who fit the mould: full-time, no dependents and work in a male dominated workforce. Many workers, especially women, are responsible for the care of others, may have to work part-time and are in professions that do vital work that is still undervalued.”

She said new reporting on gender inequality could surprise employers who may not realise how their workplace policies breed inequality.

“The Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting obligations that started this year may be a wake-up call for employers.”

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