

Gender Pay Gap



The gender pay gap measures the difference between the average earnings of women and men in the workforce. The gender pay gap is an internationally established measure of women's position in economy in comparison to men.

It is not the difference between two people being paid differently for work of the same or comparable value, which is unlawful.

Undervaluation of Women's Work

“Women's Work” has historically been less valued than traditional male work. In 1951 a meeting of the international Labour Organisation passed convention C100. The convention asked each member country to “by means appropriate promote and, in so far as is consistent with such methods, ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value”.

At home things took a little longer. During World War II, workers were needed to replace the men who had been shipped overseas for service, and women enthusiastically filled the labour shortage. In 1943, in response to rising pressure from women's organisations, the government established a Women's Employment Board, securing women war workers around 75% of the male wage. With the return of the male workforce at the end of the war in 1945, there was a sharp decline in women's employment participation.

It was not until 1969 that the first wage equity decision was made by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (later the Australian Industrial Relations Commission). This introduced 'equal pay for work of equal value'. The ruling officially set the female wage at 85% of the male wage. A follow up decision in 1972 awarded women wholly equal pay.

Equal Pay in 2012

In the years since the landmark 1972 decision, there has been minor improvement statistically.

However, on 1 February 2012, a full bench of Fair Work Australia made its first equal pay ruling. In the landmark case the majority of the bench accepted a joint submission from the Federal Government and unions to increase the pay rates in the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Industry Award 2010 by up to 41%.



The joint submission argued the wage gap between SACS sector workers and public sector workers could be attributed to gender, as the majority of work being performed by SACS workers is “care work”.

Gendered industry sectors and corresponding wage rates are just one element contributing to the gender pay gap. Women are also more likely to work part time or have casual or insecure work, have responsibility for care and other household work, as became evident during the recent Covid pandemic, are less likely to get bonuses or overtime and have lower superannuation balances.

The gender wage gap is currently around 13.5%, and work that is traditionally dominated by women is still lower paid.

Ending the gender pay Gap

To address this gap the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (now governed by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012) requires that all organisations with 100 or more employees annually report on their progress in narrowing the gap and addressing gender imbalances in the workplace.

However, the Equal Pay decision shows clearly how influential union action can be in creating change. The Australian Workers’ Union will continue to actively pursue the best possible outcome for members including closing the gender pay gap and ensuring that all members are paid fairly for the work they perform.

Courses of Action

If you suspect that you are earning less than fellow male employees in the same role, because you are a woman, contact your AWU HSR/Delegate or Organiser, if you need more information, advice or support at your workplace. Or you can contact your branch directly:

QUEENSLAND BRANCH
Toll-free 1800 298 753

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH
Phone: (08) 8360 1900

NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH
Toll-free: 1300 763 223

WEST AUSTRALIAN BRANCH
Toll-free: 1800 810 723

VICTORIA BRANCH
Toll-free: 1300 362 298

TASMANIA BRANCH
Toll-free: 1300 795 677

