



Fair Opportunity and Workplace Culture Fact sheet

Have you ever wanted to take time off work to look after a sick child or other relative? Or to go to your children's school concert or sporting activity? Have you ever had your request refused, or even not asked because you didn't want your employer to think you weren't serious about your job?

What is the problem?

Despite a large increase in part-time work, most workplaces still operate on the basis of a traditional male norm. Full-time workers are viewed more seriously, and there is an assumption of the existence of full-time unpaid domestic support from a wife.

Part-time paid work and flexibility to deal with family responsibilities are generally seen as "women's issues", and those who demand them are treated less seriously by being given fewer training and promotion opportunities.

- [One-quarter to one-third of the workforce](#) in Australia work part time, a higher percentage than in most other OECD countries.
- The part-time work force grew from 19.7% in 1987 to 28.6% in 2006
- Over 60% of the part-time workforce are female¹

Do you know how many employees have used their right to request flexible working arrangements to care for a child under school age, or a child (under 18) with a disability? Do you know how often their requests were refused? Do you know the difference in the average starting salaries and performance pay of men and women in your industry? No: no one knows, and so no one acts.

¹ Productivity Commission, paper by Joanna Abhayaratna, Les Andrews, Hudan Nuch and Troy Podbury, 12 June 2008.

What needs to happen

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency was established in 1986 to encourage cultural and systemic change in workplaces. Employers of 100 or more people are required to report to the Agency annually on their equal opportunity programs, and the Agency uses this process to provide advice and education to employers on further actions that can be taken. But the Agency cannot oblige employers to meet particular equal opportunity minimum standards. It is not even able to get information about employers who should be reporting, but don't. Nor can it specify what data it needs from those who do report.

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act should be amended to

- require the progressive implementation of minimum equal opportunity standards (such as sexual harassment training and equal pay reviews)
- enable the Agency to collect comparable data from employers so that employers can benchmark their own performance and the Agency can provide evidence-based reports and policy proposals to Government
- require employers to make their equal opportunity reports directly available to their own employees
- give the Agency access to the names and addresses of all employers of 100 or more staff who should be providing annual equal opportunity reports.

WEL will be using our Feminist Policy Framework to lobby government for policies that increase fairness.

- *Ensure the costs and benefits are fairly distributed between women and men, as well as between different groups of women*
- *Value and reward fairly people's different skills, experiences and contributions*
- *Recognise the value of caring and supporting roles, whether paid or unpaid*
- *Recognise and rectify past and current inequalities and between men and women; and*
- *Enhance opportunities for both women and men to take on equal rights and responsibilities in all aspects of society: politics, community, employment and social life*

What you can do

Email or send a copy of this fact sheet to your local member asking them whether they support these amendments to the EOWW Act.

Make your voice heard for fairness