Family and unpaid work

Phase One consultation: National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

# Introduction

Gender equality is at the heart of the Australian Government’s vision for a better future, and the Government is committed to restoring Australia’s leadership on gender equality.

The Government will develop a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (the Strategy) to drive this ambition.

What will the Strategy do?

The Strategy will guide whole of community action to help make Australia one of the best countries in the world for equality between women and men. It is an important mechanism to elevate and prioritise actions that will achieve gender equality.

The Strategy will complement other efforts across the Government to achieve gender equality, including:

* the [*National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32*](https://www.dss.gov.au/women-programs-services-reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032) (National Plan)
* the Government’s response to the Australian Human Rights Commission’s [Respect@Work Report](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020)
* the[*National Women’s Health Strategy 2020–2030*](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-womens-health-strategy-2020-2030)

It will also support the work of similar state and territory plans.

How will the Strategy be developed?

The Government will deliver the Strategy by mid-2023.

The Office for Women will develop the Strategy in consultation with women and girls around Australia, with a focus on ensuring that diverse voices are heard and included.

The Government has also established the Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce (the Taskforce) to provide independent advice to Government, ensuring women are at the centre of policy and decision-making. The Taskforce will be a leading contributor to the Strategy, and as part of this will engage broadly with the Australian community to elevate and honour the voices of women in the Strategy.

The six [National Women’s Alliances](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/grants-and-funding/national-womens-alliances) will also play a key role in informing the development of the Strategy.

Consultation

Consultations will reach people with lived experience of gender inequality, living with disability, First Nations people, people who are LGBTQIA+, migrant and refugee women, those living in regional and remote areas and people from all backgrounds and classes.

The consultation will be undertaken in **two stages.**

Starting in November 2022, the Office for Women will lead targeted national consultations to inform the early development of the Strategy. These will take place across Australia and include discussions with a range of stakeholders, including gender experts, academics, economists, women’s alliances, the community sector, unions and business.

In early 2023, broader community consultations will provide an opportunity for people to share their views of how we achieve gender equality and how this should be reflected in the Strategy.

The Strategy will draw from a comprehensive evidence base, and reflect public commentary, recent consultations and submissions to government. It will draw from contemporary research and reports, including those prepared for the [Jobs and Skills Summit and resulting Employment White Paper](https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/jobs-summit)

Further information on consultation will be provided on the Office for Women’s [webpage](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality) .

For further information or to express interest in being included in consultation, please contact: [OFWengagement@pmc.gov.au](mailto:OFWengagement@pmc.gov.au)

# Current situation

(Note: The research and evidence outlined in this paper are not intended to be exhaustive, instead it is used to facilitate consultation.)

* Women in Australia engage in 43 per cent less paid work than men. However, women spend 81 per cent more time in unpaid work than men impacting their ability to do more paid works. Women perform 50 per cent of the total value of Australia’s paid and unpaid work.[[1]](#footnote-2)
* Australia has a large labour force participation gap between women and men – 8.6 percentage points in October 2022 (70.9 per cent men vs 62.3 per cent women).
* Uptake of the Government’s Paid Parental Leave (PPL) Scheme is highly gender segregated: 99 per cent of Parental Leave Pay recipients are women and 99 per cent of Dad and Partner Pay (DaPP) recipients are men. In 2020–21, 89,784 fathers and partners received DaPP, accounting for only around 30 per cent of births in Australia. By contrast, 169,029 mothers received PPL, accounting for 57 per cent of births.[[2]](#footnote-3) While employer‑provided primary carers leave is becoming increasingly available to both men and women, only 12 per cent of those who took it in 2020–21 were men.[[3]](#footnote-4)
* Following parenthood, women typically make significant and long-term adjustments to their paid employment, while men’s employment remains largely unchanged. Women in Australia face a ‘motherhood penalty’. Women’s earnings are reduced by an average of 55 per cent in the first 5 years of parenthood. Financial penalty persists even among women who continue to work – their incomes are about 5 per cent lower than if they had not had children.[[4]](#footnote-5)
* The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS*) Time Use Survey* data shows that in 2020–21,women – when compared to men – do over 9 hours more unpaid work per week (or 1 hour 19 minutes per day) but spend 1 hour less per day in employment related activities (e.g. working, job searching and travelling to and from work).

# Drivers of gender inequality

Research and stakeholder feedback to date suggests, but not limited to, the following drivers of gender inequality on family and unpaid caring responsibilities:

* Parenthood has a significant impact of women’s economic outcomes. Since work and caring responsibilities seldom aligned, someone in the family – often the secondary income earner – has to do the juggling, balancing their work lives and family lives. Taking time out of work or limiting work hours – often for caring responsibilities – can have a big impact on women’s labour force participation, pay and career progression. Factors related to unpaid care work, interrupted workforce participation and part‑time employment contribute 33 per cent of the national gender pay gap.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* Persistent gender norms that deem women as ‘caregivers’ and men as ‘breadwinners’, along with existing social structures can make it difficult for fathers to be highly involved and engaged at home. While men’s identities, priorities and aspirations in relation to work and care have changed significantly over recent decades, most employers have not kept up with these changes.
* Women with young children are much more likely to be working flexibly – part-time, flexible working arrangement or from home – than men with young children. Often these flexible and part time roles are found in a limited number of occupations and industries that are less well remunerated than industries that have predominately male full-time workers.
* Australia’s current tax and transfer system and child care costs impact on families’ decision to increase working hours, particularly for families with young children. The interaction between tax, welfare settings and out-of-pocket child care costs, can be punishing for the fourth and fifth day of work. As a result, a typical woman with pre-teenage children works 2.5 days a week, and the proportion of Australian women working part time is higher than almost any other developed economy.
* In addition to caring for young children, women continue to shoulder significant burden on caring for their elderly parents and other family members. As at 2018, 72 per cent of primary carers – i.e., they provide the majority of care to the person needing support ­– were women, with middle-aged primary carers particularly likely to be women (82 per cent for carers aged 35–44; and 75 per cent for those aged 45–54).[[6]](#footnote-7)

# Discussion

We ask that you contribute your views on:

1. What are the drivers of gender inequality in care responsibilities and unpaid work?
   1. What is the role of policy settings (e.g. tax rates for second earners) and gender norms in driving the gender divide in paid and unpaid work?
   2. What factors contribute to the ‘motherhood penalty’ in Australia?
2. What are the barriers to achieve greater gender equality of unpaid work in Australia?
3. What are some concrete policy options that should be considered as part of this Strategy to enable better sharing of care and unpaid work?
   1. How do policy settings reinforce and influence gender norms and how can government encourage more equitable sharing of care responsibilities?
   2. Would increase in access to flexible work arrangements help families manage paid and unpaid work? Could government policy play a role to help promote access to flexible work arrangements?
4. What will success look like and how can it be measured and evaluated?

We are mindful of the need to ensure the rich variety of lived experiences of people in Australia are captured during this consultation process. This includes hearing from those who:

* are living with disability;
* are First Nations people;
* are people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community;
* are migrants and refugees;
* are people of colour;
* are living in regional and remote areas;
* are of different ages and life stages, education levels, migration status, and/or socio-economic background;
* have experience of trauma; as well as
* all other factors that may impact people’s experience of gender equality or inequality.

1. CEW (Chief Executive Women) (2022) *Addressing Australia's critical skill shortages: Unlocking women's economic participation,* Sydney and KPMG (2021) [*Towards a more equal sharing of work*](https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2021/towards-a-more-equal-sharing-of-work-parental-equality.pdf), May 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Department of Social Services (2021) [*Annual report 2020-21*](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/publications/tabledpapers/e9d4eb0f-4ef4-41f3-95ef-b2b7cf8c491e/upload_pdf/Department%20of%20Social%20Services%20Annual%20Report%202020-21.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22publications/tabledpapers/e9d4eb0f-4ef4-41f3-95ef-b2b7cf8c491e%22)*,* Canberra, pp 99–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. WGEA (Workplace Gender Equality Agency) (2022) [*Australia’s gender equality scorecard 2020–21*](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-21_WGEA_SCORECARD.pdf)*,* Sydney, February 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Bahar E, Deutscher N, Bradshaw N and Montaigne M (2022) [*Children and the Gender Earnings Gap*](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-10/p2022-325290-children-gender-gap.pdf)*,* Treasury Round Up, October 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. KPMG (2022) *She’s Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap,* A report for Diversity Council Australia and WGEA, Australia, p 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2021) [*Informal carers,*](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/informal-carers)Australia Welfare’s 2021, accessed on 11 October 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)