



## Our Watch Briefing Paper

### Jobs and Skills Summit (1-2 September 2022)

#### Background

The Commonwealth Government is hosting a national Jobs and Skills Summit on 1 and 2 September 2022. The Summit will bring together people across Australia including unions, employers, civil society and governments to discuss the economic challenges facing Australia.

One of the focus areas for the Summit and White Paper is 'ensuring women have equal opportunities and equal pay'. This Paper has been prepared by Our Watch to provide advice to the Commonwealth Government ahead of the Summit.

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. Our Watch is an independent, not for profit organisation established by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments in 2013. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch.

#### Introduction

Evidence indicates that gender inequality is linked to violence against women. Violence against women is both a symptom and a cause of gender inequality, and a barrier to its achievement. Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, *Change the story*, identifies gender inequality and sets the social context in which violence against women occurs.

As a result, work to prevent violence against women involves achieving gender equality and addressing the underlying drivers of violence against women.

There are several barriers to achieving gender equality in the context of jobs and skills, these include:

- Sexual harassment and gender-based violence, including in the workplace
- Gender-stereotyped roles and caring inequality
- Pay inequality and the undervaluing of women in the formal workforce
- Men's control of decision-making, power and resources in the workforce

The Commonwealth Government can take an important leadership role in addressing these barriers through use of policy, regulatory and legislative mechanisms to increase women's workforce participation, address the gender pay gap and superannuation gap, and promote more equitable, accessible and affordable parental leave and childcare arrangements for all people.

In particular, increasing women's independence and economic security is one of the actions necessary to promote gender equality and reduce violence against women. To achieve this, based on the evidence, Our Watch suggests that the Commonwealth Government consider the actions outlined below.

### General actions

- Establish, maintain and report publicly on processes to assess all public policy for its impact on women and gender equality, including analysing differential impacts on different groups of women, and use this gender analysis to inform the development of policy that benefits women and promotes gender equality.
- Strengthen and embed gender-responsive budgeting as standard practice across the Commonwealth. This involves assessing budget impact on the basis of gender to ensure expenditure is targeted in a way that is fair and appropriate and changing budget decisions and priorities. This could include, for example, wellbeing measurements and budget approaches.
- Implement the recommendations of the 2021 Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Review Report of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth).

#### 1. Sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace

- Intimate partner violence impacts workforce participation and alongside workplace sexual harassment contribute to poverty and financial insecurity among women and impede women's progress in employment and long-term career and financial prospects.
- The impacts of violence against women are felt across workplaces of all types. Experiences of violence against women at home and in the workplace have impacts on staff retention, presenteeism, absenteeism and morale, and undermine workplace productivity.

### Actions

- Implement all 55 recommendations of the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020) to improve the way in which Australian workplaces prevent and respond to sexual harassment.

## 2. Gender-stereotyped roles and caring inequality

- We know from the evidence that rigid gender roles are one of the underlying drivers of violence against women. They are also a key contributor to the gender segregation of the Australian workforce.
- There is a need to promote, and more importantly, to provide the policy and structural supports that enable couples to adopt gender-equitable domestic and parenting practices.

### Actions:

- Review and amend the Australian Government Paid Parental Leave Scheme to make it equitable for all parents. This could include, for example, extending the access period and ensuring the superannuation guarantee is paid during parental leave.
- Make provision for access to free and high-quality early childhood education and childcare.
- Apply an intersectional gender lens to social security and other areas of policy to ensure that the system is effective in helping to reduce the numbers of women living in poverty and supporting financial security and independence for women throughout their life course.
- Consider policy approaches to create pipelines to equalise entry in female and male dominated industries.

## 3. Pay inequality and the undervaluing of women in the formal workforce

- When women earn less, they do not have the same economic or financial security as men. This can reduce the choices and the level of independence that women have. We also know that financial control is a common form of abuse or coercion used by men against women.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had an additional impact on women's incomes and labour force participation. The immediate impacts of the crisis on women's loss of employment and income, combined with the challenging economic environment, could result in women's workforce participation declining overall over a longer period and ongoing negative impacts on women's economic security throughout their lives.

Actions:

- Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) to improve its capacity to address equal pay, including specifying gender pay equity as an object of the Act.
- Consider the gendered impact of any economic stimulus measures, in particular to ensure such measures do not disproportionately benefit male-dominated industries.

4. Men's control of decision-making, power and resources in the workforce

- Men are overrepresented in positions of power and government, institutional and organisational decision-making in the Australian workforce.
- Gender bias in recruitment, selection processes, career development and promotion and workplace cultures can result in and reinforce men's control of decision-making.

Actions:

- Develop and implement strategies to increase women's access to leadership and decision-making roles.
- Set gender targets for women's leadership across key Australian industries and workplaces, including public reporting requirements.