

NCWNZ and the Women's Employment Action Plan

The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group with a reach of over 450,000 people.

Since 1896 we have consistently worked to ensure women's economic independence as a basic step in achieving gender equality. There is still much to do!

COVID-19 has worsened existing inequalities. It has impacted on women's employment in New Zealand. In 2020, New Zealand women workers bore the brunt of job losses but by 2021 job seeker statistics showed that women were finding work in significant numbers. It is unclear if the kind of work found was adequate in terms of wages, conditions, hours and security of employment. The impact on employment and earning potential has the longer-term consequences for women e.g. lower levels of retirement savings and housing affordability. This warrants more intersectional analysis.

The pandemic has reinforced the critical importance of work in female dominated essential sectors such as care and support, retail and cleaning to maintaining our economy and safety while facing an increased risk of COVID-19 for them and their families.

Unfortunately, too many of these workers remain on the minimum wage. We do applaud the increase of the minimum wage over past years and the increase in wages of care and support workers from the pay equity settlement. We note that the gender pay gap has reduced by one third since 2018 and in 2021 was 8.6%. Māori, Pacific, and disabled women suffer much wider pay gaps and we look forward to the implementation of recommendations from the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry. We also support the EEO Commissioner's call to include ethnicity as well as sex in the Equal Pay Act.

Twenty-three pay equity claims are currently in process with five claims covering 66,000 employees in the final stages. All these claims are in the public/state sector and using Te Orowaru – the Public Service Commission Pay Equity Work Assessment tool. NCWNZ would like to see pay equity progress in the private sector. We support the YWCA's pay transparency campaign Mind the Gap as an important step. Changes arising from Fair Pay Agreements will also assist in lifting wages across sectors

Anecdotally New Zealand women followed the global trend of women's experience of the pandemic resulting in an increased domestic load. Women gave up jobs because of lack of childcare and numbers of young students left high school early in the past two years to support their families by working in the home or outside of the home.

Recognition of violence and harassment at work is hugely significant for women, especially those most vulnerable. Work associated with ratification of ILO Convention 190 is strongly supported by NCW as a way of improving prevention and responses to this serious abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fund research on barriers for women in work particularly Māori, Pacific, disabled, young, elderly and LGBTQI+

Ensure intersectional gender analysis is undertaken on all Government initiatives

Provide support for women to buy their own homes.

Recognise the value of female dominated caring, retail and cleaning work by paying them equitably and providing quality working conditions.

Ensure that progress made in pay equity in the public sector is mirrored in the private sector

Support women, whom Covid forced out of education because of work and caring commitments, to return to building their qualifications.

Support ratification of ILO Convention 190