

Issues Paper

Workplace Flexibility increases Workforce Participation

“Flexibility, as with gender equality, is good for everyone”

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Workplace flexibility as a means to improve the economic security of women increases the opportunities for women to undertake an optimal amount of paid work. By applying workplace flexibility to the workforce universally, it will increase female workforce participation through a greater share in unpaid work and care.

In terms of paid work, many women work fewer hours than they would like and/or need, they undertake a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work and are absent in greater numbers than men from the workforce as a result of inflexibility in many work places.

The facts:

- The workforce participation of females is approximately 10 percentage points below males.
- The female underemployment rate is approximately 1.5 percentage points higher than for males.
- Women undertake 28 per cent fewer hours of paid work than men.

All of these imbalances lead into the persistent gender pay and superannuation gap. Increasing female workforce participation and hours of paid work would be enormously effective steps in closing these gaps.

The goal:

Increasing female workforce participation through access to accessible and affordable childcare, job sharing, corporate cultural change, societal change to attitudes on gender issues.

Any changes to workplace flexibility need to be implemented within the current workplace laws and rules – it does NOT mean offering unsociable, non-family friendly hours or workplace conditions.

What has changed:

COVID-19 has seen significant numbers of employers and employees embrace working from home. This flexibility is a positive for those able to do this. Working from home helps women and their partners undertake adjustable working hours which can lead to a greater sharing of unpaid household chores.

Affordable and accessible childcare enables parents to go to work. While changes to childcare rules over the past 15 years are welcome, further reforms are needed to further enhance workplace flexibility and female workforce participation.

The Benefit:

Flexible workforces improve the ability of employers to get the best talent – those women currently discouraged from the paid workforce are a loss of talent to companies/businesses and the economy.

Greater flexibility that encourages women (and men) to work will improve productivity and the performance of the economy.

Definition

“Workplace Flexibility”: A flexible work arrangement is an agreement between a workplace and an employee to change the standard working arrangement to better accommodate an employee’s commitments out of work. [WGEA 2020]

Resources:

- [Workplace Gender Equality Agency – Workplace Flexibility](#)
- [Developing a flexible working arrangements policy](#) [WGEA 2020]
- [The Flexible Work Playbook](#) [BEAM Australia 2020]