WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Today, the average Australian woman is likely to be in paid work for at least 30 years of her adult life. This allows for some break from paid work for rearing children.

* More women are working – the rate at which women participate in the labour force (that is, by working or seeking paid work) has risen from 43.7% of women in 1978 to 55.5% in 2002.
* More married women are working – in 1954, 17% of married women were in the labour force. In 2002, 59% of married women are in the labour force. Their participation rate is, in fact, marginally higher than the rate for women as a whole.
* There are more single parent families in our society – in 86% of the 550,000 one parent families, the parent was female.
* Increasing numbers of women with children work – the majority of women with dependent children now work.
* Women are more likely than men to work part-time – that is, 56% of women employees work full-time, and 44% work part-time.
* Women are more likely to have breaks in the continuity of their employment than men are men. Women with children spend periods ranging from a few months to several years out of the paid workforce to bear and care for their children. In many cases, these breaks can disadvantage them in their employment, for example, they may miss out on training in the use of new technology or systems, or they may have to start again at the bottom of the career ladder in their jobs.
* The Australian Workforce is highly sex segregated - 72% of women workers are concentrated in four industries:
  - health & community services (17.6% of all woman workers)
  - wholesale and retail trade (20.6%)
  - finance, property and business services (16.3%)
  - recreation, personal and other services (7.4%)

Industrial issues for women:

There are a range of industrial issues that are important to women. These include:

* equal pay
* access to training and career paths
* the right to keep a job when pregnant, and after taking time off for the birth and care of a baby (maternity leave)
* the right to work part-time to accommodate family responsibilities
* child care services
* leave to care for sick family members
* sexual harassment
* discrimination/equal employment opportunity