Equality for Women

We will never be a successful society in which everybody is able to achieve their potential until we have full equality for women. We will take action to remove the barriers in our society to women achieving full equality, we will tackle discrimination, sexism and violence against women and girls. We will not transform society overnight but working together we can take us further along the path to an equal society for all.

Our society continues to be marked by inequality and the actions of this Government, and the previous Coalition, have harmed women and our path to an equal society. But we have an overwhelmingly pro-equality society – in a recent Fawcett Society survey 83% of all people supported equality of opportunity for women and men and two-thirds of people believe more needs to be done to achieve equality. Building a society where everyone can achieve their full potential will create a better society, a stronger economy and is the right thing to do.

Women and girls have the right to participate in all parts of society. Women and girls should be free from violence and able to fulfil their potential but are constrained by government policies and societal discrimination over the course of their lives. We will not transform society overnight but working together and with achieving equality at the heart of all our policies we can put us on the path to an equal society for all. That is what our ten pledges and the commitments we make below will do. Austerity isn’t working and has harmed women – investing in an economy that delivers for women.

Austerity is a political ideology, not an economic necessity, and its implementation has resulted in policies that have created anaemic economic growth and the longest squeeze in living standards, for all but the very wealthiest, since the 1870s. This economic stagnation is experienced as a depression by the overwhelming majority, where the falls in living standards are taking place from unequal starting positions. In their cumulative assessment of 10 years of austerity the Women’s Budget Group found that since 2010 86% of government tax and welfare ‘savings’ measures have come at the cost of women. By 2020, female lone parents and single female pensioners will experience the greatest drop in annual living standards, on average around 20%. Women have been disproportionately hit by cuts to our public services as users and the workforce.
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Investing in an economy that delivers for women

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The ‘Fair Deal for Women’ coalition has highlighted that cuts to benefits - such as the Independent Living Fund and Housing Benefit – and cuts to social care are “pushing disabled women into poverty at an alarming rate”.

Achieving equality in the workplace

Women have increased their participation in the labour market to historical highs, yet form the majority of the lowest paid. One in four women are in low paid and insecure work and over half of those on the minimum wage are women.

Women continue to be concentrated in particular sectors of the economy (occupational segregation) and on the lower rungs of the jobs ladder across the economy.

Over 40 years after the Equal Pay Act women continue to be paid 19% less than men across the whole economy. This is across all women – it is almost certain that losses for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and disabled women are even greater. The TUC has estimated that at the current rate of progress it will take 50 years to achieve equal pay.

The pathway to our segregated economy begins early with gender stereotyping influencing which subjects girls and young women study. Women are underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) occupations – at just 14% of the workforce - and are overrepresented in the five ‘C’s, Catering, Cleaning, Caring, Cashiering, Clerical work.
As well as women’s concentration in low paid sections of the economy, lower pay is also a result of outright discrimination and women continuing to shoulder most caring responsibilities in society, of children and older relatives – a fact which was recognised in the Women and Equalities Select Committee on the gender pay gap in March. The Select Committee further found in August 2016 that Muslim women experienced widespread discrimination in the labour market and workplace.

The take up of shared parental leave in the UK is predicted to be 8%, compared with 80% in Sweden. Women provide the bulk of informal care in this country and make up 73% of recipients of the Carer’s Allowance.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission found that 54,000 women a year are forced out of their jobs due to pregnancy discrimination, with 390,000 women a year experiencing negative and potentially discriminatory behaviour linked to their pregnancy. Yet less than 1% take a case to Employment Tribunal. Since the introduction of tribunal fees of up to £1,200 in 2013 the number of sex discrimination cases has fallen by three-quarters and pregnancy-related cases by half. The Select Committee report on the increase in maternity discrimination has further highlighted this issue.

In 2012 the Women’s Business Council estimated that there were 2.3 million women who wanted to be in work but were not, and a further 1.3 million who wanted to work more hours.

Lower earnings throughout a career turn into smaller pension pots, with the Fawcett Society reporting that just over a fifth of women will receive the full amount of the new single tier state pension compared to half of men.

**Equality benefits everyone**

Building an economy and workplaces that deliver that equality benefits everyone. The Women’s Business Council further estimated that equalising men and women’s participation in the economy would add 10% to GDP by 2030.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) has pointed to research by the Women and Work Commission which estimated that the under-utilisation of women’s skills costs the UK economy between 1.3 and 2% of GDP every year. Eradicating the full-time gender pay gap would contribute additional spending into the economy of £41 billion each year.

With our commitment to **full employment and an economy that works for all** we will:

- Build an economy that ends the austerity that has disproportionately hit women by investing £500 billion, backed up by a publicly-owned National Investment Bank and regional banks.
- In investing in the infrastructure, manufacturing and new industries to move us to a high skilled, high tech, low carbon economy we will ensure that we increase the recruitment of women into Science, Technology, Engineering and Manufacturing occupations and sectors.
of the economy, opening the doors for women to enter a wider range of occupations. This is a key part of our **action to secure our environment** and will contribute to breaking down the occupational segregation in our economy.

Investing in infrastructure such as high-speed broadband, energy, transport and homes will not just create decent jobs but will underpin improving lives in multiple ways.

The housing crisis is impacting on everyone, but it can have life threatening consequences for many women with insecure housing. This makes it even harder to leave abusive relationships, and 20% of homeless women are escaping violence. We will invest in the homes we need to tackle our housing crisis and end insecurity for private renters by introducing rent controls, secure tenancies and a charter of private tenants’ rights. This is part of our **secure homes guarantee**.

Our public investment strategy will also provide a foundation for the economy to grow, and from which to properly fund and democratise our public services. This will **put the public back into our economy and services**, and end the cuts that women, as the majority public service users and workforce, have borne the brunt of. This has included the race to the bottom in pay, terms and conditions that privatisation has caused.

To **secure our NHS and social care** we will end the privatisation of our NHS and bring it back into public hands. As part of this we will also:

- Protect women’s rights and their reproductive health, opposing the cuts to health services that restrict women’s rights in practice, and take action to stop anti-choice protesters from restricting access to abortion services and ensure proper funding of midwifery services.

With our commitments to **security at work**, a **National Education Service open to all** and **cutting wealth and income inequality** we will:

- End the scourge of insecure, precarious work that disproportionately affects women by ending exploitative zero hours’ contracts and committing to measures that will bring equality to the workplace by strengthening employment and trade union rights - including giving trade unions Equality Representatives statutory rights.

- Create more equal workplaces. Strong trade unions in the workplace give women a means to enforce their rights at work, and workplaces with effective trade unions have better equality policies - including flexible working practices, enhanced maternity pay and support for women returning to work from maternity leave. We must ensure that women’s maternity rights are enshrined and enforced, and that their employment rights are upheld on their return to work. Labour has already committed to abolishing tribunal fees as part of increasing access to justice.
Take action to achieve equal pay. We will give enhanced powers to the Equality and Human Rights Commission to penalise companies that do not publish detailed gender pay data at a company-wide level.

Strengthen collective bargaining. The ILO and European Commission have found that greater collective bargaining coverage correlates with lower gender pay gaps.

Put the defence of social and employment rights at the centre of the Brexit negotiations agenda for a new relationship with Europe. We will ensure that women's voices are heard at the negotiating table and that women's rights are not weakened as a result of Brexit. We will stand against the rise in racist attacks since the Brexit vote, which have often been disproportionately targeted at women.

Increase the statutory minimum wage to the Living Wage level.

Work towards universal childcare, allowing greater sharing of caring responsibilities and removing a significant barrier to women participating in the labour market.

Increasing women’s representation in society, democracy and party

Women are underrepresented in our democracy, in senior roles influencing how policy is shaped and implemented, in what is seen and heard in our culture, and in how our justice system works. There are still more men in Parliament today than all the women who have been elected to Parliament put together; women are just 29% of current MPs and 39% of senior civil service roles. Women are just a quarter of FTSE 100 board members, 14% of police commissioners and 21% of high court judges.

Alongside removing economic barriers to women’s participation in their local communities, society, our democracy and the labour market, we must take active steps to increase women’s representation in our democracy and our party, including disabled, LBT, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women. Increasing the representation of all women is important in recognising and addressing the intersectional impact of discrimination experienced by many women.

We ensured that we followed up our promise in August 2015 to appoint women as half the Shadow Cabinet, and we ensured that women were half of important bodies which we created, such as our Economic Advisory Committee. Now, we will:
Support All Women Shortlists to achieve 50:50 representation in Parliament. We should aim for 50:50 representation across all public offices with gender balanced shortlists.

Support an annual policy making Women’s Conference as part of strengthening women’s voice within the Labour party.

Consult on establishing a high level, strategic Women’s Advisory Board linked to the Leader’s Office to ensure women are at the heart of our policies, and to support the Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, along with advisory boards on other equality strands.

Publish a regular ‘gender audit’ of our policies to better communicate the positive impact all our policies will have on transforming women’s lives and moving us towards a more equal society.

Taking action to end violence against women

Girls face constant bombardment of hyper-sexualisation, and boys hyper-masculinity, in the media, retail and online. This distorts their view of what a healthy relationship is, what consent means and affects mental health. A fifth of girls aged 9 to 10 say that how they look is the thing that makes them feel most sad or down, with self-harm, mental illness, depression and anorexia now the top health concerns of girls and young women aged 11 – 21. At age 17 – 21, nearly half of young women report needing help with their mental health.

We will ensure real parity for mental health services, including ensuring access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Domestic violence affects a quarter of all women in their lifetime; two women a week continue to be killed by their current or ex-partner; and 85,000 women are raped year. The cuts wrought on services for women and girls facing violence have been devastating. Women’s Aid estimate that 112 women and 84 children are turned away by services every day. Specialist Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women’s services have been bearing the brunt of local authority cuts in this area.

Sexual harassment, sexual name calling and assault in schools have increased, and in their report ‘Still just a bit of banter?’ the TUC and the Everyday Sexism highlighted that more than half of women had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace. Among women aged 18-24, this proportion climbs to nearly two thirds (63%).
Campaigns such as the Everyday Sexism project have powerfully used social media to expose the day-to-day examples of sexism in every aspect of women’s lives. ‘Reclaim the Internet’ brings together women’s campaigns, think tanks, trade unions and media platforms to challenge the abuse that women face online. The abuse, threats of violence and bigotry that displays itself on the internet is a manifestation of attitudes, culture and society offline. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that action against all abuse is taken seriously – whether on- or offline. We will:

- Properly fund Violence Against Women and Girls Services and make it easier for women to be believed and get justice.
- Ensure that Sex and Relationship Education is compulsory in all schools, with a focus on sexual health, healthy relationships and consent
- Tackle homophobic bullying in schools.
- Consult and work with women’s and other relevant organisations on how to strengthen the law and its implementation to tackle sexual harassment and threats online, and increase organisations’ responsibility for promoting safe and respectful ‘community standards’ online. Within the party, we will take forward the recommendations of the Shami Chakrabarti Inquiry to consult on and introduce a wider Equal Opportunities Policy, training and guidance for members and staff, recognising that online abuse is often also racist and homophobic in nature as well as misogynistic.

Women are the majority of those affected by war and make up the majority of the world’s refugees; women seeking asylum in the UK are often fleeing human rights abuses and violence, and the UK government keeps pregnant women and women who have experienced sexual assault in detention centres. We will:

- Adhere to United Nations High Committee for Refugees (UNHCR) Detention Guidelines and place peace and justice at the heart of our foreign policy.