



## Flexibility and Job Security

Caring is crucial to the social and economic fabric of Australia. Flexible working arrangements are central to working carers' attempts to combine work and care. Research shows there are nearly 5.5 million unpaid carers between the ages of 15 to 64 years in Australia. In 2010, unpaid carers were estimated to contribute \$650 billion per annum of care to the community. This has a significant impact on carers' workforce participation, particularly for women, who are much more likely than men to be primary carers throughout the course of their life.

Current reforms and demands on workers, including the national productivity and participation agenda are unsustainable unless employers offer flexible working arrangements. The latest ABS statistics show that 29.5% of full-time males and 30.9% of full time females report having a flexible work arrangement with their employer.

Workplaces need to mirror the changing nature of households, as we see both an increase in two-parent families working, as well as an increase in single parent families. This is reinforced from an economic productivity viewpoint, as employers that enable their employees to better balance their work and caring responsibilities have an advantage in attracting and retaining the best talent.

The right to request (RTR) flexible-working arrangements in the National Employment Standards (NES) allows those with children under school age to request changes to their working arrangements. It does not, however, include any practical right to appeal an employer's unreasonable refusal to consider the request. Eligibility for this request is also limited to workers with 12 months service with their employer.

The RTR standard also ignores the fact that many other Australians require family members to give unpaid care, including the sick and elderly. In 2009, 12% of the population had caring responsibilities for people other than children.

It is vital that vulnerable workers' rights are protected and that they have job security. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women and migrant women are often in vulnerable positions as workers, both in Australia and to a greater extent throughout the Asia-Pacific Region. Australia, as a leader in this region, must ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families to ensure protection for these women working in Australia and in other countries.



**Recommendations:**

WELA recommends that the incoming Government strike a more appropriate balance between parental and other responsibilities and the obligation to seek paid work by:

1. Incorporating Domestic and Family Violence leave provision in National Employment Standards and ensuring adequate training for staff administering the leave;
2. Enhancing the National Employment Standard on the right to request flexible working arrangements, by
3. Extending eligibility under the NES to access 12 months unpaid leave to employees who have not been with an employer for 12 months;
  - Ensuring employers are obligated to reasonably accommodate requests by providing right of appeal as applies to other NEs
  - Removing the 12 months requirement for eligibility;
  - Extending flexibility working arrangements to all carers, including age and disability carers and those with school age children; and
  - Ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.