

Australian report finds the changing nature of work provides new opportunities for workplace gender equality

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Public service employees don't necessarily benefit from remote work. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

A new research report released today has identified an important shift in how employees choose to engage in the workforce, as they increasingly seek flexibility and opportunities to tailor work schedules and locations to their needs.

The ninth report in the Gender Equity Insights Series from the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) provides an in-depth analysis of the evolving nature of [part-time](#) work and implications of this change for the future of work in Australia.

Despite Australia having one of the highest shares of part-time employment across OECD countries, the report identifies a decline in the share of [women](#) engaged in part-time work (down 3.2 percentage points to 29.7% in the two years to 2022-23).

At the same time, full-time roles that incorporate flexible work arrangements, such as remote and hybrid work options, are now becoming more prevalent in Australian workplaces, having risen by 2.3 percentage points to 42.5% for the same period.

The findings present employers with a clear challenge to actively consider what more they can do to support part-time employees as well as those who need to or choose to work flexibly.

Report author and BCEC Director John Curtin Distinguished Professor Alan Duncan said there is a re-evaluation of part-time work, with more employees and employers valuing flexibility and autonomy.

"Driven by [technological advancements](#), changing workforce demographics and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing demand for flexible work options presents a significant opportunity for women to enhance their economic participation and career progression,"

Professor Duncan said.

"While these trends indicated a structural shift towards full-time employment and away from part-time work for many working women, the same isn't true for men, where patterns of work between full-time, part-time and casual employment have remained mainly constant over the same three-year period.

"Of those that are working part-time, a rising share of both women and men are choosing part-time work out of preference and fewer are citing care of children as the main reason for doing so. However, an increasing number of women are also turning to part-time work because it's their only option. The most significant increases in the share of women in full-time work over the past three years have taken place among women aged between 35 and 55."

WGEA CEO Mary Wooldridge said the report's findings reinforced the need for employers to ensure their jobs are designed to be inclusive and not based on a [full-time](#) mindset.

"Women and men working part-time still face a promotion barrier due to the lack of flexible working arrangements and the capacity to work part-time as managers," Ms. Wooldridge said.

"Women are twice as likely to work part-time, so improvement in availability and support for part-time work will be a positive step for gender equality in Australia. Men also benefit from arrangements that better align with how, when and where they want to work. Enabling more management roles to be undertaken part-time and/or flexibly will expand employers' access to a greater talent pool and support reducing their [gender pay gap](#).

"Crucially, this report finds that employers who conduct a gender pay

gap analysis, set targets and implement a formal policy or strategy on flexible work have higher rates of women managers working part-time. By embracing flexible work practices and addressing the challenges associated with part-time employment, employers create a more equitable and supportive work environment for all employees."

The report calls on employers to develop a plan for action that normalizes both flexible and part-time work, without career penalties. By normalizing flexible arrangements, organizations can work towards removing the historical "flexibility stigma" associated with career penalties in terms of pay and progression.

The report also recommends companies consider whether some jobs that may have traditionally been "off-limits" for flexible or part-time work might be re-imagined and re-designed to enable flexibility for employees.

Co-author Dr. Silvia Salazar, from BCEC, said the move away from part-time work points to widespread structural change in the Australian labor market.

"The report shows that part-time work for women is less common in larger, male-dominated companies, but having women on company boards significantly increases part-time opportunities," Dr. Salazar said. "Implementing policies on flexible work and conducting pay gap audits are crucial for promoting flexible work arrangements and advancing pay equity, particularly for female managers.

"As part-time work decreases, more people prefer additional flexible work options. This trend presents an opportunity for employers to make these arrangements standard without harming employee experiences. The move away from part-time work is particularly evident among non-managers across various industry sectors, so businesses must not focus

solely on gender equity for managers and senior executives at the expense of non-managerial roles.

"Ensuring gender equity across all levels of the workforce is essential to achieving meaningful and sustainable progress in workplace equality," Dr. Salazar added.

With the nature of work continuing to evolve, this "Gender Equity Insights 2024: The changing nature of part-time work" [report](#) serves as a vital resource for Australian employers seeking to adapt to the changing workforce landscape.

More information: Gender Equity Insights 2024: The changing nature of part-time work

Provided by Curtin University

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