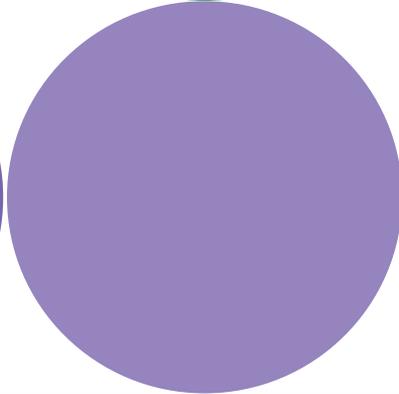
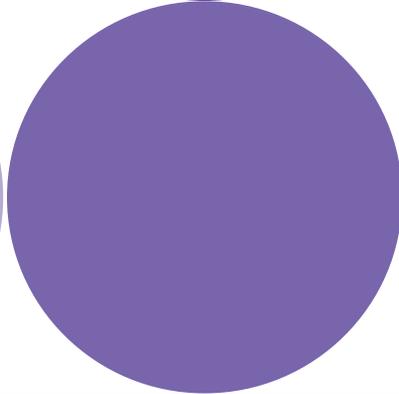
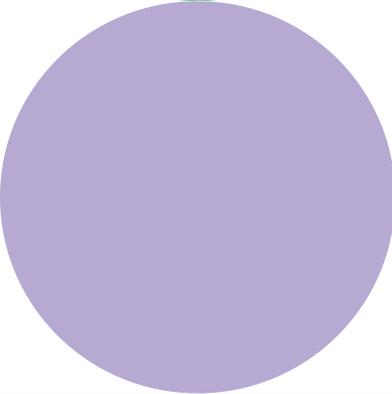
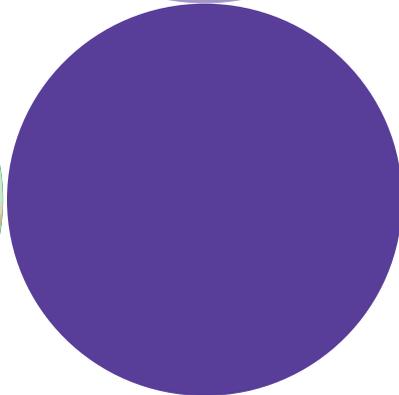
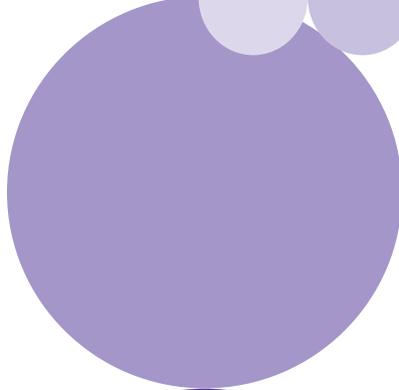
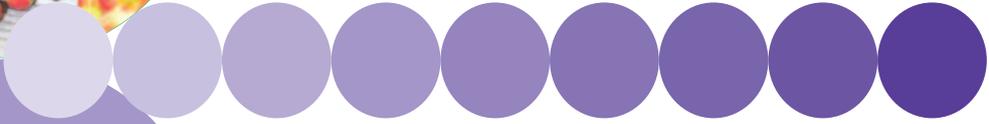




Usdaw

*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*



The Coalition – Taking Us Backwards on Women’s Equality

Executive Council Statement
to the 2015 ADM



Now is a good time to be taking stock of the progress made in tackling discrimination against women in the workplace and in wider society.

It is thirty years since the introduction of two landmark pieces of legislation that were intended to protect women from unfair treatment and help achieve equality for women at work – the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act.

These laws marked the start of a gradual but determined effort to tackle women's inequality and a recognition that Government had a leading role to play in this.

Trade unions, campaigning groups and charities have played a vital role in helping to progress changes in the law, in workplace culture and in society in the way women are treated.

But we have always been clear that this kind of voluntary approach is not by itself, enough.

To tackle discrimination and promote equality we also need Government to protect, promote and respect the basic rights of women and men on an equal basis.

Between 1997 and 2010 huge strides were made by the Labour Government in strengthening the UK's equality framework.

The law expanded from just covering sex, race and disability discrimination to prohibit age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation and religion or belief discrimination too.

The single Equality Act was introduced in 2010, further strengthening the law. The act brought all of the UK's anti-discrimination laws together in one place for the first time. It introduced new powers such as a duty on all public bodies to tackle discrimination against women and promote equality between women and men.

And the Equality and Human Rights Commission was established, with stronger powers than any of the previous equality commissions.

But since the formation of the Coalition Government in May 2010, we have seen a very different approach to tackling equality. Rather than continuing to develop equality laws and organisations, the Coalition has weakened and reduced the UK's existing equality framework and instead placed far greater emphasis on voluntary action as a means to deliver equality.

The Coalition's approach is neatly summed up in the following statement from a document called the 'Coalition's Equality Strategy':

'The Government's new approach to tackling inequality is one that moves away from treating people as groups or 'equality strands' and instead recognises that we are a nation of 62 million individuals.'

But treating people as individuals fails to recognise that some groups in society – women, Black people, disabled people and LGBT people for example – face discrimination and disadvantage and therefore need the protection of the law. The Coalition's approach to equality law is to see it as unnecessary bureaucracy and a burden on business and so important parts of the Equality Act have been repealed.

Individuals who have suffered discrimination now face greater barriers to justice with the introduction of tribunal fees and less accessible advice and legal services.

This approach is not working.

The UK is heading down the Gender Equality League table. This is an annual survey by the World Economic Forum of how countries are doing in tackling women's inequality. It is eight years since the WEF began conducting this annual survey. In that short time, however, Britain has gone from ninth in the world in 2006 to twenty-sixth this year.

A major reason behind this drop is a fall in average women's wages, from £18,000 to £15,400 over the last year. Under the Coalition women's economic inequality has significantly worsened.

The gender pay gap which is the gap in pay between women and men has begun to widen after years of slow but steady progress.

Women have lost 10% of their disposable income under the Coalition and single mothers even more.

Pregnancy and maternity discrimination is on the rise and studies suggest many employers are increasingly hostile to new and expectant mothers.

These statistics paint a worrying picture of rising inequality for many women and a Government failing to act.

Trade unions have a key role to play not only in defending and representing individual women members but also in speaking out against the dismantling of the UK's equality framework upon which women and other groups in society rely.

I welcome this Executive Council Statement as an opportunity to increase awareness of the damage being done by this Government to women's equality, shine a light on the experiences of Usdaw women members in the current climate and consider how best Usdaw can protect women who are very often at the sharp end of an increasingly casualised economy.



John Hannett
General Secretary

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For some time now the Government has been telling us that the UK economy is recovering. After nearly five years of the Coalition's economic policies there is apparently cause for celebration. Cuts in public spending, benefits, tax credits and workers' rights have, if the Coalition are to be believed, worked. The UK economy is now growing again and according to Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, "the rescue has worked".

The Chancellor, George Osborne has said that the economy is recovering faster than even he dared hope and the British people are to be thanked for their hard work.

But not everyone agrees and there are some big issues that the Coalition do not want to talk about. Senior economists, many charities, academics, the Labour Party and trade unions including Usdaw do not agree that the current state of the economy is cause for celebration.

A recent report by the Living Wage Commission said:

"Britain has a low pay problem and it is getting worse. While Britain's economy begins a nascent recovery... there is a very real danger that the nation's increased growth will not reach the lowest paid. Low paid workers are being squeezed from both sides as sharp rises in living costs are compounded by stagnating wages."

Many economists say that this is the slowest recovery for 100 years. Pay will not be back to pre-recession levels for several years and the real value of wages is falling by more than in any previous recovery, as prices rise faster than wages.

Charities are concerned that cuts in public spending have been targeted at people who are already disadvantaged. People in poverty (20% of the population) are bearing 36% of the total cuts. By 2015-16 people in poverty will be £2,744 per year worse off as a result of the cuts.

Research by the TUC has shown that the majority of jobs being created in the economy are insecure and low paid.

One in four women are low paid.

The TUC estimate that only one in every 40 new jobs being created is full-time.

Unemployment amongst young people is still high with over 700,000 young people never having had a job. It is no wonder then that polls show that most people do not believe that the so-called 'recovery' is working for lower income families.

There is a widespread belief that there is a growing gulf between those who are getting by and those who are getting on.

Women are amongst those groups in society who are all too often just getting by.

Just look at the facts on women and pay:

- Nearly one in two low paid women say they feel worse off now than they did five years ago.
- A growing number of low paid women workers are using food banks to feed their families.
- Among those who have only had minimum wage jobs in the last 10 years four out of five are women.
- 62% of those on low pay are women.
- 64% of those earning at or below the National Minimum Wage are women.
- Women make up 60% of those paid below a Living Wage.

The Living Wage is an hourly rate that the Labour Party, trade unions and others want employers to pay. It is based on what it costs to meet the basic cost of living in the UK. It is currently £7.85 per hour or £9.15 per hour in London. 27% of women workers are paid below the Living Wage compared to 16% of men.

Why are women getting such a rough deal on pay?

There are many reasons why women are not seeing the benefits of the UK's economic recovery. The three main ones are:

It's the Wrong Kind of Recovery

The UK economy is undoubtedly creating jobs but the majority of them are low paid, insecure and casualised and most of the workers taking these new jobs are women.

It is good news that more women are in employment but for too many women work is not a route out of poverty and insecurity. For the first time the majority of people in poverty are in paid work.

Since the start of the financial crisis in 2008 more than a million women have moved into this kind of work. A growing number of employers are making use (or in many cases misuse) of so-called 'flexible forms of working' including zero-hours or very low hours' contracts. Job splitting is now common with what would once have been a full-time job split into a series of low hours' jobs.

The Government and employers are fond of saying that part-time low hours contracts suit women because they can juggle their jobs around their families. But a growing number of part-time contracts do not offer enough hours for women to get by. Over 40% of women on part-time contracts would like to work more hours but cannot get them.

One high street retailer, which does not recognise unions, offers one-third of new jobs on contracts of less than 12 hours a week.

Underemployment is a major issue for many workers and particularly for women and young workers. Growing numbers of workers in the UK want to work more hours than they do; on average each under-employed worker wants to work an extra 11 hours a week. This is an issue of strong concern for many of our members. All too often full-time jobs are being replaced by a series of part-time, low hours jobs each of which does not pay enough to make ends meet.

The top three roles with the highest percentage of underemployed workers are all industries with a high concentration of women workers, waitressing and bar staff; cleaning and sales assistants.

Women are more likely to be underemployed than men. Over one in 10 of women workers is underemployed compared to around 8% of men. This is probably because women are more likely to work part-time and part-time roles are where underemployment is more of an issue.



Women are Plugging the Gaps

Drastic cuts in public services have hit all low income families hard but the evidence is that it's women who have been particularly affected.

Women still do most of the caring in our society – around 72% of the total time of providing care for children and the elderly is done by women. This makes it difficult for women to work full-time and yet part-time work is much more likely to be low paid.

In the UK the jobs with the highest risk of low pay are also those that employ a majority of women. They are often called the five C's – cleaning, catering, cashiering, clerical and caring. Two-thirds of employees in the hotels and restaurants sector earn less than £7 per hour, three-fifths of them women.

As public services are cut women are stepping in to provide more care at home which is another barrier to them participating in paid employment on the same basis as men.

It is not just public services that have been drastically cut. Most working age benefits and tax credits have been frozen until 2016, affecting many of the benefits that women and children rely on such as child benefit, statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance.

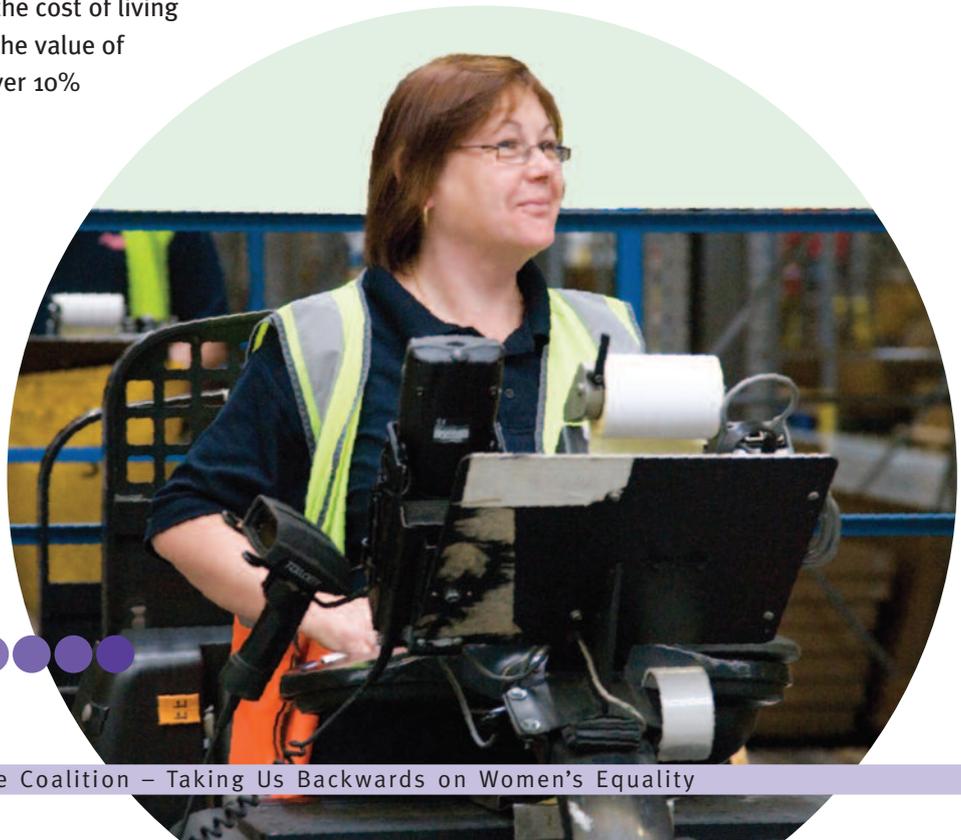
The 2010 budget froze the rate of child benefit for three years. With inflation and the cost of living rising steeply, this means that the value of child benefit had been cut by over 10% by 2014.

Child benefit was a universal benefit paid to the main carer – in 94% of cases the mother – in recognition of the fact that people who have children need more money than people who do not, regardless of income. Recent research shows that in the vast majority of cases, child benefit is spent directly on meeting the needs of children.

If they win the next election, the Conservatives have said they will freeze benefits for a further two years to make Britain 'fairer'. This will affect jobseeker's allowance, income support, tax credits, child benefit and housing benefit, although benefits for pensioners and disabled people will be protected. Half of the ten million families affected by the freeze are in work.

Women and children will, again, be hit hardest by this attack on the welfare state which shows the low value the Coalition Government places on children and those who care for them.

Women rely more on benefits and tax credits than men. This is largely because women have less chance to earn as much as men because they do most of the caring in society. On average, one-fifth of women's income is made up of welfare benefits and tax credits compared to one-tenth for men. Put another way, benefits make up twice as much of women's income than men's.



The Government Have Failed to Tackle Discrimination Against Women

Discrimination against women also helps to explain why women are not benefiting from the economic recovery.

Pregnancy discrimination is on the rise with one in seven women losing their jobs whilst on maternity leave. During times of economic difficulty women of childbearing age are more likely to suffer unfair treatment and be subjected to hostile or prejudiced assumptions and ideas. High profile figures such as Alan Sugar have suggested that employers should be able to ask women if they are planning to have children before giving them a job. But it is not just a few high profile figures who regard pregnant women as a burden; a Government survey showed that 24% of men thought that women on maternity leave should be made redundant before anyone else.

The Government has failed to tackle pregnancy discrimination and by introducing employment tribunal fees made it harder for women to enforce their rights.

The Government has also failed to tackle the gap between men's and women's earnings. Women still earn less than men – a woman working full-time will on average earn £5,000 less a year than a man. Women earn less than men in the vast majority of jobs. The main reasons for this are:

- Women do most of the caring in society and so need to work part-time and most part-time jobs are low paid.
- Many employers undervalue women's work because it is seen as less important. Jobs requiring similar skills, qualifications or experience tend to be poorly paid and undervalued when they are dominated by women rather than by men.
- Women often work in sectors where low pay is the norm. 80% of those working in the health sector for instance are women.

A Labour Government will require companies who employ 250 workers or more to publish the average pay of men and women at each pay grade. Under the Coalition the pay gap has begun to widen, after years of slow but steady progress.



Young women are increasingly likely to be working in low paid jobs. The numbers of 16 – 24 year-old women doing low paid work has tripled over the last 20 years.

- 78% of young workers are low paid and 83% of those on extremely low pay are under the age of 20.

But very often young women are better qualified than young men.

The number of young women working in skilled trades has declined.

- 20 years ago, 3% of young women were employed doing jobs such as bar managers, IT engineers, or chefs. However, by 2011 that proportion had fallen to just 1%.
- In contrast, the number of young men working in skilled trades such as plumbing or plastering has stayed roughly the same, at around 20%.

And the proportion of young women working as managers or senior officials has also declined.

If you are young you are far more likely to be paid below the Living Wage and if you are a young woman your chances of being low paid are even higher.

Apprenticeships for women are concentrated in just five sectors, all of them low paid and including hairdressing, child development and catering. These are sectors where pay qualification levels and career prospects tend to be lower.

- A growing number of young workers are underemployed, meaning they cannot get enough hours of work a week. One in five young workers are underemployed which is more than double the percentage for any other age group. The two occupations with the highest number of underemployed workers are retail and catering.

All of this means that young women in Usdaw are beginning their working lives with real challenges ahead of them; an increasingly insecure jobs market; contracts that offer only low hours; continuing falls in the value of wages and a growing gender pay gap.

Esther Pearson
a young Usdaw
member working
in Tesco says:



“I started working at Tesco five years ago when I was 17 and this was my first proper job. I’m happy with my hours, they fit round my college course and I’ve been a rep for two years now so feel I know a lot about my rights at work. But not everyone is in that position – my housemate worked in a care home and was treated really badly – terrible pay, really long hours, not getting paid on time. It worries me that so many young women are working in jobs that are like this and don’t feel able to stand up for themselves. It’s really important that unions show young women they understand how hard it can be for them. Sexual harassment is also a big issue and so many young women feel they just have to put up with it. But they shouldn’t have to and Usdaw can help.”

When I was at school I didn’t feel that we were encouraged to think about our future jobs and careers. It was seen as an individual decision – school didn’t help you think as a young woman about what might I be able to achieve.”

Bryony Hamblin
has been an
Usdaw member for
two years and has
been on stand-down.
Bryony says:



“The main issue for young workers is part-time contracts. People are finding it difficult to get full-time contracts and as a result are struggling financially.”



Naomi Tweddle
a young rep from
the Midlands
Division says:

“I also see a lot of young people starting jobs who often can only get contracts of around 12 hours a week and this makes it difficult so they might not stay as they are looking for jobs that give them more hours and therefore more pay. Young workers want to stay and progress with their companies but might not because of low hours and so everyone loses out.

Being a rep is the best bit about my job for me; I think helping people stand up for themselves is in my blood. I tell young people they need to be in Usdaw because we can help in so many ways. Sometimes you get customers or managers who think that young people can be pushed around and if you don't have the protection of the Union how do you challenge this kind of thing?”



Since the early 1970s it has been widely understood that strong employment and equality rights for women during pregnancy and whilst on maternity leave are absolutely necessary to enable women to enter and remain in paid work and earn an independent income.

Laws such as the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and more recently the Equality Act 2010 (in England, Scotland and Wales) have been a catalyst for change and have led to more mothers in employment than ever before. Since the 1970s there has been a transformation in the numbers of women in paid work that have children. In 1973 only a quarter of women with children under the age of four were in paid work. By 1991 this had jumped to 43% rising to over half (54%) by 2001. Currently more than two-thirds of women (72% of women in couples and 55% of single parents) with children aged five and under are in paid work. Perhaps not surprisingly this change in women's employment has been accompanied by a dramatic shift in attitudes towards women with young children taking up paid employment. Whilst we still have not reached a point where the public think that men and women should have equal roles both in the workplace and at home, attitudes are becoming more progressive as we move into the 21st Century.

The British Social Attitudes Survey has been tracking changes in the British public's views since the early 1980s.

'A man's job is to earn the money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family'.

In the mid 1980s almost half (43% in 1984 and 48% in 1987) of people agreed with the above statement, strongly believing that the man's role was the 'breadwinner' and the woman's role was to care.

Clearly, at that time, there was a strong belief in the traditional gender divide.

Since then, there has been a steady decline in the numbers holding this view. In 2012, only 13% of people – or one person in eight – thinks that this should be the case. So, in respect of whether women should stay

at home rather than take on paid work, there has been something of a revolution in attitudes towards gender roles in the last 30 years.

Equally the public's attitude towards whether women who enter paid work when their children are young has a damaging effect on their relationship with their child has changed dramatically.

'A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works'.

In 1989 almost half (46%) of the British public agreed with this statement. By 2012 this had fallen to less than a third (30%).

On the whole this is good news not just for women and their families but for the UK economy as well. Large sections of the economy would simply collapse without the participation of women. Retail remains the number one private sector employer of women with more than 60% of women working in this sector. The NHS continues to be the largest public sector employer of women and women still make up the majority of workers in councils and other public sector jobs across the UK. The bottom line is that business has no choice but to ensure the workplace can accommodate pregnant women and women with young children.

However, this drive towards getting women with young children into paid work has a downside. Many women feel pressured into returning to work after having a baby before they feel ready to do so because they simply cannot afford to stay at home any longer. Coalition Government policies have directly increased the pressure on women with new babies and young children by capping and cutting benefits including maternity pay, child benefit and child tax credit squeezing household budgets to breaking point. The effect of the Coalition's policies on women's decisions regarding pregnancy, maternity and returning to work are outlined in more detail later in this section.

So whilst there has been clear progress over the last half century, there is still a long way to go before women are treated equally at work and throughout motherhood. Despite over 40 years of legislation protecting pregnant women and new mothers from discrimination, the transformation in attitudes and the

fact that the majority of women with children are now in paid work, women are still being treated unfavourably for reasons directly related to their pregnancy and maternity.

The Extent of Discrimination

Even before the recent onset of economic recession and the election of the Coalition Government the most recent national research on the nature and extent of pregnancy discrimination, conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in 2005, found that half of all pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace had experienced some form of pregnancy discrimination.

Dismissal

- An estimated 30,000 women each year lost their job as a direct result of pregnancy and/or maternity discrimination.
- Women who lost their jobs due to pregnancy discrimination missed out on a total of £12 million in maternity pay.

Impact on Pay, Ability to Return to Work and Career Progression

Furthermore women who have been badly treated at work during their pregnancy or whilst on maternity leave has a long lasting effect on their future pay and employment prospects.

- About one in four women (a quarter) do not return to paid work after maternity leave and a small minority (17%) of these women have made a personal decision to become stay-at-home mothers. Large numbers of women simply do not feel able to return to work for an employer who treated them badly during their pregnancy or whilst on maternity leave.

Not surprisingly, women are also less likely to return to their jobs if their employer does not offer family-friendly working arrangements.

- One in six women change jobs because they are unable to secure hours of work that fitted around caring for their new baby in their previous job.

Having a baby also impacts on women's ability to work full-time. The majority of mothers work part-time and often not through personal choice but because they have few, if any, alternative childcare options available to them.

- Six out of 10 women with children who are pre-school or primary school age and half of mothers with children at secondary school work part-time. This compares to less than 10% of working fathers.

Although recent moves towards enabling mothers and fathers/partners to share more equally the care of children are a step in the right direction, they do not go nearly far enough. This means that women and men still do not have a real choice and women continue to disproportionately shoulder the main responsibility for childcare in our society. This is a key cause of discrimination.

The gap between men and women's earnings (the fact that women are paid less for doing the same job or an equivalent job to men) also gets bigger throughout women's childbearing years.

- The gap between women and men working full-time in their 20s is 2.6 % per hour.
- This grows to 5.3% for women in their 30s and reaches 17.5% for women in their 40s. This means that for every £1 a man in his forties earns women only earn 82.5 pence.

Women also often return to work after maternity leave to lower grade, lower paid jobs – as the following statistics confirm:

- One in 12 women take a pay cut when returning to work straight after maternity leave.
- Six in 10 mothers feel side-lined at work as soon as they disclose their pregnancy and four in 10 managers admitted that they were wary of hiring a woman of childbearing age.
- Another survey of 1,000 low paid women workers found that one in 10 were given a more junior role on their return to work.

- Each year it is estimated that 440,000 women lose out on pay or promotion as a result of pregnancy or maternity.

The Coalition Government's attitude and many of its policies have sadly made what was clearly a bad situation worse as outlined later on in this section. They are not monitoring the incidence of pregnancy discrimination so no current national figures are available. However, there are strong indications that since the onset of the recession the incidences of women being treated badly at work is on the increase. The Union has anecdotal evidence of this. Other campaigning and support organisations such as Maternity Action (to whom Usdaw affiliates), voluntary sector agencies and employment law firms have experienced a substantial increase in the demand for advice and information in recent years.

The Experience of Usdaw Members

Some time ago Usdaw conducted its own research into the experience of Usdaw members at work whilst pregnant. All of the evidence suggests that the research remains as relevant today as when it was first carried out. If anything we have evidence that the situation has worsened for pregnant women members and new mothers since 2008. Extracts from *Delivering for Pregnant Women* – a report by Usdaw into the experience of women working in retail are reprinted in the following section. For the full report visit www.usdaw.org.uk

Ante-Natal Care

Women have a right to paid time off to attend natal care. Employers cannot ask women to make the time up or to change their normal working hours so that appointments fall out of work. To do so is unlawful and yet our survey found clear evidence of both practices.

Almost a quarter of respondents (22.8%) did not get paid time off for ante-natal appointments. More than one in 10 (12.7%) women were told to work the time back.

“I was asked by managers to make the time back. I ended up not getting paid as I couldn't work the time back due to my young son.”

“They asked me to make time up when I was late a couple of times as I had fainted because of my pregnancy.”

“My manager at the time didn't think I was allowed. He hadn't been trained. I think he thought I was skiving instead of going to see the midwife.”

Night Working

More than a third of women (40%) told us that the reason they did not get paid time off for ante-natal appointments was because they worked in the evening and/or at night.

“I work from 7.00 pm to 12 midnight. I always had a late appointment at the hospital which was a good half hour away. The clinic often ran late and I had to sit in traffic but I was told to make the time up if I was late.”

“As I work a nightshift I asked if I could go home a little earlier as my appointment was early the next day and I needed a few hours’ sleep. I was asked to start my shift a few hours early to make up the time... I stayed on nightshift until I was seven months pregnant.”

Health and Safety

Seven out of 10 of the women asked whether they had received a pregnancy risk assessment either did not get one or did not know whether they had received one. This is an alarming statistic. Employers are under a legal obligation to conduct an individual risk assessment for pregnant women. Women in retail are doing physically demanding jobs which require heavy lifting, stretching and standing/sitting for long periods. Failure to properly risk assess their work may put the health of the mother and/or her child at risk.

Many store managers appear not to know what a risk assessment is. One Union rep asked her store manager whether or not she had conducted a risk assessment for a pregnant colleague. She was told – *“Yes, I asked her whether she was okay and she said yes.”*

Experiences like this are not exceptional. This is confirmed by the comments made by many respondents and the number of calls to Usdaw from members on this issue.

“I was lifting trays of meat, blocks of cheeses (20kgs in a box), boxes of fish. Having to lean into deli counters. Being left to work nine hours without a break. Going home at 9.00 pm and starting work at 7.00 am the next day. I had no risk assessment. My manager never asked me how I was coping... I had to leave nine weeks before I had planned. I collapsed at work and was admitted to hospital twice until my baby was born... she was very small and underweight they think due to the conditions I worked under.”

“They expected me to continue to lift, stretch, be constantly on my feet, work till 10.00 pm and then start again at 7.00 am the following day – right up to my 37th week of pregnancy.”

“I was still lifting, bending and having to pull cages towards the end of my pregnancy. This resulted in me having to go off sick and having my baby three weeks early.”

Demands of the Job

Given that many jobs in supermarkets and small stores are physically demanding, it is not surprising that over half (57%) of all respondents said they found certain aspects of their job difficult when pregnant.

The most common of these are:

- Lifting, carrying and manoeuvring heavy loads – 45.3%.
- Standing and sitting for long periods – 21.3%.
- Twisting/bending/reaching – 12.4%.
- Hours of work – 7%.

We asked women what their employer did to help and received a very mixed response.

Nothing Happened

40% of women told us that their employer responded to their complaints about job difficulty by either doing nothing or by making an unhelpful suggestion. Unhelpful suggestions included being told to ask others for help or to go off sick.

“I was expected to stand up for seven hours a day in the café – washing up and serving. If I complained the attitude was ... if you can't do the work you shouldn't be here... During my first pregnancy I was still expected to carry on lifting boxes of pre-packed meat. I miscarried. I feel that if my manager had been more supportive and moved me off the pre-pack meat department I might not have lost my baby. At that point I had no idea of my rights.”

“I had real problems packing heavy bags – when I told them they said it was part of my job description – I then said customers have heavy crates of beer etc. They told me to tell customers that I couldn't lift these as I was pregnant (I didn't look seven months pregnant)... Why should I have to explain to customers that I was pregnant, it has got nothing to do with them.”

Employer's Attitude

We asked women if they thought their employer's attitude to them changed whilst they were pregnant. Almost a quarter of respondents (23.4%) said yes. For some, the change in attitude was very positive. A third of women (38%) told us that their employer became more helpful and understanding during their pregnancy.

“They were very good and understanding... They reduced my weekly hours but still paid me at my full rate. They were brilliant.”



The flip side to this is that nearly two-thirds of respondents reported negative changes in attitudes. Nearly one in four women (23.4%) told us that they were made to feel guilty or marginalised and ignored.

“When I challenged decisions made over my head (which often happened) I was told I was hormonal and then disregarded.”

“I felt like I was not valued in the way I was before I got pregnant.”

“I was not involved or included in work-related things as much as I would have been if not pregnant. The general attitude was ‘you’re going off soon, so why bother’.”

A minority of women were humiliated and degraded.

“I had no one to turn to for help. I felt useless, degraded and a burden. I was not allowed to change my shifts when I had morning sickness. I was only allowed to use the toilet on my designated breaks.”

The Good News

Being in Usdaw makes a difference to women’s experience thanks to the hard work and expertise of Usdaw reps.

The top five issues that women contacted us about were:

1. Entitlement to maternity pay and leave (25%).
2. Working conditions (11%).
3. Sickness absence (10%).
4. Rights on return to work (7.5%).
5. Working hours (6%).

Just under a quarter (24.8%) of respondents had received Usdaw’s *Maternity and Parental Rights Pack* and of these 95% told us that they found the pack useful.



Barriers to Women Exercising their Rights

Despite strong legislation preventing unfavourable treatment of pregnant women at work we know that the law alone does not stop this from happening. On the whole very few women who experience discrimination take action to right the wrong. Changes to policy brought in by the Coalition Government, growing negative attitudes and on occasions open hostility towards pregnant women by those in or close to Downing Street have made it more difficult and more expensive for women to exercise their rights.

The EOC investigation into the nature and extent of pregnancy discrimination found that relatively few women were aware of their maternity rights. Of those who lost their job as a result of pregnancy discrimination, almost half (45%) did not take any action because they were not aware of their rights.

71% of women who lost their jobs because of pregnancy discrimination did not even seek advice. Only 8% took formal action such as submitting a grievance and only 3% took a claim to a tribunal. The low percentage of claims is not because women did not have well-founded claims but because they face significant demands on their time, money and emotional resources when pregnant or caring for a new baby.

Introduction of Tribunal Fees

Since the introduction in July 2013 of employment tribunal fees the number of claims on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity discrimination has fallen even further by more than a quarter. The fees (£250 to start legal proceedings and £950 to bring a claim of unfair dismissal or discrimination) are well beyond the reach of most Usdaw members. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that £1,200, at a time when women's income has usually dropped to flat rate Statutory Maternity Pay of just £138 and they have all the extra costs of a new baby, acts as an insurmountable barrier to justice.

However, Usdaw members can be assured that if they have a claim of discrimination that the Union believes has reasonable prospects of success, Usdaw will support that claim and pay any fee that becomes payable, providing that the member has applied for remission.

Access to Advice Services

Cuts to advice services are limiting women's ability to resolve problems where they are not trade union members. There have been substantial cuts to generalist advice services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, as well as specialist services.

Even where services continue to operate they are increasingly finding themselves overstretched and unable to meet demand. Every month parents download more than 30,000 information sheets from the Maternity Action website and they answer over 200 advice calls. In the last two years Maternity Action received 21 times more calls than they were able to answer. They do not receive any Government funding at all to support the invaluable service they provide.

Negative Attitudes

In recent years a high profile has been given to those who see maternity rights as a burden on business and unnecessary red tape. These negative attitudes have lent a degree of social acceptability to pregnancy discrimination and given rogue employers the green light to go ahead and treat pregnant women badly. Individuals within and close to Government have expressed negative attitudes towards pregnant women in work including in 2011 comments by Steven Hilton, the then Director of Strategy at Number 10, about abolishing maternity leave; and the Free Enterprise Group associated with Conservative MPs on exempting small employers from rights and responsibilities towards pregnant women (2012).

Cuts to Benefits

Benefits are a trade union issue, because many of our members rely on them, whether that is relying on tax credits to bump up a low wage, or disability benefits to help with the additional costs of being disabled or for caring for a disabled child or Housing Benefit to help meet high rents on low pay.

There have been so many cuts of working age benefits since the Coalition came to power that some are already being forgotten.

Pregnant women and women with children under 12 months old have lost 1.5 billion per year since 2010 because of Government decisions to:

- Freeze and means test Child Benefit.
- Reduce the income cut off for the family element of Child Tax Credit.
- Abolish the Child Trust Fund and the Health in Pregnancy Grant.
- Hold down Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance to below inflation rates.
- Close 600 Sure Start Centres.

Example:

Heather works for 12 hours a week and earns £8,000 and her partner works for 24 hours a week and earns £16,000. They have lost almost £3,000 per year. £259 in Statutory Maternity Pay because of the 1% cap in uprating, the Health in Pregnancy Grant which was worth £190, the Sure Start Maternity Grant which was worth £500 and Child Tax Credit of £1,487.60.



Changes to working hours and industry-wide cuts to staffing budgets are affecting many if not most of the sectors in which Usdaw organises. Whilst the changes and cuts are impacting on all Usdaw members, many women members working in the retail sector are finding it particularly difficult to comply with employer demands for total flexibility. This is because women continue to shoulder the main responsibility for caring for children and disabled or older partners and relatives.

In this section we use the term ‘carer’ to mean anyone who is either looking after:

- their own children or the children of a relative; and/or
- ill, older or disabled family members, friends or partners.

Facts about Carers (only including those who care for adults)

- There are over 6.5 million carers in the UK and this number continues to rise.
- 3 million people combine caring with paid work – over 2 million carers work full-time and 1 million part-time.
- The care provided unpaid by the nation’s carers is worth an estimated £119 billion per year – considerably more than total spending on the NHS.
- The 2011 UK census shows that women are more likely to be carers than men. 58% of carers are women compared to 42% men and 73% of those that receive Carers Allowance are women.
- Women have a 50:50 chance of providing care by the time they are 59; compared with men who have the same chance much later in life at the age of 75.
- Women are more likely to combine eldercare with childcare and are also more likely to have to give up work to care.

- Over 2 million people have given up work at some point to care and 3 million have had to reduce their working hours.
- 70% of carers are over £10,000 worse off as a result of reduced earnings.
- Carers who are juggling work and care are more likely to have to forego promotion or miss job opportunities because they cannot increase their working hours or move to take up a new position.

Facts about Working Parents

- Couples with children in the UK spend more time at work than anywhere else in Europe.
- Since 1951, the number of UK mothers in employment has more than tripled. The latest figures show that 68% of women with children are now in paid work.
- Women are more likely to be in work when they live with a partner (72%). More than half of all single parents (55%) are in work.
- Women very much rely on grandparents for help with childcare. One-third of working mothers rely on grandparents for help with childcare when they are in work.
- Parents now spend more than three times as much time with their children as they did in 1972. Whilst fathers are more involved in family life, research shows mothers continue to devote the most time to childcare and household work.
- Women spend over two-and-a-half hours per day on housework such as cooking, washing up, cleaning and ironing. Men spend just under one hour on similar chores.
- Women also spend more time taking care of children, even when they work the same hours as their partner. Women working full-time spend four-and-a-half hours a day caring for and entertaining their children.

Rescheduling

Women are attracted to retail because historically retail was one of the few sectors that was able to offer women child-friendly and carer-friendly working hours. It is why women still make up the majority of the retail workforce (60%). But things are changing.

The current economic climate has led to the retail sector rescheduling working hours, restricting overtime, offering shorter working hours contracts, reducing flexibility, focusing more sharply on performance targets and promoting a more robust style of line management.

Women have never been able to pick and choose their hours of work but until recently it was widely understood by managers that any restrictions women had to place on their hours of work because of childcare or other caring commitments had to be taken seriously.

Women have always had to compromise but on the whole a compromise was usually reached that worked for them and for the company. However, caring commitments now seem to carry less weight with managers than ever before and even when they are taken into account, managers feel increasingly able to comment on or interfere with those arrangements.

For example, one woman with three year old twins has been told she now has to work every Saturday. She cannot as her mum has the kids in the week and her husband works on Saturday. Her manager's response was *"Your husband should look at changing his shifts."* When she said that this simply was not an option she was told that that was her problem.

This is an increasingly common response.

There is increasing evidence that managers are now making judgements about how parents arrange their lives and care for their kids or relatives. On one occasion it was suggested a member who was caring for her elderly mum should consider residential care as an option. Members have been told that their kids are old enough to look after themselves and so can be left alone in the evening or at weekends or it has been suggested they leave their children with neighbours.

This Government's sustained attack on employment rights sends a subtle message to employers that it is okay to disregard the needs of employees. The restructuring of hours to suit the needs of business is not always handled well.

Rescheduling has in many cases led to women either losing control over their hours of work or losing hours of work altogether. Like the member from Portugal who is a single parent and whose family members are all at home in Portugal. She has been told she must start to work weekends or lose those hours altogether but to buy-in formal childcare costs more than what she will earn.

Short Working Hours

Short working hours are also a problem for many Usdaw members, more of a problem than zero-hours contracts. Workers who want to work longer hours but cannot because they are not available are often referred to as underemployed. Over the past four years, the UK jobs market has seen a dramatic rise in underemployment. It is estimated that one-and-a-half million people are working part-time only because they cannot get full-time work. This shows that the jobs crisis is worse than the headline labour market figures suggests.

The scale and severity of the crisis in the economy means that many workers are taking on jobs on fewer hours than they need. At the same time employers are looking to find ways to keep wage costs down. The result of this is a reduction in permanent hours available and a growth in contracts for shorter working hours.

Whilst this is an issue for both men and women, women are disproportionately affected. Women who might have worked the same pattern of hours for years are being asked to be more flexible. They are being asked to work weekends, to work late or early, or both. They are not refusing the new hours simply because they like their old ones better or because they are resistant to change or because they do not understand the needs of the business but because they simply cannot fit the new hours around their childcare or other caring responsibilities.

Research shows that mothers are just as motivated as fathers to be in paid work and a third of all women identify personal development and self-esteem as important factors in deciding to work. However, lack of options around leave and flexible working result in many mothers taking on part-time hours when they really need to be able to work full-time. This has led to an increase in the numbers of women taking on more than one job. Rema's experience is becoming increasingly common.

Rema works at a convenience store in Wembley and lives in Willesden Junction with her five year old daughter, she is a single mother.

Rema holds down three jobs: 12 hours in a supermarket, six hours with the Army Cadets and 18 hours as a PA with a private company. Rema is struggling to cope with the cost of living and juggling being a single parent with holding down three jobs. She would like full-time work and is hoping to get more settled employment that would enable her to apply for a mortgage.

"As a single mother with the same bills and expenses as everyone else I find the unpredictable hours extremely difficult especially when it comes to payday. My pay packets have ranged from £900 one month to just under £300 the next. A guaranteed income is needed when raising a family and paying rent. I have had to find yet another part-time job to fill the gap."

Half of all women in full-time work move to part-time work after the birth of a child, and a fifth of all mothers do the same when their child starts primary school. As a result women are nearly four times as likely to work part-time than men and despite the fact that there are less women in paid work than men, they make up three-quarters of all part-time workers.

Working part-time has serious implications for women's wages. The problem is not just that part-timers' weekly earnings are lower – although this is obviously true and obviously a problem for many women workers, but because the hourly rates for part-timers are lower than the hourly rates for full-timers.

Part-time workers earn more than a third less than full-time workers per hour. This means that for every £1 earned by a full-time worker, a part-time worker earns only 63p.

Furthermore part-time work also has much lower prospects for promotion and fewer options for training and development.

As well as moving to part-time jobs after having children, women are also more likely to move into less secure work. Research shows that women with new born babies or children starting school are twice as likely to move from permanent to temporary work as other women, and three times more likely as men. Women make up more than half of the 1.6 million temporary workers and recent research by the TUC shows that insecure work is becoming more and more common.

- The number of temporary workers increased by 89,000 in the two years to the end of December 2012, to reach 1.65 million.
- The UK's temporary workforce has been growing for a number of years, increasing by 230,000 since 2005. Over the same period permanent jobs have fallen by 8,000.
- The number of people in temporary jobs because they could not find permanent work has been increasing sharply for years, more than doubling to 655,000 in 2012 compared with 2005.

So to summarise women are currently struggling to get the hours of work they need when they need them. This causes hardship at a time when women are least able to cushion the blow given the cuts to in-work and family benefits and the fact that wage increases despite the Union's best efforts have not kept pace with inflation.

For example three women, all with young children, working in the same store were employed as new starters on contracts of 15 hours per week. This meant that they were struggling to keep their heads above water financially. It meant that they could not claim tax credits to top up their wages and so a local priest offered each additional paid work to bump up their hours in order that they hit the 16 hour per week tax credit threshold for single parents.



One in four Usdaw members is a woman over 50 and so it is important that the Union understands the pressures that older women face.

This is the first generation of older women who have worked all their lives and felt the pressure of trying to 'do it all' – bringing up their families whilst holding down a job.

Older women in Usdaw have very often spent a lifetime of juggling work with caring for their families and yet cannot afford to retire. Low hours contracts and low pay over a lifetime mean women are having to work well into their 60s and 70s.

Very often older women are having to retire before they can afford to or are pushed out by employers wanting to make room for younger workers who might be paid less and be less able to speak up for themselves.

A recent TUC report into the experiences of older women at work, which Usdaw contributed to, puts it like this:

'This generation of women has been let down. They entered the workforce in the 1970s or 80s. They were the first generation protected by equal pay and sex discrimination laws and the first to have rights to paid maternity leave. Many returned to work after having children and struggled to combine work and childcare at a time when few employers offered flexible working. But after decades of hard work many of these women feel short-changed. The fact that this generation of women earns a fifth less than their male counterparts and less than any other age group should set alarm bells ringing.'

Urdaw's own research has shown that of all age groups women aged 50+ are currently feeling under the most pressure.

Some of the key pressure points for older women in Usdaw are:

Targets – the relentless focus on targets is having a disproportionate effect on older women many of whom cannot work as fast as they used to. Employers are failing to value the contribution of older women who might be missing targets but still have a great deal to offer.

Case Study: Linda Craven, JD Williams

"We had a new IT system introduced in our call centre; we have mostly younger workers and they are more at ease with new technology than some of our older members. The company said there was a 13 week trial period for staff to get used to the new technology but we had one older woman member who did not manage in that time to get to grips with it. The Union got involved and the member was given an extended probationary period after which she passed."

Worries about retirement – Usdaw's research shows that two-thirds of our women members and just under half of men in Usdaw are planning to work beyond the State Pension age and in the vast majority of cases this is because members cannot afford to retire.

A recent TUC study found that three-quarters of older workers said they would need to supplement their pension income. Other studies show that one in five workers say they will never be able to afford to fully retire. The numbers of people saying they will have to work beyond their State Pension age is now at an all-time high.

Case Study: Jacqui Hill, Wisemans

“I’m lucky as I’ve found my employer to be supportive of older workers who need to slow down. But for me the issue is as you get older you might want to reduce your hours or not go at the same pace but you worry about losing pay. I do 40 hours a week plus overtime and the money I earn isn’t something we can do without. Like many people me and my husband have no pension plan, we rent our home and there isn’t a lot left over at the end of the month.”

Hours of work – older workers can find stable hours of work really valuable in helping them cope with illness, ageing or planning work round caring for grandchildren and other family members.

But as with all Usdaw members, having a regular and reliable pattern of hours can be hard to achieve or to hang on to in today’s 24/7 economy.

Case Study: Dawn Arnold, Tesco

“I’ve worked for Tesco for 18 years and am the Senior Usdaw Rep so I’ve seen a lot of changes in the time I’ve worked there. When there are hours changes older workers and particularly older women can struggle with what’s being asked of them.

We recently had an older woman who had worked the same shift for many years and was being asked to change her hours so she finished at 10.30 pm at night. She came to the Union as she was very worried about her journey home given that it would mean travelling alone, in the dark, on public transport very late at night.

But we sorted it out – her hours got tweaked but nothing too major. I’m glad the Union got involved as it means we can come up with a solution that hopefully works for everyone.”

Many older workers need a reliable pattern of hours because they are caring for other family members. Not being able to get the hours they need can mean older women having to give up work altogether.

As a result of their caring responsibilities, older women are more likely than men to have given up work. Figures from the Equality and Human Rights Commission show that 17% of unemployed older women left their last job to care for someone, compared to only 1% of men. Today’s older women have been called the ‘sandwich generation’, caring for both older and younger members of the same family.

Udaw’s research shows that over 25% of women in Usdaw aged 50 and above have had to ask to reduce their hours of work to help look after grandchildren.

Udaw reps say that there is often pressure on older women to give up family-friendly shift patterns to accommodate younger women with children. Many older women are caring for grandchildren or elderly parents but their caring commitments are less well recognised. Younger women with children and older women might be competing for the same shift patterns.

And older women may be working night shifts so they can look after other family members in the day time.

Slowing Down – many older workers worry about being seen to slow down and being disciplined or managed out through competency procedures.

In March 2012 the Union ran a get-together of older women. This is what one member who came told us:

“I’m 62 now and I work in a returns centre. I stand up for seven hours a day and find my job really tiring. I pull heavy cages and get back and shoulder pain. I don’t want the company to know I’m struggling though as I need to carry on working. I can’t afford to retire. If they find out I’m not coping I might be made to go. It’s hard when younger people have stacked the cages as they don’t think about us older women having to pull them.”

And a member with rheumatoid arthritis who came to the get-together told us that she works nights, is supposed to have a regular occupational health check but won’t do so in case her condition is revealed and she is transferred to days or has her hours cut and so loses pay.

The Menopause – the menopause can be a significant workplace issue and many older women members struggle with workplace temperature, uniforms and the need for more regular toilet breaks. There is very little recognition amongst employers and colleagues about the support women might need working through the menopause. The menopause can lead to changes in a woman’s health and this can affect how the woman does her work and her relationships with colleagues, customers and managers.

The menopause is an occupational health issue and is of growing importance for employers as the proportion of older women in the workforce increases.

Research by the University of Nottingham, the TUC and others has found that many women do not feel able to be honest with their manager about the reasons for their absence, where it is menopause related.

Hot flushes, headaches, tiredness and anxiety attacks are often made worse by the workplace.



Section 6

The Union Dividend

One of the most effective ways to deliver better pay, decent work and fairness for women and men at work is for employers to recognise and work with trade unions.

Numerous studies have shown that well-organised workplaces are fairer workplaces.

Societies that recognise the contribution unions make to fairness and equality do better than those that do not.

A recent report published by the Institute of Employment Rights has shown that economic inequality in the UK was at its lowest when 58% of workers were in trade unions and 82% of wages were set by collective bargaining.

By 2012, 26% of the UK workforce were in trade unions and only 23% covered by collective bargaining. During this time the gap between top earners and the lowest is higher than at any time since records began. The UK now ranks as one of the most unequal societies in the developed world.

The report goes on to say that there is an historic link between strong trade unionism and more equal societies.

Without trade unions, the realities of working life mean that individual workers are under pressure to simply accept the pay and conditions that an employer presents to them.

The bargaining power of trade unions has the potential to defend existing employment conditions, so that new workers are not brought in on lower rates of pay or forced to accept other terms which are inferior.

Strong trade union organisation is particularly good for women workers.

Women are more likely to be paid the same as men for doing the same or similar work.

A Government report written under the last Labour Government found that women in trade unions received, on average, 30% more pay than non-unionised women workers.

A recent TUC report called The Union Advantage found that union members have more paid holidays, with 3.8 days more paid holiday than non-members.

Unions have played a significant part in campaigning and winning a fairer, more equal society and are an important part of the solution to tackling women's inequality.

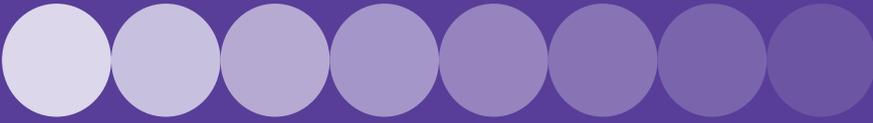
Trade union reps are vital to this work. Each time an Usdaw rep recruits someone to Usdaw or represents a member at work, or runs a campaign so members know about their rights – these everyday actions help to ensure that we tackle prejudice and discrimination and that everyone is given an equal opportunity to participate in society. The things reps do day in day out make workplaces fairer, give working people a voice and mean the dignity and worth of everyone is respected.



Usdaw is making a difference for its women members in many different ways. Making sure women know their rights is vital and Usdaw is committed to giving women clear, accessible information to help them understand their rights at work. Usdaw's Maternity and Parental Rights guide is a fantastic example of this commitment in action. The guide lets pregnant women, new mothers and fathers know what they are entitled to and has easy to use standard letters and forms to help make rights to pay, leave, risk assessments and time off a reality for working parents.

Improving rights at work is also key. Usdaw has been responsible for significant improvements to a wide range of rights at work. Two-thirds of our women members are covered by agreements that have improved family-friendly rights such as time off for family emergencies, better maternity pay, rights for women undergoing fertility treatment and support for adoptive parents.





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