

STATEMENT

15 November 2023

New data shows Australian workers face a ‘part-time promotion cliff’

A ‘part-time promotion cliff’ is limiting career progression for Australians who work part-time, or want or need to move to part-time work, according to new analysis released today by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

Private sector employers with 100 or more employees report workforce data to WGEA every year in an Employer Census that enables the nation to track trends and performance on gender equality in Australian workplaces.

An early release of that employer data shows that in 2022-23, while 21% of employees work part-time, only 7% of managers are employed part-time. This effectively means that part-time workers are facing a “promotion cliff”.

Despite a few employers leading the way, the availability of part-time management roles has remained stubbornly low in recent years, with an increase of just 1pp from 2018-19.

The new analysis also finds **the share of managers working part-time drops with seniority**: just 5% of Key Management Personnel and 3% of CEOs work part-time.

This new data points to a **large gap in promotional opportunities** for women and men who don’t work full-time.

This can impact on the quality of leadership and decision-making, and a lack of part-time worker role models can perpetuate the belief that senior management and part-time work are incompatible.

“There is effectively a “promotion cliff” for part-time workers in Australia,” WGEA Chief Executive Officer Mary Wooldridge said.

“Part-time workers who want to take up leadership roles in their workplace, or to make the change from full-time or casual work, face a sudden drop off in availability of management level jobs that could otherwise contribute to advancing or sustaining their career.

“A high proportion of Australian women work part-time (30% of women, compared to 11% of men), so limited access to flexible working arrangements has a disproportionate effect on women’s earning capacity and contributes to Australia’s gender pay gap.

“Women are more likely to want or need to work part-time, and sometimes more than once in their careers. This new analysis shows there are severe constraints on them doing so at senior levels and helps explain why we see much lower proportions of women in leadership roles.



“This risks women’s skills and talents being underutilised and can leave them languishing in more junior roles than they are capable of.”

Employers that take proactive steps to analyse the structure of full-time management roles and consider opportunities for flexibility, including with job-share or part-time arrangements, can gain access to a whole new talent pool.

Further analysis of WGEA’s new data reveals that while **female-dominated industries employ the highest number of part-time managers**, women working part-time are proportionally **more likely to be in a managerial role in a male-dominated industry**.

This suggests that all industries need to challenge existing norms and proactively redesign management roles to enable them to be undertaken part-time. Female-dominated industries, particularly, need to ask what can be done to ensure more women in part-time roles are progressing to management positions.

Research¹ has shown that at every age group, fewer than 50% of women work full-time and that gender differences in pay and senior leadership generally widen throughout life. Women are twice as likely as men to be working part-time and casually from age 35.

“While today’s new analysis relates to permanent staff who work part-time, many of the same issues are true for the 28% of women who are employed casually,” Ms Wooldridge said.

“In an environment of historically low unemployment, employers can’t discount part-time workers.

“To attract and retain talent from diverse genders and of all ages, employers need to offer flexible working arrangements, reconsider what it means to be a leader in the workplace and implement part-time or job-sharing opportunities at managerial and executive level.

“This is a call to action for all employers to actively develop and promote part-time management roles.

“Providing opportunities for women and for men to work part-time as they progress to management and leadership roles will have significant benefits for both employees and their workplaces.”

NOTE for media: The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) will release the full findings of the 2023 Employer Census in our WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard at the end of November 2023.

The annual Scorecard is based on employer reports submitted in accordance with the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012. Private sector employers with 100 or more employees submit their gender equality metrics to WGEA annually. It will include the latest figures on the national gender pay gap, workforce participation, women’s representation in leadership and employer actions to improve gender equality.

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About the Agency The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) is an Australian Government statutory agency charged with promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces. Read more and explore the full dataset for your industry at www.wgea.gov.au

¹ Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2022) [Wages and Ages: Mapping the Gender Pay Gap by Age](#)