



**INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
2009**

TIME TO END
WOMEN'S
POVERTY



On International Women's Day 2009, the TUC Women's Conference draws attention to women's low pay and poverty.

The TUC joins with trade unions around the world in the global campaign Decent Work, Decent Life for Women.

The Women's Conference celebrates the achievements of women around the world and calls for renewed action to free women from poverty, injustice, discrimination and violence.

“The secret is to keep trying, to persevere, and never give up. We women are convinced that we will not be handed anything on a platter: we have to fight for what we want. Women are alienated, we are used for production but when it comes to sharing positions of responsibility, we are pushed to the margins...

“Ever since I was born, I have liked to protest! I grew up in a family that was very politically active. It’s in my blood... I held positions of responsibility in the youth movement, then in the women’s department, but I had to go further. I wanted to reach this stage, where I would have the right to speak out in defence of the least advantaged; to fight injustice. The trade union movement is the place to do that. There are other associations, but they cannot fulfil the role of the trade union, which is to defend the interests of the workers...”

Rabiatou Diallo, General Secretary of the Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée (CNTG). Interviewed by Samuel Grumiau for the International Trade Union Confederation.



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In the UK...

Women still earn less than men

In the UK today, women are much more likely to be poor than men.

Many of these women are poor because they work in low-paid jobs.

Thirty per cent of working women earn less than £100 a week (compared with just 14 per cent of men).

It's not their choice that they are poor or that they earn less than men: it's because they work in the UK, where the pay gap is a third higher than the EU average and where women are subject to one of the highest part-time

pay penalties in the industrialised world. Women's poverty increases in retirement. In 2007 the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) calculated that it would take 20 years to close the full-time gender pay gap but 40 years to achieve retirement equality.

The EOC also calculated that an average woman working full time will have lost £330,000 over the course of her lifetime. But the cost to individual women's life chances, to her opportunities, to her family and children, and the wider cost to society is incalculable.

Come clean over women's pay


Women's low pay is rooted in the way the labour market is structured, and long-standing traditional assumptions about a woman's place.

Not only do women tend to be paid less than men, but the jobs they do attract lower wages. Eight in ten of the lowest paid jobs in the UK labour market are mainly done by women. Nine in ten of the highest paid jobs are mainly done by men.

Women are concentrated in jobs such as caring, catering, cleaning, cashiering and clerical work (the five 'C's), which are often considered 'low value' and where low pay predominates.

The TUC is calling for the UK to 'come clean' on women's low pay and to acknowledge the fact that our economy has been kept afloat by a vast army of low-paid women workers.

They are the cleaners who make our workplaces habitable, the catering staff who keep us fed and watered and the carers who look after our children. Their jobs are low-paid because they are mainly done by women.



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In the UK...

It's time to change workplace cultures

The UK has a particularly high rate of women working part time - and women are four times as likely as men to work part time. There is a gender pay gap of 36 per cent.

Many working women are forced to change jobs and careers when they have children because of a lack of high-quality part-time jobs.

Forty-four per cent of professional women who move into lower-paid jobs find themselves in workplaces where the average employee lacks A levels. A third of corporate managers 'downgrade' after having a child.

Women also take on the larger share of unpaid caring responsibilities in the

UK and are significantly more likely to be providing a high level of care than men. These 'heavy end' carers - who do 50 hours or more caring a week - find it more difficult to combine care with full-time work and are more likely to be working part time - 89 per cent of carers working part time are women.

Carers providing more than 20 hours a week of unpaid care are clustered in low-level, low-paid jobs.

The TUC has long campaigned for a greater availability of high quality, better paid part-time work, because it is women who pay the greatest price for inflexible and outdated working practices.

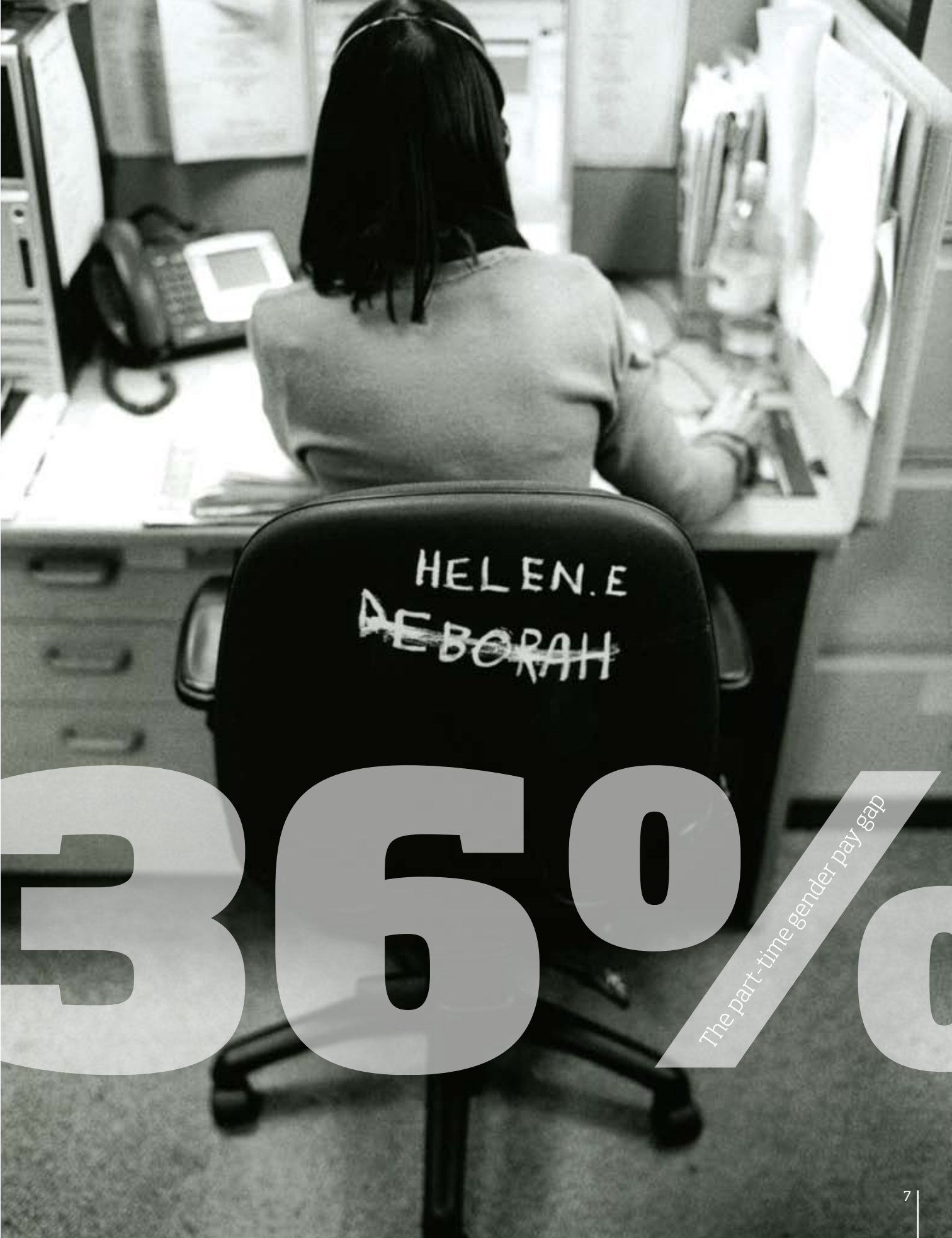
The motherhood penalty

Women's low pay reinforces their inequality in the home. Decisions about the sharing of childcare responsibilities will be affected by which parent has the higher salary - particularly in low-income homes. Women's low pay also affects their economic independence within relationships and their ability to leave abusive and violent situations.

Childcare responsibilities can have a huge effect on women's life chances. Despite greater government investment in childcare through the National Childcare Strategy, good quality, affordable childcare is still in short supply and UK parents pay some of the highest childcare costs in Europe.

A 2005 Government study found that 72 per cent of parents used an informal childcare provider - like a relative or friend - to meet some or all of their childcare needs.

Research into the 'family gap' - the difference in hourly wages between women with and without children in seven industrialised countries - found that the highest wage penalties were in the UK. Mothers in the UK are paid an eight per cent wage penalty for having one child, 24 per cent for two and 31 per cent for three.



360%

The part-time gender pay gap

In the UK...

Unions fighting for women

TUC research on the gender pay gap found that part-time work, occupational gender segregation and the onset of family responsibilities hit women in the UK particularly hard.

Women's low pay, occupational gender segregation and the 'motherhood penalty' hurts both them and their families. Half of all children living in poverty - 1.4 million of them - live in households where at least one parent works.

Low pay also leads to deprivation in communities and contributes to inequality in society.

Prejudice goes hand-in-hand with poverty, and certain groups of women have a disproportionate risk of poverty.

Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black Caribbean women are around twice as likely as white British women to live in the most deprived districts of England. They are disproportionately likely to be working on agency and temporary contracts, and black people as a whole are disproportionately likely to be poor.

As a result, 50 per cent of children in Asian families are living in poverty, as are 51 per cent of black British children and 48 per cent of children in Chinese families. This compares to 27 per cent of children in white families.

This is why trade unions have agreed to work through the End Child Poverty coalition, which brings together children's charities, campaigning organisations and unions to press the Government for action needed to beat it.

Further information and resources can be found at www.tuc.org.uk/childpoverty

The gender pay gap for the lowest paid has halved since 1997 because of the national minimum wage. Seventy per cent of those benefiting from the minimum wage are women.

Enforcing the National Minimum Wage: A Practical Guide is a resource for union reps helping people with minimum wage claims: www.tuc.org.uk/extras/nmwenforcement.pdf

The TUC is also launching a campaign to expose women's poverty pay. Women don't just 'manage poverty' within their families. Millions of women workers in the UK have been asked for too long to keep the UK economy afloat by sacrificing their life opportunities and their well-being.

Further information and resources can be found at www.tuc.org.uk/womenspoverty



In the UK...

Unions tackling women's low pay and poverty

The TUC and its affiliates have long worked to eradicate women's inequality and unequal pay, ever since the resolution supporting equal pay for women was passed at the TUC's first Congress in 1888.

The union movement has been at the forefront of the campaign to close the gender pay gap; has championed the cause of decent childcare provision; and has argued for better maternity and parental provision, both in law and in workplace agreements.

As the economic situation worsens, the most vulnerable people in society are set to lose again. On International Women's Day 2009, the TUC Women's Conference calls for a renewed focus by the trade union movement to confront this challenge by:

- reinforcing the message that women's poverty must be tackled in order to achieve the Government's target of eradicating child poverty by 2020
- placing women's equality at the centre of the trade union bargaining and organising agenda
- continuing to press for mandatory pay audits and extension of the public sector duties to the private sector
- reaching out to and organising women in un-unionised and exploitative sectors
- challenging the low value and low status given to the work done by women
- demanding greater availability of high quality childcare and high quality part-time work

- bringing a greater impetus to negotiate and improve on family-friendly rights in the workplace to enable genuine cultural change in workplaces and peoples' homes
- welcoming black women's voices, experiences and agendas in driving forward the trade union movement's work on race and gender equality, and
- acting urgently to end women's retirement poverty.

Trade unionists around the UK have already started tackling women's low pay and poverty with a renewed urgency.

In the north, women trade unionists, including UNISON's regional women's network, started raising awareness of the extent of poverty in their region. The Northern TUC's campaign was launched at a conference called Hard Times: Trade Unions Tackling Poverty, highlighting the growth of inequality, low pay, child poverty and quality of life.

The Southern and Eastern Region TUC is conducting a Vulnerable Workers pilot project to reach and engage with vulnerable workers by meeting immediate needs, such as advice and information on employment rights. This work revealed that 70 per cent of the most exploitative situations were experienced by women.

The South West TUC Women's Committee is developing a campaign around using the gender equality duty to tackle women's low pay and poverty.





"It is estimated that there are between 9,000 and 9,500 waste collectors in Pune, 90 per cent of whom are women. Of these, 6,500 are affiliated to our union. There are several types of waste collectors: those who collect the waste in the streets and from public bins; those who work in the landfills; those who go house to house with a trolley, buying waste that is worth a little more and that people do not throw directly in the bin, such as beer bottles, paper, etc... Their daily income is around two dollars a day. They have to work 8 to 10 hours a day to make this amount, and walk a lot...

"One of the main problems for the women is back trouble, as they carry a huge weight on their heads or in bags on their backs. Many are also bitten by dogs or cut by broken glass. And then, the big bins in the streets are really high and they have to jump inside, so some of the women end up with fractures from falling. During the monsoon, waste collectors are also electrocuted, by coming into contact with bare electric wires."

Maitreyi Shankar, an activist from the Waste Collectors' Union, KKPKP - India. Interviewed by Samuel Grumiau for the ITUC.

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The international perspective

The global campaign Decent Work, Decent Life for Women reminds us that the common experience of poverty and discrimination that links women around the world is felt most acutely by women in the developing world.

In 2006, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) stated that women were “the prime victims of poverty all over the world”. Their lives are characterised by increasing income inequality and, for many, economic insecurity.

Women and children constitute 70 per cent of the 1.2 billion people living in poverty. This proportion is on the increase. They account for 64 per cent of illiterate adults around the world.

Of the 550 million people who are classified as ‘working poor’ – earning less than a dollar a day – 60 per cent are women.

An additional 77.8 million women are unemployed.

As girls they face a lack of access to education. As young women, childcare and pregnancy limit their employment opportunities. The level of unpaid caring work increases in middle age when they themselves become increasingly vulnerable to illness.

Women make up an increasing proportion of people infected with HIV – in Africa young women are three times as likely to be infected as their male peers.

The vast majority – 90 per cent – of child domestic workers are girls between 12 and 17 years old. They are at risk of both sexual and economic exploitation, violence and abuse.

While women’s labour market participation has increased, work is not always a way out of poverty for them and their families. Increasingly women are providing a cheap, flexible labour pool. They are casual workers, temporary workers, contract workers and homeworkers.

Women workers are over-represented in the informal sectors of the economy where their jobs, whether linked to the local economy or ultimately to the global economy, are unrecognised, unprotected by law and are therefore highly insecure. Most jobs are damaging to their health, very badly paid and are often hugely exploitative.

As in the UK, women’s work internationally is undervalued and badly paid. Women experience gender pay gaps, occupational segregation, an unequal distribution of unpaid care work and motherhood penalties. However, women in the global south experience these penalties in their most severe form.



The international perspective

Decent work, decent lives for women now

Women's presence in trade unions worldwide is growing. Their vulnerable position means trade unions and trade union organising can transform their lives.

"My friend used to tell me that we had rights. I told her that we do not, that we are like 'third grade potatoes' and that's life. Nobody teaches us that we are workers and have rights to work, to defend our stalls, to earn a living. But we do have rights."

Street vendor, Peru (Ospina, StreetNet 2003) Quoted in UNIFEM (2005) *Progress of the World's Women*.

The ITUC and the Global Union Federations (GUFs) focus their activities on sectors and areas of work where women workers are most vulnerable, including part-time work, domestic work, migrant labour and work in the informal economy and export processing zones.

The key objectives of ITUC's Decent Work, Decent Life for Women campaign are to:

- advocate decent work for women and gender equality in labour policies and agreements
- seek gender equality in trade union structures, policies and activities and a significant increase in the number of women trade union members and women in elected positions.

Further information about this campaign can be received by signing up to the unions4women campaign email list, by emailing the ITUC on equality@ituc-csi.org.



The international perspective

What you can do

The TUC has developed a Gender, Globalisation and Poverty Reduction course aimed at union officers, tutors and senior lay reps. The course examines the impact of globalisation on workers in developed and developing countries with an emphasis on women and opportunities to develop and strengthen links between female trade unionists worldwide.

Small grants are available for unions, regions and branches to build relationships with sister unions in the global south (up to £2,000) and/or organise a small international development project (up to £3,000).

Further information about the grants, the course and the TUC's work on international development can be obtained by contacting Gemma Freedman, gfreedman@tuc.org.uk

The TUC is running an online course, starting in October 2009, entitled Going Global. www.unionlearn.org.uk/education/learn-2326-f0.cfm

The international pages of your union's website will list opportunities for you to get involved in your union's international solidarity work.

Further reading and links

Websites

Further resources for the TUC's women's low pay and poverty campaign are available at www.tuc.org.uk/womenspoverty

Further resources for the TUC's child poverty campaign are available at www.tuc.org.uk/childpoverty

Further information about the TUC's international development work can be found at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/index.cfm?mins=465&minors=465>

Child Poverty Action Group www.cpag.org.uk

Further information about the ITUC can be found at www.ituc-cis.org

Publications

TUC *Gender Pay Gap Update* (2008)
www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-14435-f0.cfm

TUC *The Iron Triangle* (2008) www.tuc.org.uk/extras/irontriangle.pdf

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