



the iron triangle

women's poverty, children's poverty and in-work poverty

This briefing note sets out why the TUC's campaign against poverty sets out to tackle three inter-locked problems: the poverty of women and children and the poverty of low paid workers. It sets out how we are working with campaigns led by End Child Poverty and the Fawcett Society, and how we are mobilising trade union support for a national demonstration on 4 October. This campaign is informed by the findings of the Commission on Vulnerable Employment – for some workers, poverty is an aspect of extreme exploitation.

women and children first

Poverty in this country affects some groups of people much more than others. Here we concentrate on the fact that women and children are significantly more likely to be poor than men. Thirty percent of women have an income of less than £100 a week, compared to fourteen percent of men, and it is having a child that puts women at a particular risk of becoming poor. Four out of ten poor children live in households headed by a single mother and another three out of ten in households where the father is in employment but the mother has low or no income.¹

In the table overleaf the first column of percentages shows what proportion of the whole population are children, women and men; the second column shows what proportion of people who are poor are children women and men. Twenty two percent of the population are children, but thirty percent of poor people are children; thirty eight percent of the population are men, but only thirty three percent of poor people are men.²

percentage of individuals in poverty and whole population 2005/06

	Proportion of whole population	Proportion of poor
Children	22%	30%
Adult female	40%	38%
Adult male	38%	33%

Why should this be so? One of the key reasons why women and children are poor is likely to be because women are more likely than men to be low paid. Women are far more likely than men to work in part-time jobs:

part-time and full-time employment, end of 2007³

	Full-time jobs	Part-time jobs	Part-time jobs as a percentage of all men's/women's jobs
Women in employment	7,796,000	5,727,000	42.4%
Men in employment	14,089,000	1,786,000	11.3%
Women's jobs as a percentage of all full-time/part-time jobs	35.6%	76.2%	

And part-time jobs are much worse paid:

mean hourly rates, full- and part-time jobs, 2007⁴

Full-time	Part-time	Difference
£13.96	£9.89	£4.07

Even in full-time jobs there is a large gender pay gap:

gender pay gaps, 2007⁵

Full-time pay for men	Full-time pay for women	Part-time pay for women	Full-time Gender Pay Gap	Part-time Gender Pay Gap
£14.98	£12.40	£9.65	17.2%	35.6%

In an important recent paper on low pay, the Institute for Public Policy Research noted that, in 2006, 16.1 percent of men in work were low paid, compared with 29 percent of women workers. 45.7 percent of part-time workers were low paid, compared with 14.2 percent of full-time workers. There are 1.4 million children in working households living in poverty - half of all poor children.⁶

Low pay is an important cause of women's poverty, which is important because of its effects on women themselves and because of the effects on their children. The Government has a high profile commitment to ending child poverty in a generation, and the poverty of children is inextricable from the poverty of their mothers.

There are a number of reasons why women face low pay, but a key factor – and an essential link between low pay, women's poverty and child poverty – is the employment discrimination that mothers face. As the Fawcett Society has noted, mothers are more likely to be poor in Britain than anywhere else in Europe; they have pointed out that:⁷

- From the moment they conceive a child, women face immediate financial penalties - thousands lose their jobs, and many more face disadvantage and reduced opportunities in the workplace.
- After having a child, many mums become trapped in part-time, low-paid and low-status work. They are more likely to be in insecure jobs as temps or homeworkers (where they have fewer employment rights).

low pay and child poverty

The key fact to note about low pay and child poverty is that a clear majority of children in poverty live in a family where one or more adults have jobs. The table below looks at all children living in poverty, and shows what proportion live in families where all the adults have jobs, at least one adult has a job and none of the adults have a job. Altogether, fifty-seven percent of all poor children live in families where one or more adults have got jobs:

composition of child poverty by economic status, 2005/6⁸

All adults in work	24%
At least one in work, but not all	33%
Workless households	43%

Low pay is a major cause of child poverty, and it is closely linked to exploitation. Many low paid workers are also vulnerable workers, as described in *Hard Work, Hidden Lives*, the report of the Commission on Vulnerable Employment.⁹ Around two million workers are caught in a web of low paid insecure employment, where mistreatment and abuse are the norm. The Commission spoke to agency staff paid less than permanent staff for the same work, homeworkers who face desperately low rates of pay with no paid holidays or sick leave and construction workers in bogus self-employment lose all entitlement to National Insurance benefits and sick pay. It found that illegal treatment by employers goes unpunished because enforcement of employment rights is pitifully weak, and that many low-paid, temporary workers are entitled to far fewer rights at work than directly employed ‘employees’ – making it even harder to for them to tackle mistreatment or to progress at work.

the Government’s child poverty promise

The Government has promised to end child poverty by 2020 and to halve the number of children living in poverty by 2010. They have achieved a great deal – more than half a million children have been lifted out of poverty and the number of children in poverty would be 1.7 million higher if the pre-1997 system had simply been kept in place. But the number of children in poverty has been rising for two years, and the Government will miss its 2010 target unless it invests about £2.8 billion in extra benefits and tax credits for children.

This means that the 2009 Budget is the last chance for the Government to keep its promise to this country’s 3.9 million children in poverty. Of course, higher

benefits and tax credits can only be part of a comprehensive anti-poverty package. In the medium to longer term, action to help vulnerable workers, to deal with low pay and to stop discrimination against mothers are all as important. But the first target is to win the extra package of redistribution, which is why we are encouraging trades unionists to support the *Keep the Promise* demonstration on 4 October.

campaigning to change things

Low pay, child poverty, women's equality and exploitation are all connected, they are all causes that trades unionists should want to take up. That is why the TUC established the Commission on Vulnerable Employment, and is fighting to make a reality of its recommendations.

It is also why we are working with allies in these campaigns:

- The TUC supports the Fawcett Society's *Keeping Mum* campaign to make mothers' poverty a priority. For more information visit the Keeping Mum web page: <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=644> in addition to plenty of facts and figures, there are is an e-postcard to send Gordon Brown, information about campaign events and a free campaign newsletter.
- We support End Child Poverty's *Keep the Promise* campaign, to make the Government keep its promise to halve the number of children in poverty by 2010 and end child poverty by 2020. For more information visit <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/promise> for the latest news about the campaign. Show your support for the Campaign on your website, blog, or in your window by using ECP's e-banners, or poster downloads available on their resources page.
- As a first step the TUC Executive Committee is urging trades unionists to mobilise for the national *Keep the Promise* demonstration in London on 4 October.

notes

1 Background Briefing for the *Keeping Mum* campaign, Fawcett Society, 2008, <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=647>

2 *Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 1994/95-2005/06*, DWP, 2007, table 3.3.

3 LFS data.

4 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS, 2007, table 1.5a.

5 Calculated from Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS, 2007, table 1.6a.

6 *Working Our Of Poverty*, Graham Cooke and Kayte Lawton, IPPR, 2008, cap 2. Cooke and Lawton define low pay as 60% of full-time median hourly pay, excluding overtime.

7 *Keeping Mum* web pages, Fawcett Society, 2008, www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=647

8 *Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 1994/95-2005/06*, DWP, 2007, table 4.3.

9 Available from www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk