

A Manifesto for Equality

Women's votes will decide the next election. As evidence shows women losing faith in the major political parties, Fawcett presents an initial version of its Manifesto for Equality, setting out what is needed to meet women's needs and win women's votes. We will be developing the demands set out here as we approach the next election.

Employment & Pay

Fair pay, skilled jobs, promotion, training and even a living wage are denied to many women. Pay inequalities thrive in pay systems guarded by secrecy. Nearly half women employees work part-time, losing pay, benefits, training and promotion as a consequence. Opportunities to develop skills are often not provided for women, particularly those returning to employment after raising children. A culture of long working hours limits men's involvement at home and restricts career advancement for women whose caring responsibilities make them unable or unwilling to work ever longer hours. **Fawcett believes that all women should have access to fairly paid, good quality jobs that ensure their financial independence.**

FACTS

- Women working full-time earn on average 82p for every £1 earned by a man; for part-time women workers it is only 60p.
- British employees work the equivalent of eight weeks a year more than those in France or Germany.
- Nearly three quarters of Bangladeshi women have no formal qualifications.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. Compulsory pay audits for all organisations in order to reveal pay inequalities.
2. Stronger, well-enforced laws to ensure fair treatment of part-time employees.
3. An increase in the minimum wage to at least £5.50 per hour for all employees.
4. Full sign-up to the Working Time Directive and other steps to tackle long working hours.
5. All training and skills initiatives, such as the New Deal for Skills and Modern Apprenticeships, to meet women's needs.

Women's Poverty & Financial Independence

Poverty in the UK has a female face. Yet the government takes a gender-blind approach to tackling poverty, while too often our benefits system makes out-dated and unfair assumptions about women's financial dependence on men. The welfare and benefits system must help poor women and their children, not barring women from employment but providing for those whose circumstances mean they will remain outside the labour market. **Fawcett's vision is of a world in which women enjoy financial independence and live free from poverty.**

FACTS

- Women in the UK are twice as likely to live in poverty as men.
- On average, benefits and tax credits comprise one fifth of women's income and less than one tenth of men's.
- Half of women have a disposable income of less than £100 a week in their own right, compared to just one in five men.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. A concerted effort to reduce women's poverty, including a clear target and strategy.
2. Adequate assistance from Income Support and the Social Fund for those unable to enter employment, lifting recipients out of poverty and providing in times of need.
3. Reforms of Housing Benefit to ensure that it does not act as a barrier to women's employment.
4. Increased support for children through the Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit.

Pensions

Women lose out in an antiquated state pension system which compounds workplace inequalities, fails to reward women's caring roles and ignores women's distinct working patterns. Women are penalised for earning too little or not being in employment for long enough. Women's caring saves society billions yet can lead to enormous financial hardship in later life; the current system of compensating carers is confusing, inflexible and covers too few women. Meanwhile, lower earnings, part-time work and time out of employment place occupational or private pensions out of reach for many women. **Fawcett's vision is of a fair and inclusive pension system that delivers women an adequate and secure income in retirement.**

FACTS

- One in four single women pensioners lives in poverty.
- Around 1.4 million women are excluded from pension entitlement simply because they earn too little.
- Only 30% of all private pension products are held by women and just 8% of women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have a company pension.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. A fairer, more accessible system of pension credits for all carers.
2. A reduction of the Lower Earnings Limit to £60 per week – this would entitle around 570,000 more women to a state pension.
3. Abolition of the rule that National Insurance Contributions made for less than 10 years do not count towards your pension.
4. Reform of the State Second Pension to make it a good alternative to occupational and private pensions

A Manifesto

Supporting Parents & Carers

Financial constraints and inflexible working practices prevent many parents and carers balancing work and family life as they would wish. Too few women can afford to spend even the first six months – the recommended period for breastfeeding – with their new baby before financial pressures force their return to work. Very brief paternity leave, combined with lengthier unpaid maternity leave, reinforces gender stereotypes and means many fathers cannot afford to share the pleasures and burdens of being a new parent. Those who care for disabled, ill or elderly relatives can face poverty, isolation and a lack of recognition or status.

Fawcett's vision is of a society in which women and men can combine family and employment responsibilities, unrestricted by gender stereotypes.

FACTS

- Full-time mothers are rewarded with maternity pay of barely £100 per week, but full-time employees must legally be paid at least £170 a week.
- Fathers are entitled to twelve weeks paternity leave in Sweden, compared to just two weeks in the UK.
- The unpaid work of carers, 3.4 million of whom are women, saves society £57 billion a year.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. Earnings-related maternity pay to cover the first six months of leave.
2. An extension of paternity leave to six weeks and the introduction of earnings-related paternity pay.
3. The second six months of a child's life to be covered by paid parental leave, which either parent should be able to take.
4. A right to work flexibly for everybody who requests it, most urgently for parents and carers.
5. The Carer's Allowance to rise to at least the same level as the Basic State Pension.

Childcare

Childcare in the UK is scarce and too expensive for most parents, especially those with larger families or whose children have additional caring needs as a result of disabilities. Childcare should be considered a mainstay of the welfare state, as indispensable as the NHS or schools; but the current emphasis on private provision restricts availability to affluent and urban neighbourhoods. The Government must take steps to boost the availability of childcare if it is to become a universal service available to all and a realistic option for the many women on low wages. **Fawcett's vision is of a universal childcare service providing quality, affordable and flexible care.**

FACTS

- There are only enough childcare places for 12% of children aged under eight.
- A full-time nursery place for a child under two typically costs over £7,000 per year.
- Over 60% of working families include parents who work shifts or during evenings, nights, weekends or early mornings.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. A Children's Centre in every community meeting the needs of all children, providing quality care by well-trained and well-rewarded childcare professionals at an affordable price.
2. Wrap-around care at schools, including breakfast and homework clubs.
3. The Childcare Tax Credit to meet at least 90% of childcare costs for poor families.

for Equality

Criminal Justice

Women victims and offenders are treated harshly by a 'man-made' criminal justice system. The tiny number of women in senior decision-making positions – for instance there is only one woman judge in the highest court – leads to policies designed from a male point of view and to neglect of issues such as childcare and domestic violence. Victims of rape and domestic violence face a 'post-code lottery' in services, with excellent specialist services only available in some urban areas. Meanwhile, suicide and self-harm are rocketing in female prisons, which are filled with women who have experienced abuse, poverty, poor mental health and drug and alcohol problems. Most of these women have been convicted of non-violent offences, and many have not been convicted at all. **Fawcett's vision is of women being treated fairly by the criminal justice system, whether as victims or offenders.**

FACTS

- Domestic violence accounts for a quarter of all violent crime and one in four women experience it during their lifetime.
- Less than 6% of reported rapes lead to conviction.
- The number of women in prison has almost trebled in the past decade, without any increase in female offending.
- Today more women are sent to prison for shoplifting than any other offence.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. A coherent strategy to combat all forms of violence against women.
2. Women victims of violence across the country to have access to specialist services.
3. An obligation on courts to consider the impact on the woman's mental health and the well-being of her children before sending her to prison.
4. Community services which provide alternatives to prison for women accused and convicted of crimes, reserving prison for serious violent offences.

Women & Politics

Women remain under-represented in almost all democratic institutions in the UK. Women are discriminated against within political parties' selection processes by old-fashioned attitudes and by poor procedures. The resulting under-representation excludes women from decisions that affect all of our lives, and contributes to women's political disengagement. Fawcett supports the use of positive measures to increase women's representation at both national and local levels. **Fawcett's vision is of fair representation and an equal voice for women in decision-making.**

FACTS

- There are 119 women and 540 men MPs, meaning just 18% of our MPs are women.
- There are only – and have only ever been – two Black women MPs.
- Only 59% of women, and only 36% of young women, voted in the 2001 election.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. The political parties to conduct reviews of their recruitment and selection procedures, assessing them for equal opportunities.
2. The use of positive action, such as all-women short lists, by all parties to ensure that the House of Commons and local government are more representative.
3. All parties to put in place appropriate mechanisms to listen and respond to women's political agendas.

Making Equality Happen

Thirty years after sex discrimination legislation and the Equal Opportunities Commission were introduced, gender inequalities at home, at work and in public life remain. Fawcett has lobbied for a new law obliging public authorities to promote sex equality, not only in employment but also in the delivery of services. This should make a difference. But tackling deep-seated inequalities requires an overhaul of sex equality legislation and robust mechanisms to ensure that gender equality becomes a priority in policy-making across the whole of government. **Fawcett's vision is of a society in which gender inequalities are fully understood and take their rightful place on the political agenda.**

FACTS

- The Equal Opportunities Commission's budget amounts to only 14p per person in the UK.
- There are Government targets to cut vehicle theft but not to reduce domestic or sexual violence.
- Current legislation means that hotels or bars, for example, cannot refuse to employ a woman because she is a Lesbian, but they can refuse to serve her for that reason.

FAWCETT IS CALLING FOR

1. The new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) to work for all women, particularly those – such as Black women or disabled women – who experience 'multiple discrimination'.
2. Immediate implementation of the promised public sector duty to promote sex equality.
3. A Single Equality Act ensuring that women have the same protection against discrimination on the grounds of their age, religion or sexual orientation as on the grounds of their sex, ethnicity or disability.
4. Support for women's organisations to ensure that their voices are heard within the CEHR and in the heart of Government.

