

A BETTER FUTURE FOR WOMEN

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FOREWORD

Labour Party values start from the belief that who you are or where you come from should never hold you back from achieving your potential.

We have made great strides in improving equality for women, from the right to vote to the right to equal pay, and Labour has consistently led this progress. Under the last Labour Government, the gender pay gap closed by almost a third, we opened 3,000 Sure Start Centres, extended maternity leave and introduced paternity leave, and transformed the way that police, prosecutors and courts dealt with cases of domestic violence.

But progress for women has never been achieved by sitting back.

In the last five years progress to close the gender pay gap has slowed. More women are low paid and on zero-hours contracts. Many families feel that they have never been so stretched.

Instead of taking action the Tories have chosen to hit women harder, with women bearing 85 per cent of the impact of tax and benefit changes.

Violence against women and girls is a national scandal. Rapes and incidents of domestic violence reported to the police have gone up, but the number of cases prosecuted and convicted has fallen. And there is still much further to go to change a culture that permits everyday sexism.

Labour has a better plan for equality for men and women from the shop floor to the boardroom.

We'll do more to help women and men balance families and work through more free childcare. We will support the millions of women trapped in low paid work by raising the Minimum Wage and addressing discrimination. We'll put tackling violence against women and girls back at the heart of government, and lead by example to increase women's representation in public life.

Labour has a proud record of working for equality. Building on that record will be at the heart of our agenda for government.

Ed Miliband

Harriet Harman

Gloria de Piero

Introduction

Labour believes that Britain will only succeed when everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential. Achieving that goal for women will require us to do more to break down the barriers to equality, from discrimination at work, to domestic abuse that goes unchallenged.

Life has changed dramatically for many women over the past four decades. The aspirations and opportunities available to women have expanded beyond recognition.

But despite this progress, women still face persistent challenges. They are under-represented in senior roles and over-represented in poorly paid work, earning on average just 81p for every pound a man earns. Too many women find themselves pushed into jobs below their skills and abilities because they cannot balance work with looking after children, grandchildren or caring for an elderly relative.

For many women these challenges have become more acute in the last five years. Stagnating wages and rising insecurity have fuelled a cost of living crisis that has hit women hard, and the Tories' tax and benefit changes have left families across the country £1,100 worse off on average, with £6 in every £7 raised coming from

women's pockets. Low pay, rising childcare costs and an outdated parental leave system are making it harder for men and women to balance their work commitments with family life.

Many are also concerned that the narrow portrayal of women in cultural and public life can reinforce ongoing problems of casual sexism, discrimination and outdated views and behaviour towards them. When one in six teenagers in relationships say they have experienced sexual violence and the police receive a call every 30 seconds about domestic abuse, violence against women and girls remains a national scandal.

Labour has a proud history of supporting and championing changes to ensure that women can achieve their potential and organise their lives in the ways they want. From the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts in the 1970s to the 2010 Equality Act, we have legislated to tackle discrimination in the workplace and in public life. The last Labour Government extended maternity rights, introduced paternity leave, and extended childcare, supporting women and men to balance their work commitments with family life, and took action to ensure that the criminal justice system takes domestic abuse seriously.

The next Labour Government will build on this record by working for an economy that creates the more secure and better paid jobs we need to raise living standards and support people's choices at work and at home.

We have a clear plan for equality, tackling low pay in the sectors dominated by women and strengthening the law on maternity discrimination. We will put in place a system that reflects the realities of modern family life, with more free childcare and better leave for fathers and grandparents. We will do more to support healthy relationships, and to tackle domestic violence. And we will always lead by example when it comes to women in public and senior roles, not only to ensure fairness but because we know that the exclusion of women's voices makes our public life poorer.

Labour's better plan for women's equality

- Address the low pay that affects women most, by raising the Minimum Wage to more than £8 an hour by October 2019.
- Support women and men to better balance work and care, by extending free childcare for working parents of three and four year olds from 15 to 25 hours a week.

- Double paid paternity leave and increase paternity pay.
- Consult on allowing grandparents to share in parents' unpaid parental leave.
- Work to close the gender pay gap, by requiring companies with over 250 employees to publish information on the gender pay gap and strengthening the law against maternity discrimination.
- Support healthy relationships by introducing compulsory sex and relationship education.
- Step up action to stop violence against women and girls, by appointing a new commissioner to enforce minimum standards in tackling domestic and sexual violence, and providing more stable central funding for women's refuges and Rape Crisis Centres.
- Lead by example in public life including through the use of all women shortlists in Labour parliamentary selection contests.

1. A fair deal at work

A workplace culture that leaves women too often trading off decent pay and progression opportunities for the chance of flexibility at work leaves millions trapped in poor quality jobs, with the jobs dominated by women most likely to be low paid. Over forty-five years after the Equal Pay Act we have further to go to eliminate all forms of unfair treatment from the workplace, with many women disadvantaged not only by their gender, but by their age, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality.

Britain has been characterised in the last five years by a rise in low pay and insecurity, with women often at the sharp end of an economy that doesn't work for working people. And tackling workplace unfairness has been made harder by the introduction of fees for employment tribunal claimants of up to £1,200 locking many women out of access to justice when they face discrimination at work.

In Britain today:

- A quarter of women now earn below the Living Wage and 60 per cent of new jobs for women since 2010 have been in low paid industries.
- As many as 60,000 women are being forced out of their job each year due to maternity discrimination.

- Sex discrimination claims have fallen by over 80 per cent since the introduction of employment tribunal fees.

The last Labour Government took action to address these challenges. The introduction of the National Minimum Wage helped lift the pay of millions of women across the country, and the 2010 Equality Act strengthened protection against discrimination.

The next Labour government will go further to improve the working life of women across the country. We have a clear plan to tackle low pay, and will raise the National Minimum Wage to more than £8 an hour by October 2019. We will promote the Living Wage, with a tax rebate for firms who sign up to become Living Wage employers in the first year of the next Parliament. And we will do more to ensure that sectors dominated by women such as care, retail and hospitality are better valued, with new powers for the Low Pay Commission to set up taskforces to raise productivity and pay in low paying sectors.

We will go further to tackle discrimination in the workplace, strengthening the law on maternity discrimination to make it harder for

employers to dismiss female employees while on maternity leave. We will take action on the gender pay gap by requiring companies with more than 250 workers to publish their hourly pay gap in their annual report.

And we will ensure that women who may face more than one form of disadvantage at work because of their age, ethnicity, sexuality or disability are protected, implementing the dual discrimination provisions of the 2010 Equality Act.

Labour will ensure that those who do face discrimination are able to challenge it. We will abolish this Government's employment tribunal fee system as part of reforms to make sure that workers have proper access to justice, employers get a quicker resolution, and the costs to the taxpayer do not rise.

Labour will:

- Increase the National Minimum Wage to more than £8 an hour before October 2019.
- Promote the living wage with a tax rebate for firms who sign up in the first year of the next parliament.
- Strengthen the law against maternity discrimination.
- Abolish the Tory-led Government's employment tribunal fee system.



2. Helping families balance work and care

Families today are frustrated with a system that has not caught up with the realities of modern life, with parents increasingly struggling to balance the demands of work and family. With an ageing population, family care is increasingly an intergenerational issue, with many older women caring for grandchildren, as well as for other family members. Nearly one in ten women retire early to care for a family member, and eight million grandparents are providing some childcare.

In the past five years childcare costs have risen by over 30 per cent, placing an increasing burden on families. Families have seen support with childcare through tax credits reduced by up to £1,560 a year, while hundreds of Sure Start centres have been lost, and many more are standing empty due to reduced opening hours and cuts to services. And an outdated leave system too often restricts families' choices about how they balance work and care.

In Britain today:

- Childcare places have fallen by over 40,000 since 2010 and there are over 750 fewer Sure Start centres.
- Half of parents say that the current way they organise work and care is through 'necessity rather than choice'.
- One in three working parents rely on grandparents to provide childcare.

The last Labour government introduced Sure Start, expanded childcare support and maternity leave, and brought in the first ever paid paternity rights. The next Labour government will go further to help families, with more support for childcare, and for fathers and grandparents who increasingly want to be involved in children's lives.

Labour will do more to make childcare available and affordable. We will extend free childcare from 15 to 25 hours for working parents of three and four year olds, give parents of primary school age children a legal guarantee of access to childcare from 8am to 6pm through primary schools, backed up by a new National Primary Childcare Service, and require children's centres to offer childcare, opening up 50,000 places to families.

We will give families more time together with their new baby, doubling paid paternity leave, and increasing paternity pay to the equivalent of a full weeks work at the National Minimum Wage.

And we will do more to help everyone caring for a family member get the support they need. We will consult on allowing grandparents who want to be more involved in caring for their grandchildren to share in parents' unpaid parental leave, enabling them to take time off work without fear of losing their job.

Labour will:

- Extend free childcare from 15 to 25 hours for working parents of three and four year olds, paid for by an increase in the bank levy.
- Give parents a legal guarantee of access to childcare from 8am to 6pm, through their local primary school.
- We will protect the Sure Start budget, and open up an additional 50,000 childcare places by requiring Sure Start children's centres to offer childcare.
- Double paid paternity leave to four weeks, and increase the level of paternity pay to over £260 a week.
- Consult on allowing grandparents who want to be more involved in caring for their grandchildren to share in parents' unpaid parental leave, enabling them to take time off work without fear of losing their job.

3. Tackling violence against women and girls

From everyday sexism to unacceptable violence, our culture still fails to treat all women and girls with respect. Young people are confronted with an increasing proliferation of sexualised and often sexist images, without the tools they need to critically address them. Violence against women and girls is still far too rife in our communities, and we have further to go to ensure it is confronted with robust laws and that offenders are properly punished.

In the last five years the clock has been turned back on justice for women. Not only have prosecutions and convictions fallen at a time when reported crimes of rape and domestic violence are going up, there is a worrying use of community resolutions, a form of justice which experts say are inappropriate for serious crimes.

In Britain today:

- Two women a week are killed by a current or former male partner.
- One in six teenagers in relationships say they have experienced sexual violence.
- At least 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence.

The last Labour government worked to transform the way that police, prosecutors and courts deal with cases of domestic abuse. The next Labour Government will make tackling violence against women and girls one of its biggest priorities, putting it back at the heart of government. We will publish the first UK-wide 'Violence against Women and Girls Bill', and set up a Commissioner to enforce national minimum standards in preventing domestic and sexual violence.

We will work to prevent violence, introducing age-appropriate compulsory sex and relationships education in schools, because we believe this is the most important preventative measure in challenging attitudes and cultures. Our children – boys and girls - need to understand the importance of equal and respectful relationships and have the self-confidence to feel entitled to the respect of others. Sex and relationships education will help give young people the tools and resilience to negotiate the stereotypes and images they are bombarded with in the media, as well as the pressures they face. It will include teaching about consent, online safety, respectful relationships and zero tolerance of violence and abuse.

We will consult on strengthening the law to prevent Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), ban the use of community resolutions as a response to domestic violence and tighten gun license rules so that people with a history of domestic or sexual violence will not be given an unrestricted license. We will make changes to DNA retention, so that rape suspects have their DNA recorded and stored, and give victims of rape and child sexual exploitation the right to demand a review of police decisions not to proceed with their case where a suspect has been identified. And we will do more to help women who have been affected by violence, establishing a National Refuge Fund, providing stable funding for rape crisis centres, and widening access to legal aid in domestic violence cases.

Labour will also end the practice of detaining women in the asylum system who are pregnant, victims of trafficking, or are survivors of torture or rape in their countries of origin. And we will order an independent investigation into the allegations of abuse of women at Yarl's Wood detention centre.

Labour will:

- Make age appropriate sex and relationship education compulsory in all schools.
- Appoint a new commissioner to enforce minimum standards for tackling domestic and sexual violence.
- Ban the use of community resolutions in domestic violence cases.
- Make changes to DNA retention, so that rape suspects have their DNA recorded and stored.
- Establish a National Refuge Fund and provide stable funding for rape crisis centres.

4. Equality in public life

Women remain under-represented in positions of power across our society, a visible sign of continuing inequality, and a fact that leaves our public life poorer. From outdated stereotypes about what women can do and be, to explicit discrimination, women are too often held back from achieving their ambitions.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have stood back from taking action to push forward equality, with a Cabinet and Government that is three-quarters male.

In Britain today:

- Nearly 100 years after the first female MP was elected less than one quarter of MPs in the last parliament were women.
- Women make up just one in three councillors, and one in four council chief executives.
- Six per cent of executive directors of FTSE boards are women.

Labour will continue to lead by example when it comes to ensuring women have the chance to participate in public life. We will promote positive action measures to achieve a better balance of representation, including through the use of all women shortlists in Labour

Party parliamentary selection contests. And we will go further to ensure equal representation on public boards, setting a goal for 50 percent of ministerial appointments to be women to ensure that the people who lead our public bodies look like the communities they serve.

We will continue to drive forward progress towards boardroom equality, considering the use of legislation if we do not see action.

Better representation of women in high profile positions will help ensure that every girl growing up knows that no career or position should be off limits because of who they are. At present, we still see women concentrated in low paid careers such as hospitality and retail, but under-represented in science and engineering. We will do more to ensure that girls' aspirations are not narrowed while at school, putting in place face-to-face careers advice that helps all young people to achieve their potential.

Labour will:

- Remain committed to achieving a Parliament that better reflects the country it serves, including through the use of all women shortlists in Labour party parliamentary selection contests.
- Set a goal for fifty per cent of ministerial appointments to public boards to be women.
- Provide face to face careers advice in schools, ensuring that girls know that no ambitions are off limits.



