

WOMEN AND PENSIONS FACTSHEET



The majority of public sector workers are women (65%) however, in some sectors the numbers are much higher such as, in health care 77% of workers are women.

In a union with such a significant number of women members (75%), it is important that women members have information about pension issues that are relevant to women and a basic understanding of pensions.

Summary of main issues,

- **Increase in state retirement age.** Government proposals will increase women's state retirement age to 66 years by 2020 – 6 years earlier than originally planned. Equalising the state pension age is not in itself unfair but by 2020 men's retirement age will have increased by 1 year and women's retirement age will have increased by 6 years – that doesn't seem fair. Age UK have reported that 2.6 million women will have to work for longer with hundreds of thousands of women losing between £10,000 and £15,000 in lost state pensions.
- **More women than men retire in poverty.** Income for women is so low that 65% are reliant on Pensions Credit but a third of eligible women don't even claim this. 28% of women workers retire in poverty. The number of women retiring in poverty is only set to increase as the change from PRI to CPI will result in further financial losses for women on the lowest pensions e.g., £2,600.

- **Coming out or staying in!** - Issues for our women members who have already suffered at least 2 years of pay freezes, are likely to be whether to continue to pay extra into a pension scheme that will not increase their pension benefit on retirement, especially low paid women whose considerations might boil down to feed family, pay bills v pension contributions.

As paltry as most pensions for women public sector workers are, averaging at £2,600 women would be far worse off without it, it offers at least some security and coming out of the scheme would mean even higher numbers of women pensioners living in poverty than there are already.

Plans to speed up the increase of the state pension age for women, combined with asking people to work longer for lower pensions in the public sector where more women than men work, is a double whammy for women approaching retirement.

- **'NEW' UNISON Women and Pensions Guide** – for more in-depth information about pensions issues that are particularly relevant to women, please see the updated women and pensions guide produced by UNISON, which you can download from

www.unison.org.uk/southeast/women.asp

- **Women and the Cuts** - The governments 'Calm Down Dear' policies have and will continue to put women in the 'hardest hit' category, especially single mothers. Research carried out by the Fawcett Society and the

Institute of Fiscal Studies, shows clearly that 'single mothers' have been 'singled out' for the fiercest attacks.

A raft of changes to taxation and benefits introduced by the Coalition Government, such as reductions in entitlement to Child Tax Credits, cuts in Housing Benefit, freezing Child Benefit and Sure Start Maternity Grant, combined with the job cuts and pay freezes in the public sector, where women make up 65% of the workforce, will result in billions being taken away from women.

The Women's Income Network estimate that nearly half of all black Caribbean working women and 37% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi working women are employed in the Public Sector. Ethnic minority women will likely be hit very hard by the spending cuts and the public sector jobs to be slashed – especially as a high proportion work in administrative roles. In addition, many Black women are the sole earners in their household, so this could have a huge impact on their children and families, as we already know that single mothers and families are being hit the hardest.

For more information on the impact of the cuts on women and links to external website such as, the Fawcett Society please go to www.unison.org.uk/southeast/women.asp

- **Equality in general.** The plans by a Cabinet that is 83% male to water down current and proposed equality legislation is going to throw equality back decades, from the watering down of the public sector 'specific duties', to

the cuts to benefits and welfare which will have a serious impact on all equality strands not least disabled people.

For equality issues relating to the other equality strands please contact the relevant regional SOG organiser, alternatively information can be found on each of the South East regional SOG web pages (including contact details for regional SOG organisers) at

www.unison.org.uk/southeast