

The future of work

► How women and girls can adapt, survive and thrive

We are entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution; emerging technologies and changing demographics are expected to significantly change the future landscape of work globally and in Australia. Recent research paints a picture of our future work that is far from clear. That said, it is incumbent upon all individuals to plan for their future prosperity, by recognising the forces that are likely to shape that future.

economic Security4Women wants women to enjoy lifelong economic wellbeing. Our background paper on the future of work has been released to coincide with Equal Pay Day 2016, and encourages women and girls in Australia to pro-actively plan for a prosperous future in the emerging landscape of 'new work'.

As we mark Equal Pay Day 2016, we note that the gender pay gap in Australia is 16.2%, and that the number of women in leadership roles in Australia remains disappointing. A recent Senate Committee inquiry concluded that there are significant factors impacting women's economic lives that leave them at greater risk than men of experiencing poverty and homelessness in retirement.

Against these existing systemic challenges, women must consider key findings about the future of work that are likely to impact their economic lives in the near future. There are exciting opportunities and challenges ahead, even if our destination is unclear.

Future of work - risks

Rapid technological change isn't a new phenomenon for humans; research suggests that it is likely to play out as follows in the next 10-15 years:

- More than 40% (or 5 million) current jobs have a high likelihood of being computerised or automated;
- Women are particularly at risk of job automation as they tend to be concentrated in the 'at risk' categories (eg clerical and administrative), whilst being under-represented in managerial and technical (STEM) job categories (which are at 'low risk' of automation);



- Nearly 60% of Australian students are currently studying for occupations where at least two-thirds of jobs will be automated;
- There is a risk that future jobs may polarise between "high skill - high wage" and "low skill - low wage".

Future of work - opportunities

- The 'changing nature of work and flexible working arrangements' is the top trend emerging for large Australian corporate employers – this likely will present opportunities for women to remain in senior leadership roles, as job-share and part time opportunities are expected to grow;
- Recent growth in new jobs has been predominantly part time, although the RBA sounds a note of caution about under-employment rates (circa 9% for females);
- Emerging online marketplace platforms ("the peer-to-peer" economy) will provide avenues of income and career flexibility;
- Australia requires millions of us to be competent "digital workers" in the next few years, i.e. to have a knowledge of how to get the best out of digital technology; and
- The Australian labour market has been very successful at dealing with structural change in the past, and it is hard to predict new jobs that digital disruption will create.

Final thought

It is imperative that women and girls commit to undertake lifelong learning to keep up with the future pace of change. Many commentators call upon us to foster an adaptable, entrepreneurial aptitude, and run our careers as a "business-of-one".

Simultaneously, it is crucial that policy makers and employers keep up with evolving real-world practices; pro-active approaches are required to avoid a worst case scenario of technological change accompanied by talent shortages, mass unemployment and growing inequality.

[Click here to view our background paper.](#)

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