

Women Taking the Brunt of Austerity in Britain

Women are bearing the brunt of the government's austerity drive in the public sector, according to figures showing that twice as many women as men have lost jobs in [local government](#) since 2010.

George Osborne's revelation in his spending review that a further 144,000 jobs are to be slashed from the public sector means there is more pain to come for women, critics say.

So far there has been a disproportionate blow to female workers so far. The female headcount in local government has plunged by 253,600 to 1.43 million since the coalition came to power in 2010. The number of men in local government jobs is down less than half that figure, by 104,700 to 452,300, [Office for National Statistics](#) data published by the [Local Government Association](#) shows.

The numbers were brought to light after Liberal Democrat peer Lord Oakeshott raised the issue of female employment in the public sector through a [parliamentary question](#). His question was referred to the ONS, which replied that it was "not able to produce numbers of women and men employed in central government, local government, the National Health Service and the police".

There are, however, [publicly available figures](#) broken down by gender in civil service and local authority employment, while there are ONS estimates for the public sector as a whole. They show the extent to which female jobs have been shed and echo a wider pattern which has seen unemployment throughout the economy rise for women and fall for men since 2010.

Oakeshott commented: "Public sector job cuts hammer women hardest. Rebalancing the economy on the back of sacked women in the public sector is utterly unacceptable to most Liberal Democrats as it should be to our government as a whole. I'm also shocked that the

government don't know how many women they employ or so they claim in a misleading written answer I have received."

The former Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman described the rising jobless rate for women as shocking. It was 7.3% in the [most recently available data](#), up from 6.9% in May 2010, according to the ONS. For men it remains higher but has been falling and now stands at 8.2%, compared with 8.7% when the coalition came to power.

"Since May 2010, women's longstanding advantage in unemployment rates has halved from 1.8 percentage points to 0.9 percentage points and it's getting worse," said Oakeshott.

The sharper drop in women's local government jobs reflects the fact the sector is largely made up of female employees, but has nonetheless raised questions over the net impact on women from the government's cost-cutting and how it plans to account for the disproportionate effect.

The Treasury's own [impact on equalities assessment](#) from last week's spending review devoted two paragraphs to gender, in which jobs were not mentioned. The document instead highlighted the boost to women from tax-free childcare measures announced in the budget and the protection of NHS services.

A spokeswoman for the Treasury said: "The government has had to take tough decisions to cut the deficit and put the public finances back on a stable footing. We have taken difficult decisions in the fairest way possible, protecting services for the most vulnerable and focusing resources where they are most needed and most effective."

Oakeshott is pushing for more and has put down parliamentary questions asking for immediate publication of the impact assessment on the effect of the spending review on women's jobs and for "transparent, regular reporting on how many women we employ in central and local government, the NHS and the police."

"We can't fight the next general election on economic recovery if we've failed women at work," he said.

Oakeshott's criticisms were echoed by the [TUC](#), which argues

women have suffered unfairly from austerity and an economic downturn that has seen jobs go in sectors traditionally dominated by women, such as retail, as household finances are squeezed.

The TUC general secretary, Frances O'Grady, said: "Women are bearing the brunt of the cuts through reduced pay, job losses and cutbacks in the services they run and use. In local government, where workers have felt the greatest pain of redundancies, three in four staff are female."

Responding to the ONS claim that figures are not produced, she said: "It is bad enough that the government don't seem to care about the effect of austerity on women's jobs. It's shameful that they don't even bother to collect information on it.

"The chancellor has tried to gloss over public job losses – another 144,000 were forecast just this week – by playing divide and rule with public and private sector workers. But with three in 10 working families having at least one parent in the public sector, the chancellor will pay a heavy political price for ignoring the affects of austerity on women."