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WHERE DO WE DRAW THE (POVERTY) LINE? GROWING LEVELS OF INEQUALITY BETWEEN RICH AND POOR

The Australian concept of a “fair go” means to provide equitable opportunities to all. Initially coined during the 1891 shearers’ strike (one of the earliest and most significant industrial disputes which led to the birth of the Australian Labor Party), the term is now prevalent in contemporary political rhetoric. This edition of Just In Time examines the extent to which a “fair go” is given to all in relation to wage equality, housing affordability and international aid.

1. HOUSING

In 2015, The Senate Economics References Committee concluded that, based on the evidence, “A significant number of Australians are not enjoying the security and comfort of affordable and appropriate housing”. Some of their major findings are summarised below.



Between 2001 and 2011, house prices increased by **147%**, compared to income growth of just 57%.

70% of low income earners were in housing stress in 2015 (where housing costs exceed 30% of income)



From a survey of 360 international housing markets, **Australia has 25 severely unaffordable areas**. Sydney is ranked 4th least affordable city in the world.

Overall homelessness has grown **17.3% since 2006**, with more than 105 000 Australians sleeping rough, couch surfing or living in crisis or temporary accommodation

“This election is a choice about what sort of Australia we want to live in... Will this country be a country that ensures a fair go is for everyone? Or that the fair go is just limited to the fortunate few?”

- Bill Shorten, May 2016

2. MINIMUM WAGE

2016 findings by the Australian Council of Social Services suggest that minimum wage earners, **who constitute 1.86 million Australian workers**, and their families are at risk of falling behind the living standards of the rest of the community.

In real terms, the minimum wage has decreased **from 50% of the average full-time earnings rate in 2000 to 43.8% in 2016**. At the same time, the median full-time wage has increased significantly

Among those most at risk of being left behind are women (**who constitute 51% of low-paid employees compared to 47% of the total workforce**), part-time workers, and those employed in industries such as health care and social assistance.

3. INTERNATIONAL AID

Since the 2012 budget, released by then-treasurer Joe Hockey, the Australian aid budget has seen **\$11 billion worth of funding cuts. A further \$224 million** worth of cuts in the 2016-17 budget has seen aid spending reach an all time low of **0.22% of the national budget**.

Funding has been either completely cut or significantly reduced to aid programs including:

HIV TREATMENT AND PREVENTION in nine Indonesian provinces and in West Papua.

THE AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE, a partnership between the CSIRO and African farmers, to help ameliorate the severe impacts of climate change on farming.

PAKISTAN AUSTRALIA PREVENTION OF AVOIDABLE BLINDNESS, a project designed to improve eye-care services to disadvantaged women and children.

WHAT ARE AUSTRALIANS DOING TO ADDRESS THESE INEQUALITIES?

EVOLVE HOUSING

Evolve Housing is a registered Community Housing Provider **which aims to respond to the growing housing crisis**. *Evolve Housing* provides affordable housing solutions and services, educational and social engagement programs to residents, and community regeneration programs. The organisation manages **4,200 properties across Australia that houses just under 12,000 people**.

Deanne (pictured below) is one of these 12,000. After living through abuse at the hand of her partner and the death of her teenage daughter, Deanne struggled to find suitable and affordable accommodation in her area. *Evolve Housing* provided Deanne with affordable accommodation close to transport, her work and her son's school, in a community which they already knew. Deanne says **"being able to come home to my own place every day is a beautiful thing"**.



Image from Evolve Housing

LIVE BELOW THE LINE

Live Below the Line is an annual fundraiser event founded by the Oaktree Foundation. *Live Below the Line* participants **feed themselves on \$2 worth of food per day for 5 days in May and raise funds for development organisations overseas**.



Loving God
You have given all peoples one common origin,
and your will is to gather them as one family in yourself.
Fill the hearts of all with the fire of your love
and the desire to ensure justice for all our sisters and brothers.
By sharing the good things you give us may we secure justice and equality for every human being,
an end to all division,
and a human society built on love and peace.

John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1987

LIVE BELOW THE LINE (CONTINUED)

In 2016, **more than 5000 participants** Australia wide signed up to LBL. **Together they have raised over \$1 million**, which will go towards youth education and vocational training programs in Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste.

CLRI spoke to LBL participant Shayaan Malik (pictured below), who was one of the highest fundraisers in the country this year. When asked about her motivations for participating in LBL, Shayaan said **"A few years ago, I worked with at-risk street youth in Vietnam... I could see the difference a quality education and skills training program made to their lives. I knew firsthand that I would be raising funds for a worthy cause"**.

Shayaan agreed that the cuts to Australia's foreign aid budget encouraged her further in her fundraising. **"Australians are intrinsically generous"** she states "and this is evident even in just the support I had doing LBL. **Even friends who I haven't seen in years donated to my campaign and sent me wonderful messages of support"**.



Just In Time is an occasional publication of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Follow the Social Justice Committee of CLRI on

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/clrinsw](https://twitter.com/clrinsw)

Add your voice to the "I Vote Home" campaign for more affordable housing via:

<http://housingstressed.org.au/>

Write to your local Federal MP to express your concerns about the cuts to the Australian aid budget

Donate to or volunteer at your capital city's "Homeless Connect" event which provides free goods and services to people experiencing homelessness: <http://homelessconnect.com.au/>