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Victory for Waspi women: Ombudsman tells parliament to set up compensation scheme - after DWP refuses to act

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The Parliamentary Ombudsman has told the Government to compensate women for failing to adequately inform them their state pension age was delayed.

It has asked parliament to intervene and swiftly set up a compensation scheme, over the head of the Department for Work and Pensions which has refused to do so.

The Ombudsman has recommended those affected should receive £1,000 to £2,950 in compensation, which it says would cost £3.5 to £10.5 billion if paid to all women born in the 1950s.



Set for compensation: The Parliamentary Ombudsman has ordered a Government payout for Waspi women after failing to adequately inform them their state pension age was delayed

The Ombudsman's chief executive, Rebecca Hilsenrath, said: 'The UK's national Ombudsman has made a finding of failings by DWP in this case and has ruled that the women affected are owed compensation.'

'DWP has clearly indicated that it will refuse to comply. This is unacceptable. The Department must do the right thing and it must be held to account for failure to do so.'

'Complainants should not have to wait and see whether DWP will take action to rectify its failings.'

'Given the significant concerns we have that it will fail to act on our findings and given the need to make things right for the affected women as soon as possible, we have proactively asked Parliament to intervene and hold the Department to account.'

'Parliament now needs to act swiftly, and make sure a compensation scheme is established. We think this will provide women with the quickest route to remedy.'

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Many women born in the 1950s have faced hardship while they wait longer than they expected to draw the state pension.

They argued there were major failings in the way the rise in state pension age was communicated. Two hikes were also speeded up and timed to happen in quick succession in 2018 and 2020, giving them little notice to fill the hole in their retirement finances.

The Women Against State Pension Inequality - or Waspi - campaign said today the DWP's approach was 'unbelievable' and called for the matter to become a major election issue for the 3.6m women affected.

It is pressing all parties to include pledges for 'fair and fast compensation' in their manifestos.

Waspi group chair Angela Madden said: 'The DWP's refusal to accept the clear conclusions of this five year long investigation is simply unbelievable. One of the affected women is dying every 13 minutes, and we just cannot afford to wait any longer.'

'Now that the PHSO findings have at last been published, all parties owe it to the women affected to make a clear and unambiguous commitment to compensation.'

'The Ombudsman has put the ball firmly in Parliament's court, and it is now for MPs to do justice to all the 3.6m women affected.'

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Liberal Democrat Pensions Spokesperson, Wendy Chamberlain MP, said: 'After years of waiting, the Ombudsman has finally recommended compensation for WASPI women.'

'These courageous women, who have tirelessly campaigned for justice after being left out of pocket, deserve our admiration for their persistence.'

'Liberal Democrats have long supported WASPI in their campaign and it is now up to this Conservative Government to come forward with a plan to get these women the compensation they are owed.'

Former Pensions Minister Ros Altmann said: 'The Parliamentary Ombudsman's long-awaited report into Government handling of increases in women's state pension age is finally out. It is damning.'

'It highlights clear failings and indicates that millions of women are owed an apology, to acknowledge the impact on their retirement plans, but does not recommend the level of compensation many WASPI women were hoping for.'

'Of course, an apology would be a start, but will not pay the bills for those plunged into poverty as a result of not knowing their state pension age had been increased. Nor will it remedy the distress, anger and anxiety for women born during the 1950s.'

Lady Altmann added: 'When I was Minister, it seemed I was the only person in the DWP who believed the issue of women's state pension age needed to be taken seriously and that Government failures had caused severe hardship.'

'Having campaigned against 2011 Coalition Government proposals to further increase women's state pension age beyond the 1995 measures, I knew there were problems.'

'Unfortunately, Parliament ploughed ahead regardless of the pleas from myself and many others. Accelerating the increases after 2015 was unfair and the WASPI campaign started around that time. The women have been campaigning ever since for compensation.'

'I was hoping to devise a scheme for those worst affected to claim money to tide them over, but this was rejected both by fellow Ministers and the women themselves.'

In summer 2021, the **Parliamentary Ombudsman highlighted government failures** to write to affected women directly earlier and to act on internal research on improving and targeting its communications.

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Women Against State Pension Inequality - or Waspi - said the findings reinforced what it 'knew all along' about the Department for Work and Pension's failure to adequately inform 3.8million 1950s-born women that their state pension age would be increasing.

The Waspi campaign says it agrees with equalising women's and men's pension ages, but not the 'unfair' way the changes were implemented.

At the urging of the Waspi group, thousands of women lodged official complaints over failures to notify them about state pension age hikes.

The Ombudsman put a decision on hold during a **judicial review, brought by the separate BackTo60 group**, which was ultimately unsuccessful.

When it took up the issue again, the Ombudsman said women should have had at least 28 months' more individual notice of changes to their state pension age, an opportunity to adjust their retirement plans that was 'lost'.

Since 2021, it has been considering 'the impact that injustice had', and any recommendations for redress.

A DWP spokesman said: 'We will consider the Ombudsman's report and respond in due course, having cooperated fully throughout this investigation.'

'The Government has always been committed to supporting all pensioners in a sustainable way that gives them a dignified retirement whilst also being fair to them and taxpayers.'

'The state pension is the foundation of income in retirement and will remain so as we deliver a further 8.5 per cent rise in April which will increase the state pension for 12million pensioners by £900.'

Why is there controversy over women's state pension age rises?



Plans to equalise men and women's state pension age were first outlined in 1995.

The then Conservative Government stated the intention of gradually raising women's retirement age to 65 between 2010 and 2020.

This was followed in 2007 by a Labour announcement that both men and women would see their retirement age go up to 66 between 2024 and 2026.

But in 2011, Chancellor George Osborne brought forward the timing of both changes to 2018 and 2020 respectively, hitting women particularly hard because their increases happened both sooner than expected and in quick succession.

Initially, the overhaul included a cap of a maximum two years' extra wait for a state pension, but protests led to the cap being reduced to 18 months.

Some 2.6million women got five years' notice of a delay to their pension age.

The Women Against State Pension Inequality or Waspi campaign has fought for measures to cushion the financial blow, and urged women to complain first to the DWP itself and then to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

A separate group, BackTo60, brought a legal challenge but this was dismissed by the Court of Appeal in September 2020.

Waspi said the courts could not make a judgement on maladministration because that was the role of the Ombudsman.

The end of the court case freed the Parliamentary Ombudsman to look at women's complaints, and its report in 2021 accused the Government of 'maladministration' over delays to informing women about the changes.

For the past few years, it has been considering 'the impact that injustice had' and its recommendations to remedy what happened.