

# CONDUCTING GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENTS IN THE TRANSPORT AND PLANNING SECTOR

## TIP SHEET 4 / GENDER AND URBAN PLANNING

The purpose of this tip sheet is to help you identify and address key gender issues in urban planning.

Research shows that ignoring gender and other intersectional factors in urban design (i.e. 'gender-neutral' approaches), tends to prioritise the needs of heterosexual, able-bodied men.<sup>1</sup> This leaves many others underserved and feeling unwelcome or unsafe, including women\*, gender-diverse people, First Nations people, people of colour, and people with disabilities.

In contrast, taking a 'gender-responsive' approach actively enhances safety, drives economic growth, and elevates the quality of life for everyone. As Victoria continues to grow, prioritising equitable access and safety in planning is essential to building inclusive and thriving communities.<sup>2</sup>

### Gender-responsive design benefits everyone

Creating inclusive public spaces not only enhances safety but also fosters a more vibrant, economically dynamic, and accessible community. Gender-responsive planning addresses the needs of women, girls, and gender diverse people benefiting society as a whole by promoting equitable access to jobs, services, and amenities.

- Gender-responsive planning enhances accessibility for multi-modal trips, supporting economic participation and reducing barriers for women and other marginalised groups across the state of Victoria.<sup>3</sup>
- Public spaces used by diverse people engaging in different activities at various times can significantly enhance perceptions of safety among women.<sup>4</sup>
- The presence of women and girls in public spaces tends to attract others, fostering greater community engagement.<sup>5</sup>
- Mixed-use areas where women feel welcome and safe often become hubs of activity, where people are more likely to linger, interact, and contribute to a sense of safety and belonging.<sup>6</sup>
- Research shows cities that embrace gender-responsive planning see improved economic outcomes<sup>7</sup> as accessibility and safety enable higher workforce participation for women.
- Without gender-responsive planning, we risk perpetuating inequalities. Addressing gender and intersectional needs in both urban and regional planning is crucial to ensuring Victoria is a liveable, and an accessible state for all.

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\*Women/woman includes cisgender women, transgender women, non-binary people and gender diverse people who may be perceived as women, female or feminine (regardless of their expression or identity), and therefore may share common barriers and challenges.



These resources include a focus on women who identify as First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ+ and/ or as a person with a disability. This focus acknowledges that women across these groups face multiple, intersecting inequalities.

## Gender and urban planning: the evidence

### Enhancing public safety

From concerns about safety to harassment on public transport, women and gender-diverse people experience public spaces differently than men. Depending on their identity, ability, age, and other factors, this can have a significant impact on their comfort and willingness to engage with these public spaces.<sup>8</sup>

**Inclusive design features – such as improved lighting, unobstructed sightlines, and secure transit access – can foster environments where all Victorians feel safe and welcome.**

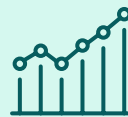
People's experiences of public spaces are shaped by the intersection of various attributes, including cultural background, age, sexuality, disability, and socio-economic status.

**For example, women from culturally and racially marginalised backgrounds may encounter language barriers in the design of public spaces<sup>9</sup>, while LGBTIQ+ individuals are at increased risk of facing harassment or discrimination, making them more likely to be targeted in these spaces.<sup>10</sup>**

### Improving safety and security through design

- Safety is a fundamental concern when accessing public spaces, and research shows that women are less likely to use these spaces if they feel unsafe.<sup>11</sup> This limits their ability to benefit from outdoor activities and community engagement.
- Poorly lit areas, isolated parks, and limited visibility at public transport stations heighten feelings of vulnerability, making it less likely that women will use these spaces.
- Women's perceptions of security in public spaces and urban parks are often driven by 'visibility' factors due to time of day or season as well as permanent physical features. Clear sightlines enable people to better detect the presence of potential threats and to be seen by others.
- Open space landscaping (e.g. trees, bushes, and shrubs) and fixed features such as fences or gates can create areas that feel hidden or dangerous, further exacerbating feelings of insecurity and restricting movement contributing to a fear of entrapment.<sup>12</sup>
- These perceptions can vary based on a number of factors such as vegetation, foliage density, park maintenance, seasonal changes, and the presence of barriers (e.g. fences and walls) that hinder visibility, ultimately reducing both perceived and actual safety and highlighting the need for ongoing maintenance and evaluation.

- Urban design must prioritise security through features like well-lit trails and car parks, clear sightlines for effective visibility, and welcoming environments with amenities that cater to people of all ages and abilities.<sup>13</sup> By embedding these elements into public spaces, we can create inclusive environments where everyone feels secure and encouraged to participate fully in community life.<sup>14</sup>



### Violence and harassment in public spaces

In Victoria, 44% of women feel safe walking alone at night, compared to 78.8% of men.<sup>15</sup>

Victorian crime data indicates that safety incidents in public spaces disproportionately affect women, resulting in certain areas being underutilised, particularly in regional towns and transit hubs (e.g. train stations).<sup>16</sup>

Women and gender-diverse people engage in extensive "safety work," such as changing their behaviour, strategising, and planning, to navigate public spaces safely.<sup>17</sup>

Research indicates that 87% of Australian women have experienced verbal or physical street harassment,<sup>18</sup> while LGBTIQ+ youth with disabilities report even higher rates of harassment and abuse compared to their non-disabled peers.<sup>19</sup>

Women and gender-diverse people often encounter fear and violence when using public transport.<sup>20</sup> For instance, a survey of students in Melbourne<sup>21</sup> found that 45% of women reported feeling 'rarely' or 'never' safe on public transport after dark, compared to 11.3% of men. Likewise, four fifths (79.4%) of female students and an equivalent proportion of LGBTIQ+ students, said that they had been the victims of unwanted sexual gestures, comments, advances, exposed genitals, groping, or being followed on public transport over the previous three years.

## Access and mobility

### Commuting and economic access

- Gendered commuting patterns affect access to both economic and educational opportunities.<sup>22</sup> Women are more likely to take multi-stop, shorter journeys to combine work, childcare, and errands.<sup>23</sup> This can often result in longer travel times, higher costs, and greater reliance on personal vehicles, particularly in regional and peri-urban areas.<sup>24</sup>

### Wayfinding

- People with disabilities and people for whom English is an additional language benefit from wayfinding that includes multiple languages, simplified wording, and clear visual icons. This approach improves accessibility and navigation for all users in public spaces.<sup>25</sup> In particular, this may benefit women who are more likely to be carers of children, people with disabilities, and aging parents.

### Public furniture

- Public furniture plays a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and addressing gender disparities in urban design.<sup>26</sup> Furniture in parks and along streets promotes walking, resting, and cycling activities that benefit everyone, but particularly women and gender diverse people who might otherwise feel excluded from certain areas.
- Public furniture also provides much needed opportunities for rest for older people, carers, children, and people with disabilities.
- Social features such as shelters and picnic areas encourage physical activity and greater use of open spaces, particularly among women.<sup>27</sup>

### Walking and cycling

- Women are more likely to walk but are less likely to cycle, often due to safety concerns, caregiving responsibilities, and perceptions of cycling as a male-dominated activity.<sup>28</sup>
- More than 55% of women participate in walking as a form of physical activity on a weekly basis, compared to 47% of men.<sup>29</sup>
- Women often face specific concerns about cycling near motor vehicle traffic, including safety risks, and report confidence-related barriers to participation.<sup>30</sup> Addressing these barriers through safer infrastructure can make active transport options more inclusive and accessible, for example as part of the City of Melbourne's Transport Strategy 2030, the introduction of protected bike lanes within inner Melbourne have shown to increase cycling participation among women now making up 36% of riders, compared to 24% across the city of Melbourne in 2018.<sup>31</sup>

- A walkable environment supports both men and women of all ages. Women between the ages of 18 and 54 are twice as likely as men to participate in recreational walking as a non-sport activity. This gap closes significantly for elderly people 54 years and older.<sup>32</sup>

### Housing security

Gender-responsive planning can help address the socioeconomic challenges disproportionately impacting women who are the primary caregivers for children, older parents, and people with disabilities. Persistent gender inequalities in job security and housing stability reveal critical gaps in urban design, highlighting the need for affordable housing and public spaces that are safe and inclusive.

- In Australia, a persistent gender gap in workforce participation affects women's job security, weekly earnings, career advancement, and long-term financial stability. The national gender pay gap stands at 21.7%, impacting women's economic position and retirement prospects.<sup>33</sup>
- The combination of Australia's ageing population and women's longer life expectancy means the number of women aged 75 and older living alone will continue to rise. This further emphasises the need for secure, age-appropriate housing options.<sup>34</sup>
- In Victoria, 79.3% of lone-parent households are headed by women, and women make up 71% of primary carers who provide ongoing informal assistance to people with disabilities.<sup>35</sup>
- Women face higher rates of housing insecurity and are more vulnerable to homelessness.<sup>36</sup> Family violence remains a major factor, with 57% of women seeking help from Victorian homelessness services in 2019-20 citing family violence as the cause.<sup>37</sup>
- Women constitute the majority of social housing tenants, reflecting broader socioeconomic vulnerabilities and the challenges they face in accessing stable, affordable housing.<sup>38</sup>
- Victorians who identify as LGBTIQ+ are twice as likely as the general population to be at risk of, or experience, homelessness.<sup>39</sup>

# Translating gender insights into practical planning outcomes

## Evidence-based solutions

Completing a robust Gender Impact Assessment will support decision making, revealing options that will better support the needs of men, women, and gender diverse Victorians.

Some straightforward evidence-based improvements that can be considered are:

- **Improved public lighting** including well-lit trails, car parks, public transport stations and stops, as well as continuous lighting across main pedestrian paths. Good lighting in public spaces improves the perception of safety. Avoid extreme contrasts between dark and light, and consider placement, colour, intensity, and impact on wildlife to ensure everyone feels safe and supported to participate after dark
- **Improving lines of sight** to see what is happening within a place, and passive surveillance provided by other people using the space. Ensure plantings don't obstruct visibility along paths. Tall trees with clear understorey are preferred to improve passive surveillance
- **Safer bike lanes:** Provide more off-road cycle paths as separated cycle paths or appropriately wide shared paths. Locate cycle routes off main roads that are quiet to ride on. Consider measures that make streets more comfortable and safer for pedestrians and cyclists including increased crossing opportunities, lower traffic speeds and space for pedestrian and cyclist amenity
- **Incorporating public art**, statues, and place names celebrating women, gender diverse and First Nations Peoples. This can create vibrant and activated spaces and increase opportunities to celebrate and reflect the diverse communities living and working in the area
- **Install wider pedestrian paths** that can accommodate a pram and two people walking side by side, cyclists, and pedestrian traffic in the opposite direction. Design paths with suitable surface treatments and maintenance services to facilitate equitable access. Ensure pram ramps are positioned thoughtfully along the travel route

- **Regular maintenance and upkeep of public spaces** including regular rubbish removal. Prevalence of rubbish can be a signifier that a space is unmonitored, unmaintained and unsafe.
- **Consider public furniture needs.** Consider location, quality, material and placement to support a diversity of users including the elderly, those with limited mobility, and adults with small children. Provide a choice of more flexible seating such as picnic settings or loose furniture to serve as a meeting spot for socialising.
- **Navigation.** Develop a consistent and easy to understand wayfinding system to help people orient themselves and navigate safely to key landmarks and amenities. This could consist of physical signs as well as GPS enabled apps.
- **Public furniture** that is multi-functional furniture (e.g., movable chairs, long benches) supports varied activities, ensuring equitable access to public amenities. Public furniture in well-lit, accessible spaces encourages a sense of safety, particularly for women and other marginalised genders. Benches near transport hubs, parks, or open spaces allow people to wait comfortably and safely. Public seating near playgrounds, wide benches for strollers, and spaces for breastfeeding or caregiving reflect gender-responsive urban design.

These changes can be especially impactful for outer suburbs and rural areas with limited public transport options, and where residents face distinct safety and mobility challenges. It is up to us, as DTP, to ensure missing perspectives are genuinely heard through tools like community surveys, consultations, or partnering with local organisations that represent 'at-risk' groups.



### Resources for gender analysis in urban planning

A list of data sources and resources highlighted below are available on the [Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector Website](#) and on the [DTP GIA intranet page](#).

**Census, surveys, and local data:** Key sources, including ABS Census data, the Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity (VISTA), and Victoria Police crime statistics, offer critical insights into commuting patterns, urban accessibility, and safety concerns by gender. These datasets are essential for evidence-based urban planning across Victoria.

**Incorporating health, education, and employment Data:** Health and education data reveal disparities in access for women and gender-diverse people, often due to geographic and infrastructure limitations. Employment data disaggregated by gender also highlights commuting trends and barriers to workforce participation, which can inform more inclusive urban policies.



### Case Study

#### Gender-responsive Initiatives in Vienna

Building on examples such as [gender-responsive initiatives in Vienna](#), where public space redesigns prioritise the needs of women and gender-diverse people, we don't have to look far for inspiration on how to create more inclusive parks, public squares, and transport hubs.<sup>40</sup>

Vienna has carried out more than 60 initiatives that have used gender responsive approaches, including street lighting projects, widening pavements for prams, additional seating, apartment complexes and social housing designed by and for women, and improving the safety of shortcuts and alleyways by adding mirrors.

More recently, Vienna won the 2025 Access City Award for its commitment to making the city accessible for people with disabilities.<sup>41</sup> All metro stations and over 95% of bus and tram stops are accessible, using tactile guidance systems, low-floor vehicles, and multisensory emergency systems. The Inclusive Vienna 2030 strategy, and its collaborative approach with organisations of persons with disabilities in decision-making, also demonstrates the city's strong commitment to achieving accessibility. Specific projects like accessible swimming pools, intelligent traffic lights, and support for housing and employment integration have significantly contributed to making Vienna more accessible and inclusive.



## Toolkits

Relevant toolkits and frameworks for gender-responsive planning are also available, providing practical guidance for integrating gender analysis into urban design and policy. Some examples include:

- [Tip Sheet 1 – Gender and safety on public transport](#)
- [Tip Sheet 2 – Gendered differences in transport journey](#)
- [Tip Sheet 3 – Gender responsive toilet and change room facilities](#)
- [Gender Sensitive Urban Design Implementation Toolkit \(ACT Gov\)](#)
- [Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework \(ACT Gov\)](#)
- [Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women \(Women's Health East\)](#)
- [XXYX Lab – Gender + Place \(Monash University\)](#)
- [Safe Spaces: Understanding and enhancing safety and inclusion for diverse women: Final Report](#)
- [Crime Prevention through Environmental Design \(CPTED\) and place making principles](#)
- [Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design](#)
- [Gender Equity in Design Principles \(City of Whittlesea\)](#)
- [Fact sheet: Gender-sensitive design, Community Crime Prevention](#)
- [Put Her Name on It – resources to support geographic place naming and public art equality](#)

## Tips to improve gendered data collection

Good planning starts with good data, and these methods collectively contribute to closing the gendered data gaps, so that urban planning better reflects the needs of men, women and gender diverse people with intersecting attributes, diverse needs and experiences.

**Collect gender disaggregated data:** Gender-Disaggregated Data is information that is coded or separated by gender, which allows us to see differences in outcomes, behaviours, and needs of men, women, and gender-diverse people. It is essential for completing a GIA. If you are collecting survey data from community, include demographics questions and analyse data disaggregated by gender and other intersecting attributes.

**Consider participatory consultations:** Night-time consultations with women and other diverse community groups can help to identify unsafe design features and evaluate the use of urban spaces. By asking participants what makes them feel comfortable or uncomfortable in specific spaces, planners can use this feedback to collaboratively improve public areas for everyone.<sup>42, 43</sup>

**Conduct Safety and accessibility audits:** Consider safety and accessibility audits to identify areas where improvements can be made. These audits help highlight specific barriers that may be less visible in traditional assessments.

**Use gender-sensitive methodologies in community engagement:** Apply gender-sensitive approaches during consultation. Methods may include small workshops, focus groups, exploratory consultations, street surveys, online engagement, flexible timing for sessions, and providing financial compensation for participants. Engaging local entities and associations can support ensuring diverse voices are included.

**Involve underrepresented groups as key stakeholders:** Make targeted efforts to include underrepresented groups as central stakeholders in the data collection process, bringing attention to overlooked areas of research. For example, focus on the experiences of women with disabilities, men who are carers, or Indigenous women, adopting an intersectional approach to uncover unique insights.

**Embrace co-design practices:** Integrate co-design processes that bring planners, urban designers, and other specialists into direct collaboration with women and gender-diverse people. By engaging directly with these groups early in the design process, planners can gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, resulting in more inclusive urban spaces.



## Notes

- 1 Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework, ACT Gov, 2024
- 2 Big Ideas for Victorias Future, Department of Transport and Planning, Engage Victoria, 2024
- 3 Monash University XYX Lab: Gender + Place, 2020
- 4 Lambrick and Rainero, 'Safe cities', Unifem, 2010
- 5 Soraganvi, Safe Public Places: Rethinking Design for Women's Safety, 2017
- 6 Creating safe and inclusive public spaces for women, Women's Health East, 2021
- 7 Gender-Sensitive Infrastructure Planning Means Better Cities for Everyone, Cities Alliance, 2022
- 8 Creating safe and inclusive public spaces for women, Women's Health East, 2021
- 9 Creating safe and inclusive public spaces for women, Women's Health East, 2021
- 10 Kalms, Johnson & Matthewson, 'The new normal', 2020
- 11 [Monash University XYX Lab: Gender + Place, 2020](#)
- 12 ['Merri Creek Coburg Precinct Safety Survey', Monash University XYX Lab, 2020](#)
- 13 [Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework, ACT Gov, 2023](#)
- 14 [A gender lens for leisure, @leisure, 2019](#)
- 15 2015 VicHealth Community Indicators Survey: Perceptions of Safety indicator, VicHealth, 2015
- 16 Victorian Womens Health Atlas, Violence Against Women Factsheet, 2024
- 17 "I'll Try and Make Myself as Small as Possible": Women and Gender-Diverse People's Safety Work on Public Transport, Sage Journals, 2024
- 18 Transport for NSW: Safer Cities Survey, 2023; Plan International Australia: Sexism in the City, 2018, The Australia Institute Survey, 2015
- 19 Rates of violence and abuse higher amongst LGBTQA+ people with disability, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 2022
- 20 Women's Safety on Public Transport, La Trobe University, 2024
- 21 Tertiary Students' Public Transport Safety in Melbourne, Australia, University of Melbourne, 2019
- 22 Transport has a gender bias problem. This is what needs to change, World Economic Forum, 2022
- 23 Mind the Gender Gap, The Mandarin, 2019
- 24 The challenge for 'chauffeur mums': navigating a city that wasn't planned for women, The Conversation, 2022
- 25 Accessible Wayfinding and Signage, Government of South Australia
- 26 Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Design, The World Bank, 2020
- 27 Heart Foundation: Healthy Active By Design, 2022
- 28 Gender differences in active travel in major cities across the world, Goel, R. et al. 2022
- 29 Victorian Population Health Survey (2017), Department of Health and Human Services, 2019
- 30 Pearson, Reeder, Gabbe, & Beck, What a girl wants: A mixed-methods study of gender differences in the barriers to and enablers of riding a bike in Australia, 2023
- 31 Melbourne updates bike lane rollout, Bicycle Network, 2024
- 32 AusPlay Focus – Women and Girls Participation, Australian Sports Commission, 2017
- 33 Gender pay gap data, WGEA, 2024
- 34 Older Australians, Demographic profile, Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2024
- 35 Spotlight on women and unpaid care, Women's Health Victoria, 2018
- 36 Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data Insights, City Futures Centre, UNSW Sydney, 2023
- 37 Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20, AIHW, 2020
- 38 More women experiencing homelessness, Per Capita, 2022
- 39 Supporting LGBTQIA+ Victorians At Risk Of Homelessness, Premier of Victoria, 2024
- 40 Planning for inclusivity: How Vienna built a gender-equal city, LGiU, 2020
- 41 Vienna wins 2025 Access City Award for leading the way in accessibility for persons with disabilities, European Commission, 2024
- 42 Fact sheet: Gender-sensitive design, Community Crime Prevention Victoria, Department of Justice and Community Safety, 2020
- 43 The project for gender fair cities, Womenability, 2020