

Insights report: gender pay gap

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In this document, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Koori/Koorie’ is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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# Introduction

Gender pay gaps affect employees across the Victorian public sector. This report shows duty holders what they can do to understand and address these gaps.

This report uses data from the 2023 workplace gender audit. It identifies trends and challenges. It gives practical actions based on evidence. The report builds on the 2021 Baseline Report. It provides updated insights to help duty holders meet their obligations under the Gender Equality Act 2020 and to close pay gaps across the sector.

The analysis shows that gender pay gaps are common. Systemic factors continue to affect pay outcomes. These factors include:

* occupational segregation
* industrial segregation
* career interruptions
* bias in recruitment and progression.

The report also shows how sector-wide change is happening. New laws, evolving policies and better reporting practices drive this change. Pay gap figures from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency show that change is possible. Nationally, the pay gap for private sector employers with over 100 employees fell from 24.2% in 2018-19 to 21.1% in 2023-24 (mean total remuneration). But there is still more to do to achieve pay equity.

We designed this report for workplace leaders, HR professionals and gender equality practitioners in organisations with duties under Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020.

The report focuses on:

* what the 2023 data from duty holders tells us about gender pay gaps in the sector
* how gendered patterns in work, care, and leadership influence pay outcomes
* what effective action looks like at the organisational level
* how policy and law changes should inform workplace responses.

Our current data has limits. This report focuses mainly on pay differences between women and men. Not all duty holders provide data on people who self-describe their gender, so often the sample size is too small to analyse meaningfully. Where we have good data, we include findings for employees of self-described gender.

This report is designed to help organisations track progress, identify barriers, and take practical steps toward fairer workplaces. We recommend that organisations maintain mean and median total remuneration gender pay gaps well within a target range of under 5% and over −5% (WGEA 2025).

# What is the gender pay gap?

The gender pay gap measures the difference in earnings between different gender groups. It’s usually expressed as a percentage or dollar figure and can be calculated in several ways. There is currently no internationally agreed method for calculating the gap.

The Commission reports gender pay gaps using both base salary and total remuneration, calculated by both the mean (average) and median:

* **Base salary:** refers to an employee’s fixed annual pay, excluding bonuses, allowances, or other discretionary payments.
* **Total remuneration:** includes base salary plus all additional payments, such as allowances and bonuses. These elements are often influenced by gender and provide a fuller picture of overall pay equity.
* **The mean (average) gender pay gap:** is calculated by taking the difference between the average earnings of men and women, divided by the average earnings of men. This measure is sensitive to very high or very low salaries and typically results in a larger gap.
* **The median gender pay gap:** is based on the middle point in each group’s earnings when sorted from highest to lowest. It is less affected by extremes.

A positive pay gap means men earn more on average than women. A negative gap indicates women earn more than men.

All figures include full-time, part-time, and casual employees, with earnings converted into full-time equivalent (FTE) amounts to ensure comparability.

## Drivers of the gender pay gap

Research shows that many complex factors influence the gender pay gap. These drivers are interconnected and affect whole systems. Interconnected inequalities are measured by the Act using workplace gender equality indicators (WGEI). Key contributors include:

### Workplace biases and discrimination

Social expectations about how people of different genders should behave continue to influence career choices and limit opportunities. These norms and expectations directly affect gendered work segregation (WGEI 7). They undervalue work in female-concentrated occupations and industries. They also lead to fewer women in leadership roles because of gender stereotypes about what a leader looks like and who can lead (WGEI 1) (Goldin 1990, 2021; Criado-Perez 2019; Yanadori et al. 2021; Sieghart 2022).

Gender bias and discrimination appears in many workplace practices:

* recruitment and promotion (WGEI 5)
* pay decisions
* training opportunities (WGEI 5)
* performance evaluations
* everyday interactions, where people may be treated differently due to their gender.

Research shows this bias can:

* limit career progression, which affects the gender composition of the workforce (WGEI 1), particularly at senior levels, and of governing bodies (WGEI 2)
* reduce job satisfaction, including where discrimination creates workplace cultures that tolerate sexual harassment (WGEI 4)
* widen income gaps.

For further information, see Bohnet 2018; Goldin 2021; KPMG et al. 2022; DCA 2024.

In 2020, KPMG et al. (2022:38) found that gender discrimination is the biggest driver of the pay gap, contributing 36% of the total gap.

### Workforce participation, career interruptions and employment type

Women are more likely to work part-time or take career breaks because they carry more of the unpaid caring responsibilities. This limits long-term earning potential and progression into leadership roles (WGEI 1). Access to supportive flexible work and leave arrangements is vital (WGEI 6). It ensures that carers, including parents, can remain and progress in paid employment. (Goldin 1990, 2021; Miller 2018; Dangar et al. 2023; PM&C Office for Women 2023; WGEA 2024). In 2020, KPMG et al. (2022:38) found that career breaks due to caring responsibilities account for 20% of the total pay gap. Working part-time contributes 11%.

### Workforce gender segregation

Certain industries remain highly gendered. Women continue to be concentrated in lower-paid roles in care, administration and services (Women's Economic Outcomes Senior Officials Working Group 2024). Men are overrepresented in higher-paid technical and leadership roles (Women's Economic Outcomes Senior Officials Working Group 2024). This reinforces the gendered division of paid and unpaid labour (Commonwealth of Australia 2023). WGEI 7 directly measures this driver.

To address these issues meaningfully, organisations must examine their workplace gender audit data, identify what drives their pay gaps, and take targeted action using their Gender Equality Action Plans. Industrial and occupational segregation are significant contributors to the total pay gap, accounting for 4% and 20% respectively in 2020 (KPMG et al. 2022:38).

## The costs of the gender pay gap

Unequal pay weakens women's financial security and slows Australia's economic growth. Addressing it is both fair and economically necessary.

Wealth inequality builds up over women's entire lives. Women earn less money than men because they work fewer hours, spend more time on unpaid work like housework and childcare, and often work in feminised occupations and industries that pay less (KPMG et al. 2022). This means women have much less superannuation money saved for retirement than men do. At retirement age, Australian women have around 25% less super than men (ASFA 2023).

When women get divorced or inherit money from family, they also tend to get less than men, which makes their financial situation even worse. For example, in the farming industry, research from 2007 found that men inherit 90% of farms in Australia (Barclay et al. 2007). More recent studies also show how gendered norms continue to affect who gets to inherit farms (Voyce 2014; Sheridan et al. 2021). Traditional ideas about who can be a ‘farmer’ remain strong, and women’s work on farms is still mainly focused on household tasks and raising children (Sheridan et al. 2021).

When women have less money and wealth, it affects their freedom to make choices in their personal relationships. If a woman is in an abusive relationship, having less money can make it harder for her to leave because she might not be able to support herself financially. In 2021, it cost on average $18,000 to leave a violent relationship (Commonwealth of Australia 2021). This figure is likely to have grown due to cost-of-living pressures (Campbell 2024). Wealth inequality also stops women and gender diverse people from making free choices about their health and how they want to live their lives.

## Changes to laws and policies

Recent years have brought major reforms that place economic equality and gender pay gaps on the national agenda:

* [Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Act 2022](https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2022A00079/latest/text) introduced key changes, including a ban on pay secrecy and new protected attributes (gender identity, breastfeeding, intersex status). The Act strengthened the equal remuneration principle, which has guided the Fair Work Commission’s consideration of equal remuneration and work value cases.
* In 2023, the Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce delivered [*A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/10-year-plan). It emphasised the undervaluing of feminised work and made 7 key recommendations to advance women’s economic equality.
* In 2024, the Australian Government launched [*Working for Women: A National Strategy for Gender Equality*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/working-women-strategy-gender-equality), which sets out a vision for a fairer, safer and more equal society. Specific strategies around pay inequality include recruiting and training more women in trades and other male-concentrated occupations, driving private sector actions through reform to the Workplace Gender Equality Act, and tax reform to address the gendered distribution of income.
* The [Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Closing the Gender Pay Gap) Bill 2023](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd2223a/Copy_of_Migration_Amendment_Australia_Engagement_in_the_Pacific_and_Other_Measures_Bill_2023) passed in March 2023 and requires WGEA to publish individual employer gender pay gaps from February 2024, and Commonwealth public sector gaps from June 2024.
* In 2025, the [Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (setting Gender Equality Targets) Act](https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2025A00025/asmade/text) introduced new obligations for organisations of 500 or more employees to make gender equality a business priority. Large employers must drive change towards problem areas in their annual gender equality reporting by committing to 3 evidence-informed targets and meeting them within 2 years or demonstrating improvement.

In Victoria:

* The government released [*Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023–2027*](https://www.vic.gov.au/our-equal-state-victorias-gender-equality-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2027/our-equal-state-glance/delivering-plan), which aims to halve the gender pay gap, reach gender parity in CEO roles and senior leadership, and double the number of men accessing paid parental leave in the public sector.
* In June 2024, Victoria became the first state to legislate [gender responsive budgeting](https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/gender-responsive-budgeting-victoria) through amendments to the [*Financial Management Act 1994*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/financial-management-act-1994/067).

# About our data

This report uses data from duty holders for the 2021 and 2023 workplace gender audits under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. Duty holders must report this data to the Commissioner every two years. This is part of their requirement to develop gender equality action plans and report on progress.

Duty holders can update their audit submissions if they identify ways to improve or correct their data. This can lead to changes in the underlying data used in our reports. As such, data in this report may be different from previous released.

We use three types of data:

* Aggregated workforce data: Data already put together from organisations’ payroll and HR systems, shown mainly as headcounts. We used this for the 2021 audit results for WGEI 2, 5 and 6 (31 organisation submitted only aggregated results in 2021).
* Unit-level workforce data: Anonymous individual employee data from organisations’ payroll and HR systems. We used this for the 2023 audit and the 2021 audit where it was available (270 organisations in 2023 and 253 organisations in 2021).
* Unit-level employee experience data: Anonymous individual data from the People matter survey[[1]](#footnote-2) for participating duty holder organisations in 2021 (106,069 people from 271 organisations) and 2023 (131,852 people from 276 organisations).[[2]](#footnote-3)

An organisation’s audit results are only included in a measure if their underlying data passed our data quality standard. For example, if we identified issues in an organisation’s base salary data, their audit is excluded from pay gap results.

Many public sector employees take the People matter survey, so small percentage changes can mean a large number of people have experienced a change.

Some of this audit data for each duty holder organisation is published on the Commission’s [Insights Portal](https://insights.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/application-dashboard) to support transparency, accountability and learning across the sector.

Industry results for 2021 published on our Insights Portal are based on aggregated data for each organisation, so they may differ from those in this report, which use unit-level data for 2021, where it is available.

This report builds on our *Baseline Report*, which looked at 2021 data. Compared to 2021, the 2023 data includes more organisations and better data, especially from duty holders who were just starting their gender equality work in the first audit.

Where possible, we compared 2021 and 2023 data to find trends, track progress and highlight areas needing more attention. But there were some limitations:

* In 2021, some duty holders’ data was too poor-quality to use.
* The 2021 audit happened during long COVID-19 lockdowns, which may have affected some reporting.
* Many duty holders and researchers still only collect gender data as male/female or men/women, limiting analysis for people with diverse gender identities.

Where we had enough data, we included insights beyond just the categories of women and men.

This report also uses research from across Australia and specific sectors to help understand our results and give evidence-based recommendations. The analysis in this report includes data related to other workplace gender equality indicators because they provide insight into the factors that shape the gender pay gap.

# What our data shows

## Gender pay gaps

The overall [mean](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/audit-guidance-2025/appendix#mean) [base salary](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/audit-guidance-2025/audit-handbook-employee-dataset#base-salary) and [total remuneration](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/audit-guidance-2025/audit-handbook-employee-dataset#total-remuneration) gender pay gaps across the public sector did not change between 2021 and 2023.

Table 1: Overall mean base salary and total remuneration pay gaps in 2021 and 2023

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Mean base salary pay gap 2021 | Mean base salary pay gap 2023 | Mean total remuneration pay gap 2021 | Mean total remuneration pay gap 2023 | | 13.8% | 14.1% | 15.1% | 15.1% | |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

Table 1 shows that the overall public sector pay gaps between women and men stayed about the same from 2021, remaining around 14% for base salary and 15% for total remuneration. In 2023, this equals an average difference of $15,746 in base salary and $20,375 in total remuneration per year, with men earning more in both cases. However, the [median](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/audit-guidance-2025/appendix#median) total remuneration pay gap dropped by 1% to 9% in 2023.

Every industry continued to have a pay gap in favour of men.

Table 2: Mean total remuneration pay gaps by industry

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Industry | Mean total remuneration pay gap 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 |
| Creative industries | 5.5% | +2.1 |
| Finance and insurance | 16.6% | +1.4 |
| Local government | 3.5% | −1.9 |
| Police and emergency services | 10.5% | −7.6 |
| Public health care | 31.9% | −2.1 |
| Sport and recreation | 4.1% | +1.2 |
| TAFE and other education | 8.6% | +0.1 |
| Transport | 13.9% | +3.2 |
| Universities | 10.8% | +0.5 |
| Victorian public service | 10.1% | −2.0 |
| Water and land management | 4.8% | −2.2 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

In 2023, all 11 industries had pay gaps favouring men. Public health care had the largest gap at around 32% (or an average of $56,985), which decreased by 2% from 2021. This was much higher than the second-largest gap of 17% for finance and insurance (up nearly 1.5% from 2021). Local government (3.5%), and sport and recreation (4.1%) had the lowest gaps.

Public health care had the largest pay gaps favouring men in both 2021 and 2023. The public health care industry in Victoria was 77% women in 2023, and health care has traditionally been a majority-women industry. The continuing pay gap in health care supports existing evidence that feminised industries are not safe from pay inequity (Cortis et al. 2023).

Police and emergency services made the most progress, with the pay gap dropping by almost 8 % to 10.5% (or $13,938 on average) in 2023.

Men continued to earn more than women across every public sector occupation group.

**Table 3: Mean total remuneration pay gaps by occupation group**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Occupation group | Mean total remuneration pay gap 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 |
| Managers | 10.4% | +0.7 |
| Professionals | 17.4% | +5.0 |
| Technicians and trade workers | 9.0% | −0.1 |
| Community and personal service workers | 21.8% | +2.1 |
| Clerical and administrative workers | 11.0% | −0.5 |
| Machinery operators and drivers | 7.3% | −5.0 |
| Labourers | 11.0% | −8.0 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

Table 3 shows that men were paid more than women in every occupation group in 2023. Mean total remuneration pay gaps ranged from just over 7% to around 22%, which translates to an average of $8,138 to $24,022 per year respectively. Traditionally majority-women occupations had some of the largest pay gaps, including community and personal service workers. As with the public health care industry, this supports existing evidence that jobs and industries with more women are not safe from pay inequity (Cortis et al. 2023).

Four occupational groups made progress towards closing the gender pay gap. Labourers showed the biggest drop since 2021, down by 8% to 11% (or an average of $8,830). However, mean total remuneration pay gaps increased for more than half the occupation groups in the public sector, with the gap widening most for professionals (up 5%).

All industries except water and land management had pay gaps in favour of men at the senior leadership level

Table 4: Mean total remuneration senior leader[[3]](#footnote-4) pay gaps by industry (including CEOs)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Industry | Mean total remuneration pay gap 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 |
| Creative industries | 1.5% | +20.9 |
| Finance and insurance | 17.7% | +11.5 |
| Local government | 5.5% | −3.3 |
| Police and emergency services | 12.3% | −15.6 |
| Public health care | 20.5% | +0.3 |
| Sport and recreation | 13.0% | −6.6 |
| TAFE and other education | 3.4% | +3.2 |
| Transport | 3.7% | −14.8 |
| Universities | 14.3% | +3.2 |
| Victorian public service | 6.8% | +0.9 |
| Water and land management | −8.4% | −11.6 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

In 2023, all industries except water and land management had pay gaps that favoured men in leadership roles. Public health care had the largest gap at over 20% ($61,284). Universities also had a significant 14% pay gap favouring men in leadership roles, up more than 3% from 2021. This means men who were senior leaders in universities earned on average $84,583 more than women in similar roles in 2023.

The police and emergency services industry narrowed its senior leader pay gap by almost 16%. But this means men who were senior leaders in this industry still earned on average $45,969 more than women in similar roles in 2023. There was also a significant change in the water and land management industry, where the pay gap shifted from favouring men in 2021 to favouring women in 2023.

Gender pay gaps in all sectors, industries and occupations in Australia overwhelmingly favour men because of the combined gendered drivers outlined above. However, any significant pay gap favouring a particular gender can indicate inequality. Therefore, a large gender pay gap favouring women should not be seen as positive. Rather, organisations should aim to achieve a pay gap that is as close to zero as possible (noting that fluctuations in smaller organisations can be expected). Organisations should maintain mean and median total remuneration gender pay gaps well within a target range of under 5% and over −5% (WGEA 2025).

## Drivers of gender pay gaps

As discussed above, many complex and interconnected systemic issues influence the gender pay gap. Many of these issues are captured using the [workplace gender equality indicators](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/workplace-gender-equality-indicators) (WGEI) in the Act.

The above section focuses on data related to Indicator 3 (equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value across all levels of the workforce, irrespective of gender). This section here identifies selected data from other indicators that can help us understand the pay gap in the Victorian public sector.

### WGEI 1: Gender composition of the workforce

Men continued to hold a disproportionate share of leadership positions.

Table 5: Proportion of the workforce and senior leaders who were women

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Proportion women in 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 |
| Senior leaders | 48% | +2.0 |
| CEOs | 43% | +3.0 |
| All employees | 65.7% | −0.9 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

While there were small gains in women’s representation in leadership roles in 2023, men still held most of these positions. Although around 66% of Victorian public sector employees were women, only 48% of senior leaders and 43% of CEO positions were held by women.

Pay gaps at the organisation, industry and sector level are partly driven by the fact that women tend to be overrepresented in lower-paid junior roles and men tend to be overrepresented in highly paid senior roles. Several factors cause this. Women are far more likely to experience career interruptions and barriers to participation due to caring responsibilities. Gendered assumptions about who can lead and what a leader looks like also lead to reduced representation of women at senior levels.

### WGEI 2: Gender composition of governing bodies

Governing bodies remained relatively gender balanced.

In 2023, the average public sector board was just over 52% women. This remained relatively steady since 2021. The proportion of governing body chairs who were women increased slightly to 51.2% (up 2%).

The Victorian government has worked since 2015 to increase the diversity of public sector boards. This initiative included a target for 50% of new board appointments to be women (see [‘Why board diversity matters’](https://www.boards.vic.gov.au/why-board-diversity-matters) for more information). Consistent gender balance of governing bodies in Victoria in recent years shows that this policy is working.

### WGEI 5: Recruitment and promotion practices

Recruitments and exits closely matched the gender balance of the workforce.

Table 6: Proportion of recruitments, exits and all employees by gender

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Proportion women in 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 | Proportion men in 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 |
| Recruitments | 65.8% | +0.4 | 32.6% | −1.8 |
| Exits | 65.9% | +1.7 | 33.6% | −2.1 |
| All employees | 65.7% | −0.9 | 33.8% | +0.5 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

The overall gender composition of the Victorian public sector remained steady at around 66% women in 2023. However, the proportion of employees disclosing their self-described gender increased 7-fold to 0.5% of all employees.

Recruitments and exits closely mirrored the gender composition of the workforce.

The largest change in recruitment was in the police and emergency services industry. The proportion of new recruits who were women rose 7% in 2023 to 55%. This may be promising, given this industry is one of the most men-concentrated in the Victorian public sector. However, there was also a sharp and concerning rise in women exiting this industry, up almost 6% to nearly 48%.

In 2023, men continued to receive a disproportionate share of career development training opportunities, secondments, higher duties and promotions.

Table 7: Proportion of career advancement opportunities accessed by each gender

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Career advancement opportunity | Proportion accessed by women in 2023 | Percentage change since 2021 | Proportion accessed by men in 2023 | Percentage change since 2021 |
| Promotions | 59.0% | −3.5 | 40.8% | +3.2 |
| Career development training | 61.8% | +0.9 | 37.9% | −1.2 |
| Secondments | 59.0% | +0.9 | 40.8% | −1.1 |
| Higher duties | 54.3% | −4.0 | 45.5% | +3.9 |
| All employees | 65.7% | −0.9 | 33.8% | +0.5 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

In 2023, men continued to receive a disproportionate share of career development training opportunities, secondments, higher duties and promotions. In particular, men received almost 46% of higher duties opportunities and almost 41% of promotions and secondments, despite being only 34% of the workforce.

In the People matter survey in 2023, women were slightly more likely to report barriers to success at work compared to men. 27% of women respondents reported barriers compared to 24% of men (down 0.4 and 4.2% since 2021 respectively). People of self-described gender reported barriers at much higher rates, up 1% since 2021 to 53%.

Ensuring women have equal access to career advancement opportunities is important for addressing pay gaps. More senior or technical roles and more well-trained and experienced candidates are likely to be paid more. Inequality in access to training, experience in other roles, and ultimately receiving promotion contributes to gendered differences in remuneration.

### WGEI 6: Leave and flexible working arrangements

In most industries, the proportion of parental leave takers who were men grew.

Table 8: Proportion of parental leave takers who were men and number of weeks of leave taken in 2023

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Industry | Proportion of parental leave takers in 2023 who were men (%) | Percentage change from 2021 | Average number of weeks’ leave taken by men in 2023 | Change in weeks from 2021 |
| Creative industries | 36.6 | +10.9 | 4 | +0.7 |
| Finance and insurance | 32.2 | +11.8 | 7.9 | +5.6 |
| Local government | 29.4 | +4.7 | 6.2 | −2.3 |
| Police and emergency services | 55.7 | −1.1 | 8.0 | +4.0 |
| Public health care | 12.6 | +1.3 | 3.3 | +0.6 |
| Sport and recreation | 21.9 | −2.8 | 4 | +1.8 |
| TAFE and other education | 21.1 | +3.6 | 2.4 | −0.3 |
| Transport | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | Insufficient data |
| Universities | 25.9 | +1.3 | 5.2 | −0.8 |
| Victorian public service | 12.4 | +0.6 | 5.7 | −2.4 |
| Water and land management | 52.2 | +5.2 | 5 | −0.1 |
| All industries | 25.9 | +5.4 | 7.6 | +2.2 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

Between 2021 and 2023, 9 out of 10 industries with sufficient data saw an increase in the proportion of parental leave takers who were men. The largest jump was in the finance and insurance industry, where men were 32.2% of employees accessing parental leave in 2023, up nearly 12%. The largest drops were in the police and emergency services and sport and recreation industries.

In most industries, there were only small changes in the average number of weeks’ leave men took. The largest changes were in finance and insurance, and police and emergency services, where the average number of weeks went up by 5.6 and 4 respectively.

Across all industries, the proportion of parental leave takers who were men jumped over 5% to nearly 26%. Men across the sector also took an extra 2.2 weeks’ leave on average in 2023.

Breaking down the gender imbalance in parental leave is central to gender equality at work and in the home. Gendered divisions of labour, especially in heterosexual relationships, disadvantage women at work and men in the home (Dangar 2023; Sojo et al. 2022).

Normalising parental leave, regardless of gender, ensures men can spend time with their children and share the domestic load. It also contributes to changing how organisations view parental leave. Instead of viewing it as a choice women make to opt out of the workforce, de-gendering parental leave helps reframe it as an important contribution made by people of all genders that should not set them back at work. If people of all genders take up parental leave at similar rates and there is no career disadvantage for taking parental leave, the financial penalty women currently experience will reduce (WGEA 2024:78).

Fewer women and slightly more men had a flexible work arrangement in 2023.

Table 9: Prevalence of formal flexible work arrangements, by gender

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Proportion of women with a formal flexible work arrangement (%) | Percentage change since 2021 | Proportion of men with a formal flexible work arrangement (%) | Percentage change since 2021 |
| 32.6 | −6.1 | 26.0 | +1.74 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

Flexible work arrangements continued to be more commonly used by women. However, the gap between men and women closed.

Women are more likely to be responsible for care work and household duties (Dangar et al. 2023). Evidence shows that options like flexible and part-time work or carer's leave support women to manage competing priorities of career and care (Dangar et al. 2023). However, taking up these options can also mean women are overlooked for career advancement (Dangar et al. 2023). Similarly, men may find it hard to ask for, or be granted, flexible work (Sojo et al. 2022). Closing the flexible work gap between men and women helps normalise flexible work, helps women advance in their careers, and helps men participate at home.

### WGEI 7: Gendered segregation in the workforce

Industrial and occupational gendered segregation continued to be an issue.

Women make up 48% of the Australian workforce (AIFS 2023). By contrast, the Victorian public sector was 66% women in 2023 (up 1% from 2021).

Women made up the largest proportion of workers in the public health care industry, at around 77%. By contrast, transport had the lowest concentration of women, with 27% of all employees being women.

Table 10: Proportion of employees who were women, by occupation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Occupation group | Proportion of employees who were women in 2023 | Percentage change from 2021 |
| Managers | 55% | +1.0 |
| Professionals | 70% | 0.0 |
| Technicians and trades workers | 40% | +1.0 |
| Community and personal service workers | 63% | +2.0 |
| Clerical and administrative workers | 73% | 0.0 |
| Machinery operators and drivers | 12% | +0.1 |
| Labourers | 51% | +2.0 |
| All occupations | 66% | +1.0 |

Source: Workplace gender audit workforce data, 2021 and 2023

Occupational segregation continues in the Victorian public sector. In 2023, men made up 88% of machine operators and drivers, while women were 73% of clerical and administrative workers.

Occupational segregation is a significant driver of the pay gap. Technical occupations that men more often hold tend to be higher paid. Roles that women traditionally hold, such as administration or caring jobs, are often lower paid and often do not have opportunities for additional remuneration, such as shift work and overtime.

Occupational segregation is also difficult to change. Gender stereotypes about what roles are appropriate for what gender start very young (Canessa-Pollard 2022). For this reason, little change since 2021 is unsurprising. This demonstrates a need to continue focusing on reducing gender segregation in the public sector.

## Intersectionality

Intersectional forms of inequality compound disadvantage.

Where gender inequality intersects with another form of discrimination, pay gaps are likely to be larger. This is explored in detail in the Commission’s 2023 report [*Intersectionality at work*](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/intersectionality-work).[[4]](#footnote-5)

For this report, estimated mean salary gaps were calculated between groups who experience one or more forms of discrimination. This analysis found that:

* the largest pay gap was always between women who belong to a disadvantaged group (for example, women with disability) and men who don’t belong to that group (for example, men without disability)
* the second (or equal second) largest pay gap was always between women who don’t belong to a disadvantaged group (for example, women without disability) and men who also don’t belong to that group (for example, men without disability)
* the smallest (or equal smallest) pay gap was always between women who belong to a disadvantaged group (for example, women with disability) and women who don’t belong to that group (for example, women without disability).

This demonstrates that while intersecting forms of inequality can lead to significantly larger pay gaps, gender is still the primary contributor.

Table 11 shows the pay gaps for the comparator groups with the largest gaps in 2021. These pay gaps are estimates and use self-reported survey data. For further information on how these were calculated, see the ‘Estimated pay gap calculation’ section of the [methodology](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/intersectionality-work/introduction#methodology) of Intersectionality at work.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Table 11: Estimated mean salary gaps by comparator groups

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Comparator groups | Mean estimated salary gap (%) | Percentage change since 2021 |
| First Nations women vs non-Indigenous men | 27 | +1 |
| First Nations men vs non-Indigenous women | 6 | +3 |
| CARM women vs non-CARM men | 20 | −1 |
| Non-CARM women vs CARM men[[6]](#footnote-7) | 16 | +3 |
| Women with disability vs men without disability | 21 | −2 |
| Women without disability vs men with disability | 7 | 0 |
| Lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual or asexual women vs straight men | 20 | +3 |
| Straight women vs gay, bisexual, pansexual or asexual men | 16 | 0 |
| Trans, non-binary or gender diverse people vs cisgender men | 23 | +4 |
| Trans, non-binary or gender diverse people vs cisgender women | 6 | +6 |
| All women vs all men | 16 | +1 |

Source: People matter survey data, 2021 and 2023

As in 2021, the largest estimated pay gap was between First Nations women and non-Indigenous men. This gap grew by 1% in 2023 to 27%. The largest jump was in the pay gap between trans, non-binary or gender diverse people and cisgender women, up 6% to 6%.

At the industry level, public health care consistently had the largest gaps between the above groups. These ranged from 33% (between trans, non-binary or gender diverse people and cisgender men, down 1%) to 45% (between First Nations women and non-Indigenous men, up 2%).

# How to address pay gaps

Reducing the gender pay gap starts with understanding what drives it in your organisation. This section outlines 5 practical steps organisations can take, from analysing data to building leadership accountability. Each step is backed by evidence and aligns with Australian best practice guidance. For further resources to support these actions, see the ‘Key resource’ links throughout this section.

## Step 1: Collect your data

Start by collecting detailed, high-quality pay data for each employee across your organisation. Include the following, broken down by gender (WGEA 2019):

* base salaries
* bonuses
* allowances
* other benefits.

Even if base salaries appear equal, gaps often appear in the ‘extras’ that significantly affect overall earnings. Look at who receives overtime pay, bonuses, allowances, and other financial benefits. There may be gendered patterns in these ‘additional’ forms of remuneration. This could be based on factors like caring responsibilities or gender stereotypes about what work is valued or who is available.

If possible, consider additional demographic categories such as age, disability and race. This helps identify where gender inequality may compound with other forms of disadvantage to worsen inequality.

Reliable, comprehensive data is the foundation for meaningful action.

## Step 2: Use your data to understand the problem

Once you have collected your data, analyse it to understand where pay gaps exist and what might drive them in your organisation (WGEA 2024b). Look at:

* **Like-for-like pay gaps:** Compare men and women (and if possible, people of self-described gender) who are in the same or similar roles (for example, occupational group).
* **By-level or pay band (pay classification) pay gaps:** Compare men and women (and if possible, people of self-described gender) across various levels (for example, entry level, mid-level, senior and executive) or pay bands of the organisation.
* **Leadership pay gaps:** Compare men and women (and if possible, people of self-described gender) in leadership roles, including executives and senior management.
* **Organisation-wide pay gaps:** Compare all men and women (and if possible, people of self-described gender) in the organisation, regardless of role.

Pay gaps often reflect broader inequalities. Look deeper by reviewing:

* **Recruitment and starting salaries:** Track each gender group’s progression through the hiring process by applicant, those shortlisted, the selection outcome, the candidate appointed, and their starting salaries. Investigate if there are gender differences in outcomes and whether gender discrimination or unconscious bias may be playing a role.
* **Participation rate:** Look at participation rates by full-time, part-time and casual work to explore differences between genders. While pay gaps are usually based on full-time equivalent remuneration, differences in employment type can affect career advancement (and therefore pay).
* **Promotions and talent pool:** Find out if there are gender disparities in who is accessing training and development opportunities, performance evaluation processes, and decisions related to promotions. Also look for any gender imbalance in talent pipelines and succession plans.
* **Flexible work and leave entitlements:** Check any gender differences in the use of flexible work, leave entitlements (for example, parental leave and carer’s leave), and changes to return to work patterns.
* **Employee turnover and exit interviews:** Monitor who leaves the organisation, the reasons for their departure, and any patterns related to tenure or role to figure out if structural or cultural workplace factors are affecting people of different genders differently.
* **Staff engagement and job satisfaction:** Assess the rate of employee participation in work initiatives and collect feedback from employee experience surveys and interviews to look for potential gender differences.
* **Gendered workforce segregation:** Consider where people of different genders are concentrated across your workforce. Are men concentrated in higher paid technical roles and women in lower paid clerical and administration roles?

Where possible, analyse your data to see whether factors such as Aboriginality, disability, ethnicity or sexual orientation are compounding any gender pay inequality you find.

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| **Key resource**   * WGEA (2024b) [*Gender pay gap analysis guide: For employers*](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Gender-Pay-Gap-Analysis-Guide-For-employers_February2025.pdf), WGEA, accessed 4 March 2025. |

## Step 3: Communicate gender equality as a leadership priority

Visible leadership commitment is essential for meaningful change. Senior leaders need to clearly communicate that closing the gender pay gap is a strategic priority. This could include:

* public statements
* setting internal targets and key performance indicators
* sharing progress updates with staff
* addressing any resistance or backlash.

Leaders must also ensure the work is properly resourced (this is a requirement under the Gender Equality Act 2020). This means:

* allocating adequate funding
* appointing enough skilled staff to lead the work
* giving them the authority to drive change (Creary 2020).

While equity and fairness should be the primary drivers for gender equality, if needed, you can also consider building a business case that connects gender equality with broader organisational goals such as attracting talent, improving performance and reducing risk (WGEA 2018; KPMG et al. 2022; Jackson et al. 2024; Champions for Change 2025).

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| **Key resource**   * Champions for Change Coalition (2025) [*Closing gender pay gaps: Guide for leadership, transparency and employer action*](https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Closing-gender-pay-gaps-guide-2025.pdf), Champions for Change Coalition website, accessed 13 March 2025. |

## Step 4: Develop and implement actions

Use insights from your data analysis to design targeted actions that address the root causes of your gender pay gap. Consider implementing these actions:

### Adjust pay where needed

Make salary corrections to eliminate unjustified differences between individuals or groups doing the same or similar work (CA ANZ 2024; WGEA 2024; Champions for Change 2025).

### Review remuneration and performance policies

Assess how you set and review salaries. Apply a gender lens to identify rules or practices that may disadvantage certain groups. Ensure policies are transparent and shared with staff (CA ANZ 2024; FWC 2024; WGEA 2024; Champions for Change 2025).

### Set measurable goals

Identify where gaps exist, then set clear, time-bound targets to reduce them. For example, aim to reduce your organisation-wide pay gap by a set percentage over 12 months (Fitzsimmons et al. 2020; Ghalebeigi et al. 2022; Sojo et al. 2022; Risse 2024; WGEA 2024).

### Improve recruitment and selection practices by minimising bias

Be clear about how you make hiring decisions and ensure you assess all candidates against the same criteria. Offer flexible work by default. Use inclusive language in job ads, structured interviews, skill-based assessments and diverse interview panels to minimise bias (Cho and Segrave 2023; Davis 2023; Lucy et al. 2023; WGEA 2024; Champions of Change 2025; State of Victoria 2025).

Review how you define and apply merit, and challenge assumptions that may unfairly disadvantage underrepresented groups (The Behavioural Insights Team 2021; Lucy et al. 2023; Champions of Change Coalition and Chief Executive Women 2024).

Aim to increase the talent pipeline of women entering traditionally male-concentrated fields and positions. While this may temporarily inflate your reported gender pay gap, introducing more women into junior roles in these fields will help you achieve better gender balance across your workforce and can help reduce the gender pay gap over time (Khattar 2024; McKinsey & Company, the Business Council of Australia, and WGEA 2017).

### Ensure equal opportunities for development

Identify and address barriers that may limit access to training and development opportunities. Provide mentorship, sponsorship and leadership development programs that are inclusive and accessible to all staff. Work with individuals to develop tailored career plans that support their goals and progression (GOV.UK 2023a; LeanIn and McKinsey 2024; WGEA 2024; Champions for Change 2025).

### Promote flexible work practices and leave entitlements

Encourage and normalise the uptake of flexible work arrangements, parental leave and carer’s leave by men to help shift gendered norms around care. Monitor who is using these options to identify and address any gaps in access or uptake across different groups (FWC 2023; DCA 2024a; Deloitte 2024; Champions for Change 2025).

### Listen to your workforce

Consult staff regularly, use surveys to gather feedback, and set up Employee Resource Groups or working groups to build staff buy-in and track the progress and impact of work policies and initiatives.

This demonstrates leadership commitment to gender equality, helps ensure that your actions better reflect the needs of your employees, and guides you on what is working and what might need tweaking or changing (APSC 2022; McKinsey 2022; Jackson et al. 2024; WGEA 2024; Champions for Change 2025).

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| **Key resources**   * WGEA (2024) [*Workplace Gender Equality Action Planning Playbook: A playbook for planning effective actions for gender equality*](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/WGEA_Action-Planning-Playbook_V01b.pdf), WGEA, accessed 4 March 2025. * CA ANZ (Charted Accountants Australia New Zealand) (2024) [*Narrowing your gender pay gap playbook*](https://www.charteredaccountantsanz.com/tools-and-resources/practice-management/diversity-equity-inclusion/narrowing-your-gender-pay-gap-playbook), CA ANZ website, accessed 14 March 2025. * Champions for Change Coalition (2025) [*Closing gender pay gaps: Guide for leadership, transparency and employer action*](https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Closing-gender-pay-gaps-guide-2025.pdf), Champions for Change Coalition website, accessed 13 March 2025. |

## Step 5: Undertake regular monitoring and internal reporting

Monitoring progress helps organisations stay accountable and adapt when things aren’t working. Review your data regularly (at least annually, if not more frequently) to track changes in pay gaps and identify emerging issues.

Check in on how you are implementing actions. Are you following policies? Are you meeting targets? Are staff seeing and feeling the impact? Use surveys, focus groups or performance reviews to gather feedback and guide adjustments.

Sharing progress transparently with staff builds trust and reinforces the organisation’s commitment to equality. Consistently reporting this information to senior leaders supports accountability. Consider existing channels for sharing information with your employees and senior leaders. These may include existing working groups or forums, executive committees or internal communications channels. Leadership accountability and buy-in are vital to drive change.

|  |
| --- |
| **Key resources**   * WGEA (2024) [*Workplace Gender Equality Action Planning Playbook: A playbook for planning effective actions for gender equality*](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/WGEA_Action-Planning-Playbook_V01b.pdf), WGEA, accessed 4 March 2025. * Duncan, A, Mavisakalyan, A and Loan Vu, L (2023) [*Gender Equity Insights 2023: Accelerating the pace of change*](https://bcec.edu.au/publications/gender-equity-insights-2023-accelerating-the-pace-of-change/), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, accessed 23 April 2025. |

We encourage organisations to stay up to date with the best practices in their industry, work to enhance their knowledge base, take part in communities of practice, and engage with other practitioners. By doing so they can attract talent, make informed decisions and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

# Resources

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1. The People matter survey is an annual employee experience survey administered by the Victorian Public Sector Commission. In every Gender Equality Act reporting year, around 90% of duty holders use the People matter survey to fulfil the employee experience data component of their workplace gender audit. For more information on the People matter survey and its use in data insights, see the methodology section of [*Intersectionality at work*](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Intersectionality-At-Work-Report.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Data in this report is not comparable to similar data published by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC). VPSC collect data from all public sector organisations. We collect data from public sector organisations with more than 50 employees, as well as local councils and universities. The two Commissions’ workforce data collections are separate. And while we both use People matter survey data, we analyse a different selection of organisations. We also often make different calculations. As such, the results we publish are different. To learn more about recent data from the VPSC, visit the [State of the public sector report](https://www.vpsc.vic.gov.au/state-of-the-public-sector-2024-is-now-live/). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. In 2023, organisations were asked to identify senior leaders in their audit data. This data was not requested in 2021. For consistency, senior leaders have been defined in both 2021 and 2023 as those in the top 2 levels of an organisation, with an occupation within the Manager or Professional groups. CEOs have also been included. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The methodology used in this report is the same as in ‘Intersectionality at work’, except that the mean reported salary is used instead of the median. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The methodology used in this report is the same as in *Intersectionality at work*, except that the mean reported salary is used instead of the median. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. CARM is an acronym for culturally and racially marginalised. See *Intersectionality at work* for further discussion around language used to describe groups that experience discrimination. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)