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*Building Gender Equity Strategy 2023-2031: Women in Construction*

*FOCUS GROUP CONSULTATION: 1*

*2022*

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# Introduction

## Background

The construction industry represents one of Australia's three highest creators of economic value and the second biggest employer; however, women’s involvement remains low at all levels. The systemic cultural issues prevalent in the industry continue to impact the attraction and retention of women in the sector.

To address the issues inherent within the industry, the Victorian Government partnered with the Building Industry Consultative Committee (BICC) in 2018 to increase the proportion of women working in the construction industry, resulting in the *Building Gender Equality: Victoria's Women in Construction Strategy 2019-2022*. The BICC developed the Strategy in partnership with key organisations in the industry to address the attraction, recruitment and retention of women in trade and other onsite roles. The Strategy set out a four-year work program with actions at three critical intervention points: attract, recruit and retain.

In 2022, the Victorian Government continued its efforts to strengthen gender equality by committing to continue and expand on the 2019-2022 Strategy. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) is leading the development of an eight-year *Building Equity Strategy 2023-2031 – Women in Construction* (the Strategy) and an initial four-year action plan that will build on the work already commenced.

The Strategy's purpose is to create an industry agreed, long-term plan to increase the number of women in onsite and offsite professional, trade and non-trade roles across the building, construction, infrastructure, and civil engineering sectors. The development of the second Strategy presents the opportunity for a generational shift within the Victorian construction industry.

This report presents the findings from focus groups conducted to identify and understand the critical issues facing women in construction to inform the development of the Strategy and its related action plan. The approach ensures that the Strategy meets the industry's needs and includes all stakeholder voices while committing the industry to more equitable and inclusive workplaces, identified responsibilities to action change, and a Strategy to guide the industry's evolution.

## Key findings

Sixteen focus groups were conducted with stakeholders associated with the Victorian construction industry. The Victorian Government, Unions, employers, industry Associations/peak bodies, and education/training providers were represented. Both women and men participated in focus groups.

The focus groups explored the scope and vision of the new Strategy, challenges experienced by women in construction, and areas of priority to inform the development of the Strategy and its associated action plan.

The lived experience of focus group participants and the initiatives already in place will additionally be incorporated into the Strategy and the action plan to build on the work implemented through the first Strategy.

Key findings from focus group consultation included the following:

#### Scope

Focus group participants agreed that the scope of the Strategy should remain inclusive of all sectors of the industry, roles, tender types, and workplaces, including both onsite and offsite. The "construction industry" is a broad term, and clarification of the type of work, professions, occupations, and organisations must be defined in the scope so that it is clear what the reach of the Strategy will be.

#### Vision

Focus group participants agreed that the Strategy should be aspirational, with a vision to lead the industry and the broader community to world’s best practice for gender equality. Communicating the vision and rebranding of the industry is essential to improving the inclusion of all workers.

Participants questioned whether the Strategy’s central tenant should be about “equity” rather than “equality” and “diversity and inclusion” rather than “gender”. Some argued that a diversity and inclusion focus would be inclusive of all minority groups and remove any resentment from men towards women.

All stakeholder groups suggested that the Strategy communicate the economic and social value that women can bring to construction.

Intersectionality was recognised as essential to include but too much to tackle in this Strategy. Stakeholders suggested the development of a greater understanding of intersectionality concerning women’s experiences as a starting point. However, if “diversity and inclusion” replaced “women” as the focus, intersectionality would be addressed inherently.

#### Key challenges impacting equality

The key issues women faced in the exploration, education and training, early experiences and growth in the construction industry included: support, the male-dominated culture and pathways.

*Support*

A lack of support for women inhibits them from reporting inappropriate workplace behaviours which deters skills development, accessing work, and feelings of belonging and inclusion often does not occur. The lack of support is problematic in attracting and retaining women across all occupations.

*Male-dominated culture*

*Safe, respectful and inclusive workplace:* The male-dominated culture and associated problematic behaviour deliberately excludes women from work opportunities and creates physically and psychologically unsafe environments. The consequences of such a culture inhibit the attraction and retention of women into the industry and perpetuate the gendered work stereotypes that construction is not appropriate and is unwelcoming of women of all ages and life stages.

*Leave:* Taking leave in construction is associated with stigma and hinders the attraction and retention of women. However, the young generation now entering the industry has a different understanding of masculinity (positive rather than toxic masculinity) and holds different perceptions of leave and family roles and responsibilities. Blocking opportunities to co-parent or participate in family life as desired may result in lower attraction and retention of all genders.

*Flexible work arrangements:* The lack of flexible work arrangements is a barrier to attracting and retaining women in construction. Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) prohibit the inclusion of job-sharing and part-time work, reinforcing rigid work schedule arrangements. There is concern from Unions that flexibility will result in the loss of pay entitlements and leave workers worse off financially. Employers were concerned that flexible work arrangements would compromise work schedules. However, the provision of flexible work arrangements was identified as providing increased work-life balance and enabling more women to enter the industry as it would facilitate co-parenting.

*Acceptance:* Women are not fully accepted in the industry, which impacts their ability to access work and develop long-term career pathways. Further, lack of acceptance fuels inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour by men.

*Women in leadership positions:* There is a lack of women in leadership positions due to culture-based barriers. Women in leadership positions can help change the culture through positional power and influence and inspire other women in their career paths and aspirations.

*Negative industry reputation:* The public perceives construction work as dangerous, hostile towards women, and requires little academic acumen. These stereotypes deter women and their families from considering/supporting a career in construction.

**Pathways**

*Access to information about construction-related occupations and entry points:* There is a considerable lack of awareness among schoolgirls, women and their families of the professional roles, apprenticeships/traineeships and semi-skilled occupations available in the construction industry. Further, education pathways into these occupations are complex and confusing, negatively impacting the number of school leavers and mature aged women entering the industry. Curriculum intervention programs in lower secondary and primary schools are vital to challenge gender work stereotypes and increase awareness of opportunities presented by the construction industry.

*Apprentice and trainee education and training:* Pre-apprenticeship programs are critical entry pathways into construction for women. However, inflexible delivery modes limit women's participation. Low apprenticeship wages decrease women’s uptake of apprenticeships as a planned career change. Further, a lack of governance in the trades training system, few female trainers, and workplace culture contribute to low retention rates of women in apprenticeships and traineeships. In addition, the inflexibility of the workplace can prevent women from accessing further training and inhibit career development.

*Mapping capabilities:* The identification and communication of capabilities and skills associated with different types of work will enable women to explore a career path into construction. In addition, it will also assist those currently working in the industry to match their skills, abilities, and interests with work opportunities.

*Accessing meaningful work:* Women often lack access to meaningful work as they are perceived as incapable and/or unable to access training, compromising their productivity and ability to upskill. In addition, there is limited recognition of transferable skills, so mature-aged women are deterred from entering the industry as the costs and rigid training times are problematic.

#### Intersectionality

The multiple levels of disadvantage experienced by women are essential to acknowledge in the Strategy. Exploration of multiple disadvantages experienced by women was viewed as the first step, with subsequent action developed across the Strategy’s second action plan.

#### Key priority areas

*1. Economic Equity:* All stakeholder groups agreed this is an important priority area. However, social values resulting from economic equity and independence were also identified as essential in this priority area. An education piece on financial literacy for women was identified as an important inclusion in this priority area. Mapping skills and capabilities associated with construction related occupations and tasks are central to improving the industry's image, increasing women's attraction to construction related work, and creating clearer career pathways.

*2. Leadership:* Leadership was central to improving gender equality, but so was representation at all levels. The definition of leadership must include respectful behaviours and subsequent actions when witnessing inappropriate behaviours. Leadership is vital to the cultural change required to remove the many issues identified as problematic for women working in the industry.

*3. Health and Wellbeing:* There was discussion among the different stakeholders within and across focus groups as to whether health and wellbeing should be renamed Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). There was also discussion about whether gendered violence should be part of this priority area. Participants felt this priority area should focus on health and wellbeing and that safety form part of an additional priority area.

*4. Ending Gendered Violence:* Gendered violence as a priority area and term was polarising among stakeholders. Despite the agreement that all genders experience gendered violence and that the industry is responsible for educating and leading change within their sphere of influence, participants were concerned that gendered violence was only understood as physical violence. Some participants felt the term was offensive and accusatorial and would alienate and limit the impact of any associated actions. Industry stakeholders suggested replacing the term with something more positive such as respect. However, most participants across the various stakeholder groups felt that, while confronting, the term was important to retain in the Strategy.

*5. Education:* An additional priority area on education was suggested by stakeholders with a focus on:

* increasing the knowledge and supporting the education sector to facilitate the attraction of women into the industry,
* educating within the industry on the issue of gender inequality, and
* developing education materials and initiatives for the broader community to improve the industry’s reputation as an employer of choice for women and girls.

#### Governance

All stakeholders believed that the Strategy should sit with the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) or an associated committee. It was suggested that the current membership of the BICC ([see link)](https://www.vic.gov.au/building-industry-consultative-council) should be expanded to include other sectors of the construction industry. Participants agreed that a third party should independently assess the Strategy and action plans.

#### Action Plan 2023-2026

Actions emerging from focus group discussions are considered according to the career cycle model of exploration (attract), education and training (attract and recruit), early experience (recruit and retain), and growth (retain). Actions are categorised into support for women, addressing the male dominated workplace culture, and pathways.

## Report structure

The report is organised into five parts, as follows:

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| --- | --- |
| Part 1: Introduction | A brief overview of the report is outlined, including background, key findings, and report structure. |
| Part 2: Methodology | Data collection and analysis methods are outlined. |
| Part 3: Strategy | Findings are presented from focus groups in relation to the new Strategy. |
| Part 4: Action Plan 2023-2026 | Findings are presented from focus groups in relation to initiatives informing the Action Plan. |
| Part 5: Appendices | Information provided to participants in preparation for the focus group discussion. |

# Methodology

## Research approach

The Victorian Government alone cannot achieve gender equality in construction. All industry stakeholders are responsible for building a culture of respect and equality for all individuals. Therefore, a collaborative approach is being undertaken to develop the new Strategy.

The development of the Strategy's scope, vision, and associated actions will be developed in consultation with stakeholders from relevant government departments and representatives from education, construction, infrastructure, civil engineering and the employees of these sectors.

Focus groups were conducted with stakeholders from the Victorian construction industry to:

1. Identify and discuss the scope, vision, and key areas of focus for the *Building Equity Strategy 2023-2031; and*
2. Explore critical actions for the period of 2023-2026.

Focus groups explored:

* The proposed scope and vision of the Strategy.
* The role of government, industry Associations, employers and Unions in setting standards for acceptable behaviour and modelling good practice.
* The barriers women experience across their career lifecycle and how these can be removed.
* The forms of disadvantage and discrimination women experience, why these behaviours are present and reinforced, and what can be done to address these negative behaviours.
* The traditional male stereotypes prevalent in the industry and how these can be modified to actively encourage and normalise inclusion.

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The focus group data were de-identified and thematically analysed. The thematic analysis results are reported in Part 3 and Part 4. Ethics approval was attained from RMIT University to conduct focus groups and collect and analyse the data.

## Participants

Sixteen two-hour focus groups were conducted with 83 participants, including men and women from industry Associations, state government departments, schools, higher education, vocational education and training (VET), employer organisations, Unions, and women’s advocacy/employment groups. Table 1 summarises stakeholder groups and the number of participants involved in the consultation.

Participants were provided with documents outlining topics for consideration and discussion in preparation for the focus group. Refer to Appendix 1 for preparatory focus group documents. Participants were also provided with the report “*Preparing for Building Equality: Insights for Success*” by Valerie Francis, Amelia Costigan and Eva Cunningham.

Table 1. Focus Group Participants

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Industry Stakeholder Groups** | **Number of participants** |
| Government | 20 |
| Industry Associations | 11 |
| Employers – Commercial (Builders) | 17 |
| Employers – Civil (Infrastructure) | 10 |
| Education | 18 |
| Unions | 7 |
| Total | 83 |

# Findings for Strategy 2023-2031

## Introduction

This section presents the findings from the sixteen focus groups and is structured into the following areas:

* Scope
* Vision statement
* Challenges the Strategy should address
* Intersectionality
* Key priority areas

## Scope

### Who, what and where?

Participants were asked to comment on how the construction industry should be described in the Strategy, and the following description was provided to participants as a starting point:

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| *Building, construction, infrastructure, and civil engineering.* |

Government, Employers (commercial and civil sector) and Unions agreed that the Strategy's scope should include building and construction, infrastructure and civil construction. Participants identified and agreed that civil construction was different from infrastructure. It was considered that the Strategy should include infrastructure, given the work associated with the Victorian Government’s Big Build projects which incorporates rail and road upgrades and housing. Employers from the civil sector commented that there was no need to specifically identify *"civil engineering"* because it is work that falls under the categorisation of infrastructure.

All stakeholder groups believed that *“building and construction”* were well-understood terms; building infers domestic work, while construction infers commercial work. Participants from Industry Associations suggested using the term “*construction industry”* as an umbrella term *“because construction is the generic term for everything else that comes underneath it and then refers to building, infrastructure, etc.”* Regardless of the words used, all stakeholder groups believed the Strategy should acknowledge the differences between industry sectors.

There was also a recognised need to consider the different types of organisations operating within the industry, i.e. the size of an organisation, responsibilities, areas of work and their level of progress toward gender equality. For example, many tier 1 and 2 construction organisations have been working on gender parity for some time, while smaller organisations may have achieved less progress. All participant groups felt that the Strategy should include all roles within the supply chain and include management, non-trade, and trade occupations.

One Employer (commercial sector) suggested that naming different categories of work might be restrictive. This participant felt that framing the scope more generally using the term *"industry and trades”* would be more inclusive because it *“covers bigger areas and cross-pollination of skills…[given] there's a lot of subcontractors that don't directly work in construction, but indirectly do."*

It was felt that approaching the scope from a more generic perspective would also enable a more significant impact. For example, when discussing recruitment, the narrative could be framed around the skills and capabilities required to drive a crane rather than advertising for a crane driver. This framing also provides an opportunity for rebranding the industry and challenging gendered work and social stereotypes, all identified as essential elements of the Strategy.

Participants believed the Strategy should include work in rural, regional, and metro locations and government and privately funded projects as these present different constraints and opportunities.

### Gender equality or diversity and inclusion?

Participants were asked to consider the following statement:

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| --- |
| *Gender equality cannot be achieved by the Victorian Government alone. It is the responsibility of all of us to build a culture of respect and equality for all individuals.* |

There was discussion within the Government, Industry Association and Employer (commercial) focus groups around broadening the scope of the Strategy from “*gender equality*” to “*diversity and inclusion*”. Participants who preferred the use of “*diversity and inclusion”* believed that focusing solely on women was *"too narrow"* and polarising. A singular focus on women may *"put people off"* as any initiative addressed under the Strategy would be considered a *"women's"* problem rather than issues aligned with changing cultural norms prevalent in the industry. For example, all genders can access parental leave rather than being considered an initiative for women only. Further, the focus on diversity and inclusion would implicitly address the issues faced by women and be inclusive of intersectionality. Intersectionality is addressed again in section 3.5 of the report.

Government stakeholders were concerned about using the term *"for all individuals"* in the context of diversity and inclusivity as there was no explicit reference to intersectionality and associated minority groups such as LGBTQI. However, all stakeholder groups agreed that including other groups in the scope and vision would distract from the original intent of the Strategy. While gender identity is important, it was argued that the focus should be on women at this point in the industry's evolution.

Additionally, most participants across all stakeholder groups believed that replacing gender inequality with diversity and inclusion would dilute the focus away from women, which is the key objective of the Strategy.

There was consensus that diversity and inclusion is a foundational element of the Strategy and that the focus in this iteration is on women. Into the future, there was an aspirational goal that diversity and inclusion will be the norm in the industry and the women will have equal status.

### Equity or equality?

Government, Industry Associations, Union and Employer (civil sector) stakeholders questioned why the Strategy was framed around gender equality rather than gender equity. While each term has a specific meaning, there was a sense from some participants that the different meanings of the terms were not well understood.

One Government representative commented: *"equal, yes. We already are. We're all getting an equal opportunity. But is it equitable?"* Some participants argued that if equity is about giving everyone an equal chance, the industry will reach a point where everyone starts with an equal opportunity, and gender targets will no longer be required.

One Employer (civil sector) commented that the framing around equality rather than equity sets the tone of the Strategy as it frames how the issues are perceived. Equality in the context of the Strategy may be understood as a woman's problem. The associated solution then focuses on "fixing" women, for example, providing mentoring programs when the better solution is for the industry to remove the barriers that women experience.

However, to counter the argument around equity, an Industry Association participant commented:

*"I thought there was the deliberate use of equality because we're trying to provide a respectful and safe environment for women. Equity is something completely different that needs a lot of training, awareness and education to occur within the industry to build up the support and the mechanisms required to be able to provide equitable access; it requires a lot of investment from individual businesses and the government."*

There was discussion that positioning the Strategy through the lens of diversity and inclusion rather than women would align the Strategy with progressing equity and intersectionality, as individuals from different groups do not have the same needs.

### The inclusion of education

All stakeholders identified education as a key priority area essential to understanding the needs and associated actions for change regarding women’s equality across the industry. Therefore, participants determined that the education sector as an important stakeholder group to include in the scope and activities associated with the Strategy. The education sector is a vital inclusion in the Strategy given the critical role played by schools, VET, and higher education in shaping career choices made by students and their families and, more broadly, the impact and influence this has on breaking down gender stereotypes and societal norms.

### Responsibility for implementation

Participants were asked to consider:

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| *What systems and structures need to change? Who should be responsible for leading the change?* |

All participants agreed that gender equality is the responsibility of all construction and associated stakeholder groups rather than being the sole responsibility of the Victorian Government:

*"Gender equality cannot be achieved by the Victorian Government alone. It is the responsibility of all of us to build a culture of respect and equality for all individuals."*

Some participants believed that the Victorian Government plays a leading role, with all stakeholders working together to make a coordinated and sustained change. One Employer (civil sector) stated:

*"Government has to play a role first here; construction companies have to play a role. The education system must play a role. Everybody needs to support each other because it can't be achieved by the government alone.”*

While all stakeholders recognised that they had some responsibility for increasing gender equality, they also identified the obligations held by other stakeholder groups. For example, some Government and Employer (civil and commercial sector) stakeholders believe that Unions have the most influence in creating change and caring for women working on construction sites in contrast to those in management positions or working for the government. One Government participant stated:

*"If there's ever an issue onsite, you're best to go to the Union rep to get that level of protection than go to management, because management are so busy running massive projects they are not going to be worried about an individual."*

It was also suggested by Government and Employer stakeholder groups that Unions could influence project timelines and working hours, and address issues of workplace flexibility and leave. Government and Employers (both civil and commercial) believed that Unions, through enterprise bargaining agreements (EBA), were responsible for rethinking wage and overtime structure. It was suggested that prescribed overtime requirements disincentivised workers to pursue more flexible workplace options.

Government stakeholders discussed the issue of social procurement and how construction organisations were responsible for meeting pre-defined targets. However, all Employer stakeholder groups articulated the need for government to support their efforts in meeting their social procurement tender requirements. One Employer commented that government should not just *"drop some sort of target and leave it up to the contractor/s to deal with it all and manage the process"* but share in the responsibility for the attraction and retention of women into the industry by assisting in "*finding the women you need… and to ensure that there's a five-day week and it's consistent with an EBA."*

Employers, both civil and commercial, also felt the government, through the tender process, should incentivise organisations to include flexible work arrangements, training/work experience opportunities, and encourage more women into the workplace through financial support and coordination. One participant working in the civil sector explained:

*'it comes back into that build it into your price. If you genuinely want us to have a five-day-a-week, 40-hour week so we reduce burnout, mental health issues, fatigue, suicide, and all sorts of stuff, then build it into your price. Let us tender for that and build it into our price where we say, "Well, the program is now going to be X long because it's going to take longer," but we're all going to live normal lives. We can do it as part of the norm to say, "Right, we finish on site at 3:00" or whatever so that we can. We start at 8:00 in the morning so that we can – anyone can drop off the kids and come to prestart at 8:00 or 7:30 or whatever it might be. We are hamstrung in those sorts of things around the way these projects are all tendered and costed.'*

Education stakeholders suggested that the government should take responsibility for leading and coordinating STEM education across primary, secondary, vocational and higher education and encourage the education sector to lead in the promotion of gender equality in non-traditional careers such as construction. An Educator commented: *"Schools need to support young women who want to enter these sectors."*

## Vision statement

Focus group participants were asked to consider the following draft vision statement, taken from the Victorian Government’s *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy (*[*https://www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality*](https://www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality)*).*

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| --- |
| * *All Victorians live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities, and are treated with dignity, respect and fairness.* * *All Victorians recognise that gender equality is essential to economic prosperity and that gender inequality has significant economic cost.* * *Victoria leads the way in gender equality with sustained, enduring and measurable actions.* |

Various topics emerged during the discussion around the vision statement, as follows:

### A vision to effect change at the industry and society levels

All participants supported a vision reflecting the intention to lead change in the industry and the community it serves. It was agreed that the vision should have a positive impact on society more broadly concerning the treatment of women.

All stakeholder groups agreed that the Strategy's vision should lead to a culturally evolved industry where all workers can thrive. Furthermore, the Strategy should support change so that the public views the industry in a positive light and one in which people want to work: *"we want construction to be an industry of choice; an employer of choice."*

It was unanimous that a vision with a narrow context would limit implementation. The Strategy's vision should be broad enough to apply to all stakeholders across the industry, irrespective of size and function, and at different maturity points.

In addition to a vision focussed on *safety and economic benefits,* the following text could be added:

* The creation of not only a safe environment but an environment where women can thrive and all people in the industry have high levels of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.
* To significantly increase the number of women employed in the building, construction, infrastructure and civil engineering sectors.
* The evolution of an industry where anyone has an equal opportunity to thrive.
* Rather than Victoria leading the way, industry leads the way.

Some participants from Government and Employer (commercial and civil sector) groups believed the vision should be aspirational and targeted with a suggested aim of 50/50 gender representation. While those who argued for 50/50 representation recognised this was ambitious in the short term, it was essential to articulate the industry's goal of gender parity. However, not all participants agreed that the goal of 50/50 representation across the sector should form part of the vision. These participants felt the vision should increase women's representation in the industry by providing equal employment opportunities, jobs, leadership roles, and education and training initiatives that improve women's representation.

All participants agreed the vision should include incentivisation through targets that guide change toward gender equality beyond compliance-checking activities. However, employer (civil and commercial sector) stakeholders believed that careful consideration of the 50/50 gender quota goal was needed due to:

* 50/50 gender representation may not be achievable, nor does it address the value of diversity as the central tenant of the Strategy or a successful Strategy.
* 50/50 gender representation does not necessarily reflect that everyone in the room has a voice and is respected.
* Opportunity and employment are not always correlated.
* 50/50 gender representation may result in employment based on gender rather than skill, potentially setting women up to fail rather than developing a capable workforce.
* Using quotas may lead to resentment and a hijacking of the conversation/action.

This Strategy presents an opportunity to rebrand the construction industry. An Employer from the commercial sector commented that this involves *"not just [thinking] about gender equality, but about great outcomes"*. Importantly, it was agreed that until the negative assumptions informing the construction industry’s “brand” are changed and understood by the public, efforts undertaken to improve the industry's reputation will result in superficial change.

### Links with existing strategies

All participants agreed that the relationship between this Strategy and other gender equality strategies should be articulated and aligned.

There was a discussion that:

* The Safe and Strong vision (from the Victorian Government’s *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*) be included as part of the Strategy's vision with some additional text that targets the Victorian construction industry, or
* The Safe and Strong Strategy should be referenced, but a separate vision should be developed to address the issues specific to and in the context of the Victorian construction industry.

Comments made by participants about the Safe and Strong vision included:

* In reference to the first sentence from the Safe and Strong vision: *"All Victorians live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities, and are treated with dignity, respect and fairness."*
  + The meaning of the term “equal power” is unclear.
  + The term "equal power" in the sentence be replaced with "feel empowered."
  + The word "live" be replaced with "work", "society" should be replaced with "industry", and "power" should be removed.
  + The term "safe" implied all workplaces were unsafe and immediately evoked connotations of negativity concerning equality. While safe workplaces are considered an essential part of the vision, safety will only improve with respect, and that "respect" should be inserted before "safe."
* Participants commented that the draft vision was good because it acknowledged economic prosperity and a safe and equal society.
* The Strategy uses the term economic cost, but this fails to include the social costs of not having women in the workforce. Some participants voiced concerns that only aligning gender equality to economic cost could detract from the agenda, as the following arguments could be raised:
  + If it costs money to fix, the incentive is lost to bring about change.
  + The development of models to calculate social and economic costs may be questioned and result in a lack of action.

The potential focus on economic cost fails to acknowledge and address the social costs, which include the question of fairness, respect and the personal cost to women, which effectively results in "harm" (Union participant). A Union participant suggested an additional point that referenced the social benefit, for example: *"that gender inequality impacts on women and families, communities, all of those things more broadly than just economic."*

* Dot point three: *"Victoria leads the way in gender equality with sustained enduring and measurable actions."*  There was strong support for this statement as it reflects that the Victorian construction industry is leading the way in gender equality.

Given the unique opportunity presented, it was highlighted that the vision should challenge accepted gendered norms and work stereotypes contributing to women’s inequality.

### Creating “value”

There was strong agreement between stakeholder groups that the Strategy, to be meaningful, must create awareness and educate on the value of gender equality. The financial and social value of increased diversity in the industry and its relationship with wellbeing must be included in the Strategy. One Employer stakeholder commented:

*"it will be more acceptable or embraced by a lot of the men if they can see that this Strategy benefits their mental wellbeing… a Strategy that's focusing on supporting the wellbeing of all humans in the construction industry and the fact that there's a focus on women is because of the low representation. But the reason they're the focus is because the outcome benefits everyone in the industry."*

Industry Association stakeholders suggested the value proposition for gender equality should also be included in the vision.

In light of the current skills shortage, Employer stakeholders highlighted that the industry "*needs them [women] more than they need us*".

## Challenges the Strategy should address

Participants considered what challenges, barriers, and problems contributed to women’s inequality and how these could be addressed through the Strategy. The key challenges that emerged included: lack of support, the male-dominated culture, and poor access to employment pathways. These themes were raised by different stakeholder groups, as summarised in Table 2. Following the Table, each challenge is considered in more detail.

Table 2. Challenges to women’s equality raised by stakeholder groups

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Identified Issues**  **Stakeholders** | **Government** | **Employer: Commercial** | **Employer: Civil** | **Unions** | **Industry Associations** | **Education** |
| **Support** | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Male Dominated Culture** | | | | | | |
| Safe and respectful workplaces | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Acceptance | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Leave | X | X | X | X | X |  |
| Flexible work arrangements | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Negative reputation and lack of knowledge of construction | X | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Pathways** | | | | | | |
| Access to information about construction related occupations and entry points | X | X | X |  |  | X |
| Access to ongoing education/training to build capability | X | X | X | X |  |  |
| Mapping capabilities | X | X | X |  | X |  |
| Access to meaningful work | X | X | X | X | X |  |

### Support

Lack of support is problematic in attracting women to the industry and has severe consequences for the retention of women in the industry. Lack of support was wide ranging:

* Educator and Employer (commercial sector) stakeholders identified limited workplace support for women seeking feedback, reporting and addressing inappropriate behaviours associated with the workplace, and accessing and undertaking education and training.
* Union stakeholders felt that some of the governing bodies associated with legislation established to protect women did not provide enough support for women to safely undertake their work.
* All stakeholders raised the issue of the lack of amenities such as childcare provided by industry or the government's failure to support women accessing employment.

Support was also discussed in the context of nurturing a feeling of “*belonging and connection"* to the workplace where spaces, both tangible and non-tangible, are created so that women *"feel valued for their contributions and connected”* (Employer commercial sector). The *"next generation [of women] is seeking that sense of connectivity [with the workplace]”,* which has consequences for retention.

Supportive workplaces with a participatory management structure will contribute to a more inclusive workplace where individuals feel connected and less afraid to challenge gendered norms.

### Male-dominated culture

Participants commented that men had established the existing industry culture to privilege men. The male-centric culture has implications for women’s equality as the culture is not safe, is disrespectful, and inflexible work and leave arrangements exclude women from accessing work. Women are still not accepted in the workplace by many workers, nor have access to leadership positions, and gendered work stereotypes continue to deter women from workplace participation. Ironically, this workplace culture not only presents workplace health, safety and accessibility issues for women but also negatively impacts the wellbeing of male workers. One participant commented:

*"men created a toxic environment [for women], which enabled them to thrive. Ironically, they’re no longer thriving, it's flipped on its head, and it's affecting them."*

#### Safe and respectful workplaces

Employer (civil sector), Union and Industry Association stakeholders highlighted that the male-dominated workplace and resultant culture perpetuates an unsafe workplace that excludes women, leading to a lack of participation in all roles and across construction sites and corporate offices. Further, the workplace can be “confronting” and “offensive”, where women may encounter “psychological violence” and/or “physical violence”. Stakeholders agreed there was a need for compulsory workplace behaviour change to remove the existing gender bias. The hostile culture has implications for women's attraction, exploration, retention and growth in the industry.

#### Acceptance

Participants commented that many men in the industry still do not accept women. This lack of acceptance has become an entrenched cultural norm, with implications for women and schoolgirls considering construction as a career path. Participants suggested that women were not accepted as they threatened men’s jobs and were incapable of the work requirements. Furthermore, some men had an attitude that women were only employed to meet quota requirements, which led to resentment. Government and all Employer stakeholder groups agreed that women are still considered *"a bit fringe"* and *"outsiders.*"

The lack of acceptance of women affects their ability to access meaningful work, as men typically access employment through their networks. One participant explained that men get jobs in construction by *"being mates with someone or being related to someone."*

For women to become accepted and enjoy long-term and meaningful career paths, participants stressed the importance of *"buy-in from men at the highest levels and for employers who are men to prioritise gender equality"* as “*men promote men.”* Participants identified that this *"responsibility rests on the shoulder of the manager, both onsite and in the boardroom."*

Significantly, the lack of acceptance of women in the industry contributes to perpetuating inappropriate and disrespectful treatment.

The issues associated with a lack of acceptance of women in construction deter schoolgirls from entering the industry, parents supporting their daughter to work in construction, and women from seeking a career change into construction.

#### Leave policies

All stakeholder groups other than Educators highlighted the existence of leave policies such as parental and carers leave. However, two key issues emerged. The first issue articulated by Union stakeholders identified that despite existing leave entitlements, these lagged behind other industries in terms of associated provisions. One participant commented: “*we're [the construction industry] so far behind the eight ball in terms of parental leave provisions for construction workers generally."*

The second issue articulated by all stakeholder groups (besides the Educator participants) referred to a workplace culture that discourages individuals from taking leave. Participants reflected that taking leave was an inconvenience as those who took leave were viewed as letting down their mates. Taking leave could also be a sign that an individual was not coping, being labelled as “not a real man” as they couldn't cope with the hours and/or the physicality of the work, or was participating in "women's work" such as caring for the family.

Participants also highlighted different expectations emerging around leave provisions as the younger generation entered the industry. It was observed that younger men and women brought different expectations and understanding of gendered work and parental responsibilities, with co-parenting and shared caring responsibilities viewed as the norm. There were expectations from the younger cohort of workers of having access to appropriate leave entitlements and the opportunities to take leave. The prevalence of a culture that demonises taking leave or does not provide leave will lead to an inability to attract and recruit young men and women. Further, by preventing men from taking leave, women's participation in the workforce is limited, including their long term involvement in the construction industry.

For those already working in the industry, poor leave entitlements and the inability to take leave was recognised as problematic for the career development of women. A woman’s career is potentially limited depending on the work opportunities post maternity leave. Participants commented that many women return to roles more junior than their previous roles and *"our industry doesn't like to accommodate for part-time work"* (Union participant).

#### Flexible work arrangements

All groups other than Educator stakeholders highlighted that the rigid six-day work schedule and early start and finish times limited work opportunities for women, given their disproportionate level of caring responsibilities.

The lack of flexible work arrangements referred to by participants, including job-sharing, part-time roles, and later start or earlier finish times, results in women not having the same work experience, career progression, and financial independence opportunities as men.

Participants also highlighted that workplace flexibility and a positive attitude to leave would broadly benefit the industry. Greater flexibility would enable all workers to improve their work-life balance and encourage women to access more work opportunities due to emergent co-parenting opportunities.

Another critical barrier compounding workplace issues was accessing childcare and before/after school care. It was suggested that changing start times from 7 am to 9 am would not solve the problem for those with caring responsibilities as access to childcare was the critical issue, which remained problematic.

Employers and Educators also identified flexibility as essential to access education and training or other matters needed during working hours, such as doctor's appointments or pregnancy scans.

Employers, Government and Union stakeholders commented that existing construction EBAs prohibit flexible work arrangements. One Union participant explained that the current EBAs are *"really inflexible for women"* and *"need to become modernised into the 20th century."*

A participant from the Union highlighted that Unions had fought hard to ensure the *"longstanding security of employment and hours of work versus penalty rates"* and are concerned that the introduction of flexible work arrangements will disadvantage workers and benefit the organisation, as cutting working hours will result in the loss of penalty rates.

In contrast, Employers cited their concerns about flexible working hours as potentially compromising productivity. Reducing an individual's working hours will increase the number of on-site workers if the accepted work schedule remains the same as well as increase the overall project cost. For example, workers completing a twelve/fourteen-hour shift require one site induction. Splitting the shift requires an additional site induction and associated worker, thereby increasing costs and time associated with work packages. Additionally, if the number of workers needed on a job increases, there is concern that access to more workers may be difficult due to the current labour shortfall.

A Union participant commented on the existing complexity around flexible work arrangements:

*'Everybody is worried for different reasons. Unions are worried about introducing flexibility as our history tells us that, basically, that's about f\*\*king workers over so employers can make more money. Employers worry about flexibility because they go, "We can't possibly manage a complex construction if we've got everybody arriving at different times… we can't possibly get it done to maximise the profit margin because profit margins are maximised by making sure I've got some certainty."'*

Employers from both civil and commercial sectors explained that there is a fear of job sharing among workers due to concerns about the loss of employment opportunities. One Employer (civil sector) participant explained:

*"People, once they've got their job, they get very territorial over it - that's mine; I'm not going to share because that second person might do it a bit better, and then they will get the extra days or the Saturday [overtime hours]."*

All stakeholders agreed that more flexibility in the workplace would improve women's attraction and retention in their early experience and growth career stages. Flexible working hours will enable women to meet their responsibilities in and outside the workplace. Participants agreed that the more women that can access work, the more normalised their presence becomes – challenging the norm that they “do not belong.” Further, flexible work arrangements enable women with partners in the industry to share domestic responsibilities, enabling both individuals to work and challenging the assumption that men partake in paid work, and women are responsible for domestic work.

#### Negative reputation and lack of knowledge about the industry

Participants commented that there is a perception within society that construction work is not financially lucrative, does not command respect, is physically demanding, dangerous, and does not require academic acumen. All stakeholder groups were concerned that this negative view of construction did not reflect the sophistication of the industry and discouraged women and girls from entering the industry.

There was a clear recognition that occupations outside of construction have knowledge and skills directly transferrable to construction jobs. A better understanding of these transferrable skills would enable women to identify opportunities in and across the industry. The lack of awareness of transferrable skills and knowledge of available occupations and roles presents additional barriers to attracting and retaining women.

### Pathways

#### Access to information about construction-related occupations and entry points

Employer stakeholders (commercial and civil sectors) were acutely concerned about the pipeline of women entering the industry. All stakeholder groups identified a lack of awareness within the broader community about the required skills, career opportunities, and pathways into the construction industry (building, commercial, infrastructure and civil) in management, trades and semi-skilled roles, which prevented the attraction, exploration and recruitment of women to the industry. One Employer (civil sector) commented that *"most [women and girls] don't know what civil work means, what that looks like, what roles are within that, and what the civil construction industry does."*

Clear pathways for women transitioning from university degrees into professional graduate roles in construction through industry graduate programs were identified as well-established. These programs were viewed as clearly communicated to university students by construction organisations via career fairs, guest presentations, and employer-of-choice programs. However, it was considered that the promotion of construction-related degrees to school girls was poorly promoted within schools.

Attracting women into trades was particularly problematic in the context of school leavers. VET organisations and employers have a much smaller presence in schools and associated career education initiatives. Enrolling in a VET-associated certificate course requires that employment is first secured. The lack of awareness of trade certificates, pathways and connections to an employer inhibits the number of women entering trades from school compared to those enrolling in degree programs and transitioning into the industry.

Educator stakeholders commented that there is a considerable misunderstanding in schools and the community of 1) what an apprenticeship is, 2) what trade occupations exist and what they entail, and 3) career progression once qualified. Further, the lack of a clear entry point inhibits mature-aged women from seeking a career change and considering construction as a valid and suitable option.

All participants agreed that societal and gendered work assumptions around ability, activities, and workplace limit not only the consideration of the construction industry as a career path for women but also the proactive exploration required to identify entry pathways. These assumptions and lack of understanding about the industry further inhibit the promotion of careers in construction to schoolgirls, as the sector is omitted from career advice within the secondary system. Careers councillors, teachers, girls and their families often lack access to the information required to make informed career choices based on the opportunities offered by the industry. Subsequently, incorrect assumptions inform career decision-making. One Employer commented:

*"I've spoken to careers teachers at jobs like Expo nights, and they go, "So, what exactly do you guys do?" And I thought, "Oh dear, we're in trouble."*

The omission of subject choices in technology and engineering and the lack of career education for non-traditional occupations in early secondary and primary education deters schoolgirls from exploring careers in construction. To overcome this barrier, participants from all stakeholder groups argued for increased communication of work opportunities to girls in lower secondary education, which:

* focused on women in construction,
* challenges gendered work assumptions in construction, and
* builds confidence that girls can undertake construction-related work.

One Educator commented*: "there needs to be a curriculum piece in Year 7, Year 8 for everyone to try and have an informed choice".* Another Educator commented, *"it's not about targeting students when they get to that maturity point of Years 9 and 10. It's starting in junior school, and it's also the education of the family."*

The lack of awareness about the industry in the early, formative years was viewed as particularly problematic concerning the exploration and attraction stage of the career lifecycle.

Accessing workplace experience was also identified by Educator stakeholders as necessary in raising awareness about the potential opportunities that construction presents to women. However, accessing workplace experience was viewed as problematic. The Education Department's work experience requirements, the new child safe and OHS regulations, and established relationships between industry and schools limit school girls' exposure to construction-related occupations and potential career opportunities. One Educator stakeholder commented:

*“It's one thing to say it'd be great to get them [women] involved, and women should be involved, but actually giving them the opportunity to do that is really quite challenging*."

Educators highlighted that while industry and other groups had developed programs for schools to raise the profile of the industry and STEM-related careers, accessing information about these opportunities so that they can be built into a career education program within a school is challenging. The disparate approach to construction-related career awareness and experience reflected a disconnect between the Department of Education, schools, VE/HE and industry. As one Educator commented:

*"It's not just going into schools. How do you get communication across the Education Department, Apprenticeships Victoria, all your different building organisations, subcontractors, et cetera… it's about communication and how we communicate across."*

Education, Union and Industry Association stakeholders also expressed concern that there was still a gap in awareness and communication about training pathways for mature-aged women seeking training to enter the industry. This gap existed for women working in semi-skilled roles and women exploring construction as a career change.

#### Education/training

Attraction

**Pre-apprenticeship programs:** Education, Union and Industry Association stakeholders highlighted the importance of pre-apprenticeship programs for women’s exploration and recruitment into the industry. However, due to rigid delivery modes of education, i.e. Monday to Friday, full-time during the day, not all women can access these programs if they have work commitments and caring responsibilities.

**Wage level:** Employers (commercial), Unions and Government stakeholders all cited that the low apprentice and trainee wage prevents women from looking for a career change into construction or moving from semi-skilled roles into a trade role. The low wage also has implications for attraction and retention as the low wage has a financial impact on “making ends meet”.

Retention in training

Employers and Union stakeholders expressed concern regarding the retention of apprentices and trainees owing to a lack of governance and oversight. One Union stakeholder commented:

*"We have a terrible completion rate for apprenticeships, and we have no real regulation on apprenticeships more broadly."*

The quality of training and supervision, in addition to the workplace culture, was raised as providing poor learning experiences and low levels of wellbeing. One Government stakeholder commented that when working in the education and training system:

*"many kids drop out because they were getting bullied, harassed, they weren't getting the right training, and no one goes in [to supervise or audit the system]."*

Educator stakeholders believed that more women in technology and VET training roles would help challenge the industry's male-dominated culture and attract and retain more women in non-traditional occupations.

Participants commented that improving the training system is vital to increasing the number of women completing their training and becoming qualified tradeswomen.

Career development and retention

All participants noted the importance of access and time to build technical and interpersonal capability across all career stages by providing affordable training and education programs for women in all roles and occupations.

#### Mapping the capabilities of construction-related tasks

Employers, Industry Associations, and Government stakeholders identified the importance of mapping the capabilities and skills associated with work in the industry to attract and retain women. Mapping will help to deconstruct the work stereotypes and conscious and unconscious bias within the industry and provide information to those outside the industry with little knowledge of construction. Unpacking the job, tasks and role and linking them to capabilities and skills can illustrate how work has evolved in the construction and civil sector and that physicality is not a barrier for women.

Importantly, capability mapping enables those seeking a career path or career change to identify synergies between their skills and skills required in construction work. Capability mapping can increase the inherent opportunities available in the workplace and enable women to find employment as their life circumstances change and to improve their career opportunities.

An Employer (commercial) participant commented that capability mapping could provide the following:

*"career diversity as a construction worker, for example, doesn't feel like they don't have any other role in moving within the industry… or women don't need to select a role based on a task with more [workplace] flexibility than other [opportunities she may prefer]…this opens the industry up for more transferability of skills [and opportunity]."*

Additionally, increased flexibility around matching roles to capabilities encourages the industry's evolution as roles are understood and aligned to capabilities.

#### Access to employment, meaningful work and career progression

Government and Employer stakeholder groups commented that the male-dominated culture presented a barrier to women accessing work across all stages of the career lifecycle. For women in a management position, the critical areas of concern were the long-held assumptions that they would be unable to concurrently manage positions of responsibility and family commitments due to the lack of flexibility in the workplace and long working hours. While opportunities to access early career/graduate positions had significantly improved over the years, an identified retention issue for women in middle, senior and executive management positions was the lack of career opportunities.

Trades and semi-skilled women faced barriers to accessing employment and work opportunities, given the perception that they couldn't and didn't belong, which manifested in recruitment and retention issues.

Employer groups (civil and commercial sector) identified the tendering phase of a project was problematic in terms of recruiting women into the industry or accessing work due to tight project timeframes. A participant working in the civil sector commented:

*"The reality is with the competitive tender process, a day makes a big difference for a subcontractor. They don't want to train people. They don't want to have anyone who's not quick. They don't want to have to tell someone what to do. All they give a crap about is getting it done because, in the end, most of them have gone in at two or three per cent, and the time period, in commercial and civil, it's the same."*

Participants identified that a failure of the current tendering process was the exclusion of costed time to enable women to attend training, further limiting their work opportunities. One Employer commented that women entering the industry often do so as traffic managers. While traffic management is now an accepted role for women in construction, it is limiting as women are often *"pigeonholed"* due to a lack of access to training in other areas of construction.

Access to different site roles is further limited due to the perception that women are *"unproductive"* in more "*masculine"* roles such as builders' labourers, hoists or crane operators.

Educator stakeholders believed that there exists a subconscious attitude that trade and semi-skilled work are only for the young or middle-aged, with *"20 to 28 the golden years."* While mature age women can access apprenticeships, transitioning once qualified into employment was considered difficult unless women were able to "*sell their transferrable skills."* Providing women with the knowledge and confidence to identify and communicate transferable skills was identified as necessary by Industry Associations, Employers, and Educator stakeholders.

Industry Association stakeholders commented that recruiting into construction fails to *"value experience outside of our industry"* and that "*the expectation from most people within the industry [concerning-mature aged entrants] is that you've got to go back to Base 1 and build your way back up again."* Despite years of transferrable experience and the development of relevant skills, those entering construction as a second or third career must retrain in a junior role. The low wage and need for further training deter women from entering construction. Further, the industry perceives the need for training as removing workers from the workplace and decreasing productivity.

### Aligning the challenges with the career cycle model

The challenges raised in the preceding section are considered in the context of the career cycle model of exploration (attract), education and training (attract and recruit), early experience (recruit and retain), and growth (retain), outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges aligned with career stage

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Challenges**  **Career**  **Stage** | **Exploration**  **(attract)** | **Education and Training**  **(attract and recruit)** | **Early Experience**  **(recruit and retain)** | **Growth**  **(retain)** |
| **Support** | X | X | X | X |
| **Male Dominated culture** | | | | |
| Safe and respectful workplaces | X | X | X | X |
| Acceptance | X |  | X | X |
| Leave | X |  | X | X |
| Flexible work arrangements | X | X | X | X |
| Negative reputation and lack of knowledge of construction | X |  |  | X |
| **Pathways** | | | | |
| Access to information about construction related occupations and entry points | X | X |  | X |
| Access to ongoing education/training to build capability | X | X |  |  |
| Mapping capabilities | X |  | X | X |
| Access to meaningful work |  |  | X | X |

## Intersectionality

Participants were asked to consider:

|  |
| --- |
| *Gender inequality is impacted by other forms of disadvantage and discrimination including:*   * *Aboriginal women* * *Culturally diverse communities* * *Rural and regional women* * *Women with disabilities* |

Participants suggested that the new Strategy should include all groups not represented in past Strategies, such as the LGBTQIA+ community. The Strategy has a role in ensuring industry acknowledges the unique challenges and disadvantages these workers can experience.

Participants held concerns that the Strategy could not address the complex and nuanced actions required to fully address the issues associated with intersectionality. Employers (civil and commercial sectors), Unions, and Government stakeholders were concerned that trying to manage multiple levels of disadvantage at this stage of the Strategy would not be achievable. Further, many participants felt that if the Strategy worked, it would work for all women. One Employer (civil) commented:

*"I think plenty of research suggests that if you get women into decision making positions, they promote equality across the whole spectrum."*

Some stakeholders suggested that challenges experienced by intersectional groups (aboriginal/first nations women, culturally diverse communities, rural and regional women, and women with disabilities) would be addressed through project management plans or gender equality project plans.

An emerging concern requiring further attention was *"migrant labour."* Union and Employer (civil sector) participants stated that this group of women had been identified as a future labour source for the industry and is easily exploitable.

Employer and Industry Association stakeholders commented on the prevalence of ageism in the industry. In addition to gender, it is perceived to detract from a woman’s capability and is an additional barrier to the recruitment of women.

Participants suggested that the first step of the Strategy should be to explore and identify the areas of deeply entrenched inequality and then target appropriate forms of interventions concerning intersectionality. The development of analytical programs for data collection would be helpful only if they captured multiple levels of disadvantage across the supply chain. However, any data to be collected must be explicitly communicated and connected to existing social procurement programs rather than replicating existing requirements so as not to place more pressure on the industry. It was considered that introducing intersectionality quotas would be very challenging to meet.

Employer stakeholders highlighted the value of addressing disadvantages through skills and employment programs. However, these programs are costly, and their value may be slow to emerge. One Employer who implemented employment programs for the disadvantaged commented: *"we do it because we know it's absolutely the right thing to do, and we know that it has massive benefits to society and the projects as well."*

Concerns were raised that current government social procurement tender targets require the inclusion of training for minority groups so that they are job-ready for a role in construction. However, some participants noted that social procurement tender requirements didn’t always meet the stated objectives of the social procurement policy, and could add financial pressure to employers and stigmatise those employed through the program.

Key concerns held by Employers (civil and commercial sectors) that the next Strategy and associated actions should be address included:

* The tendering process requires a project cost/price prior to awarding of the contract, therefore changes to subsequent procurement requirements after this time could compromise the financial viability of the project.
* Training costs relative to work undertaken, as explained by one Employer participant (commercial):
  + - *'if you're making between 1%-3%, you're doing well. So, when you're talking about a 70 million dollar job [and training associated with social procurement will result in an additional] 1% of costs, [equivalent to] $700,000 [on that 70 million dollar job] to employ some other people, then it just doesn't make sense.'*
* A lack of recognition by the government related to initiatives undertaken by construction organisations or consideration of past work pertaining to future tendering metrics:
  + *"There's no kudos given for us educating and taking those businesses on those journeys."*
  + *"we’re not graded on that (work previously done with disadvantaged jobseekers) for the next project about the longer term impacts of those things we’ve implemented.”*

A lack of support by the government to assist organisations in meeting their social procurement requirements.

* + - *"What we're not getting back from government is that ongoing support."*
* Employment and training that do not result in meaningful work.
  + *“I think we need to work out how we actually create the skills opportunities when we’re looking at those more diverse groups so that we’re not just picking up unskilled people and having somebody coming in and working as a Peggy as an example.”*
* Individuals within the identified cohort did not want to work in construction, meaning the tender quotas were impossible.

## Key Priority areas

Participants were asked to consider four suggested priority areas:

|  |
| --- |
| * Economic equity * Leadership and representation * Health and wellbeing * Ending gendered violence |

There was agreement that the four suggested priority areas were relevant and appropriate for the Strategy, with the addition of a priority area focussed on the education and training sector.

Depending on the final scope and vision, some participants suggested replacing *“women”* with *“all genders”* across the priority area descriptions. Furthermore, the relationship between the existing industry culture and each key priority area should be prefaced, setting the context for associated objectives.

The following section overviews each priority area in detail, and outlines participants’ feedback and suggested modifications to draft content. *Refer to the appendix for the draft content that was discussed during the focus group*.

The findings are structured into the emergent themes generated relative to each priority area. The priority area findings then conclude with specific comments from participants about the suggested text.

### Priority Area 1: Economic Equity

Four themes emerged in the discussion of economic equity: the gender pay gap and lack of senior representation, the need to identify and communicate transferrable skills associated with construction “work”, economic literacy, and workplace culture and flexibility.

#### The gender pay gap and senior level representation

Government, Union and Employer (civil and commercial sectors) participants identified the pay gap between the salaries and superannuation of men and women as a critical area of economic inequality. Participants suggested that salary transparency would enable women to achieve pay parity and better inform career decisions.

Employers also identified that the opportunities afforded to women needed to be addressed by the Strategy, given the lack of women in senior leadership roles. A participant commented that “*promotion must be based on merit and accountability, not tenure and friends*”, reflecting the intertwined relationship between gender, advantage/opportunity, and existing economic inequity within the industry.

One Employer (civil sector) representative commented that access to opportunity was essential to meeting the listed objective: *“We will empower women to achieve economic security.”* Opportunity in this context is the ability to continue developing existing knowledge across all career stages, access to support, and a clear and communicated career path associated with different occupations and roles.

#### Identification of transferrable skills

Employer and Government stakeholders highlighted the need to identify and communicate transferable skills associated with construction “work” as central to economic equity. As discussed in section 3.4, many transferrable skills exist between other industries and the construction industry. Identifying these and mapping them across the different occupations and roles in the industry will assist in creating pathways at all career stages for women, addressing both work and financial opportunities and the current skills shortage facing the industry.

#### Economic literacy

Employers, Educators, Industry Associations, and Government stakeholders agreed that economic literacy education for women working in the industry was vital to achieving economic equality. Financial literacy education is essential given:

* There is an increasing number of young women entering the industry as apprentices at the ages of 16, 17, and 18, earning significantly more than others but with limited financial skills.
* The need to plan for future financial security, given women are more likely to have career breaks.
* Pay inequality between genders and lower opportunities to attain senior-level positions such that women generally earn less than men.

Educators also suggested this section should highlight and celebrate the advantages of economic equity. For example, tradeswomen can own and operate businesses, leading to financial independence.

#### Workplace culture: flexibility and respect

All stakeholder groups identified the provision of flexible workplaces as allowing more women to enter and stay in the industry, thus increasing their economic prospects.

*Comments on suggested text:*

* All participants felt the heading of this priority area should include social: *“Social and economic equity”* or *“Economic and social equity.”*
* Dot point 1: *“We will reduce the systemic, cultural and institutional barriers to women’s workforce participation.”*
  + *“Reduce”* be replaced with *“remove.”*
  + “We will aspire to eliminate…” replacing “We will reduce.”
  + Add education as a barrier in the text, i.e. *“…the systemic, cultural, institutional and educational barriers.”*
* Dot point 2: *“We will address gender segregated work and improve workplace safety and culture.”*
  + Add *“in doing so”* after the word *“and.”*
  + Split *“gender segregated work”* from *“improve workplace safety and culture.”* Participants commented these two points are separate as *“gender segregated work”* focuses on accessing work while *“improving workplace safety and culture”* focuses on addressing the associated issues and would be more appropriate in Priority Area 3.
  + Workplace safety and culture are not specific to any gender, so *“for all”* should be added to the end of the objective.
* Dot point 3: *“We will empower women to achieve economic security.”*
  + How we will empower women to achieve economic security should be added to this sentence. For example, by encouraging and facilitating …[career paths, literacy tools or opportunities for further knowledge building and support]
  + Replace *“empower”* with *“educate”* or *“encourage and facilitate access to education, training, support to create career pathways etc.”*
  + Others liked the term “empower” as long as it is achieved through the facilitation/provision of the tools to empower women.

Education stakeholders suggested the addition of an objective that focused on creating educational pathways, such as *“We will create pathways for school-age young women into trades and technology studies and post-secondary employment.”*

### Priority Area 2: Leadership

Participants identified two themes relative to this priority area: leading by example and increasing leadership opportunities for women, supported by training.

#### Leading by example: Behavioural change

Leadership was recognised as both informal and formal activities and behaviours undertaken by all regardless of gender resulting in change within their sphere of influence. For example, a Union participant explained:

*“Everyone can be a leader themselves in whatever role they’re playing. You don’t need to have the title of a construction manager to be making a change in the workplace.”*

Participants described leadership as facilitating respectful workplace behaviours that challenged gendered workplace norms, which was an important addition to this priority area. It was agreed that clear behavioural expectations are missing from the industry at all levels. As reflected in one comment made by a participant:

*“It’s not just about being in a leadership position or providing pathways; it’s also about how we lead in terms of our behaviours and what we choose to accept and what we choose to call out, whether you’re a senior or a junior. It doesn’t matter where you work; if someone’s doing something hurtful and discriminatory, you say something. That’s leadership to me.”*

As reflected in the quote above, leadership was understood as acting against those exhibiting disrespectful behaviours and setting a tone that disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated.

#### Leadership opportunities

All participants agreed there had been a lack of leadership opportunities for women, and this is important as leadership roles enable influence and ability to action change. Positions of influence include board roles, senior management, organisation ownership, and delegate roles within the Union.

Government participants were concerned that construction organisations and subcontractors would have a limited understanding of leadership opportunities, what was expected of them, or how to achieve such outcomes. This stakeholder group believed that central to the success of this priority area is an understanding of what leadership and representation would mean to each organisation and different sectors within the industry. As such, it is essential that the Strategy clearly explains what women in leadership positions look like, i.e., types of roles.

Union representatives commented on the limited number of women delegates and the importance of increasing representation in these positions.

Leadership behaviour was understood to support, encourage and facilitate career pathways and opportunities for women. Consequently, all participants highlighted the importance of training to support women in developing the skills required to undertake such positions. However, the provision of training can be perceived by others that women are not in senior level leadership positions because they are incapable. Training must be communicated and developed from the standpoint that skill development is required not because women are unable but lack opportunity. Training, therefore should be designed to prepare women for a role where they will likely be in the minority.

Further, when assembling leadership teams, the diversity of representation was identified as essential to actioning change rather than perpetuating the status quo.

Comments on suggested text:

* Respect should also be included in this area with reference to all genders leading by doing or leading by example.
* Dot point 1: *“We will introduce measures to increase the representation and diversity of women in positions of influence in ways that are meaningful to them.”*
  + Replace *“of women”* with *“all”* people and remove *“of influence.”*
  + Participants felt this point was incomplete and questioned the meaning of *“meaningful.”* It was suggested that the word “*meaningful”* be removed.
* Dot point 3: *“We will support equal representation.”*
  + It was suggested that this sentence be expanded to: “*We will support equal representation across every level and role in our industry*”, as it is about representation rather than leadership.

### Priority Area 3: Health and Wellbeing

#### Priority Area: OHS or Health and Wellbeing and Safety

Government representatives discussed Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and commented that it had become an umbrella term encompassing many issues. Participants questioned whether OHS could/should be split into two topic areas; Health and wellbeing (physical and mental health) and Safety. Workplace flexibility could sit within the health and wellbeing area or be categorised as a standalone priority area.

Educators also discussed whether “health” should be considered according to its dimensions: social health and wellbeing, mental health and wellbeing, physical health and wellbeing, and emotional health and wellbeing. Gendered violence, a recognised safety issue, could sit within this priority area.

Employer stakeholders further commented that OHS safety-rated systems, policies and practices are well progressed within construction, however safety that is related to poor workplace culture and associated hazards (e.g., gendered violence, harassment and bullying) is yet to be understood and adequately addressed as an OHS issue.

Educator stakeholders suggested that an education piece should sit within this priority area to prepare organisations to create a safe workplace culture for their employees as defined under the OHS Act.

Industry Association stakeholders suggested that the text in this section should be crafted to remove the onus on women to be responsible for their mental health, given the hostile environments in which they work. The industry's culture is everyone’s responsibility, and investment from the government and employers should ensure that a safe, healthy, and happy working environment is provided for all workers.

*Suggested amendments to priority area bullet points:*

* Dot point 1: *“We will ensure our workplaces consider and respond to the needs of women.”*
  + It was suggested that the “*needs of women”* be spelt out in the Strategy; otherwise, it may be interpreted as a provision of amenity.
  + It was suggested that the following words be worked into the text: *“understand”, “prevention”, “feeling comfortable in your environment”, and “safe”.*
* Dot point 2: *“We will make access to mental health services safer and more effective.”*
  + It was suggested that this could be amended to: *“We will remove barriers to accessing mental health services for all people onsite.”* Or, *“We will make health, mental and physical, services safe and effective.” Or, “We will make access to mental health services safe and more readily available.”*

### Priority Area 4: Ending Gendered Violence

#### Important but not an immediate priority area

Participants agreed on the importance of preventing gendered violence in the workplace. While all participants felt it was important to include gendered violence in the Strategy, the level of priority it should be given differed amongst participants. Some participants felt that access and pathways for women were of a more immediate priority.

#### Polarising

Some Government, Educator and Industry Associations and all Employer stakeholders felt that gendered violence was a polarising term and left them feeling *“confronted”* and *“uncomfortable*” as it represented *“something that’s very bad.”* Some Employer (commercial sector) participants thought that it was *“offensive”* and would not resonate with male workers in the industry, specifically those whose behaviours the Strategy is trying to influence. An Employer stakeholder stated:

*“if you go onto a site and have a discussion like that in a toolbox, then 90% of the people are going to shut down straight away and say this is bulls\*\*t.”*

As reflected in the quote above, the term “gendered violence” may be *“counterproductive”* and not facilitate the desired change, and may *“make the conversation even more difficult to have, because it’s almost like telling people or telling men that you’re violent.”*

Participants also commented that the language used to articulate the priority was very reactionary: *“we are going to stop gendered violence”* and counter to the other proactive priority areas. Participants understood that gendered violence is present in the behaviours of some in the industry. However, there is a need for this priority area to proactively address behaviours that create healthy workplaces in a way that encourages individuals to seek out pathways for building good skills and emotional/anger management rather than deter them through communication that is judgemental and demonising. One Employer participant stated: *‘it’s really important how we package that up, that they see it as a good thing rather than “I’m a monster.”’*

Employer, Industry Association, and Government participants suggested replacing the term “gendered violence” with something more positive, such as “respect” or “respect in the workplace”. It was thought that the priority area and its objective might gain more traction for those delivering associated programs if the language was changed to avoid alienating those participating. One Industry Association representative commented:

*“Respect is at the core. If you can get respect, if you can drive the notion of respect, if you can sack people for being disrespectful if you can engage and promote people because of their work on respect. If you drive that, you drive change.”*

However, other Government, Educator and Union participants suggested that the language is uncomfortable because these issues are not frequently discussed in the workplace and, as such, felt the term should stay. One Educator commented:

*‘The term violence should be used. And I favour more the direct approach and say, “No, you need to get on board.” I’m over it. It damages young men as well. Misogyny damages everyone. It’s cruel. It’s demeaning. And we need to be very direct in challenging it.’*

The confronting nature of the priority area could be offset if it was clear that the Strategy would develop a process and procedure to address the issue.

#### The (mis)understanding of Gendered Violence

There was agreement that “gendered violence” within the industry was primarily understood as domestic or physical violence. This understanding does not align with the WorkSafe Victoria definition: *any behaviour affecting a person because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, which creates a risk to health and safety or related to workplace behaviour.*

One Employer (civil sector) commented, *“I’d put a description there. If I did a prestart and said the term gendered violence, I’d get a lot of blank faces.”* A narrow understanding of the term related to physical violence would inhibit individuals from identifying with the issue and taking responsibility for their current and future actions. One participant commented:

*‘A man seeing that [the term Gender Violence] would go, “oh, I’m not violent. I don’t hit women” but he may make snide remarks, and comment that you should wear short shorts? Or he might say “I don’t hit my wife, therefore all these other things that I do …” Or, “even if I hit my wife, I don’t hit my work colleagues.”’*

Participants also identified that this narrow understanding of gendered violence might impact how women understand their experience, as stated by an Employer (civil sector):

*“I think some people might fall through the cracks as they might not automatically think that gendered violence includes those things aligned with harassment.”*

Additionally, some Employers discussed the lack of immediate identification of gender violence with workplace behaviours. One participant commented:

*“When I first read it [Gender Violence], my mind went straight away to domestic violence, and I had to recalibrate my thoughts. It could be bullying, and it could be coercive behaviours and those kinds of things, which we do have in the industry.”*

Employers (civil and commercial sectors) suggested using the term “gender-based harassment/discrimination” and then, in brackets “gendered violence”.

Further, while tier 1 and 2 organisations had the capacity and understanding to act within the priority area, subcontractors picking up this key priority area would not *“understand how this relates to building equality naturally”.* For widespread dissemination and action, education and training are vital to improving the understanding of the terms/behaviours and, ultimately, actions so that individuals are empowered to think, *“I can contribute to that piece myself”.*

All participants agreed that if the term is to remain in the Strategy, it must be accompanied by an education campaign and a clear explanation to increase industry engagement in the priority area. Additionally, the wording and its tone needed significant thought as it could result in a lost opportunity to connect with workers and educate them on the issue.

#### Gender neutral approach

Participants also highlighted that gender violence does not only occur between men and women but all people (e.g., man to man). Participants noted that as construction is male dominated, there needs to be a gender-neutral approach to gendered violence in the Strategy.

#### Work and Home?

All stakeholder groups agreed that the culture of the construction industry and the work environment could validate and enable a perpetrator's behaviour both on the job and at home. As such, family violence was identified by some participants as an important issue for the Strategy to address. However, the boundary between work and family and the employer's responsibility for ending family violence was discussed as something that needed clear demarcation. Employers and Government stakeholders felt an employer could not take responsibility for *“fixing”* family violence, nor should they have the right to *“invade people’s personal space.”* Employer stakeholders felt there needed to be a stronger link to the workplace; otherwise, this priority area falls out of scope. As such, these stakeholder groups felt the Strategy was best placed to focus on violence in the workplace with the knowledge that a workplace education campaign would benefit society more broadly.

There was a conversation about gendered violence merging into the health and wellbeing priority area. However, most participants felt gendered violence needed to remain a stand-alone priority area given the amount of work to be done, the considerable duration of the Strategy, and the recommendations from the Victorian Government’s *Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment* (https://www.vic.gov.au/ministerial-taskforce-workplace-sexual-harassment).

#### Victoria’s existing OHS legislation

Union participants highlighted that there was insufficient recognition that gendered violence is an occupational health and safety hazard and a contravention of the OHS Act. Further, there needed to be an objective related to penalties for employers and employees that fail to meet their obligations under the Act. Developing an industry-wide standard policy and procedures for compulsory reporting for all employers was suggested for inclusion in this priority area.

*Comments on suggested text:*

* It was suggested that *“ending gendered violence”* be changed as it is negative, whereas all the other priority areas are positive. It was suggested that this statement should be proactive rather than reactive: *“safe and respectful/fair workplaces.*
* The bullet points need to be more inclusive of all non-violent and antisocial behaviour, and violence should be more reflective of the violence experienced onsite, recognising that this may be transferred to the home.
* Point 1: *“We will address family violence, sexual harm and all forms of violence against women before it happens through early intervention.”*
  + It was suggested that this objective should explicitly include sexual harassment, *“violence against women*” should be replaced with “*all/all genders/everyone*”, and *“family violence*” should be replaced with *“gendered violence”.*
  + This priority requires a stronger statement such as: *“We will not tolerate family violence, sexual harm or sexual harassment in our industry.”* This is to ensure it is clear that there is no place for such acts.
  + It was suggested that this text be changed to focus on the workplace: *“We will promote a safe workplace free of violence, sexual harm against women or anyone through early intervention or identification.”*
* Point 2: *We will focus on measures to make workplaces safer for people of all genders.*
  + Discussion of dot point 2 identified that “all genders” and “women” are not used consistently. It was suggested that “women” be replaced with “all genders” for all the dot points in this priority area.
* Point 3: *We will strengthen processes, access and outcomes for victims and survivors of gender harm and violence.*
  + It was suggested *that “strengthen”* be replaced with *“evaluate”.*
  + Strengthening processes and outcomes for victims and survivors was highlighted as important, but so was the inclusion of stronger consequences and penalties for perpetrators. It was suggested that regulating inappropriate behaviour sat with employers, Unions and WorkSafe. It was also recommended that education and training be added to this objective, as these processes need to occur to end gendered violence.
  + There needs to be an incentive for men to report unacceptable behaviour by other men because women are not likely to do so for fear of being further marginalised.

### Priority Area 5: Education

While education and training were recognised as implicit in all the priority areas in the Strategy, all stakeholder groups felt an education priority area should be added. Education was discussed in relation to adding content to the education system curriculum.

One Industry Association stakeholder commented:

*“Education and training should be it’s own thing. Education and training and the skills for the careers advisors, for the employers, for the TAFE teachers, for everybody. A lot of people need to be educators. “*

As reflected in the quote, education must also focus on education within the industry.

Education must also occur outside of the industry across the community more broadly, which presents a rebranding opportunity.

## Governance and Implementation

All participants believed the Strategy should have oversight by a government body that can develop policy and manage implementation. A committee under the BICC with full representation of all stakeholders was suggested. However, caution was raised as changing State leadership and politics may render such a committee defunct, compromising the Strategy's ongoing work and success. Furthermore, a regular external audit from a third-party organisation was deemed necessary.

# Findings for Action Plan 2023-2026

## Introduction

The second part of focus group discussion explored initiatives informing an action plan for 2023-2026 (three financial years). For each priority area, participants were asked to consider:

* What are the top 3-4 activities that should be in the 2023-2026 action plan?
* Who is responsible for each action?
* What funding or change to existing practice is needed?

Actions in this section of the report are aligned with the career cycle model of exploration (attract), education and training (attract and recruit), early experience (recruit and retain), and growth (retain).

## Support and addressing the male dominated culture through accountability and recognition

Two themes emerged which identified that women working in the industry face a lack of support (Table 4), and a male-dominated culture which poses obstacles around accountability of inappropriate behaviours and the recognition of skills, capability, and their application in the workplace (Table 5).

### *Support*

Table 4 below outlines actions that can support women’s participation and progress in construction across their career lifecycle.

Table 4. Actions to support women in the workplace

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue/s addressed** | **Exploration**  **(attract)** | **Education and Training**  **(attract and recruit)** | **Early Experience**  **(recruit and retain)** | **Growth**  **(retain)** | **Responsibility** |
| Support | Childcare services are set up by businesses or built by superannuation organisations with a reduced fee for members. | | | | Government  Industry organisation  Superannuation funds |
| Women represented during EBA negotiations. | | | | Industry organisations |
| Establish a paid mentoring/buddying program between women working and women in VET and HE education. | | |  | Government (Department of Education and Training, Apprenticeships Victoria),  Industry Associations  VET and HE providers |
|  |  | Establish paid mentoring programs between women (mentees) in early /middle career stages and senior-level members (men and women mentors) in the industry. | | Government (Department of Education and Training, Apprenticeships Victoria)  Industry Associations  VET and HE providers |
|  |  | The establishment of safe spaces for women to enable them to discuss what they have been experiencing or remove themselves from an unsafe environment. | | Government (Department of Education and Training)  Industry organisations  VET and HE providers |
|  |  | Pink/purple/silver/gold/rainbow coloured hat/t-shirt program, which identifies trained individuals (across all levels) who can provide support onsite to women in need. | | Government  Unions  Industry Associations |
| Inclusion of a gendered violence/respect module in white card training. | | | | Unions  VET  Industry Associations |
| More women delivering trades training and white card training. | | |  | Unions,  VET  Industry Associations. |
|  | Workplace training for all recruitment staff to reduce unconscious bias. | | | Industry Associations,  Government  Unions |
|  | Gendered violence/respect module in OHS units of competence. | |  | Government, Industry Associations |
| Research to identify barriers encountered by women experiencing multiple layers of disadvantage (intersectionality) and the actions required to improve their workplace experience. | | | | Industry Associations  Government  Unions |
|  | Development of economic literacy and leadership programs for women in the industry | | | | Government  Industry Associations |
|  | Promotion system based on merit | | | | Government  Industry Association |

### *Addressing the male-dominated culture through accountability and recognition*

To ensure women are accepted into a respectful and inclusive workplace, all workers need to be educated and accountable for their actions towards or in support of women. Further, recognition of those who are well progressed in developing an inclusive and diverse workplace such that others can learn from and follow their lead. The actions outlined in Table 5 are suggested as those which can address the male-dominated culture and the current barriers to women's progress.

Table 5. Actions to address the masculine culture of the industry

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue addressed** | **Exploration**  **(attract)** | **Education and Training**  **(attract and recruit)** | **Early Experience**  **(recruit and retain)** | **Growth**  **(retain)** | **Responsibility** |
| **Male-dominated culture**  Safe and respectful workplaces  Leave and Flexible work arrangements  Acceptance of women | Transparency of wages and work towards decreasing the gender pay gap. | | | | Industry Associations  Unions |
| Trial new ways of working and rewarding innovative work practices like job sharing, PT work, flexibility and mental health initiatives. | | | | Government (Apprenticeships Victoria),  Industry Associations |
|  |  | Organisations clarify and discuss promotional pathways with women and train staff (who recruit) to reduce unconscious bias in promotion. | | Industry Associations |
|  |  |  | Clear work paths for women returning to work from maternity leave. | Industry Associations  Unions |
|  | Organisation leaders to implement policies and training on diversity and culture to improve inclusiveness and reduce the positive reinforcement of presenteeism. | | | Industry Associations  Employers  Unions |
|  | Explore the development of an external body/unit/department to report and manage gender violence in the workplace. | | | Government |
|  | Diversity and inclusion excellence awards for small to medium businesses through government or industry Associations. | | | Government  Industry Associations |
|  | External auditing of a construction organisation's performance against their social procurement government tender requirements informing an associated social procurement performance ranking system that informs the government’s tender selection. | | | Government |
|  | Quantification of the social and economic value women bring to the industry. | | | | Government  Unions  Industry Associations Industry |
|  |  | Government tenders that require work schedule flexibility in the workplace and a reduction in working hours. | | | Government |

## Pathways

Attracting women and girls into the construction industry is fraught with multiple barriers, including gendered work stereotypes, lack of awareness of education/training opportunities and access to meaningful work and career pathways. Actions to address these systemic barriers are grouped into key action areas of incentivisation and promotion of the industry, as presented in Tables 6 and 7.

### *Incentivise women’s participation*

Actions to incentivise women’s participation in the construction industry are outlined in Table 6 and aligned with career cycle stages.

Table 6. Actions to incentivise women’s participation in the construction industry

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue addressed** | **Exploration (attract)** | **Education and Training**  **(attract and recruit)** | **Early Experience**  **(attract and recruit)** | **Growth (retain)** | **Responsibility** |
| Pathways  Access to information about construction related occupations and entry points  Access to ongoing education/training to build capability  Access to meaningful work | Increased wages for apprentices and trainees. | | |  | Government  Unions  Employers |
| Free access to pre-apprenticeships for women | | |  | Government  Education sector |
| Tender concessions that subsidise time for head contractors to engage with schools to promote the industry as a career for women. | |  |  | Government  Employers |
|  | Financial incentives for an employer to recruit adult apprentices and trainees. | |  | Government |
| Free courses for women outside the school system in maths and literacy skills to increase their confidence enabling movement across sectors and occupations on-site. | |  |  | Government  Employers |
| Scholarships that pay for a student’s education and provide them with employment. | |  |  | Government  Employers |
| Government coordinator of site visits for schoolgirls on State Government projects. | |  |  | Government  Employers |
|  | Government employed apprenticeships/traineeships on State Government projects in partnership with principal contractor and sub-contractors with employment pathways post completion. | | | Government (Apprenticeships Victoria)  Employers |
| Incentivising the supply chain and subcontractors to employ more women | | | | All |
| Scholarships:   * To entice schoolgirls into VET and HE with aligned employment in construction Industry organisations. * To entice women from a wide range of degrees or professions into construction related HE or VET training. | | |  | Government  Employers |

### *Promotion of the industry*

Increasing promotion opportunities through partnerships and communication of examples of inclusive and diverse workplaces will increase the awareness and normalisation of women working in construction, thereby lifting the numbers entering the industry. Further, communication of transferable skills and entry pathways will increase the opportunity for those women seeking a career change to consider construction. Key initiatives to increase the number of women in education and training are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Actions to increase the promotion and access of women to construction related occupations and career progression

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue addressed** | **Exploration**  **(attract)** | **Education and Training**  **(attract and recruit)** | **Early Experience**  **(recruit and retain)** | **Growth**  **(retain)** | **Responsibility** |
| Pathways  Access to information about construction related occupations and entry points  Access to ongoing education/training to build capability  Access to meaningful work | Promotion campaign communicating construction as an industry of choice for women. | |  |  | Government  Industry Associations |
| Government coordinated roadshow that visits all Victorian schools promoting STEM education, construction occupations and skill development. | |  |  | Government |
| Create a pilot site (demonstration project) focused on promoting women and changing industry culture across the entire supply chain. Communicate these findings across the industry. | | |  | Government (Department of Education and Training, Apprenticeships Victoria),  Industry Associations Unions |
| Establishment of a paid mentoring/buddying programs between women working in the industry and girls in school/women in VET and HE. | | |  | Government (Department of Education and Training, Apprenticeships Victoria). |
| Industry groups lead efforts via media and targeted campaigns e.g., Women in Construction Week. | | |  | Industry Associations |
|  |  | Development of programs/training to support women transitioning from HE into the workplace with a focus on how to navigate the current hostile culture. |  | Higher Education |
| Construction organisations partner with schools and use local projects to expose women and girls to roles in construction. | |  |  | Department of Education and Training  Industry Associations |
|  | Women only pre-apprenticeships. |  |  | Department of Education and Training,  Apprenticeships Victoria,  VET providers |
| Construction organisations partner with schools and use local projects to expose women and girls to roles in construction. | |  |  | Department of Education and training  Industry Associations |
| The development, facilitation and promotion of industry-based projects and problem-solving activities for schoolgirls by schools, VET, HEI and industry to increase awareness of the industry and associated roles/occupations. | |  |  | Department of Education and Training  Industry Associations , Schools, HE, VET Industry Associations  Unions |
| Development of a state government-based STEM education centre that coordinates all education providers (primary, secondary, post-secondary including vocational, higher education and those outside of the school system) with information and support, coordinated industry experiences and activities that promote construction to schoolgirls and women. | |  |  | Department of Education and training  Schools, HE, VET  Industry Association  Unions |
|  | Map the capabilities and transferable skills associated with all roles and occupations in the industry. | | | | Department of Education and training  Schools, HE, VET  Industry Association  Unions |
|  | Public disclosure of wages across the industry | | | | Industry  Employers |

# Appendix

## Focus Group Consultation Documents

**Development of Victoria’s Building Equality Strategy 2023-2031: Strategy**

| Strategy Structure | Ideas for content | Consultation questions and key issues | Record responses for focus group discussion |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Introduction | | | | |
| * 1. We will work together | Scope: building, construction, infrastructure, and civil engineering  Gender equality cannot be achieved by the Victorian Government alone. It is the responsibility of all of us to build a culture of respect and equality for all individuals. | Does the scope need to be changed?  What do you think the role of government, industry Associations, employers and Unions should be in setting standards of acceptable behaviour and modelling good practice? |  |
| * 1. Our Vision | All Victorians live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities, and are treated with dignity, respect and fairness.  All Victorians recognise that gender equality is essential to economic prosperity and that gender inequality has significant economic cost.  Victoria leads the way in gender equality with sustained, enduring and measurable actions | What should the vision be?  Should there be a separate vision that relates to specific industry sectors?  Should the vision align with the vision under the Victorian Government’s Gender Equality Strategy? |  |
| * 1. Gender inequality across the career cycle | The career cycle model accommodates women who change careers, enter construction later in their life, leave the industry or transition to different roles.  Below is how it links to the attract, recruit and retain framework:   * Exploration - attract * Education and Training - attract and recruit * Early Experiences - recruit and retain * Growth - retain | What are the barriers for men and women across the career lifecycle?  What can be done to remove these barriers?  What needs to change to ensure men are taking on equal responsibility for caring roles? |  |
| * 1. Gender equality impacts people in different ways | Gender inequality is impacted by other forms of disadvantage and discrimination including:   * Aboriginal women * Culturally diverse communities * Rural and regional women * Women with disabilities | What type of disadvantage and discrimination do people experience?  Why are these behaviours present and/or acceptable?  What can be done to address these behaviours? |  |
| 1. Now is the time for change | | | | |
| * 1. The case of change | The problem is the systems and structures – but we can change them. | What systems and structures need to change?  Who should be responsible for leading the change? |  |
| 1. A Strategy for the long term – actions for government, Unions, employers, and industry Associations | | | | |
| * 1. What are the key priority areas? | Unions, employers, industry Associations and Government will lead by example:   * Economic Equity * Leadership and Representation * Health and Wellbeing * Ending Gendered Violence | For each priority area stakeholders representing government, Unions, employers, and industry Associations need to:   * define the eight-year vision |  |
| * 1. Key Priority 1: Economic Equity | The eight-year vision might be:   * We will reduce the systemic, cultural and institutional barriers to women’s workforce participation * We will address gender segregated work and improve workplace safety and culture * We will empower women to achieve economic security | What is the 8-year vision?  What challenges are there to achieve the vision?  What actions are needed to reach that vision? |  |
| * 1. Key Priority 2: Leadership and Representation | The eight-year vision might be:   * We will introduce measures to increase the representation and diversity of women in positions of influence, in ways that are meaningful to them * We will break down the systemic, cultural and institutional barriers that Victorian women face in reaching leadership positions in all settings * We will support equal representation | What is the 8-year vision?  What challenges are there to achieve the vision?  What actions are needed to reach that vision? |  |
| * 1. Key Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing | The eight-year vision might be:   * We will ensure our workplaces consider and respond to the needs of women * We will make access to mental health services safer and more effective | What is the 8-year vision?  What challenges are there to achieve the vision?  What actions are needed to reach that vision? |  |
| * 1. Key Priority 4: Ending Gendered Violence | The eight-year vision might be:   * We will address family violence, sexual harm and all forms of violence against women before it happens through early intervention * We will focus on measures to make workplaces safer for people of all genders * We will strengthen processes, access and outcomes for victims and survivors of gendered harm and violence | What is the 8-year vision?  What challenges are there to achieve the vision?  What actions are needed to reach that vision? |  |
| 1. Governance, Implementation and Evaluation | | | | |
| * 1. Governance and Implementation | The BICC can oversight the Strategy | Should the BICC retain oversight of the Strategy? Noting the BICC does not include the key stakeholders in the infrastructure and civil sector?  Should a new subcommittee of BICC be established to oversee the actions relating to the infrastructure and civil sector? The subcommittee could report through the BICC to the Minister for Industrial Relations.  How will Unions, employers, and industry Associations oversee the delivery of actions that fall within their area of responsibility and how will they report to Government?  *For example: IRV will oversee the government actions, VTHC will oversee the Unions actions, MBV will oversee the industry Associations actions.*  What reporting arrangements should be put in place to track progress? |  |
| * 1. Monitoring and Evaluation | The Strategy will be reviewed after three years, and another action plan put in place to build on the work that has been undertaken.  An academic will be appointed to monitor and evaluate the Strategy. | What process should be put in place to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the Strategy and who should lead this work? |  |

**Draft Workplan for Victoria’s Building Equality Strategy 2023-2026: Action Plan**

| Key Priority Areas | Significant questions | Record responses for focus group discussion |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * A Strategy for the long term – actions for government, Unions, employers, and industry Associations * To inform your responses please refer to Attachment A for a summary of the key outcomes from the Women in Construction Strategy | | |
| Key Priority 1: Economic Equity | What are the top 3-4 activities that should be in the 2023-2026 action plan?  Who is responsible foreach action?  What funding or change to existing practices is needed? |  |
| Key Priority 2: Leadership and Representation | What are the top 3-4 activities that should be in the 2023-2026 action plan?  Who is responsible foreach action?  What funding or change to existing practices is needed? |  |
| Key Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing | What are the top 3-4 activities that should be in the 2023-2026 action plan?  Who is responsible foreach action?  What funding or change to existing practices is needed? |  |
| Key Priority 4: Ending Gendered Violence | What are the top 3-4 activities that should be in the 2023-2026 action plan?  Who is responsible foreach action?  What funding or change to existing practices is needed? |  |

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