

2024-32

BUILDING EQUITABLE FUTURES

Strategy



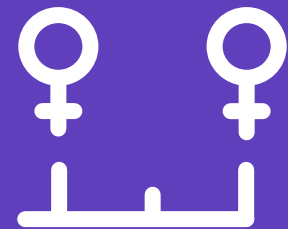


Our Commitment

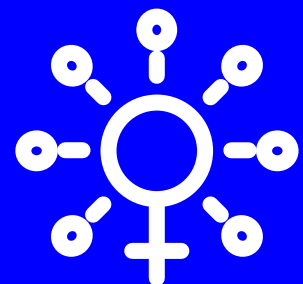
The Victorian Government is committed to **achieving a gender balance** on government funded projects of 40 percent women, 40 percent men and 20 percent any gender.



To achieve this commitment we need to work together and **set measurable milestones** that will demonstrate change over time.



This Strategy provides the opportunity for a sector wide approach where we can all **work collaboratively** as a cohesive group to create lasting change.



Message from the Minister for Industrial Relations



This Strategy builds on our continued commitment to creating equitable futures for all Victorians.

Now more than ever, we need to invest in people. And we know that education and employment are the key to good, meaningful and rewarding jobs. Many Victorians experience barriers that limit their potential to find work and earn a secure wage. These barriers are often due to discrimination, disadvantage, gender stereotypes and norms.

Women continue to shoulder enormous burdens and face immense barriers to equal opportunity.

They face entrenched forms of disadvantage with cost-of-living pressures like childcare, job insecurity and the risk of family violence.

We need to create new opportunities for women to enter employment by encouraging greater workforce participation, increase workplace flexibility and deliver clear pathways to upskill or change careers.

Part of the problem behind the gender disparity is that women are not considering construction as a career path, let alone applying for work and making their mark in the industry.

We intend to change that. No matter what your age, gender, ethnicity or previous experience – there is a suitable job for you in construction.

Every day, we are making the state fairer and more equal for all.

There is always more work to be done to improve outcomes for women and address the cultural and structural barriers women face in the workplace.

Message from the Building Industry Consultative Council

The Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) was established in 2001 as a high-level advisory council to the Minister for Industrial Relations. The membership includes employers, industry associations, unions and government. The BICC provides advice on economic and industrial relations issues affecting the building and construction industry.

The BICC comprises experienced people that are committed to working together to implement positive change in the construction industry.

In 2018, the BICC identified a real need for significant steps to be taken to increase the number of women employed in the industry. This resulted in the first *Women in Construction Strategy 2019-2022*.

The BICC has now worked with the Victorian Government to develop the *Building Equitable Futures – Women in Construction 2024-32*. The practical initiatives outlined in the new Strategy will create lasting change, not only for women in construction, but for the whole industry.

The Strategy has been developed in partnership with key organisations in the industry and provides a solid foundation for sustainable change and a more inclusive future.

All stakeholders have worked with a high degree of consensus on this important initiative. We acknowledge the support and assistance provided by the Victorian Government, to the BICC, to develop this Strategy.

We look forward to working with the Government and all industry stakeholders to make an actual difference to the employment of women in the construction industry.

The BICC wishes to acknowledge the many people that provided their time and expertise to enable the development of this holistic Strategy.

Our Vision

The Victorian building and construction industry is:

→ an industry of choice for a diverse group of creative, considerate, and future focussed people inspiring them to take up rewarding careers

→ an inclusive and positive place to work where everyone thrives as they feel safe, appreciated, respected, and valued

→ leading sustained and enduring cultural change by discovering and advancing progressive initiatives that support an efficient, safe, competitive and profitable sector

What is the construction industry?

For the purposes of this Strategy 'construction industry' means building, and construction works in three sectors: commercial, industrial, and civil.

The Strategy applies across the construction supply chain to all the people that are responsible for delivering the project.

It applies to rural, regional, and metropolitan locations throughout Victoria.

Language statement

We acknowledge that our approach to gender equality must always be trans and gender diverse inclusive. We celebrate the critical role of trans and gender diverse people in the fight for gender equality.

A person's gender is their own concept of who they are and how they interact with other people.

Many people understand their gender as being female or male. Some people understand their gender as a combination of these or neither. A person's gender may or may not exclusively correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.

When we say women, that word always includes trans and gender diverse women and sistergirls.

Equality or Equity

For the purposes of this Strategy, the term gender equity is taken to include gender equality. Although equality and equity sound similar we acknowledge they are distinct terms with different outcomes for marginalised people.

This Strategy is about ensuring women have access to the same opportunities as men and where necessary, extra resources are provided to women to ensure they can achieve the same outcomes.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men and gender diverse people. It relates to the need for reforms to the way our society works to improve outcomes for people of all genders. Equality does not mean that women, men and trans and gender diverse people will become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender.

Gender equity requires the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities based on gender. The concept recognises that people may have different needs and power, related to their gender, and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies gender related imbalances.

Is small scale residential construction included?

This Strategy does not apply to small-scale residential construction¹ (less than three storeys, excluding the basement). However, we encourage the adoption of any actions and initiatives that may be used in the small-scale residential sector.

A bespoke strategy is needed to address the specific industry issues in the small-scale residential sector. It must be informed by the voices and experiences of the people that work in this sector.

¹ Building classifications are set out in the National Construction Code: Click here for definitions www.ncc.abcb.gov.au



What the data says²

Gender equality is a human right. Almost every human rights treaty includes the prohibition of gender discrimination.

Australia's progress to achieving gender equity has fallen behind other countries. Australia fell from 15th in 2006 to 43rd in 2022 on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, which measures gender-based gaps across educational attainment, political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival.³

Australia's construction industry is the third highest creator of economic value and the second biggest employer with an estimated workforce of 1.24 million people.

Although the construction industry continues to be male dominated, things are slowly starting to change. Women now account for 13.6 percent of the total workforce. However, the gender split is not even across occupational groups.⁴

Women make up 30 percent of professional roles. While they occupy 3.5 percent of trade and technician roles, while this remains a small proportion it is above the historic average of 1.5 percent.⁵

Victoria's gender pay gap currently sits at 13.4 per cent for full-time employees, which is slightly higher than the Australian average of 13.3 percent. This represents a 1.0 percent reduction since November 2021.⁶

The gender pay gap is still higher than it was pre-pandemic, but we are starting to see it decrease. By 2026, it is forecast that the construction industry workforce will increase by more than 66,400 workers.⁷ This presents an opportunity for employers to actively recruit women to meet future workforce needs.

Gender segregated occupations contribute to misallocate talent across the economy as workers are matched to jobs based on gender, not their capability.

2 The data is drawn from Australia's Building and Construction Labour Force, August 2022

3 'Global Gender Gap Report 2022: Australia', World Economic Forum (13 July 2022)
www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022

4 Master Builders analysis of ABS Labour Force data, August 2022, Share of construction workforce by occupation and gender, August 1992 and August 2022

5 Master Builders analysis of ABS Labour Force data, August 2022, Share of construction workforce by occupation and gender, August 1992 and August 2022

6 ABS Average Weekly Earnings, November 2022

7 National Skills Commission, Projections by industry, www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/topics/employment-projections accessed: 25 October 2022

We will work together

We will align the Strategy with initiatives across Australia and work to provide industry with a clear and consistent approach to equity in construction workplaces.

Equal representation of people in the construction industry will only occur when everyone takes the necessary steps to attract, recruit and retain women workers.

Everyone is responsible for creating a workplace culture of respect, inclusion, and diversity. It requires collaboration, motivation, and determination. It also requires ongoing funding to support the structural changes needed to make a difference.

It will take successive generations of Victorians and their governments to drive long-term systemic cultural change.

Workplace gender equity will only be achieved when everyone can access and enjoy equal rewards, resources, and opportunities regardless of gender.

It is our responsibility to act now to create an industry where everyone can thrive.



Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women

In 2021, the Government established an independent *Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women*, to find solutions to long-standing issues of systemic inequality, such as unequal pay and workplace barriers to women's success.

The Inquiry found that structural inequalities persist, with women more likely to be:

- employed part-time, with 45 percent of employed women in part-time roles compared with around 20 percent of employed men
- underemployed (wanting to work more hours) or unemployed

The Inquiry Panel made a specific recommendation in relation to the construction industry. Recommendation 20 endorses the Government raising the employment targets in the BEP to improve gender equality. To support this, the Inquiry Panel detailed several actions including:

- create a vision of at least 40 percent women in the workforce (40/40/20 model)

- providing free TAFE for construction skills and priority apprenticeships
- mandate gender-equitable facilities on all publicly funded construction projects
- request suppliers create inclusive and respectful workplace cultures
- fund support networks for women
- pilot ambitious targets, including 50 percent women onsite and 50 percent majority-women enterprises as sub-contractors
- pilot family-friendly hours on public construction projects

The Government provided support-in-principle for Recommendation 20. This recommendation will continue to inform the implementation of this Strategy and the BEP.

[Click here to view the final report and the Government's response.](#)

Culture Standard in the Construction Industry

Delivering culture change will happen faster and be more effective if we do it together and adopt a consistent approach. That is why the Victorian Government is working with the Construction Industry Culture Taskforce (CICT)⁸ to ensure the Strategy aligns with and complements the work of the CICT.

The CICT has developed a Culture Standard to address recognised cultural problems that are preventing the construction industry from being an employer of choice.

Without a change to current workplace practices, long working hours, poor mental health and a lack of diversity will limit the ability to deliver the infrastructure pipeline already committed to, on time and on budget.

The Culture Standard seeks to improve project delivery outcomes for Government and benefit the lives of our workers and their families. It seeks to ensure:

- **Time for Life:** the workforce is provided adequate time to rest and pursue life activities outside of work
- **Wellbeing:** the occupational health and mental wellbeing of the workforce is prioritised
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** the industry can attract and retain a diverse range of people to work in the industry.

The Culture Standard is being piloted on two Victorian and three New South Wales infrastructure projects to identify its benefits to industry, clients, the workforce and their families.

[Click here for practical tools, resources and information about the Culture Standard and the pilot projects](#)

⁸ The CICT is a collaboration between the NSW and Victorian public sectors, the Australian Constructors Association and leaders from industry and academia.



Gender equity is good for everyone

Gender equity is good for everyone and is the responsibility of us all.

Workplace culture and wellbeing issues cost the economy close to \$8 billion annually due to workplace injuries, mental illness, suicide, long work hours and a lack of diversity.⁹ Below is a breakdown of the cost impact to the construction sector:

- **\$6.1 billion** cost of lost wellbeing from work-related fatalities, injuries and illnesses
- **\$708 million** productivity cost of employees consistently working overtime
- **\$643 million** cost of mental ill-health resulting in workers being present but with reduced output (presenteeism)
- **\$533 million** cost of higher incidence of male construction worker suicides compared to other industries.¹⁰

Improving the number of women working in the construction industry has social and economic benefits including:

- improved productivity and economic growth
- increased organisational performance by drawing from a wider talent pool, broadening perspectives and ideas, stimulating innovation, and improving staff retention
- enhanced ability of employers to attract and retain employees which will address the skills gap the industry is facing based on current workforce settings
- narrowing the gender pay gap and strengthening the economic security of women and their families

⁹ The Cost of doing nothing, BIS Oxford Economics, May 2021. Visit www.cultureconstruction.com.au

¹⁰ The Cost of doing nothing, BIS Oxford Economics, May 2021. Visit www.cultureconstruction.com.au

Inequity starts at an early age

Gender norms are created and reinforced from an early age through families, education, peers and social channels.

These norms can be internalised and shape our individual preferences, or they can be externalised and lead to bias and discrimination, which impacts the way society and institutions are organised.

The cultural conditioning that contributes to gendered workforce segregation starts at an early age. From two years old, children begin forming concepts of gender and gender difference. By age five, children develop their gender identity and become aware of gender differences and by seven, children are developing rigid ideas of gender.

Gendered stereotypes that define jobs as boys or girls are engrained at an early age.

Women confront the consequences of these gendered attitudes formulated in childhood from the biases and expectations of their families and teachers to the widespread discrimination women face trying to manage work and family or caring responsibilities.

These entrenched attitudes result in women facing isolation, harassment, tokenism, and comparatively slow career growth.

While the challenges of gender inequity are endemic to the labour force, the construction context is unique due to the masculine culture. We must focus on changing the culture of majority-men industries as gender inequity is deeply ingrained in men's attitudes and behaviours.

Inequity does not impact all people in the same way

Gender inequity may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience based on age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other attributes. This is sometimes called intersectionality.

Intersectionality recognises that the causes of disadvantage or discrimination do not exist independently but intersects and overlaps with gender inequity. This magnifies the severity and frequency of the impacts, while also raising barriers to obtaining support.

Everyone has multiple intersectional identities. For some their intersectional identity may provide a degree of privilege, but for others, it may result in more discrimination.

The Victorian Government recognises and celebrates diversity and acknowledges the importance of addressing the compounding barriers issues that perpetuate inequality.

Through implementation of this Strategy, we will listen to and work with all stakeholders to ensure workplace barriers to equity are identified and actions are put in place to create inclusive workplaces.

Inequity impacts men

With women continuing to carry the majority of Australia's unpaid caring work, creating workplaces that empower people to balance paid work with caring responsibilities is not only critical to achieving gender equality, but also improving workers wellbeing.

A masculine workplace culture places pressure on men to be emotionally resilient which often prevents men from:

- talking to supervisors about reducing work hours or asking for time off
- seeking professional help
- seeking help from friends or family

Men working in the construction industry are six times more likely to die by suicide than a workplace accident. Victoria's construction worker suicide rate is the second highest in Australia, with one worker taking their life every two days.¹¹ Wellbeing issues contribute to high rates of turnover, absenteeism, stress, and burnout related leave.

Workplace flexibility is major features of Australian workplaces. However, men's access to and uptake of these entitlements in the construction industry remains low.

Successfully balancing paid work with family responsibilities remains a major challenge. It is vital that flexible work arrangements and the uptake of parental leave is normalised and modelled, as it will benefit all genders.

¹¹ RMIT, Triple Wins: Work Hour Cultures for Health, Safety and Gender Equality in Construction, 2021. Visit www.cultureinconstruction.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Triple-Wins-Work-Hour-Cultures-for-Health-Safety-and-Gender-Equality-in-Construction-April-2021.pdf



We have built a solid foundation for change

In 2019, the Victorian Government launched the first *Women in Construction Strategy 2019-2022* (WIC Strategy), to increase women's workforce participation in trade and non-trade roles. It is predicated on a four-year workplan with actions at three key points of intervention attract, recruit and retain. The WIC Strategy expired in 2022.

The WIC Strategy was developed by the construction industry, for the construction industry. The BICC oversaw the development and implementation of the WIC Strategy.

Victoria's construction industry is leading the way

Since 2018, the Victorian Government has invested **\$5.566 million** to help employers, industry associations, unions, and government start the cultural change process.

WIC Strategy Outcomes – State Budget investment 2018–19 \$500,000 and 2020–21 \$1.5 million

The WIC Strategy focused on increasing women's participation in trades and non-trade roles as it is an area that has proven to be highly resistant to change.

→ *Building Futures – Women in Construction* website which includes:

- information and resources about the construction industry for students, parents, teachers, employers, and women already in construction
- tools for employers looking to recruit women or make their workplaces inclusive
- resources for careers counsellors, VET and VCAL providers to promote the trades and semi-skilled roles to women in secondary education

- careers day to inspire women and careers teachers to consider construction occupations
- customised online job support service to match women looking for work with employers wanting to recruit women
- support program for women thinking about a career in construction to provide support and career guidance to assist them to persevere to find a job
- respectful workplaces code of practice to educate people about their legal obligations under bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination laws (mandated for use in the BEP)
- recruitment and employment standards to promote gender equity and embed a formal recruitment approach as informal hiring practices disadvantage women
- respectful workplace accreditation model to provide a recognition framework for employers who are actively working to create gender inclusive workplaces

→ training program to create safe and respectful relationships on worksites and raise awareness about gendered violence

→ research by RMIT on women's wellbeing in the industry and the gender bias held by careers counsellors, VET/VCAL providers and secondary teachers

Building Equality Policy – 2020–21 State Budget allocation \$3.566 million

A key action in the WIC Strategy was for the Victorian Government to consider how procurement practices could be used to promote gender equality.

On 1 January 2022, the Government's Building Equality Policy (BEP) came into effect. The BEP is a world-leading policy that sets onsite targets for the employment of women and mandates actions that are needed to drive systemic cultural change.

The BEP is implemented through the Social Procurement Framework (SPF). It has three mandatory actions:

Action 1: suppliers must meet the following minimum onsite targets for women:

- 3 percent for each trade position
- 7 percent for each non-trade position

→ 35 percent for each management/supervisory and specialist labour position.

Action 2: suppliers must engage women who are registered apprentices, trainees or cadets¹² for at least 4 percent of the contract works' labour hours.

Action 3: suppliers must develop Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAPs) that set out the strategies and measures that will be put in place to promote gender equality in the workplace.

The BEP mandates targets as they are a necessary measure to improve women's representation in the sector.

However, targets alone will not change the industry. That is why the BEP requires suppliers to develop project-specific and organisation-wide GEAPs.

A dedicated SPF implementation team provides advice and guidance to buyers and suppliers on their mandatory obligations. While a separate compliance and monitoring team evaluates and reports on compliance with the BEP.

¹² From 1 January 2024, amendments to the BEP came into effect. Cadets are now included in Action 2 to align with the Major Project Skills Guarantee under Local Jobs First. Click here for the updated policy: [Building Equality Policy | vic.gov.au](http://www.vic.gov.au) (www.vic.gov.au)

To support the implementation of the BEP an advertising campaign called '**She Built It**' was developed to highlight the construction industry with the aim of attracting women to choose a construction career. The campaign featured women working in the industry and the projects they helped build.

The BEP must be supported by the delivery of the actions in the WIC Strategy, as they seek to address the broader cultural and structural barriers women face.

Despite Progress more needs to be done

The University of Melbourne was engaged to evaluate the success of the WIC Strategy. The evaluation found that the WIC Strategy achieved its goals at the key points of intervention: attract, recruit, and retain.

[Click here to view the *Evaluation Report Victorian Women in Construction Strategy | Victorian Government*](#)

Although progress is being made to improve gender equality, cultural change has proven difficult in the construction industry as it is a slow and incremental process.

Until the number of women reaches a critical mass, there is an ongoing need for government intervention.

Women need to be empowered through dedicated sponsorship and mentoring programs, while employers need to be supported to address the systemic barriers through the provision of supportive government and industry policies, tools and resources.

The evaluation report also found that the inclusion of actions that incentivise employers would further encourage cultural change. As construction by its nature is based on competition, harnessing this could help drive the industry to become more inclusive and improve the representation of women.

Finally, The University of Melbourne recommended that the WIC Strategy be updated, refined, and expanded to ensure the construction industry is supported to create workplaces that are safe and welcoming for women.



Barriers perpetuate inequity through the life stages

Good intentions have never been enough to deliver equity for women. The most successful gender equity initiatives are those that identify and remove the barriers to women's workforce participation and advancement.

The barriers encountered by women are both distinct to the construction industry and endemic to the broader workforce. The key barriers identified through the literature review and focus groups are summarised in the table below.

Life Stage → **Formative Years**

- Barriers**
- × Gendered assumptions about paid and unpaid work
 - × Family opinions and expectations
 - × Discouragement/low participation rates in science, technology, engineering, and maths
 - × Lack of awareness of career opportunities and pathways
 - × Outdated perceptions
 - × Lack of visibility of women

Life Stage → **Education and training**

- Barriers**
- × Influence of parents and peers on career choices
 - × Inadequate awareness of training pathways
 - × Negative societal perception that trades are 'not academic'
 - × Gendered and inadequate careers advice
 - × Lack of information, industry exposure and role models
 - × Inadequate training - sexism from trainers and peers
 - × Financial barriers to undertaking educations and training

Life Stage → **Career experiences and growth**

- Barriers**
- × Psychologically and physically unsafe workplaces
 - × Culture of disrespect, harassment, inflexibility and exclusion
 - × Informal recruitment and promotional practices mean women do not get jobs
 - × Not feeling a sense of connection and belonging
 - × Lack of flexibility for people with caring responsibilities
 - × Inadequate access to support networks for women workers
 - × Limited access to meaningful work, career progression and corporate roles
 - × Lack of women in leadership
 - × Inadequate amenities and Personal Protective Equipment
 - × Long hours and culture of presenteeism
 - × Lack of work life balance



A long-term strategy is needed for systemic change

This Strategy builds on the foundational work achieved in the WIC Strategy. It identifies enduring actions to increase the number of women in trade, non-trade, and professional roles across the construction industry.

It draws on global evidence of what works and is informed by the voices of the people who work in the construction industry.

It also draws upon the CICT research which identified the need to make systemic change to three areas: inclusion and diversity, mental health and wellbeing and time for life practices.

This world leading Strategy responds to the needs of all Victorians. It provides a unique opportunity for a generational shift to occur in the construction sector.

RMIT University was engaged to run focus groups with over 100 people from government, employers, industry associations/peak bodies, unions, and education/training providers. This Strategy is founded on the ideas and views of these people. Click here to view the report:

[Click here to view the report 1](#)

[Click here to view the report 2](#)

The University of Melbourne undertook a global literature review. Click here to view the report:

[Click here to view the report](#)

The power of the workplace

We must act now to create workplaces that are safe, respectful and inclusive.

Our work lives shape our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours around gender equity and violence against women. Every workplace conversation, policy and action can either reinforce or challenge gender inequity and the beliefs, attitudes and norms that drive inequity and violence.

Peer relationships and stereotypes can be formed and shaped in the workplace, so what an employer accepts, and rewards can influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

Employers can use their status, influence to challenge stereotypes, and speak out against violence. They can also drive change by implementing policies and practices that empower people to share caring responsibilities and unpaid care work¹³, take up leadership positions and be economically independent.

Men have a role to play

Gender equity is not just women's responsibility. Men must recognise their privilege and challenge the barriers faced by women in masculine systems.

Men have the power to challenge and dismantle damaging gender stereotypes, both in their personal lives and workplaces, fostering a more inclusive masculinity.

Men contribute to their own liberation by actively supporting women's equity, advocating for gender equity, and rejecting harmful behaviours.

Men and women's freedom are interconnected. Collaboration is key to creating a society where everyone can genuinely thrive.

¹³ Unpaid care work includes all forms of domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening and home maintenance. It also includes taking care of children, the elderly or a family member with a long-term health condition or disability as well as voluntary community work



The Government will lead by example

Although gender equity cannot be achieved by the Victorian Government alone, we will lead by example and set standards for acceptable behaviour. We will model best practice.

We understand and embrace our unique role and are committed to working cooperatively with all stakeholders to implement the actions set out in this Strategy.

Priority areas to drive change

This Strategy sets out four key priority areas that will drive systemic, structural, and cultural change. The following priority areas were identified through extensive and in-depth stakeholder consultation:

- driving economic equity and inclusive leadership
- promoting workplace health and safety laws
- creating respectful and inclusive workplaces
- building gender inclusive education and training

Each priority area identifies the issues to be addressed, the barriers to be removed and the outcomes sought to achieve cultural, attitudinal, behavioural and structural change.

The outcomes are intentionally ambitious and inspirational as they describe what success looks like for Victorians.

The priority areas, barriers and key outcomes are founded on the research undertaken by RMIT and The University of Melbourne.

Driving economic equity and inclusive leadership

Economic equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed for them to reach an equal outcome.

For women, it means working to make sure gender inequity does not limit their career potential or ability to achieve financial independence, safety and security.

Women are held back by rigid workplace cultures that do not acknowledge their unique perspectives, experiences, and skillsets resulting in women being underrepresented and undervalued as leaders.

There is change coming, the current generation of workers hold different perceptions about leave and flexible working arrangements and will look for employers that provide the flexibility they need for better work life balance.

Research has found a direct link between women in leadership roles and greater employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced performance and innovation.

Barriers

Women do not have the same opportunities as men to participate in the construction industry and thrive in the workforce as equals. This is not due to a lack of ability or talent, but because the systems and structures are designed by men, for men.

Male dominated industries like construction widen the gender pay gap and negatively impacts women's economic security.

Women are more likely to be in insecure forms of work resulting in inadequate superannuation compared to men, as they earn less over their lifetime leading to more women living in poverty.

To break down harmful gender norms and provide opportunities for the participation of a diverse workforce, women's achievements must be visible and celebrated.

Key outcomes

The Government will work with the construction industry to help:

- remove the systemic, cultural, and educational barriers that restrict women's workforce participation
 - empower women from diverse cultural backgrounds to take up leadership roles
 - create training and development opportunities to provide women with leadership knowledge and skills
 - increase the number of women working in leadership positions through targeted use of Government levers, including procurement
 - encourage employers to publish 'good faith' salary ranges¹⁴ so that women are confident their salary is fair, objective and aligned to their skills and experience
 - reduce the gender pay gap so women retire with superannuation equivalent to men
 - support women to build their financial capabilities by connecting them with existing programs and resources to plan for a secure future
- remove the gender barriers to sharing caring responsibilities by supporting part-time and flexible work arrangements for everyone to ensure unpaid work is recognised, redistributed, valued, and shared
 - map transferrable skill sets of workers outside the construction industry, so career pathways and opportunities are obvious to workers and employers promote positive role models for future generations - 'you can't be what you can't see.'

¹⁴ The *Fair Work Act 2009* now gives employees and future employees new workplace rights to share, or not share information about their pay and the employment terms and conditions that would be needed to work out their pay, such as their hours of work. Employees can ask any colleagues (whether employed by the same or a different employer) about their pay and terms and conditions of employment.

Promoting workplace health and safety laws¹⁵

Legal obligations under occupational health and safety and equal opportunity laws are in place to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees and other people at work.

Employers have a legal obligation to provide and maintain a work environment that is safe and without risk to the health of their employees, as far as is reasonably practicable.

Employers have a legal obligation to protect women from work-related factors that impact psychosocial and physical safety. Factors employers can control include:

- **Work-related violence** incidents where a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.
- **Work-related gendered violence** behaviour, directed at any person, or that affects a person, because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, or because they do not adhere to socially prescribed gender roles, which creates a risk to health and safety.

→ **Work-related stress** the physical and psychological response of an employee who perceives that the demands of their work or workplace environment exceed their ability or resources to cope.

→ **Work-related fatigue** an acute and/or ongoing state that leads to physical, mental or emotional exhaustion and prevents people from functioning safely.

Barriers

Women remain in a gendered minority group and have limited positional power to control and influence their work environment, which is exacerbated by a lack of women in leadership.

Physical safety has been the focus of the industry over many years – and that effort must continue and be strengthened. The same effort must go into addressing psychosocial safety.

¹⁵ **Important Note:** If an allegation involves assault or threats of assault, acts of violence, sexual assault, damage to property or stalking, a person or a group of people affected can contact Victoria Police.

The incidence of poor mental health within the construction industry is one of the highest of all industries in Australia. It has profound impacts on the individual, their families, the community, and it directly impacts employee productivity.

A workforce with insufficient time away from work will affect the outcomes of projects including reduced productivity, quality of work and safety.

Key outcomes

The Government will work with the construction industry to help:

- educate employers and workers about their legal obligation and rights under occupational health and safety and equal opportunity laws to drive behavioural change in the workplace to ensure all workers feel safe at work
- ensure workers have adequate time to rest and pursue life activities outside work
- create a culture where everyone feels safe to make complaints and help employers develop a complaints management process to deal with allegations and behaviours

- create a confidential reporting system for workers and ensure trained mental health first aiders are available for the duration of the project
- implement programs that support the psychosocial health of the workforce to address existing mental health issues and identify prevention measures
- provide clean and safe amenities

Creating respectful and inclusive workplaces

A respectful workplace culture is one where everyone feels safe, appreciated, respected, and valued. Everyone has a right to a workplace where safety, inclusiveness and wellbeing are paramount.

The construction industry must recruit, retain, and develop skilled, enthusiastic people in sufficient numbers to meet the increasing work demand.

Barriers

The construction industry is not viewed as an employer of choice.

The work is viewed as dangerous, excludes women from opportunities, requires little academic acumen and creates physically and psychologically unsafe work environments.

Gendered work stereotypes supported by the perception that women are not physically or mentally capable reinforce the belief that women do not belong in the industry.

The work environment is challenging due to many factors including, excessive hours, inflexible work arrangements, inappropriate facilities, and inadequate clothing.

Rigid work practices exclude all genders with caring responsibilities.

Key outcomes

The Government will work with the construction industry to help:

- drive cultural change so the industry is recognised as an employer of choice
- create safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace cultures that represents Victoria's multicultural society
- develop and implement inclusive workplace practices for the recruitment and promotion of workers
- attract, recruit, retain workers to meet the increasing work demand
- ensure project schedules and hours worked prioritise the wellbeing of workers
- develop supports to enable contractors to assess compliance with the Respect Code

[Click here to view the Respect Code Building and Construction Industry](#)

Building gender inclusive education and training

Education and training pathways into construction occupations are complex and confusing. This impacts the number of women entering the industry.

Change is vital in the education and training sector to attract women across all life stages to consider a construction career.

Barriers

There is a lack of awareness among young women and the people that influence their career choices about the opportunities in the construction industry.

Primary and secondary students need access to role models to challenge gender work stereotypes and increase awareness of opportunities in the construction industry.

Mature aged workers face additional barriers to entering the sector as they often have existing financial commitments and family or caring responsibilities.

Employers of mature-age apprentices have higher wage costs which can function as a disincentive to employment.

Inflexibility in training delivery for pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and traineeships inhibits career development.

A lack of supervision and support during training, few women trainers, and a masculine workplace culture all contribute to low retention rates of women in apprenticeships and traineeships.

Key outcomes

The Government will work with the construction industry to help:

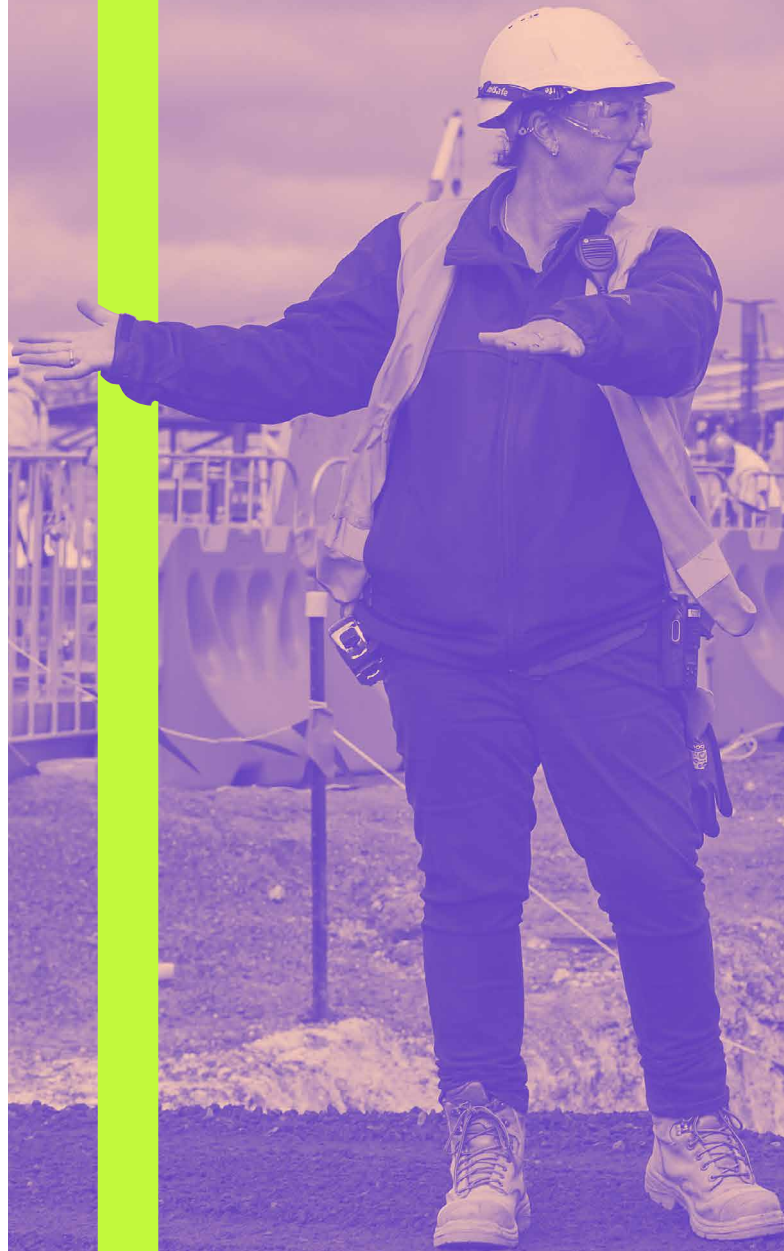
- ensure construction education and training is welcoming to women and is safe, respectful, and inclusive
- raise awareness about job opportunities in the industry
- inform those that influence people's career choices (including peers, parents, teachers, careers counsellors) about the rewarding job opportunities available in the industry
- educate teachers and trainers about safe, respectful, and inclusive behaviour in the classroom and at work.



The need for an Action Plan

This Strategy is underpinned by a four-year Action Plan to achieve change across the four key priority areas. It is founded on evidence from academic literature, the experience of people within the industry, and the input of stakeholders who have the capacity to drive change.

The Action Plan invites a collaborative approach to change with government, unions, employers, industry associations and training/education providers working together. It is a living document that will be updated as the construction industry continues to evolve.





Governance

The principles of tripartism will be carried through all the projects, processes and mechanisms used to implement the Strategy and Action Plan. Decision making will be based on a consensus approach.

The Department of Treasury and Finance will have overarching responsibility for the Strategy and Action Plan, as it falls within the Minister for Industrial Relations portfolio responsibility.

The BICC will oversee the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan and will report to the Minister for Industrial Relations on progress and challenges.

A Building Equitable Futures Expert Panel (BEF Expert Panel) will be established to oversee the delivery of the Action Plan. The membership will include people that are collectively responsible and accountable for the delivering the Action Plan.

The BEF Expert Panel will be responsible for developing project plans for each priority area that detail the scope of works, who will take the lead and indicative funding. The BEC will report to the BICC at their quarterly meetings.

Evaluation framework

To monitor the Strategy's implementation and outcomes an independent person drawn from academia will be appointed to develop an evaluation framework. This will include an evaluation and refresh of the Action Plan every four years.

The evaluation is vital to better understand and share knowledge about what gender equity actions work.

The views of people affected by the Strategy, including all people employed or seeking employment in the industry, employers, unions and industry associations, education and training providers will be sought.

Transparent and accessible public information is vital to keeping stakeholders engaged with this work. It is also a matter of basic accountability. To this end, we will publish the evaluation reports and updated Action Plans.

BUILDING EQUITABLE FUTURES

Action Plan 2024–28

Key to success

The strength of the *Women in Construction Strategy 2019–22* was the partnership approach between the Government, union movement, industry associations, employers, and the construction workforce.

To drive cultural change, we must build on the work we have started and continue to strengthen the collaborative working relationship we have developed.

We will work together

We are stronger together, Government, unions, employers, and industry associations, working together with training/education providers.

The principles of tripartism will continue to be carried through all the projects, processes and mechanisms used to implement the Action Plan.

The Building Equitable Futures (BEF Expert Panel) will be responsible for developing detailed project plans for each priority area detailing the scope of works, who will lead the action, and indicative funding.

All decisions will be made by consensus.

PRIORITY AREA

Driving economic equity and inclusive leadership

Economic equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and allocates the resources and opportunities needed for them to reach an equal outcome.

For women, it means working to make sure gender inequity does not limit women’s career potential or ability to achieve financial independence, safety and security.

Leadership is not just about being in a leadership position. It is about how individuals lead in terms of behaviour and what people choose to accept and call out.

Everyone can be a leader by acting against disrespectful behaviour.

ACTIONS 2024–28

- Develop clear pathways for women to enter the industry and have sustainable careers in diverse roles with meaningful work opportunities and secure employment
- Promote the construction industry to women leaving other occupations and industries
- Assist women to obtain qualifications to advance their careers
- Industrial parties work together to explore options for all workers to have access to flexible work arrangements so caring responsibilities can be shared
- Identify and resolve pay discrepancies to eliminate the gender pay gap, including advocating for pay transparency
- Empower women to connect with networks and communities of practice

ACTIONS 2024-28

- Connect women to financial literacy programs on operating a small business
- Connect women to programs that provide financial support to studying construction-related occupations in the Victorian Education and Training (VET) sector and support to purchase of tools related to their trade
- Incentivise employers to recruit mature-aged women, for example, providing scholarships to start apprenticeships or traineeships
- Explore childcare options for the industry
- Support the implementation of Recommendation 20 from the *Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women*
- Set aspirational targets and create a strategy for equal representation of women in leadership roles and on governing bodies
- Ensure promotional decisions are based on abilities, knowledge and skills, not gender
- Connect women to industry networks and accelerated leadership programs to assist their career development

PRIORITY AREA

Promoting workplace health and safety laws

Employers must provide and maintain a work environment that is safe and without risk to the health of their employees, as far as is reasonably practicable.

Employers have a legal obligation to protect women from work related violence, gendered violence, stress and fatigue. This is important as women remain in a gendered minority group and have limited positional power to control and influence their work environment.

ACTIONS 2024-28

- Educate employers and workers about their legal obligations and rights under occupational health and safety and equal opportunity laws
- Support employers and workers to understand their legal rights and obligations in relation to work-related psychosocial hazards and the positive duty placed on employers to eliminate workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and victimisation
- Build on existing work, to support the development of a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces training package based on the Code of Respect Building and Construction and explore avenues to deliver the training for example include it as part of White Card Training, toolbox talks and induction.
- Include work related violence, gendered violence, stress and fatigue as core competency units in Health and Safety Representative's initial and refresher training
- Explore options for the development of a victim-centric confidential reporting system, including a referral service to support victims
- Develop an accreditation system and branding to identify onsite workers trained to support women experiencing work-related violence, like 'blue hats'

PRIORITY AREA

Creating respectful and inclusive workplaces

A respectful workplace culture is one where everyone feels safe, appreciated, respected, and valued.

Everyone has a right to a workplace where safety, inclusiveness and wellbeing are paramount.

ACTIONS 2024-28

- Develop and implement a bespoke gender equitable and respectful workplaces rating and certification system that is trusted by industry, government and the community
- Create best practice workplace policies and practices that support the creation of safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces
- Build on the existing 'She Built It' advertising campaign to let women know they are welcome in the construction industry and that steps are being taken to make it a sector of choice, for example communicate through new channels, produce materials drawing on existing sources
- Connect workers with training that equips them to recognise and understand their own biases and to take steps to overcome them
- Build on the existing work being undertaken to develop a hierarchy of control model for managing psychosocial risks in the workplace with a focus on gender
- Connect women to networks, structures, and forums where they can share their experiences and receive support
- Ensure employers are meeting their legal obligations by providing amenities and facilities suitable for women and gender-diverse people
- Research the barriers to women experiencing multiple layers of disadvantage to identify actions to improve their workplace experience
- Support the industry to collaborate with experts to roll out an evidenced-based program around gendered violence and the bystander effect
- Build on existing gendered violence training offered to the industry to create a best practice resource

PRIORITY AREA

Building gender inclusive education and training

Education pathways into construction occupations are complex and confusing. This impacts the number of school leavers and mature women entering the industry.

To help navigate the pathways expert advice will be sought to ensure the actions compliment the work being undertaking at both a national and state level in the education and training sector.

ACTIONS 2024–28

- Remove the stigma of trades by educating parents and schools on the structure of a trade and the opportunities it offers to women
- Identify additional practical learning opportunities for primary and secondary school students to explore different trade-based skills
- Provide opportunities for people of all genders to visit schools to demonstrate to students that the construction industry is gender inclusive and welcoming
- Support the development of a module on gender justice, equity, and violence as a competency unit within the Occupational Health and Safety Framework for people in construction-related occupations within the Vocational Education and Training sector
- Promote existing TAFE initiatives like the Our Watch resource – *Respect and Equality in TAFE: Building a TAFE environment that promotes gender equality and respect*
- Support the registration and licensing of trades as a mechanism to attract and retain women
- Create industry partnerships with secondary schools
- Continue to address gender bias in careers education and pathways options as part of the Senior Secondary Pathways Reforms
- Identify additional approaches to education and training that provide a supportive approach to learning, for example women only pre-apprenticeships

Governance, oversight and monitoring

To oversee the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan a robust governance framework will be put in place.

- The Department of Treasury and Finance has overarching responsibility for the Strategy and Action Plan, as it falls within the Minister for Industrial Relations portfolio responsibility
- The BICC will oversee the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan and will report to the Minister for Industrial Relations on progress and challenges
- A BEF Expert Panel will be established to oversee the delivery of the Action Plan.
 - Membership of the BEF Expert Panel will include people that are collectively responsible and accountable for creating systemic change. The BEF Expert Panel will be responsible for developing project plans for each priority area that detail the scope of works, who will take the lead and indicative funding.
 - The BEF Expert Panel will report to the BICC

Evaluation framework

An evaluation framework will be developed to assess the effectiveness of the Strategy and Action Plan.

This will allow knowledge sharing about the gender equity actions that work.

- An independent person drawn from academia will be appointed to develop an evaluation framework
- The views of people affected by this Strategy, including people employed or seeking employment in the industry, employers, unions and industry associations, education and training providers will be sought
- The evaluation report and updated Action Plan will be publicly released

Membership of the BICC

Chairperson – Rebecca Casson

Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors' Association

CEPU – Electrical Division

CFMEU – Construction and General Division

CFMEU – Forestry and Furnishing Products Division

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Development Victoria

Lend Lease

Master Builders Victoria

Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia

Multiplex

National Electrical and Communications Association, Victorian Chapter

National Fire Industry Association

Office of Projects Victoria

PETU – Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union

Property Council of Australia

Victorian Trades Hall Council

WorkSafe





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