

# Workplaces **FOR** Women

Work that works for everyone.

***"It turns out I'm good at it!"***

Women's insights from  
male dominated industries



Australian Government



## Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the mighty Kulin nation; the traditional owners of the land on which VTHC stands. We pay our respects to their elders past and present. This land was stolen and never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

## Solidarity Statement

We are union. We stand united as part of a great movement of workers. Our diversity is our strength. Our solidarity is our power. We respect and take care of each other. Prejudice and discrimination – including misogyny, racism, homophobia, and all other hatreds have no place in our movement. We rise together. Today and every day we commit ourselves to achieving justice, fairness, equality, and dignity for all workers. Solidarity forever.

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## Workplaces for Women Project

### Australian workplaces can become more equal and inclusive.

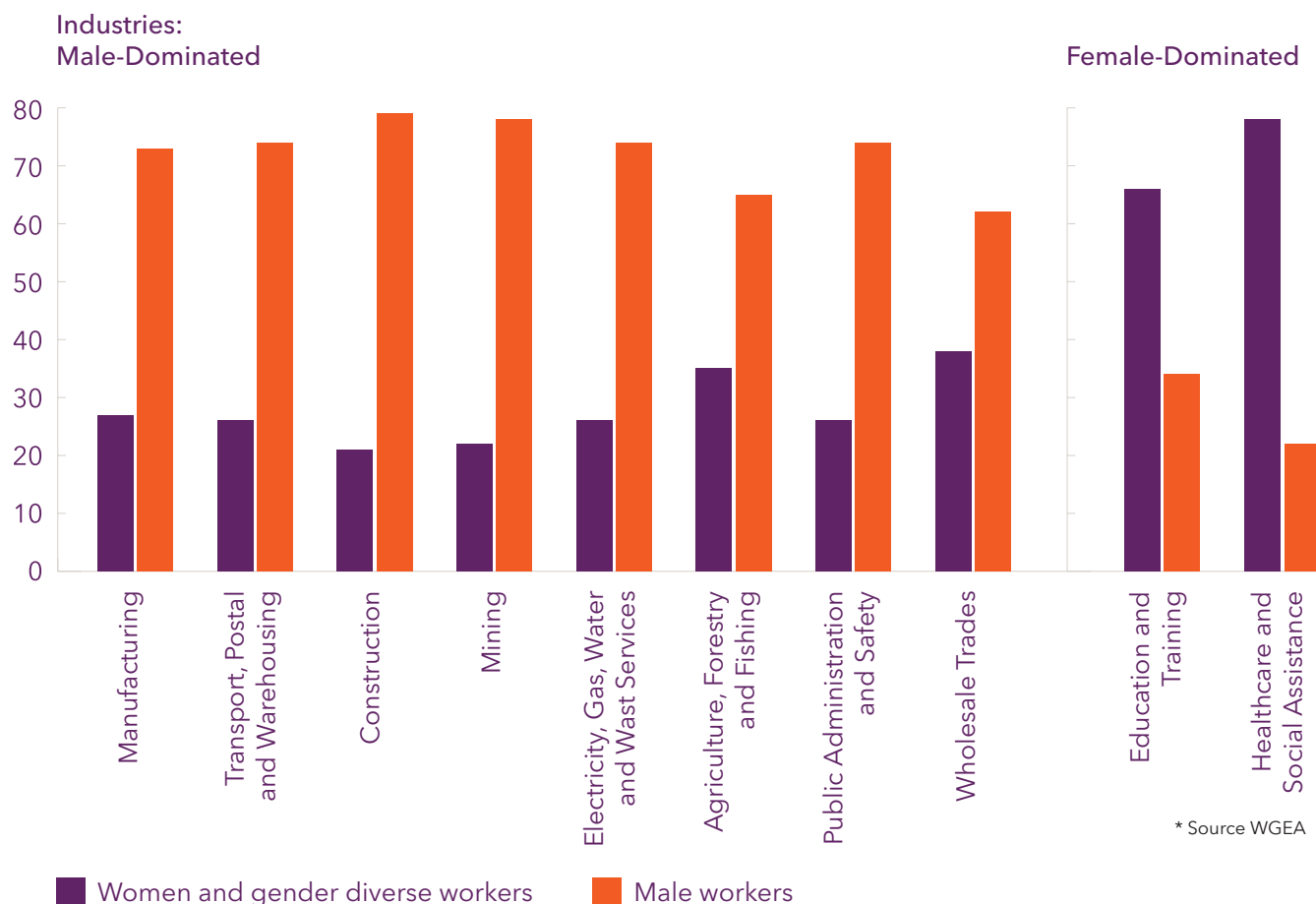
Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) has a deep commitment to advancing workplace gender equality. Workplaces become more equal when workers and their unions are empowered to advocate for safety, respect, inclusion, and fairness. VTHC amplifies women's voices by informing, educating and empowering them to take action, and by advocating at the highest levels of government for targeted action to address gender inequality. Supported by the Australian Government, the *Workplaces for Women (WFW)* Project aims to leverage recent legislative amendments to support the creation of workplaces that are safe, respectful, equal and inclusive for *all* workers.

The WFW Project specifically aims to support working women, unions and workplace leaders to advance gender equality in workplaces in historically male-dominated industries and occupations within identified target industries: **Manufacturing; Warehousing and Logistics; and Transport.** The WFW Project does this through development of targeted resources and training to support and empower unions and workers to access, utilise and improve gender equality entitlements and measures at workplaces, removing barriers to entry, supporting retention, and improving the experience of workers of all genders.

# Introduction

**Australian workplaces are deeply gender segregated, and workers are facing challenges because of harmful gendered attitudes.**

Women make up 48% of the Australian workforce.<sup>1</sup> However, men and women are not equally represented across industries. Gender segregation in Australia is more prevalent than in many other OECD countries, as more than half of workers in the Australian private sector work in industries that are either male-dominated or female-dominated.<sup>2</sup>



Gender segregation is influenced by many factors, all reflecting deeper patterns within society that shape our social institutions and workplaces.<sup>3</sup> Gender norms influence workers' decisions when choosing or switching careers, providing care, negotiating pay, and managing workers. It influences the gender composition of industries and roles, workplace culture, organisational policies, and workers' behaviours.<sup>4</sup> Workforce segregation is both a product and a driver of gender stereotyping and discrimination.

Women workers experience a wide range of challenges stemming from gender imbalance in the

workplace. In male-dominated industries (MDIs), women are paid less and given less opportunities to advance their career.<sup>5</sup> Caring responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, but they have less support and flexible work options.<sup>6</sup> Women are also at higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment, a risk that is further heightened for First Nations workers, migrant workers or workers with a migrant background, and for LGBTQIA+ workers and workers with a disability.<sup>7</sup> It makes women feel unsafe, isolated, and powerless at work. Still, women arrive at work each day, navigating these seen and unseen burdens.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), "Labour Force, Australia, May 2025."

2. WGEA, "Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard: Key Results from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's Employer Census 2023-24"; "Gender Segregation in Australia's Workforce."

3. Huppertz and Goodwin, "Masculinised Jobs, Feminised Jobs and Men's 'Gender Capital' Experiences"; Lorber and Farrell, The Social Construction of Gender.

4. Bobbitt-Zeher, "Gender Discrimination at Work."

5. WGEA, "Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard."

6. WGEA.

7. Australian Human Rights Commission, "Everyone's Business."



## Targeted government intervention

Recent legislative amendments and government initiatives driven by strong union campaigns have contributed to addressing the gender gap and segregation. The 2022 amendments to the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* (FW Act) are significant. Upholding promotion of gender equality as one of its objects, the FW Act now mandates the Fair Work Commission to consider gender equality and ensure equal remuneration in exercising its powers. Transparency is promoted through the banning of pay secrecy clauses.

The amended FW Act has also enabled more workers to access and normalise the culture of flexible work. The expansion of government paid parental leave and superannuation on paid parental leave has been welcomed by workers.

The introduction of universal right for employees to access 10 days of paid family and domestic violence leave is another vital advancement, especially for women. Employers now hold a positive duty to actively prevent and properly respond to sexual harassment (SH), discrimination and hostile work environments in the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* (SD Act), and work-related gender-based violence (GBV) is being actively addressed under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* (OHS Act). In addition, large employers are now required to report their gender gap data and set gender equality targets through amendments to the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Cth)* (WGE Act). These initiatives have enabled Australia to reduce the gender pay gap faster than other OECD nations.<sup>8</sup>

## Equality at Work Survey

To understand the unique experiences of workers in male dominated industries (MDI's), we carried out an online survey (*Equality at Work Survey*), followed by focus groups and long-form interviews. Our survey collected workers' experiences on issues ranging from workplace culture, pay and career progression, and caring responsibilities to OHS concerns and familiarity with workplace rights.

The survey was open to workers of all genders but had a focus on the experience of women and gender diverse workers. We collected comparative data from female-dominated (FDIs) and gender-balanced industries. The survey allowed us to identify key themes across workers' experiences, including barriers to gender equality in MDIs and common challenges faced by women workers across industries, and to determine focus areas for our training programs and resources.

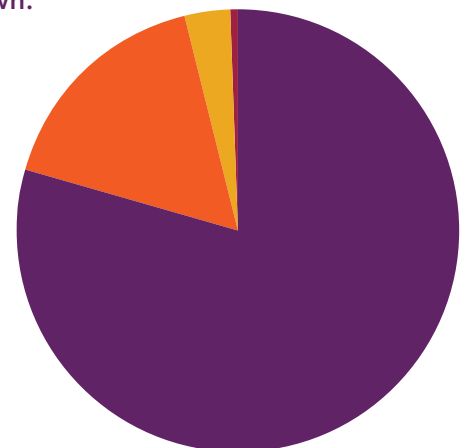
### Equality at Work Survey summary

**Survey period:** 10 June 2025 - 31 July 2025

**616 valid responses (623 total responses)**

#### Gender breakdown:

Female **491**  
Male **102**  
Non-binary **21**  
Other **2**



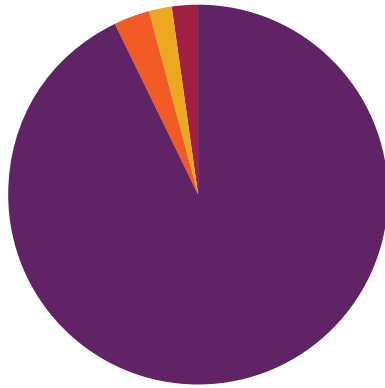
8. Australian Council of Trade Unions, "Minding the gap."



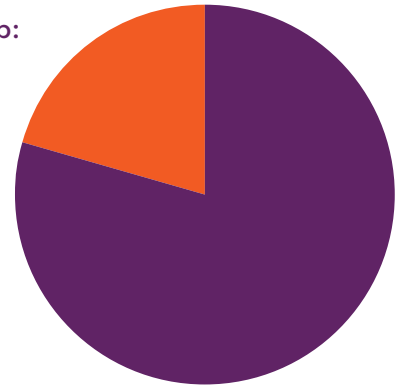
#### Main respondent industry:



#### Location:

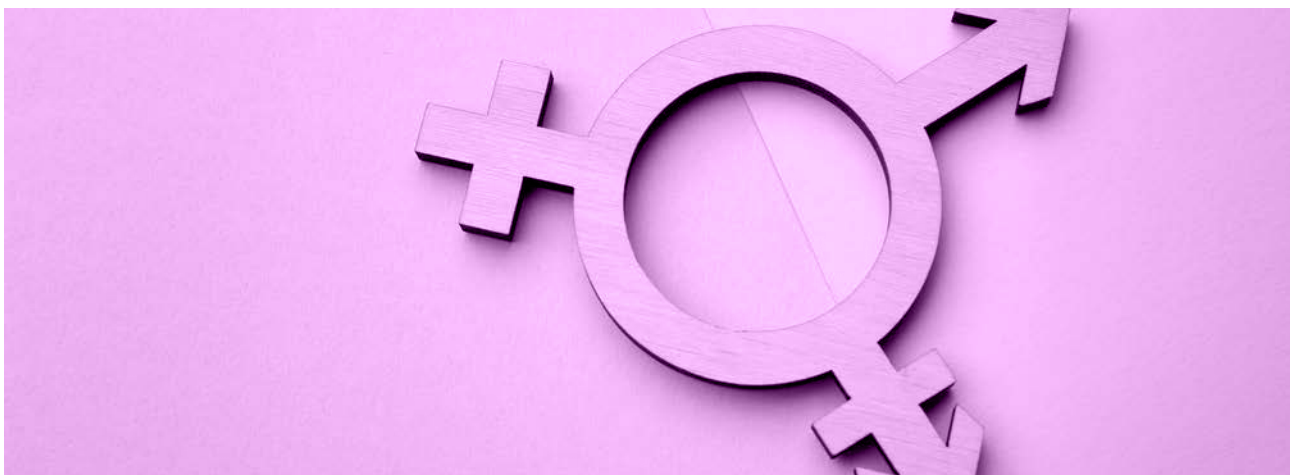


#### Union membership:



This is the first in a series of reports that delve into the issues faced by women in MDIs. It provides an overview of our survey results and recommendations for both government and employers to address the identified barriers. We have also outlined the actions we will take through the WFW Project to respond to each barrier and recommendation.

While this report predominantly uses the terms like 'women' and 'men', it does not exclude the experiences of workers with diverse gender identities. Nor does it reduce individual experiences to a simple women-men binary without considering personal backgrounds and intersectional attributes. By addressing barriers to gender equality in Australian workplaces, we believe that we can create workplaces that are accessible, fair and safe for everyone.



# Measures to improve gender equality

## Women workers want more women in the industry.

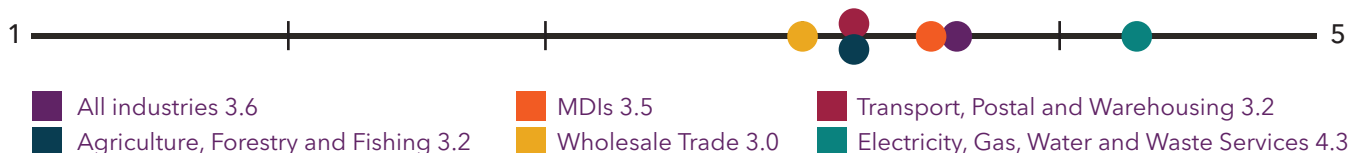
Increasing the presence and visibility of women is the most direct way to address gender segregation in MDIs. In our survey we asked workers how strongly they would recommend their industry, and whether they wish to have more women in their workplace. Overall, many workers in MDIs still feel that their industry is recommendable. Some women pointed out physically demanding workloads and hostile environments as main reasons why they

would not recommend their industry. However, this does not mean they do not want more women; 70% of women in MDIs said they wish to have more women in their workplace. Around 40% of male workers in MDIs also supported this, although their views about female representation were more mixed. Many women in MDIs emphasised the need to increase the visibility of women, to support them to speak up and create a safer work environment.

## How much women recommend their industry

**How likely are you to recommend that women pursue work in your industry?**

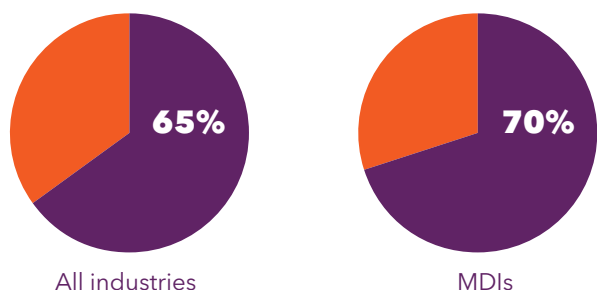
On a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely)



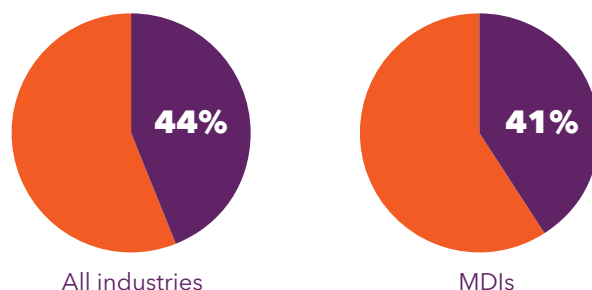
## Percentage of workers who want more women

Yes No

### Women and gender diverse workers:



### Male workers:



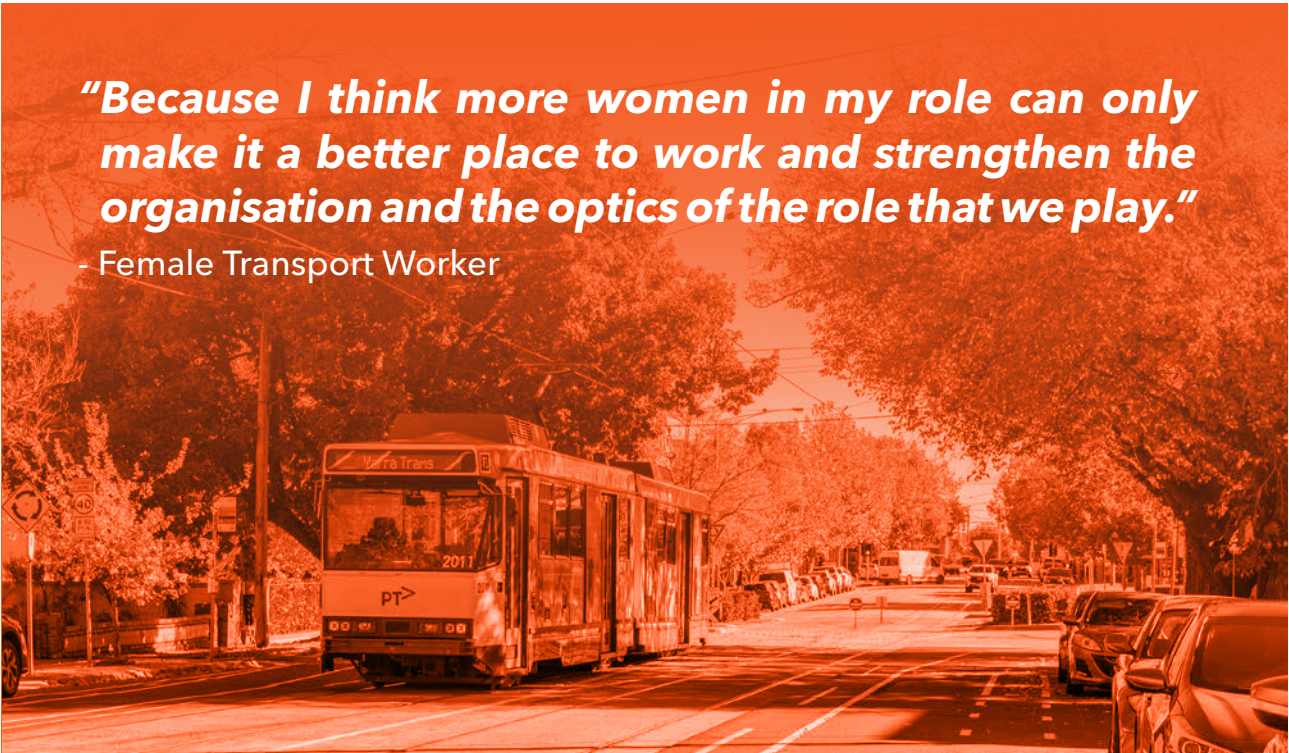
***"I believe the more the merrier!  
Joining strength and breaking  
stereotypes would be powerful  
if more women join as one."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker



***"Because I think more women in my role can only make it a better place to work and strengthen the organisation and the optics of the role that we play."***

- Female Transport Worker



***"Increasing female participation not only helps create visible role models for other women, but also creates greater equality and balance in the workplace. When more women join these fields, it challenges outdated stereotypes and inspires the next generation to pursue rewarding careers in trades."***

- Female Apprentice Electrician



## Men's views are mixed on having more women in MDIs

***"I believe it enhances productivity to make room for a greater variety of perspectives and skills. It's also my opinion that a workplace with a better gender mix will be more harmonious and better behaved. Ultimately, it's about normalising difference and diversity."***

- Male Construction Worker

***"We should be inclusive to all genders and cultures and actively backup that our company is serious about it not just because they want to appear to be inclusive for promoting purposes."***

- Male Electrician

***"It's working the way it is."***

- Male Mining Operator

***"Never thought of it [having more women]."***

- Male Construction Worker

## Workers want to see better workplace culture and more women in leadership.

Women and gender diverse workers want better workplace culture and more women in leadership, as well as fair promotion opportunities. In contrast, men are more focused on access to flexible work arrangements and support for caregivers.



***"...that psychological hazards are taken more seriously. That OHS obligations are properly understood my management to encompass providing a mentally safe and sustainable workplace that with manageable workload."***

- Female Construction Worker



## Top 3 changes workers wish to see

*What changes do you most want to see in your workplace to promote gender equality? (multiple choice)*

Women and gender diverse workers in all industries:



Women and gender diverse workers in MDIs:



Male workers in all industries:



Male workers in MDIs:



***"I'd also like to particularly see more women in leading positions and be recognized for their work abilities more."***

- Non-binary Transport Worker

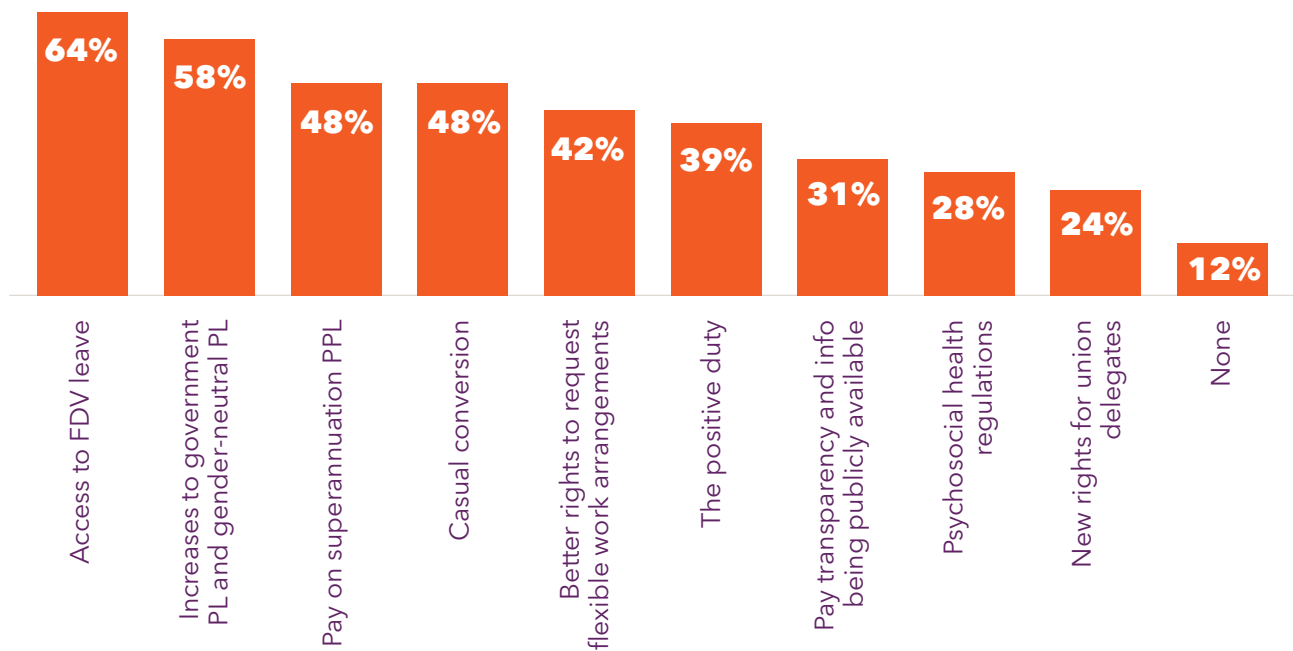
## Barrier 1: The lack of awareness of workers' rights and entitlements in workplaces

Most workers are not entirely aware of their rights and entitlements.

Our survey asked respondents about their familiarity with recent significant changes to the law designed to address workplace gender inequality. Although some rights are recognised, the newly introduced rights and conditions are not well understood and 12% of workers were unaware of any of them.

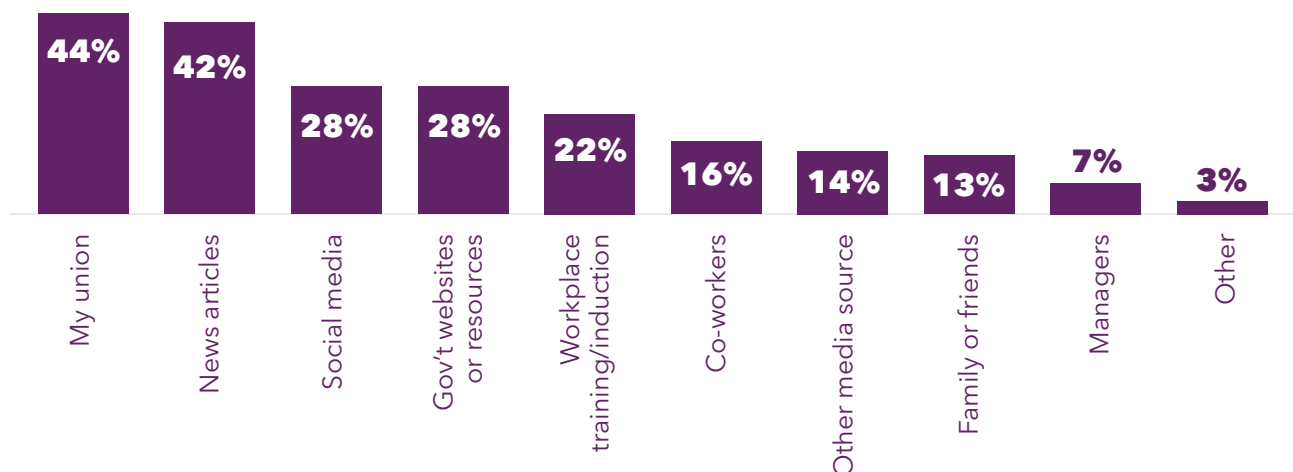
### Workers' familiarity with working conditions

*Have you ever heard of the following? (multiple choice)*



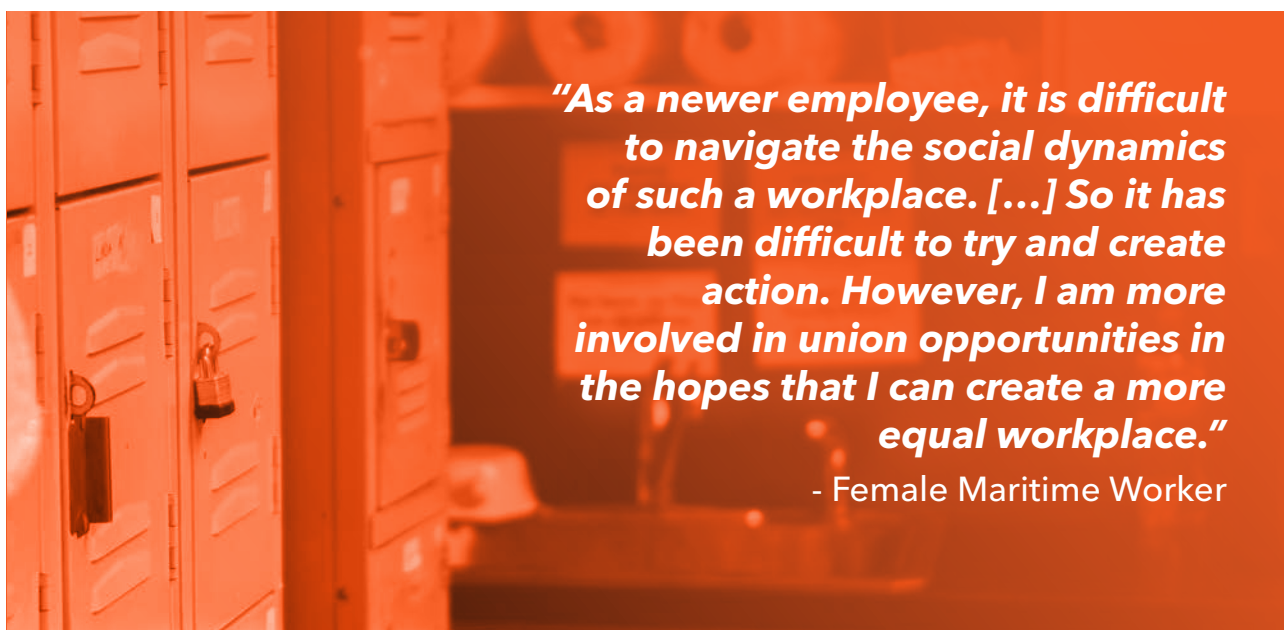
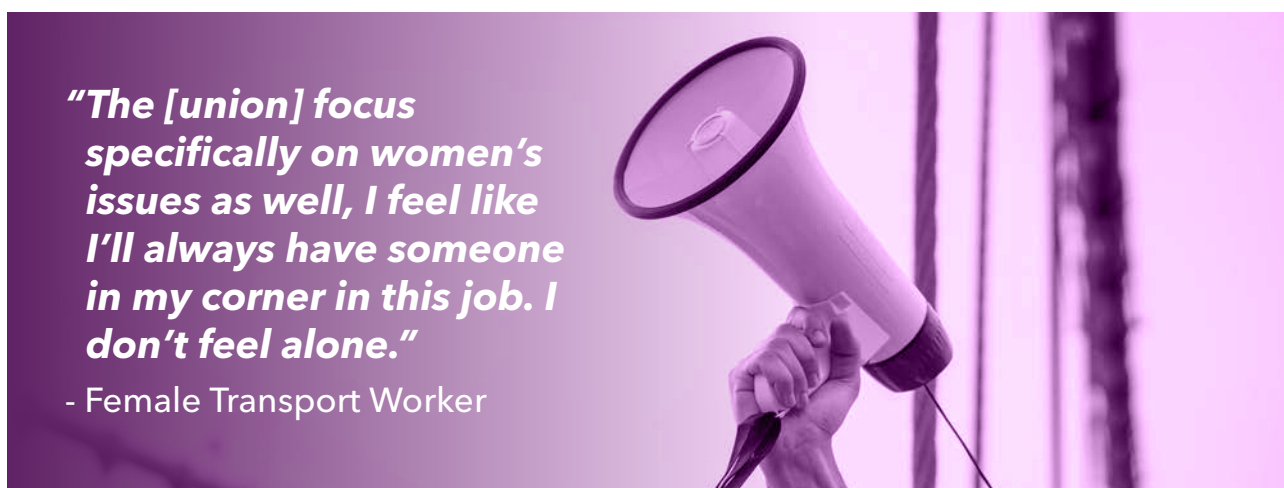
Respondents learned about their rights and entitlements mainly through their union or news articles. Workplace training, induction and co-workers ranked even lower than government websites and resources, while management was the lowest ranked source of information about work rights. This suggests both that there is little information or discussion delivered by workplace management and that unions are more trusted by workers to communicate their rights and entitlements.

### Workers' source of knowledge



## Unions empower and support workers to learn about and exercise their rights.

Unions play a significant role in educating workers about their rights and work conditions. Survey responses showed that unions also serve as important networks that empower women workers and support them in addressing workplace gendered harm.





## Trailblazing women play a vital role in creating better workplace environments.

Many women in MDIs shared their pride in being one of the first women to create changes and pave the way for fellow women workers. Resilience emerged as a recurring theme.

***"Male colleagues have said to me that having women on site has 'really cleaned up the guys' language and how people go about things.'"***

- Female Electrician



***"[...] over time, I've found that earning respect through my skills and work ethic has changed those perceptions. My resilience and ability to hold my own have influenced how I'm treated now – I'm seen as an equal on the team."***

- Female Maritime Worker

***"I love to advocate for those who feel like they don't have a voice. If I see something or someone being treated wrongly, I will speak up because I once was one to be picked on and no one was there for me at the time, so I want to be that person for others."***

- Female Manufacturing Operator



***"Despite everything I have had to put up with in workplaces I want to show women that we can do whatever we want to be in life. Don't let the negative perceptions of women dictate what job you should have or what you are capable of."***

- Female Construction Worker



***"I was treated as someone who could do the job from the start. I was given the same training and opportunities as my male colleagues. The number of women already successfully doing my job paved the way for me to step into the job and give it a go."***

- Female Transport Worker



## Recommendation 1:

**Empower workers every day to know, access and exercise their rights.**

Women workers must be supported and empowered to know, access and exercise their rights properly with the backing of strong unions. Workplace training and induction programs must involve unions and provide clear information about workers' rights and entitlements, and such information must also be communicated on the management level.

**Action 1:** Develop and deliver an Equal Workplace Advocate program for women and gender diverse workers in target industries to be leaders in their industry, support the introduction of improved gender equality entitlements and practices, and provide confidence to other women workers.

**Action 2:** Encourage and support unions to recruit and train designated Women's Advocates in MDIs.

**Action 3:** Leverage the power of union advocacy to deliver meaningful and enforceable entitlements through consultative mechanisms and enterprise bargaining, and support them with resources and training.

**Action 4:** Collect and promote positive case studies of working women, male workers and unions taking action to improve gender equality in male-dominated workplaces.

# Women's workplace realities are still defined by gender

## Gender inequality in the workplace

Women workers report they faced gender inequality in the workplace.

Women reported experiencing gender inequality at work at much higher rates than men. This was particularly true for women in MDIs, especially in manufacturing.<sup>9</sup> The main factors that led to gender inequality at work were women's representation in leadership and poor workplace culture that encompasses gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

*Do you feel that there is gender equality in your workplace?*

■ Yes ■ No

All Industries:



Women and gender diverse workers in:



*What makes you feel there is gender inequality in your workplace? (multiple choice)*



More than half of women workers report they faced workplace gender discrimination.

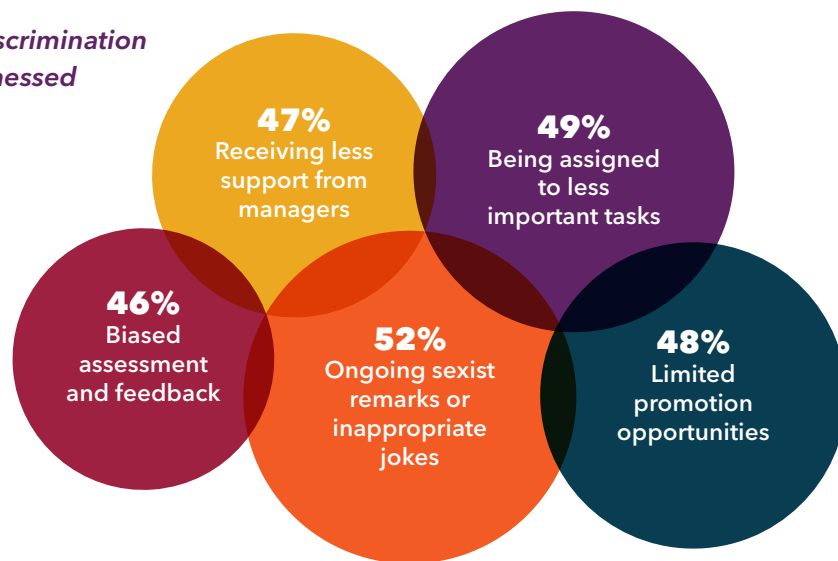
While the gender discrimination has been experienced and/or witnessed by a significant share of women workers in MDIs as well as across all industries, men are generally less aware of it. The most common issues of gender discrimination reported related to a hostile workplace culture and barriers to promotion and career development, pregnancy and care.

9. We included 'Other Services' in the category of male-dominated industries for the entire analysis, as the respondents in this sector were overwhelmingly concentrated in occupations that are traditionally male-dominated.





**Experiences of gender discrimination that workers faced or witnessed**  
(multiple choice)



**Workplace culture towards women workers has improved but there's still a way to go.**

**How has the treatment of women in your workplace changed since you started your current job?**

A scale from 1 (Much worse), 3 (Hasn't changed) to 5 (Much better)



Some workers felt that employers only paid 'lip service' to improving the experiences of women at work without implementing meaningful changes.

***"I have seen policies but they die on the paper."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker

***"There are plenty of policies that have been written up by corporate but they're not really implemented for operations staff, as the middle managers are not trained well enough to deliver them effectively, and they don't seem to have the empathy that is required to help women in a male-dominated industry."***

- Female Manufacturing Operator

## **Barrier 2: Gender stereotypes and role assignments**

Women workers in MDIs are still seen as unfit for 'men's jobs'.

Women are often perceived as incapable of performing their actual jobs and are expected to handle housekeeping tasks. Gender stereotyping affects not just role assignments and skill assessments, but also the way women and gender diverse workers are judged and treated.

***"I have been told, 'Women don't work in this area, you could get hurt', 'Women don't drive forklifts.'"***

- Female Manufacturing Operator

***"[...] a former manager said, 'Women are not as strong as men, there are some roles they can't do!'"***

- Female Maritime Worker

***"The [...] men on the farm expect me to [...] undertake tasks in the communal living environment that they see as menial."***

- Female Farm Worker

Women workers often feel they need to 'prove' themselves.

Women who enter MDIs often feel they need to 'prove' their skills and commitment to win trust.

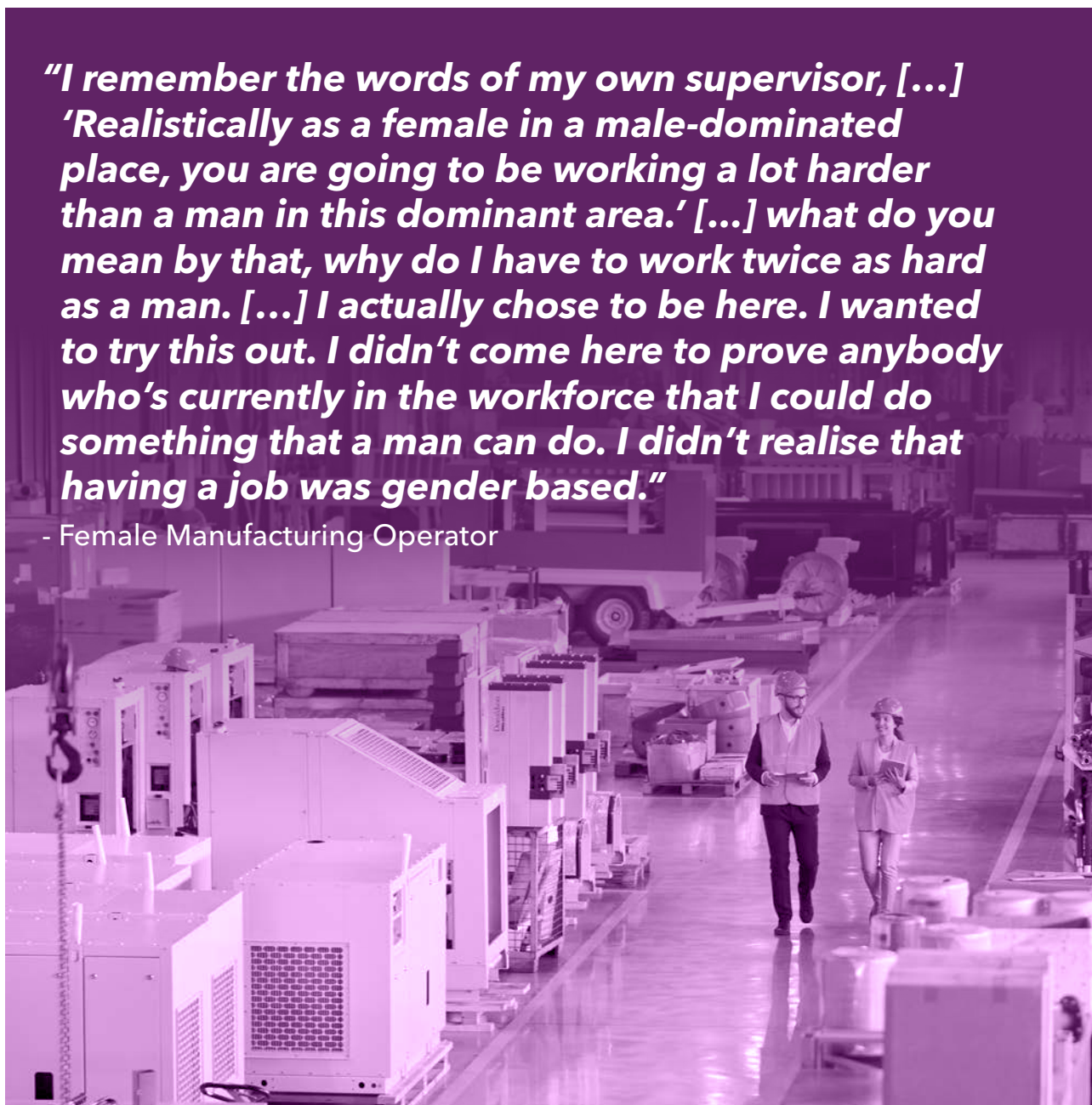
***"I always have to prove myself as a woman.  
There is huge unconscious bias."*** - Female Construction Worker

***"Not always presenting as confident means people think you  
can't do the job. Being confident get called a bitch."***

- Female Ranger

***"I remember the words of my own supervisor, [...] 'Realistically as a female in a male-dominated place, you are going to be working a lot harder than a man in this dominant area.' [...] what do you mean by that, why do I have to work twice as hard as a man. [...] I actually chose to be here. I wanted to try this out. I didn't come here to prove anybody who's currently in the workforce that I could do something that a man can do. I didn't realise that having a job was gender based."***

- Female Manufacturing Operator





# Job prospects of women workers in MDIs

Women's experiences of entering and remaining in the industry are generally good.

Women were generally positive about their experiences at work, while women in MDIs were marginally less positive.

**How would you describe the experience of women entering your industry?**

A scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good)



***"When looking for an apprenticeship, I faced a lot of discrimination and it was hard to just get a foot in the door."***

- Female Manufacturing Apprentice

**How would you describe the long-term experience of women working in your industry?**

A scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good)



***"I don't like feeling unsafe at work and I don't see a future here as a female. If I was male I would have been promoted already."***

- Female Wholesale Trade Worker

***"I'm the only female out in the field. No other woman has lasted."***

- Female Construction Worker



## The impact of gender specific recruitment

Many respondents shared how deliberate hiring practices that actively recruit women have shaped the workplace culture. In these instances, the increased number of women in a workplace has promoted gender equality and helped women feel safe and supported at work.



***"I truly feel that this job and the company I work for has changed my life. I work in what was traditionally a male-dominated field, that has become very diverse and empowers women. Not only women but the LGBTQIA+ community."***

- Female Transport Worker

***"My company is hiring more women, and it actually helped by having someone I can relate to."***

- Female Wholesale Trade Worker

However, without supportive workplace cultures to encourage women workers to stay, recruitment efforts can be meaningless:

***"[...] what's the use in a quota when we get one toilet and a wardrobe sized change-room when the males get four toilets and a change-room the size of half my house! Who's asking why there are no females in the leadership team? Who's asking why majority of the women have been put on the same roster?"***

- Female Transport, Postal and Warehousing Worker

***"Because amenities have not changed or improved to allow for our increased female employees, it feels like the company are just trying to employ women for the sake of ticking an inclusive gender box!"***

- Male Electrician

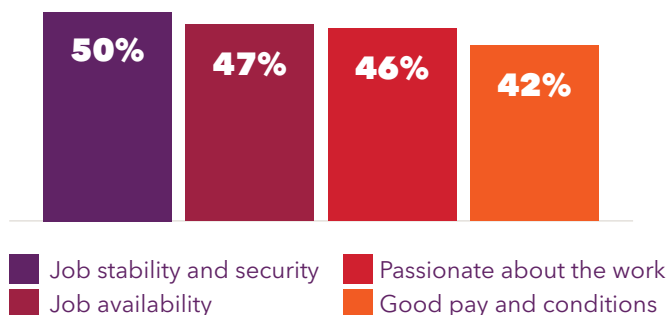
***"As a long-established business that typically hired men in the past but is now hiring for gender diversity, there is a stigma [...] that we only got the job because [we're women] and not because of our skills."***

- Female Manufacturing Operator

## Stability and passion are key drivers for women entering and staying in MDIs.

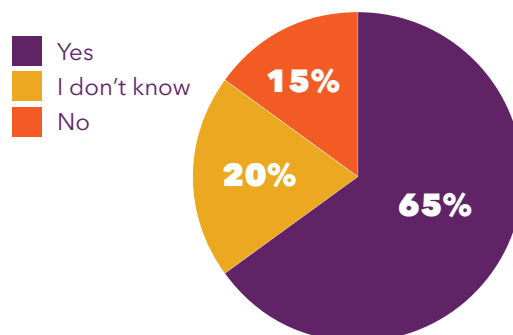
Women want to work in and be supported to stay working in MDIs. They listed job stability, opportunity, pay and work conditions, and personal passion as the main drivers that led them to the current industry.

**What led you to choose the industry you work in?**  
(multiple choices)



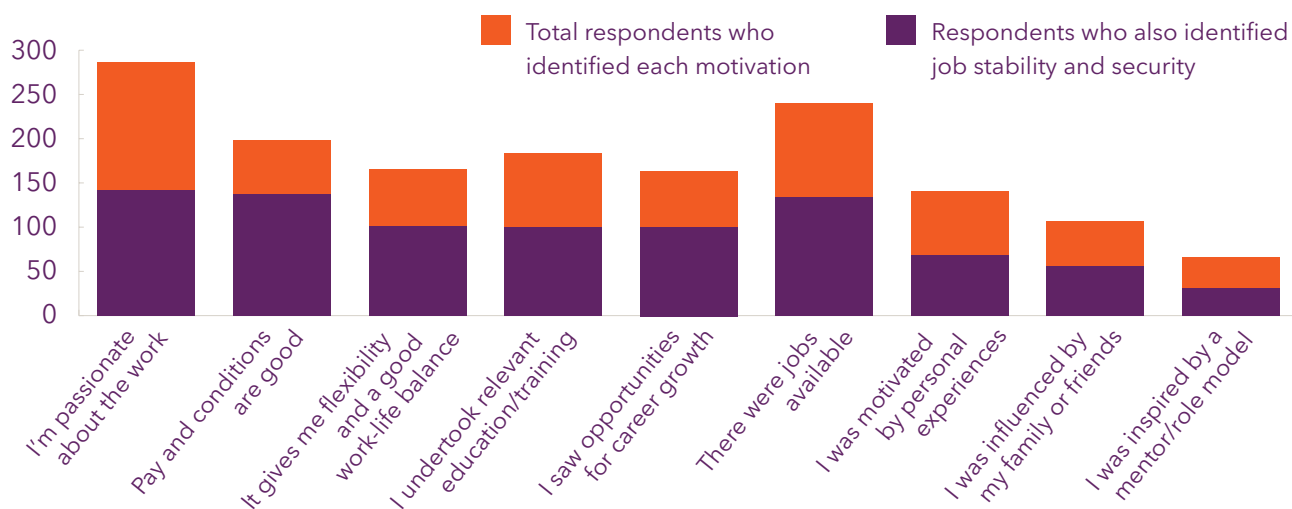
**Do you want to stay in the current industry or job?**

Women and gender diverse workers in MDIs



While women pointed to a range of motivations, job stability and security consistently stood out as the central factor across responses.

**What led women workers to the current industry**




***"I drive big machinery - I love it!!  
And it turns out that I'm good at it!! I still have lots to learn, and my role allows so much growth and personal challenges, that's what allows me to thrive and excel.  
Also, we have fun at work!"***

- Female Waste Services Worker







***"Considering I am almost finished my time in my apprenticeship, I am going to continue because the conditions are good, and the pay is really good. I love my job and I enjoy working with my work mates, everyone becomes like family."***

- Female Apprentice Electrician

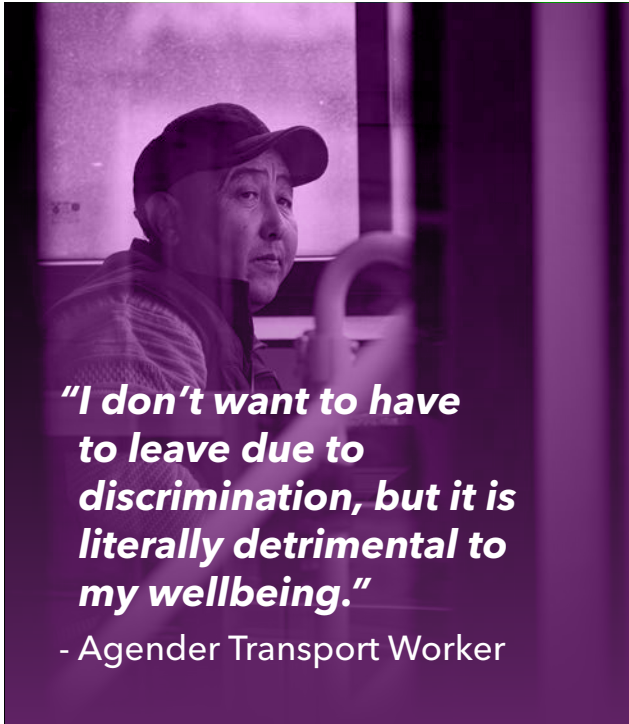
### **Women leave the industry because of hostile environments and work conditions.**

Work conditions and workplace culture were the most common reasons women reported for leaving or wanting to leave their workplace. Hostile workplace environments negatively impact workers' physical and mental well-being.



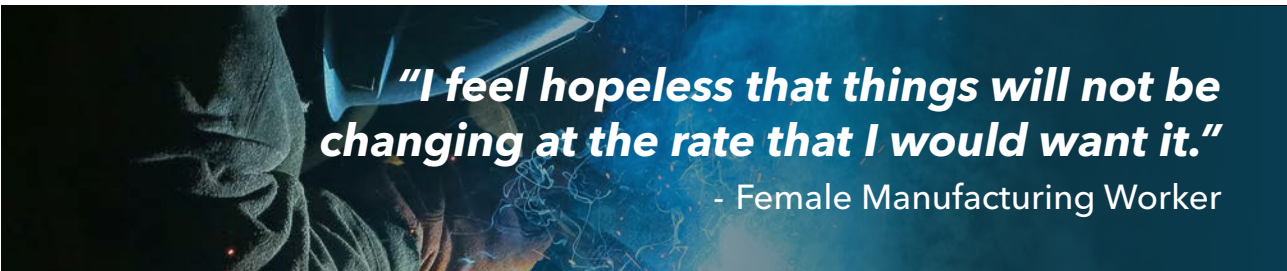
***"I entered the construction industry as a 19 year old apprentice, I was training with a group of all young men and there was a lot of sexist mistreatment towards me. I left one of my apprenticeship workplaces due to mistreatment."***

- Female Construction Worker



***"I don't want to have to leave due to discrimination, but it is literally detrimental to my wellbeing."***

- Agender Transport Worker



***"I feel hopeless that things will not be changing at the rate that I would want it."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker



***"I want better pay, more respect, better management."***

- Female Waste Services Worker



***"I'm sick of being treated the way that I am."***

- Female Mining Operator

## Recommendation 2:

**Support workplaces to move beyond 'lip service' to gender equality by promoting worker engagement.**

Workplaces must ensure that gender equality policies and targets are not just present on paper but embedded in everyday workplace practices and culture.

**Action 5:** Review enterprise agreements in target male-dominated industries. Identify gaps, best practices and promote opportunities to improve entitlements that encourage and enable gender equality.

**Action 6:** Create a workplace gender equality audit toolkit targeted at workers so they can identify the barriers to gender equality in their own workplace and collectively develop solutions.

**Action 7:** Make information about workplace entitlements clearer and more accessible by creating Equality at Work fact sheets and template enterprise agreement clauses so workers can easily understand, exercise and improve their rights at work.

## Barrier 3: Facilities and amenities that are not women-friendly

One of the main barriers that emerged from the survey and focus groups was the lack of access to and poor quality of facilities and amenities. Toilets, uniforms, and personal protective equipment (PPE) were the primary issues that frustrated women workers.

***"There are no female toilets, the only toilet in the gym to use is a urinal. There is no women's specific uniform that is of good quality. No sanitary bins for us to use."***


- Female Maritime Worker



***"Uniforms, PPE is a huge issue as far as feeling welcomed. [...] The pants make me feel very unwelcome."***

- Female Electricity Services Apprentice





***"I just would like [a] uniform that fits. [...] You just wanna buy pants that keep you safe at work. Because I can't just wear whatever I want. They do need to be hi-vis, they do need to be cut resistant."***

- Female Manufacturing Operator

## **Recommendation 3:**

### **Improve facilities and amenities for women.**

Workplaces must provide safe, clean and accessible facilities and amenities that are inclusive of women and gender diverse workers, particularly uniforms and PPE.

**Action 8:** Train and support workers to use the workplace gender equality audit toolkit to assess if their workplace has access to safe and clean toilets, appropriate uniforms and PPE, sanitary bins, and drinking water, and to develop collective solutions.

**Action 9:** Consult with workers and make information about workplace rights and entitlements clearer and more accessible by creating Equality at Work fact sheets and template enterprise agreement clauses so workers can easily understand, exercise and improve their rights at work, including the right to adequate facilities.



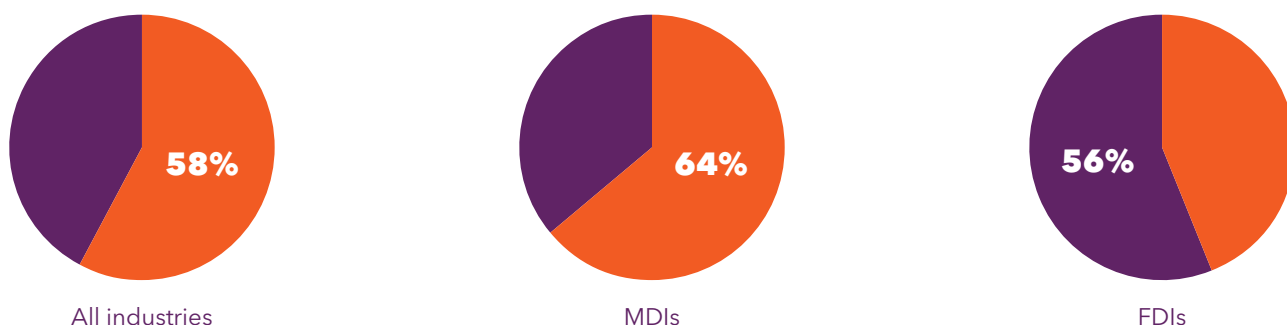
# Pay and progression

## Barrier 4: Gender pay gap

Over 40% of women think their male co-workers are paid more.

Are you satisfied with your current pay? ■ Yes ■ No

Percentage of women and gender diverse workers who are satisfied with current pay



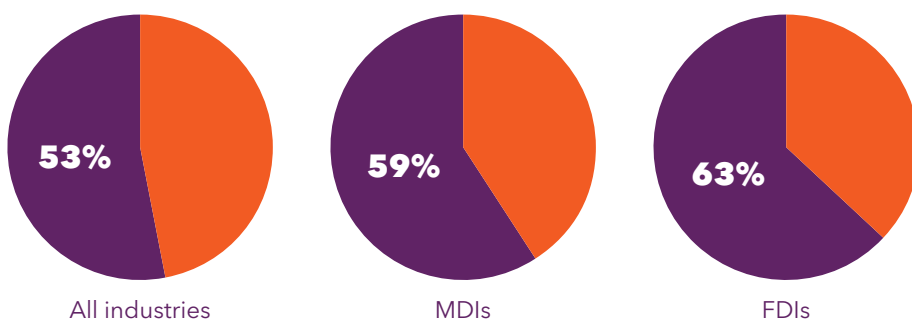
Notably, the percentage of women who were satisfied with their current pay was higher in MDIs than in other industries. Indeed, workers in MDIs on average earn approximately \$30,000 more per year than those in FDIs.<sup>10</sup> Yet, a significant share of women workers in MDIs still reported experiencing a pay gap. National average gender pay gap stands at 11.5%,<sup>11</sup> and when looking at women's

employment on the whole, such as part-time and casual employment and the inability to take up overtime, the gender pay gap widens to 21.8%.<sup>12</sup> Looking by industry, the average gap is 16.1% in MDIs and 5.5% in FDIs.<sup>13</sup> The survey responses show that a good number of women workers both in MDIs and FDIs are aware of gender pay gap in contrast to men's notably low level of awareness.

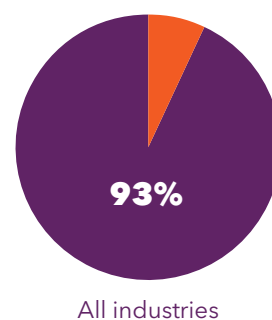
Have you ever felt that your male co-workers are paid more for the same role? ■ Yes ■ No

Awareness of gender pay gap

Women and gender diverse workers:



Male workers:



***"I have male co-workers who do the same work as me who are paid \$6 more per hour (at least)."***

- Non-binary Apprentice Parks and Gardens

10. WGEA, "Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard."

11. ABS, "Average Weekly Earnings, Australia May 2025"; This compares the average full-time wage of a typical female worker to the average full-time wage of a male worker.

12. WGEA, "Gender pay gap data;" The total remuneration average gender pay gap for the private sector.

13. WGEA, "Employer gender pay gaps report 2023-24"; The mid-point of average employer gender pay gaps.

***"I'm paid by \$30k-\$50k less than my male coworkers (same job role and I'm more qualified)."***

- Female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services Worker

Patterns have emerged that explain why men are still paid more than women in some workplaces. First, assumptions and poor perceptions about women's caring responsibilities prevents them from accessing overtime, shift penalties and higher

pay. Second, women are often overrepresented in lower-paid, casual, and/or insecure positions. Lastly, experiences of gender discrimination affect women's self-esteem and discourage them from fighting for higher classification or allowances.



***"Most of the workforce are technicians and manufacturing workers, which is mostly male-dominated, and they have capacity to do large amounts of overtime. These roles have limited flexible arrangements and so parents can't do pick up and drop off as easily and those with caring duties are less likely to volunteer for overtime."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker

***"They hire women to meet targets and there's only two of us who operate machines. The other women are all parcel operators. There doesn't seem like any career progression."***

- Non-binary Warehousing Worker

***"Women admin staff [are] told that they are not allowed an agreement and must stay on individual contracts."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker

***"A lack of confidence to advocate for higher wages due to feeling less skilled. A feeling of impostor syndrome, working in an industry that you do not 'belong' in."***

- Female Construction Worker

## **Barrier 5:**

### **The lack of progression and representation**

Women are concerned about the limited options for career progression and the absence of female leadership.

From the surveys and focus groups, it became clear that many women are concerned about career advancement, partly because progression gaps are more visible.<sup>14</sup> Male workers tend to receive more training and opportunities due to their dominance in their workplaces, whereas women often miss out on opportunities because of discrimination, their caring responsibilities or career breaks.

***“My managers would often tell me that they prioritise training/promotions for men with families.”***

- Female Transport Worker

***“I was passed over for a promotion despite being more qualified because I didn’t fit in with the management boys club.”*** - Non-binary Transport, Postal and Warehousing Worker



***“Mining has consistently developed male leaders due to the systems of development, outdated views of women’s abilities and social pressures, which affect mainly women from being able to adhere to strict shift structures during the time intensive family period of their career. So no one considers the actual experience of women (even though they now actively recruit women).”***

- Female Mining Operator

14. Women’s primary concerns are ‘not enough women in leadership (62%)’, ‘Lack of promotion for women (44%)’, ‘Gender pay gap (34%)’.



## Recommendation 4:

### Establish transparent and fair pathways for skill development and progression.

Workplaces must ensure workers have equal and transparent pay and career progression pathways. Role assignments and access to training and skill development opportunities must be fair and equal.

**Action 10:** Train and support workers to use the workplace gender equality audit toolkit to assess the factors contributing to the gender pay gap in their workplace and develop collective solutions.

**Action 11:** Encourage improved consultation between workers, unions and employers in accordance with legislative requirements about their workplace gender pay gap and gender equality initiatives through enforceable requirements to consult (for example: recommend improvements to existing consultation provisions in enterprise agreements to reflect consultation requirements in WGE Act, FW Act and OHS Act and SD Act requirements).

## Flexibility, work and care

### Barrier 6: Discrimination due to caring responsibilities in workplaces

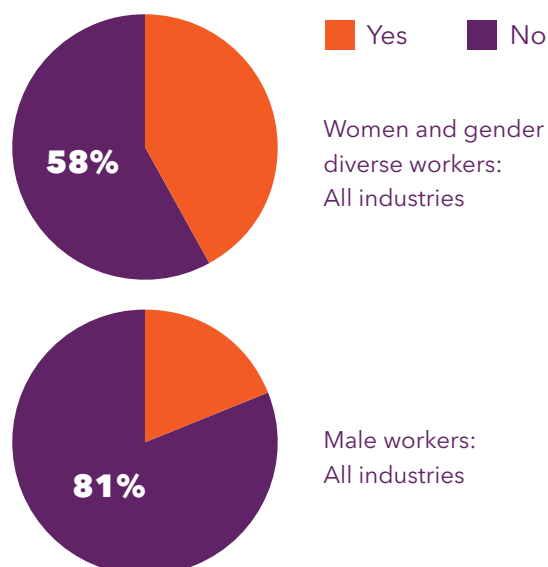
#### Women are more affected by caring responsibilities than men.

Whether parenting or other forms of care, women remain the primary caregivers, impacting their experiences at work. In Australia, 12.8% of women are unpaid carers who provide informal assistance to people with disability or people aged 65 years and over.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in 54% of families, a woman is identified as the main caregiver for children, and 80% of one parent families are single mothers.<sup>16</sup> Further, 83% of those who take primary carer and universally available parental leave are women.<sup>17</sup> Among our survey respondents, 52% reported having caring responsibilities, including parental and other forms of care.

Women told us they are expected to bear disproportional caring responsibility, and that these responsibilities are seen as a burden at work. Many described experiencing discrimination due to pregnancy, parental status and/or caring responsibilities.

#### *Have your caring responsibilities ever influenced how you were treated in your workplace?*

Impacts of caring responsibilities on work



15. ABS, "Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings."

16. Wilkins et al., "The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 22."

17. WGEA, "Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard."

***"A female crew member was asked in a management interview if 'she was here to find a boyfriend' and 'was she going to get pregnant and leave soon.'"***

- Female Maritime Worker



***"When I first started [...], numerous comments were made about me eventually needing maternity leave and inevitably not wanting to continue to do shift work once I had children."***

***I had comments from managers querying whether I might be pregnant, and when I did return to work after my first child, one manager told me they'd done a 5 year plan for me and they just think I'll get pregnant and not come back."***

- Female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Technician



***"I am a single mother of a special needs child. [...] The exact words used were, 'you aren't eligible for full-time because of your family responsibilities.'"***

- Female Manufacturing Worker



## **Barrier 7:**

### **Limited availability and access to flexible work arrangements**

**More women request flexible work arrangements than men.**

While 59% of women respondents with caring responsibilities have requested flexible work arrangements, only 40% of male workers have done the same. The lack of support for those seeking flexible arrangements was consistently reported. Although these options are available on

paper, workers have difficulty accessing them, often ending up taking their personal leaves to provide care. Even when their requests are approved, they are treated differently and pressured not to ask for further support.

***"When asked for time off due to family issues, was asked if I wanted to keep my job."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker

***"My caring responsibilities have eaten into my personal leave accruals, and then when I have needed those hours for my own personal use, I haven't had enough hours available to take paid time off."***

- Female Manufacturing Worker

***"Flexible working arrangements were treated as [having] less [of a] commitment to role and penalised with shift offerings."***

- Female Transport, Postal and Warehousing Services Worker



## Men are also affected by the lack of support for their caring responsibilities.

44% of men with caring responsibilities told us they wanted greater flexibility options. This was highlighted heavily in survey responses and focus group discussions.



## Recommendation 5:

**Improve uptake of flexible work arrangements and normalise care for workers of all genders.**

Workplaces must improve flexible work options and promote awareness about balancing work and caring responsibilities. Men should be actively encouraged to access parental leave and flexible work arrangements.

**Action 12:** Train and support workers to use the workplace gender equality audit toolkit to assess whether their employer has taken proactive steps to prevent discrimination in their workplace and encourage access to flexibility and gender-neutral parental leave.

**Action 13:** Make information about workplace entitlements clearer and more accessible so workers can easily understand, exercise and improve their rights at work (including information about discrimination, flexible work arrangements, gender-neutral parental leave and different leave entitlements).

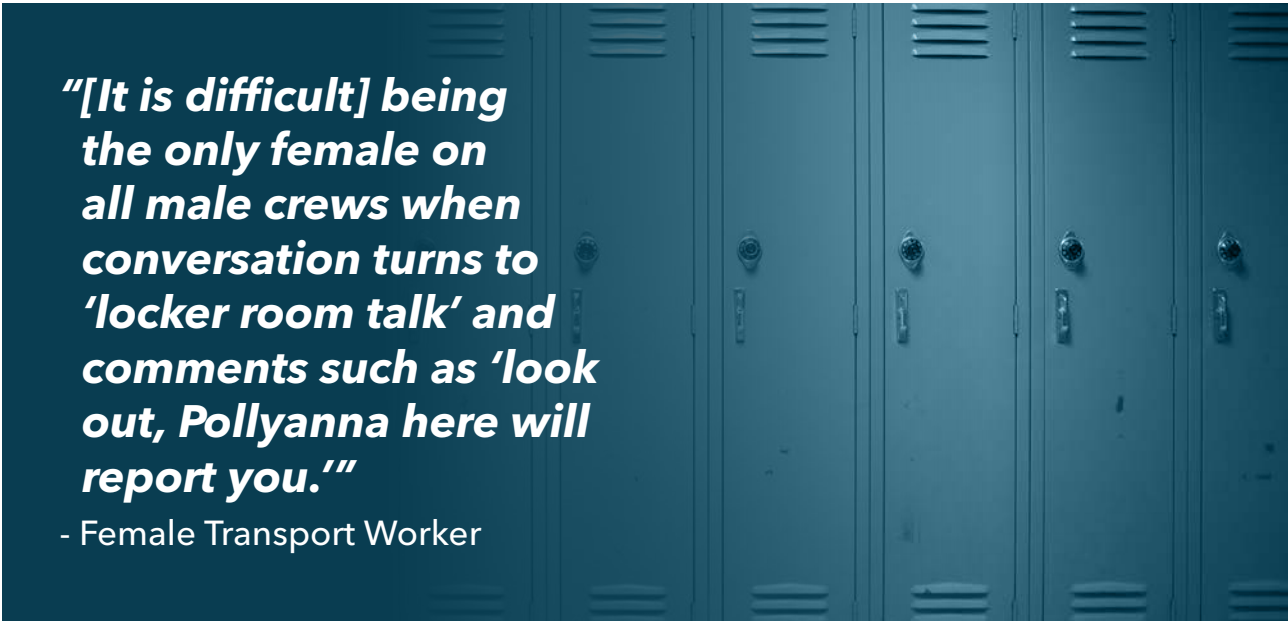
**Action 14:** Create Equality at Work factsheets and resources about workplace entitlements. Encourage and empower workers to apply new workplace laws and improve enforceable entitlements through enterprise bargaining. Share information about options available to resolve disputes.

## Safety, workplace inclusivity and culture

### Barrier 8: Hostile workplace cultures

**Male-dominated workplaces are perceived as a boys' club.**

Many respondents in MDIs spoke of a closed environment where women and gender diverse workers are excluded from everyday conversations and decision-making processes.



***"[It is difficult] being the only female on all male crews when conversation turns to 'locker room talk' and comments such as 'look out, Pollyanna here will report you.'"***

**- Female Transport Worker**

***"Just always feel like I'm on the outside when I work with groups of men because I'm not a bro. When there are group meetings they always say, OK boys, or lads, and most of supervisors look uncomfortable talking to me like they don't know how to treat me or what job to give me even though I've been a sparky for 17 years."***

- Female Electrician

***"Although the company purports to be gender diverse and inclusive and is seen to be trying on the surface to reach that goal, there is a work culture in place that valorises blokey mateship between management and workers that leaves the workplace feeling like a boys club."***

- Male Transport Worker

Workplace bullying is common.

***"I treat the guys with respect, but I don't get the same treatment, I get bullied and have rumours spread that I'm sleeping with other workmates."***

- Female Construction Worker



***"I was bullied over a period of 2 to 3 years I was physically pushed [and] yelled at in front of all the people on that shift, they made my life at work hell."***

- Female Maritime Worker



Women feel isolated, unsafe, and disempowered at work.

Women and gender diverse workers experience in MDIs:

**59%**  
Feeling isolated

**38%**  
Feeling unsafe

**58%**  
Feeling powerless

***"Just being one of the only girls and being surrounded by males everyday can feel somewhat isolating sometimes. Not having people relate to you or understand certain situations."***

- Female Maritime Worker

***"I work in an environment where anything and everything wants and can kill you. I have felt unsafe when I have raised issues about certain safety things and nothing has been done about it."***

- Female Manufacturing Operator

***"I am the only female. I have lots of jokes and banter with the men, but do not have a friend to lean on for support, comfort or guidance. Some men have approached me when witnessing sexism towards me but do not speak up to the perpetrators."***

- Female Electricity Services Worker

***"I have no voice, everyone speaks on my behalf and talks about my work as if it were their own. No one cares how I feel or what I think. I am here to be walked all over."***

- Female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services Worker




## Barrier 9: The absence of prevention, reporting mechanisms and accountability for sexual harassment and gender-based violence (SH/GBV)

Nearly half women in MDIs have experienced SH/GBV.



Women in MDIs experience harassment mainly from male co-workers and management. Respondents' experiences ranged from sexual comments and jokes, unwanted flirting, touching, stalking to sexual assaults.





***"There was a period where I was bullied for standing up to someone displaying rude pictures of women. One day I walked into my department and the entire place was filled with full on porn - to teach me a lesson."***

- Female Transport, Postal and Warehousing Worker

There were three main issues identified:

### 1) The workplace culture that lets SH happen and silences victims

In a hostile workplace that allows SH/GBV, women don't feel safe to report, fearing losing their job or being subject to retaliation. Male victims also find it extremely difficult to speak up in a male-dominated environment.

***"The frequency of these events made it difficult to 'seek support'. It was the culture, and the mentality is that if that's the way they've always behaved, why should they have to change?"***

- Female Transport Worker



***"These practices are so common women just accept it. They try to get changes made but it's not going to happen. We all know it."***

- Female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services Worker

***"Often reporting ends with women being seen as the problem (not fitting in, too sensitive) - not the overarching cultural norms."***

- Female Mining Operator

## 2) Reporting processes that hinder women from speaking up

Women respondents pointed out the lack of proper reporting mechanisms. In some cases, they are not aware of the existence of the process. In other cases, they give up on reporting because of management acting as SH/GBV perpetrators. Reporting processes are often complicated and do not take into consideration the trauma experienced by victims.

***"The managers are the biggest perpetrators so there was no one safe to report it."***

- Non-binary Transport, Postal and Warehousing Worker

***"Didn't seek support, because of the paperwork, hoop-jumping, and bureaucracy."*** - Female Public Administration Worker

## 3) The absence of accountability

Even when women managed to report an incident, respondents told us that either nothing happened, or they faced further victimisation.

***"Yes I sought support. They did nothing about the perpetrator of the discrimination. He is still in the role."***

- Female Maritime Worker

***"I have both sought support and rode through, outcomes seem similar. HR fundamentally only care to remove the issue, women, and they are consistently a major barrier to women in male populated industries."***

- Female Public Administration Worker

***"I have seen some seek support which has in turn affected their employment more than it has helped. [...] The process has been traumatic."*** - Female Maritime Worker

***"I have tried to seek support once and they let me believe it was all good, and I only worked a few weeks longer and then lost my job."***

- Female Construction Worker



## Recommendation 6:

**Strengthen accountability mechanisms where employers fail to meet their legal obligations.**

Management and employers must fulfil their positive duties to prevent and respond to workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination. Perpetrators must be held accountable through transparent processes so that workers feel safe to report via trauma-informed processes.

**Action 15:** Encourage and support unions to appoint and train Women's Advocates with the same workplace rights as Workplace Delegates.

**Action 16:** Identify best practice entitlements that exist in enterprise agreements that are proven to improve gender equality in workplaces and support unions to adopt actions. Continue progressing and improving entitlements in enterprise agreements which focus on gender equality. To support workers and unions in this work:

- Create standardised aspirational bargaining claims that focus on improving gender equality entitlements to be adopted across target industries (including responding to and eliminating SH/GBV).
- Create best practice template clauses that focus on improving gender equality entitlements.
- Provide data and research explaining why these clauses and claims will improve gender equality and train workers, unions and other stakeholders in their use. Provide bargaining arguments to support negotiations with workers and employers.

## Barrier 10:

### The absence of consideration towards intersecting issues in workplaces


**The experiences of workers are exacerbated by their intersectional attributes.**

35% of women and gender diverse workers reported that they were treated differently because of their personal attributes other than their gender. Among male respondents, 23% said they witnessed someone being treated differently for their intersectional attributes.



***"I'm gay and non binary in a male-dominated industry. I feel I need to keep a lot of my personal life to myself."***

- Non-binary Warehousing Worker

A woman with short dark hair and glasses is working on a piece of electrical equipment. The equipment has a panel with many buttons and a small screen. A label with the word "TIGER" is visible on the equipment. The entire image has an orange tint.

***"I started work in a workshop of 20+ 50-60-year-old white males. They've never had an Asian and hadn't had a woman in 20 years. I was unwelcome before I arrived."***

- Female Electrician

A woman with curly blonde hair is smiling. She is wearing a dark jacket with a white stripe on the sleeve. She appears to be in the driver's seat of a vehicle, with a steering wheel and a large circular mirror visible. The entire image has a purple tint.

***"Ageism is alive and well at my workplace."***

- Female Transport Worker

A woman with short blonde hair is looking to her left. In the background, four other people are standing and talking. The entire image has an orange tint.

***"Traits specific to my disability are mocked and have become a 'running joke' most commonly referred to/ enacted by seniors and management. This has continued after I shared why and how I find this behaviour to be offensive."***

- Female Public Administration Worker

## Recommendation 7:

### Design and deliver better workplace training for workers with diverse backgrounds.

Develop more effective and tailored workplace training that incorporates intersectional attributes and addresses unconscious bias and hostile environments that women and gender diverse workers face.

**Action 17:** Deliver training tailored to the industrial knowledge of the workforce, recognising that workers in MDIs experience different challenges depending on the density of women working onsite. Information and training should include (among other things):

- Understanding gender equality, workplace entitlements and legislative levers
- How to access and improve entitlements and raise concerns
- Advocacy, building confidence, effective bystander intervention, and managing resistance

## Conclusion:

### 10 barriers, 7 recommendations, 17 actions.

This report has identified the key issues experienced by women workers in MDIs and outlined recommendations and our actions to address them. Importantly, our findings are not limited to negative experiences in male-dominated workplaces – women shared with us that they love their jobs, are seeing change and how they want to be the positive change in their workplace. This is the aim of the WFW Project: not merely to highlight gendered

workplace challenges, but also to empower workers, take action, break barriers, and build solidarity. The action plans presented here are part of VTHC's ongoing efforts to create truly inclusive, safe and equal workplaces in Victoria and beyond. We call on all employers, the Australian Government, and the wider community to join us in building workplaces that work for all workers, regardless of gender.





# Workplaces FOR Women

[weareunion.org.au/w4w](http://weareunion.org.au/w4w)



Australian Government

