



Assessing Progress in Implementing  
the Gender Equality Act 2020

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### **Authors**

Aida Ghalebeigi, Victor Gekara, Karen Douglas, Salvatore Ferraro, Lena Wang, and Maryam Safari

### **Correspondence**

Dr Aida Ghalebeigi. Email: aida.ghalebeigi@rmit.edu.au

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## **Acknowledgement of Country**

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woiwurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.



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# Executive Summary

## Project overview

Workplace gender inequality is an enduring, global socio-economic problem. Despite significant strides made over many decades, most Australian workplaces continue to exhibit gender inequalities. The Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020 requires identified public sector organisations to drive more equal and inclusive workplaces by addressing structural disadvantage and promoting gender equality through a variety of policies, strategies, and actions. Organisations are also expected to recognise, and act on the fact, that gender inequality may be intensified by people's intersectional characteristics.

Developing responses to gender inequality requires organisations to understand what unequal practices look like in the workplace. The study presented in this report focused on the Victoria government Department of Transport (DoT) and the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA), collectively the DoT. The study assessed how the DoT is currently placed to address traditional and persistent workplace gender inequalities in response to the newly enacted Gender Equality Act 2020. We spoke to DoT senior executives and staff to determine the policies, challenges, impediments, and enablers linked to achieving gender equality. The project was funded by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector as part of its Inaugural Research Grants round in 2021.

The study proceeded in three main ways:

- First, analysis of the Gender Equality Act 2020 established a framework for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of selected DoT strategies and policies in effectively implementing and achieving workplace gender equality.
- Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 executive managers focusing on their assessment of the opportunities, challenges, and barriers to achieving workplace gender equality.
- Third, focus group interviews with non-executive staff members assessed their perceptions and experiences of DoT's actions in leading and implementing workplace gender equality.

From the analysis of these data, we identified factors that sustain workplace gender inequalities and identified ways through which practices and processes could be changed to facilitate progress towards a more gender equal organisation and workplace. We provided recommendations to support the DoT's Gender Equality Action Plan, being part of its reporting obligations to the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. This report synthesises findings from all stages of the study. The report provides sets of recommendations and required actions that DoT, and other similar organisations, can use to effectively improve workplace gender equality.

# Main Findings

- The analysis shows strong executive commitment to achieving gender equality.
- Overall, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in the DoT workforce in the years following amalgamation of the DoT, Public Transport Victoria (PTV) and VicRoads in 2019.
- Women are significantly underrepresented in operational and engineering divisions, while overrepresented in Human Resources and administration roles.
- Various programs and initiatives have been implemented to encourage women's access to DoT employment, including scholarship and mentoring programs for women and girls interested in public sector careers.
- The DoT has relevant policies and strategies for improving gender equality which set out behavioural and cultural expectations of the DoT and contract workforce. Where appropriate, targets and sanctions are identified.
- Lack of manager KPIs specific to workplace gender equality combined with the demanding operational KPIs mean that the managers and executives responsible for the various divisions and sections under-prioritise workplace gender equality.
- Actions towards culture change and strategy implementation are mostly at the discretion of individual managers, without a clear standard organisational guideline. For example, whereas flexible work arrangements were generally encouraged and supported, the experience of many women in the staff was lack of adequate support from immediate line managers. Furthermore, there does not seem to be coordinated standard support and training for managers to increase awareness and appreciation of the importance of equal and inclusive workplaces. This has led to uneven progress towards workplace gender equality across divisions and sections.
- The gender targets set in the principal gender policies at the DoT do not seem realistic and it is not clear how they have been established. Furthermore, as these are not built into management KPIs, it is not clear how they can be achieved. It is likely for this reasons that the same targets under the previous iteration of the WiT (2017) strategy were not met. Furthermore, that the WiT targets apply to the both the DoT and the private transport sector potentially undermines targeted action at DoT.
- Embedded unconscious bias seems to shape the uneven treatment of women in relation to recruitment into certain 'male' occupations and promotions to senior roles. This was highlighted, for example, in the language used in job descriptions and job requirements which seemed to sustain the masculine workplace.
- Although there were clear and comprehensive internal and external recruitment policies and processes, some aspects of the processes, driven by embedded unconscious biases and traditional masculine cultures and structures, e.g., the composition of interview panels, disadvantage women and people with intersectional characteristics.
- There was evidence of negative occupational gender segregation whereby women were over-represented in occupations characterised by greater insecurity, e.g., more part-time roles. Consequently, there was lower recognition and appreciation of their skills and capabilities, promotion, and few professional development opportunities available to them.



# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1 - Initiate, resource, and support culture change, and embed a workplace gender equality mindset

### Suggested actions:

- DoT allocates resources to developing activities specifically designed to promote and support gender equality efforts, particularly in pursuit of a fundamental change in culture.
- DoT prioritises gender equality and embeds a workplace gender equality mindset by actively promoting DoT's stance on workplace gender equality. The objective is to ensure DoT's stance is adopted by everyone in the organisation as a matter of habit and preference. Constant messaging about DoT's stance is essential. Socio-cultural reengineering activities must also be constant, if not continuous, as culture change of this kind cannot be achieved through sporadic and unsystematic action.
- DoT encourages and empowers executive managers to frequently lead discussions with their direct report team on the importance of workplace gender equality, and the value it brings to operational outcomes.
- DoT provides training opportunities for all managers responsible for staff recruitment, especially in male-dominated divisions. These could include regular expert-led seminars and workshops on workplace gender inclusivity; bonding retreats and related social activities; and social training for managers on managing gender-related issues. (There are nuanced differences between DoT divisions and sections regarding workforce gender profiles and experience of gendered spaces. For greatest effect, training opportunities must be division/section specific.)
- DoT provides mandatory training workshops for all staff on conscious and unconscious biases, benevolent and hostile sexism, and stereotypes in workplaces.

## Recommendation 2 - Build structures and implement resources, systems, and processes required for removing biases in recruitment, promotion and role assignments

### Suggested actions:

- DoT revisits the recruitment process, including interview panel composition and profile of interview panels. Diverse panel members are essential, however women representation on panels should not be limited to HR representatives.
- DoT ensures professional HR oversight to ensure job descriptions are gender sensitive and do not discourage or disadvantage aspiring women and girls. Recruiting managers should also be specifically trained on gender balanced recruitment processes and how to manage unconscious biases in the process.
- DoT conducts regular audits and monitoring of job descriptions and job advertisements to ensure inclusive language is used. Required qualifications should be revised to be more gender-neutral and appealing to female candidates.
- DoT ensures that the practice of fairness and meritocracy in employment and recruitment is moderated by consideration of historical labour market disadvantage. Some level of positive discrimination, perhaps recruitment and promotion quotas, is necessary to correct embedded and historical disadvantage.
- DoT encourages executives to cultivate and manage an effective pipeline into various roles for qualified women. Effective practices could include establishing graduate positions for entry-level roles and providing women with improved and equal access to opportunities to act in senior positions.
- DoT sets specific KPIs on achieving gender equality for all managers on achieving gender balance in their unit/section workforces and in leadership to encourage deliberate consideration of gender during recruitment and promotions.

## Recommendation 3 - Set realistic targets and clear means of achieving them

### Suggested actions:

- DoT sets realistic and achievable targets across all divisions and ensure that targets remain in place as a cornerstone of securing gender equality and ending gender segregation.
- DoT sets gender equity targets for each division and section, and annually reviews all targets for each division and section. Focusing targets in this way, rather than establishing a single target for DoT as a whole, means nuanced differences between divisions and sections are responded to.
- To effectively implement targets and related tracking and reporting processes, DoT links targets to the managers' KPIs.
- DoT monitors targets regularly throughout the year rather than annual reporting only.
- DoT increases awareness of the efficacy of targets and leads conversations on the importance of targets, with particular attention to male-dominated divisions.





## **Recommendation 4 - Increase awareness about the value of flexible work arrangements for both women and men, and provide sufficient capacity for managers to actively promote and implement such arrangements**

### **Suggested actions:**

- DoT actively promotes flexible work arrangements for men as a positive strategy for removing the stereotypical perception or belief that part-time jobs are designed for women.
- DoT revisits the design of flexible work arrangements to ensure that it does not, inadvertently, undermine women's experience of work, career advancement and earning.
- DoT examines the capacity of all roles to be undertaken through a range of flexible arrangements to suit all employment arrangements.
- DoT assesses the impediments and opportunities for the implementation of wide use of job-sharing opportunities, especially in senior management positions.
- DoT regularly monitors part-time employees' role allocations and job assignments to ensure their roles are appropriately valued rather than undervalued.

## **Recommendation 5 - Increase awareness of, and responsiveness to intersectionality characteristics**

### **Suggested actions:**

- DoT considers intersectionality characteristics in the policy formulation processes, and by extension, in the final design of diversity policies and related actions.
- DoT actively leads conversations on intersectionality within the executive team.
- DoT revises the Executive Champion role and approach in implementing its Inclusion and Diversity Strategy so that the Executive Champion role encompasses intersectionality considerations.
- DoT starts collecting data on aspects of intersectionality in its workforce and uses these data to frame, implement and monitor support designed to enable managers and employees across the organisation to improve the work environment for all.

# 1. Introduction

Workplace gender inequality is an enduring, global socio-economic problem. Despite significant strides made over many decades, most Australian workplaces continue to exhibit gender inequalities. The Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020 requires identified public sector organisations to drive more equal and inclusive workplaces by addressing structural disadvantage and promoting gender equality through a variety of policies, strategies, and actions. Organisations are also expected to recognise, and act on the fact, that gender inequality may be intensified by people's intersectional characteristics.

Developing responses to gender inequality requires organisations to understand what creates unequal workplaces and what workplace inequality looks like. The study presented in this report was funded by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector as part of its Inaugural Research Grants round in 2021 and focused on the Victoria government Department of Transport (DoT) and the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA), collectively the DoT. It investigated the DoT's capacity to effectively address traditional and persistent workplace gender inequalities in response to the newly enacted Gender Equality Act 2020.

We spoke to DoT senior executives and staff to determine the policies, challenges, impediments, and enablers linked to achieving gender equality.

This report provides key findings from an in-depth exploration of policies, structures and processes established to address gender equality issues within the Department of Transport (DoT), and Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA).

The study used a qualitative multi-method case study methodology, involving secondary data analysis (workforce data), policy analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Through interviews and focus groups, senior executives and staff were asked to highlight and discuss some of the major challenges, impediments, and enablers, as well as the progress, in the establishment of a more gender equal workplace at the DoT.

In order to ground the study in a national context, we started with a review of the workplace gender inequality problem nationally as the history of workplace gender legislation in Australia. The product of this review is included as Appendix A.

The report is organised into eight sections. Section 2 provides a brief description of the research methods and process, followed by a demographic snapshot of the DoT's workforce gender landscape in Section 3. Section 4 provides an analysis of the current gender policies and strategies at the DoT. Sections 5 and 6 draw on interview and focus-group data to discuss the key causes and influences of gender inequalities at DoT. The intersectionality problem and DoT's actions and progress so far is discussed in Section 7. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are provided in Section 8.



## 2. The study

### Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the study was to develop a case study that would be applied to inform effective implementation of Victoria's Workplace Gender Equality Act across a wide range of defined entities. This aim was shaped by the following key objectives:

1. Map out the current workforce gender landscape within the defined entity.
2. Examine the strengths and gaps in the gender policies and strategies within the defined entity.
3. Identify and document the key causes of workplace gender inequality and the major obstacles to effective change.
4. Identify the opportunities and potential facilitators of gender equality progress.
5. Develop recommendations to inform future policy and practice.

### Study methods

The study used a qualitative multi-method case study methodology and was developed in three phases. These phases were designed to enable triangulation of different data sources, thus ensuring both depth and breadth of analysis.

#### Phase one: Policy and strategy analysis

Phase one was important in establishing the broader gender equality policy context for the study.

The research team obtained policy documents from federal and state government websites and archives. These were analysed to establish the broader historical view of gender equality legislation in Australia.

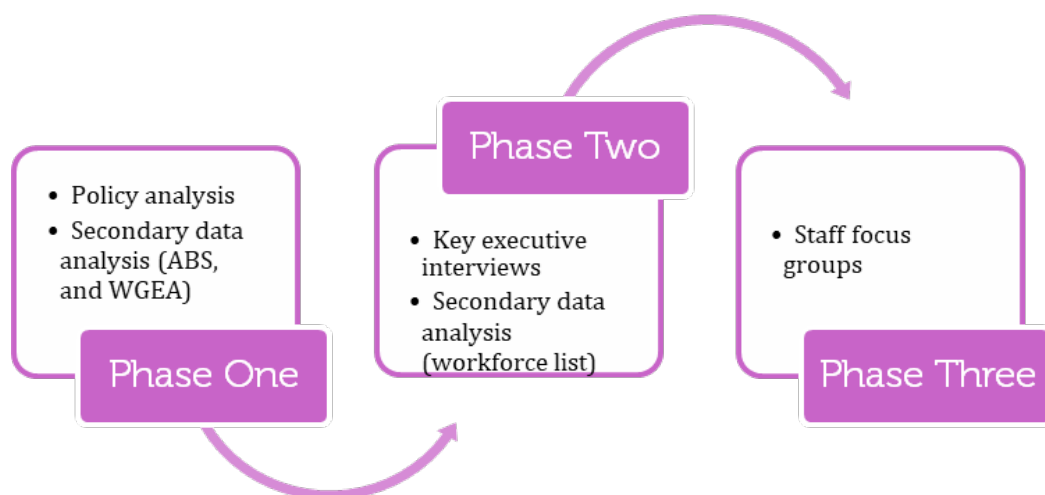


Figure 1 - Three phases of the study

Secondary data on occupational and sectoral gender distribution were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). These data were analysed to reveal the national labour force gender profile and patterns (see Appendix A), with specific focus on the transport sector, for which the DoT is responsible in Victoria.

Finally, workforce gender policy documents specifically relating to the DoT were obtained and analysed to examine their strengths and any gaps that might undermine progress. These documents were obtained directly from the DoT and from public web sources.

### **Phase two: Progress, challenges, and opportunities for workplace gender equality**

Phase two extended the policy analysis, focusing on policy implementation and an assessment of the barriers, challenges, and opportunities. This phase involved the collection and analysis of the In total, 22 interviews were conducted, including 17 with executive and senior managers from the DoT and five from the MTIA. All interviewees were purposefully chosen on the basis of their experience and managerial responsibilities, and their understanding of the organisation's gender equality policies, strategies, and practices. Five of the DoT participants were deputy secretaries while the remaining 12 were directors reporting to the deputy secretaries. Thirteen were men and nine were women. The interviews lasted 60 minutes on average and were digitally recorded and formally transcribed for analysis.

In this phase, the DoT also provided a de-identified, complete HR workforce list containing key details such as gender, age, work unit and occupational level. This was analysed to establish the prevailing workplace gender contours at the DoT and to identify areas needing more strategic focus. This analysis enabled the research team to define necessary future action to correct imbalances.

### **Phase three: Staff perceptions of policy implementation and progress**

Phase three further examined challenges, opportunities, and progress in workplace gender equality efforts, with particular focus on policy implementation and the role of leadership from staff and middle management perspectives. The phase involved four focus groups: three from DoT and one from MTIA. The focus groups comprised an average of six participants of mixed gender and roles. Discussions focused on the implementation of gender equality strategies, the perceptions and experiences of change, or lack of, and the role of senior leadership. The focus groups lasted 190 minutes on average and, like the interviews, were digitally recorded and formally transcribed for analysis.

## **Data analysis**

The data analysis followed a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke 2006) based on a flexible, deductive and inductive approach, with themes identified both prior to (pre-determined), and following the analysis of interviews (emerging).

The qualitative data, including interviews and focus group transcripts, were systematically coded in NVivo 12 using these themes and analysed based on the different perspectives offered in the data. The key findings arising from this analysis are presented in Section 5 of the report.

The workforce data were subjected mostly to descriptive analysis to highlight gender patterns and gaps from various angles.



# 3. Workforce gender characteristics

This section provides a snapshot of the DoT’s workforce gender characteristics based on the workforce demographic data provided by DoT. Data contained the deidentified workforce list captured on 31 June 2021. For the purposes of this analysis, we considered the DoT’s various agencies separately. DoT refers to the primary entity, including VicRoads and Public Transport Victoria (PTV), which merged with DoT in 2019. MTIA was analysed as a separate agency where applicable and where data was available. Other agencies under the DoT umbrella were analysed as a group comprising Chief Investigator Transport Safety (CITS), Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria (CPVV), Suburban Rail Loop Authority (SRLA), Transport Safety Victoria (TSV) and Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA).

According to the data, the DoT and related subsidiaries and agencies employed a total of 7,748 staff at the time of the study. Department of Transport employed 61 per cent of the staff, MTIA 31 per cent and the remaining five agencies accounted for the remaining 8 per cent of employees.

There were 3,415 female employees across DoT, MTIA and Other agencies, accounting for 44 per cent of total employment. The rest were identified as male with exception of three workers who were recorded as ‘self-identified’. Women represented 45 per cent of the workforce at DoT, 42 per cent at the MTIA and 46 per cent in Other Agencies (see Figure 2).

The average age of female workers was 41.5 years, around two years younger than male workers with an average age of 43.4 years. This is not surprising considering the difference in length of service between men and women whereby the average tenure of female workers was 9.5 years compared to 11.1 years for men. It shows that retention rates were lower for women than men.

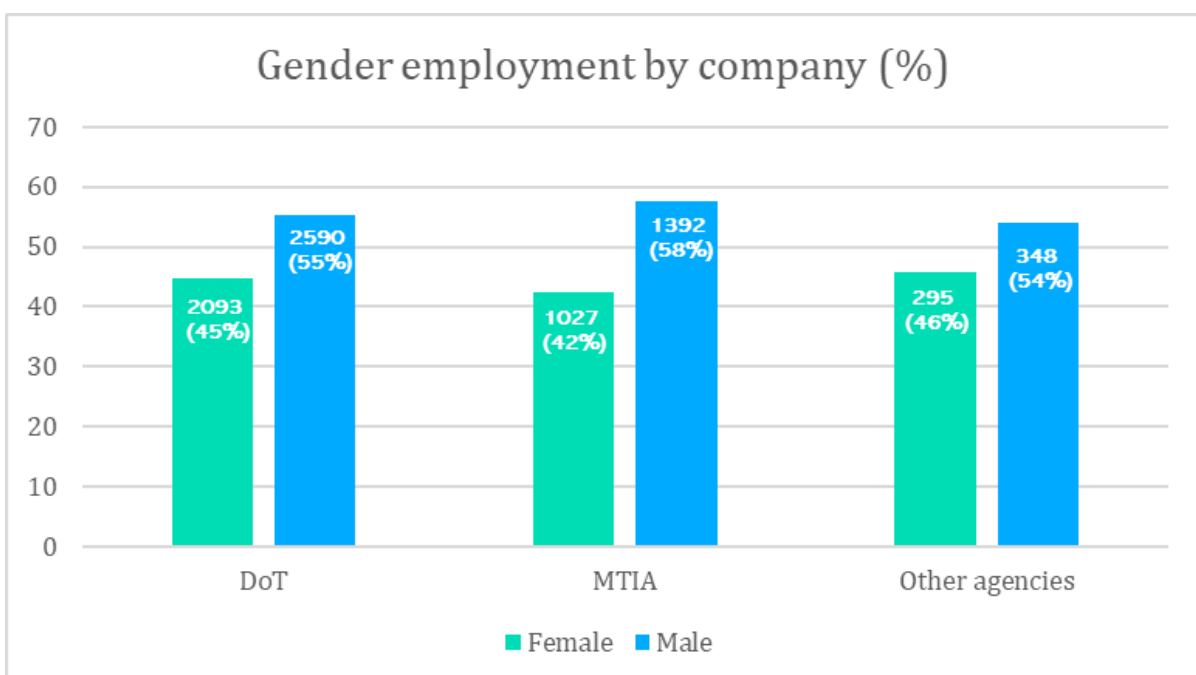


Figure 2 - Gender employment by company (%)

Full-time roles dominated the workforce, accounting for 91 per cent of total employment or 7,019 roles compared to 674 part-time roles (9 per cent). Men had a stronger representation among full-time roles (60 per cent) while women had a stronger representation among part-time roles (83 per cent) (see Figure 3). The low full-time women’s participation rate presents challenges to achieving gender equality for longer-term promotion and leadership opportunities.

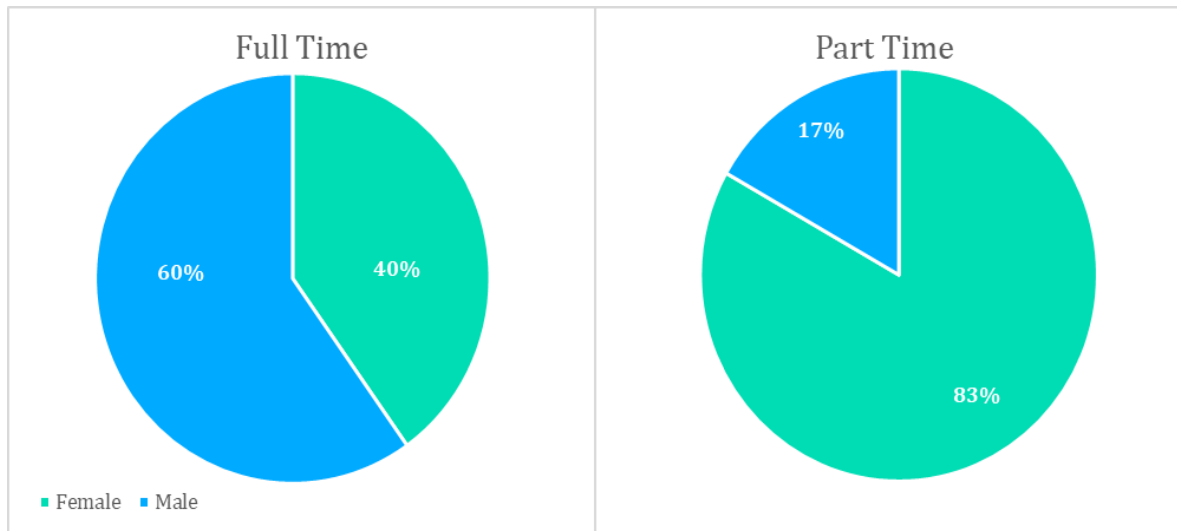


Figure 3 - Gender employment by status (%)

## Gendered employment segregation

Within the largest agency, the DoT, we investigated gender representation across the department’s six functional areas, known as Connect Groups and found evidence of gendered employment segregation. Transport Services represented the largest group, employing 1,450 persons, representing 41 per cent of total employment at the DoT. Transport Services connect group employed most of the technicians, engineers, and designer roles. The remaining groups sorted by size in descending order were People and Business Services (14 per cent), Investment and Technology (14 per cent), Network Design and Integration (14 per cent), Office of the Secretary (10 per cent ) and Policy Precincts and Innovation (7 per cent).

Women’s representation was lowest in the largest group, Transport Services (26 per cent), followed by Network Design and Integration (27 per cent). The Office of the Secretary had the highest proportion of women (63 per cent) followed by People and Business Services (61 per cent) (see Figure 4).

Given the strong female representation in the Office of the Secretary, we examined this group further and found that it was composed of four divisions, two of which accounted for 96 per cent of total employment within the group: Transport Communication and Experience (82 per cent) and Legal (14 per cent). Women made up 67 percent of employees in Transport Communication and Experience (197 employees) and 53 percent in Legal (26 employees). It is worthy to note, the Office of the Secretary and Business and People connect groups include occupational categories that are typically over-represented by women in the labour market.



The data for occupational categories were available for workers at the DoT only. The categories used were consistent with ANZSCO's eight major group classifications: Managers, Professionals, Technicians and Trades Workers, Community and Personal Service Workers, Clerical and Administrative Workers, Sales Workers, Machinery Operators and Drivers, and Labourers.

We excluded Sales Workers and Machinery Operators and Drivers from the analysis because there were fewer than ten workers employed across these occupational categories at the DoT. Professionals represented the largest classification, accounting for 36 per cent of total employment at the DoT, followed by Managers (27 per cent) and Clerical and Administrative Workers (23 per cent). The smallest classification was Community and Personal Service Workers (2 per cent).

Women occupied 53 per cent of Clerical and administrative roles, 42 per cent of Professionals, 37 per cent of Management and 11 per cent of Technicians and Trades Workers at DoT.

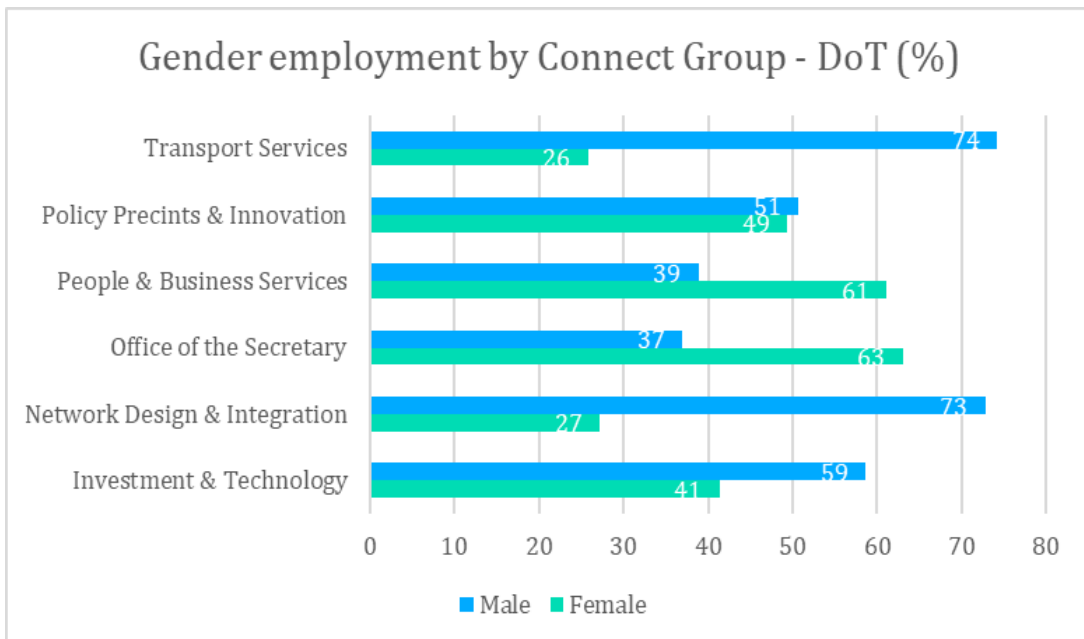


Figure 4 - Gender employment by connect group (%)

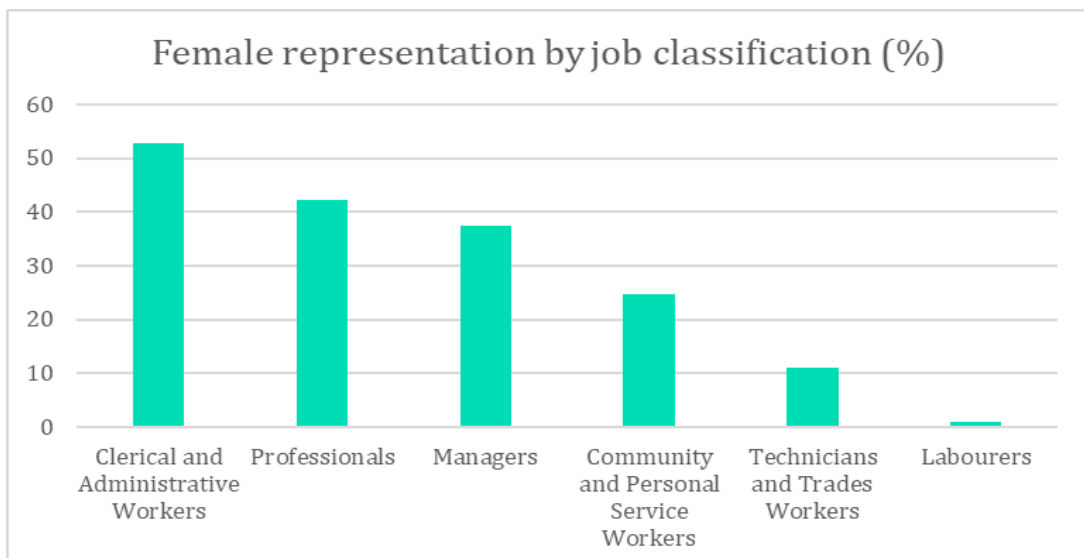


Figure 5 - Female representation by job classification (%)

# Gender and leadership positions

Females accounted for 39 per cent of leadership positions. Women representation showed a declining trend in both middle manager roles and executive roles. As indicated in Figure 4, VPS5 has the highest (45 per cent) representation, while only 24 per cent of roles at VPS7 level were occupied by female managers. Similar trend is found at the executive level classification. There were 45 per cent female leaders at SES1 while SES2 and SES3 recruited 30 and 33 percent female senior executives, respectively.

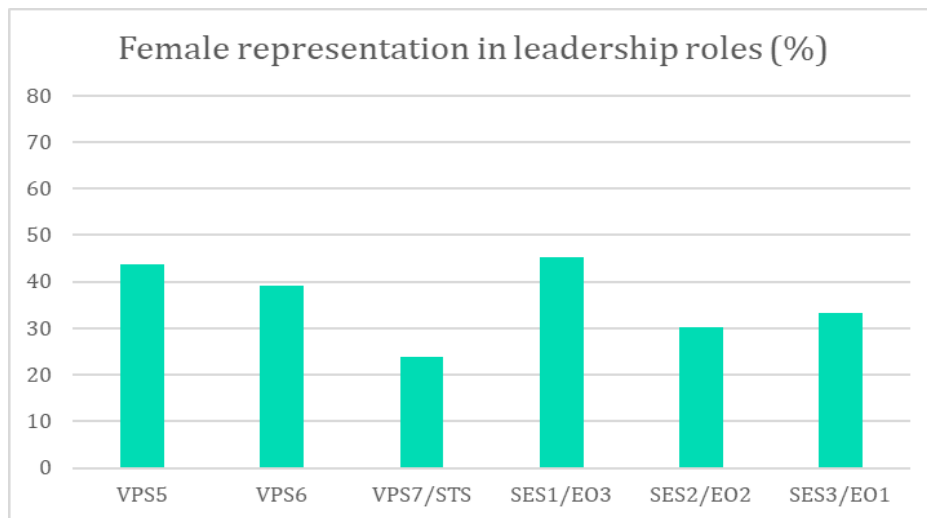


Figure 6 - Female representation in leadership roles (%)

## Key observations

- Women were generally under-represented in the DoT workforce.
- Female staff at DoT were younger on average than their male colleagues by around two years and their tenures within the organisation were also around two years shorter on average. This indicates poorer retention rates for women in the workforce.
- The majority of positions at the DoT were full-time and 60 per cent of full-time roles were occupied by men. Over 80 per cent of part-time roles were occupied by women. This points to a general disadvantage for women with regard to job security, pay gap and potential for career progression.
- That women's employment seems to be concentrated in typically 'female' occupations points to general occupational segregation and suggests an underlying unconscious bias in the recruitment processes informed by gendered occupational stereotyping.
- In relative terms, women were underrepresented in senior management and executive roles, which suggests a failure to implement effective systems and structures for supporting women to senior roles.

These analyses helped shape the key recommendations and suggested actions discussed in the following sections.





## 4. DoT's workplace gender policies and strategies

Under the Act, the DoT is required to undertake a gender impact assessment of policies and processes to assess how the organisation is promoting, and will promote, workplace gender equality. Gender equality policy at the DoT is conceived within a broad raft of strategies aimed at promoting inclusion and diversity (I&D).

In order to understand the workplace gender policy context within the organisation, we collected and analysed the key policies and strategies adopted by the DoT to influence change towards greater workplace gender equality. Some of the documents were supplied directly by the DoT while some were obtained from their website and cross-checked with DoT officials. Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) strategy and Women in Transport (WiT) were investigated thoroughly as the main two strategies in this domain. The analysis of the strategies is provided in this section.

### The Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) Strategy

The overarching policy is defined in the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2019–2023. The strategy was introduced following the formal creation of the DoT when VicRoads and Public Transport Victoria (PTV) amalgamated on 1 July 2019.

The overall vision of the I&D strategy is that:

*Inclusion is embedded into our workplace culture so that we feel a sense of belonging to DoT, are empowered to contribute fully to the organisation's success and so that we represent the rich and diverse needs of the Victorian community (pg. 6)*

In this way the DoT's "... products and services remain relevant and responsive to the needs of the community". To achieve this vision, the strategy acknowledges that a workforce "that reflects the diversity of the community" is essential in leveraging diversity of thought to achieve "desired transport outcomes" (p. 6). The strategy defines priority target groups as women, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people.

The strategy identifies recruitment, engagement, promotions, auditing and benchmarking, and correction of public perception of work at the DoT, as some of the most important drivers of change. Inclusion of regular I&D performance auditing and reporting is a significant point of strength as it means that DoT leaders must work towards measurable quantitative outcomes. The DoT in this regard has set themselves specific time bounded targets to achieve a workforce that is 50% women by 2023 and to have 50% women in leadership roles noted as VPS5 and above by 2023. Importantly, the strategy's objectives are two pronged: to achieve inclusion and diversity in the workplace, and to ensure an inclusive experience for diverse transport users.

From a gender equality perspective, the strategy's breadth of scope is perhaps its greatest weakness as issues of gender do not have the specific focus necessary for rapid progress. However, this is also true about the other priority groups covered in the I&D strategy.

# The Women in Transport (WiT)

The lack of focus on gender issues is partly addressed by the Women in Transport (WiT) Strategy 2021-2024, which was officially launched in September 2021. Whereas the scope of the I&D strategy covers several marginalised groups, the WiT strategy is specific to gender equality. The objectives of the WiT strategy are to:

- Dismantle the structural barriers to gender equality.
- Change the prevailing culture to support greater gender diversity, inclusion, and equality.
- Improve access to employment and career opportunities for women in the transport sector.

Initiatives adopted to implement the WiT strategy include:

- Scholarships and other funding support for women seeking training and employment in predominantly male-dominated transport occupations, such as heavy vehicle mechanics and bus and truck drivers.
- Mentoring for women and programs aimed at encouraging and supporting women to enter and stay in the sector.

The strategy is complemented and facilitated by:

- The WiT program, which was introduced in 2017 with the initial WiT 2017 strategy to “address the gender imbalance in the public transport sector” providing professional development, leadership, and research initiatives, and
- The WiT Network, which is responsible for regular networking events, outreach programs to secondary schools, WiT representation at university open days, and training events for WiT Network members.

An important strength, which is also ironically a significant weakness of this strategy, is its general cross-sector focus. On one hand, covering the broader industry, both public and private, enables the development of a holistic policy for the private transport sector, which is historically male dominated. On the other hand, this broad focus can easily divert attention from the state of gender diversity, inclusivity, and equality within the DoT itself.

Without nuanced definition, certain aspects of the vision aimed for the DoT could be lost. In fact, most of the current implementation initiatives emphasise change in the private sector, which could be wrongly interpreted as suggesting gender inequality is an issue for the private sector and less so for the public sector.

From the perspective of meeting the obligations under the Act, however, the fact that this umbrella policy transcends public/private sector boundaries is an important strength, considering the obligation to cascade the Act’s implementation down the supply chain. Through the WiT program and the WiT Network, the DoT is in a strong position to influence private businesses’ practices through tripartite (DoT, private industry and unions) buy-in, in addition to public/private supply contract obligations.



# Other relevant strategies and policies

## Strategy

Alongside these strategies, the DoT has also adopted several other strategies and policies which, while not specific to gender equality, support a fair, inclusive and diverse working environment. These have been developed in line with its commitments under the Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2020 (the 'VPS agreement').

Some important policies developed by the DoT in this respect include the:

- DoT Family Violence Strategy 2020-2024
- DoT Parental Leave Policy
- DoT Flexible Working Arrangements Policy.

The important premise of the Family Violence Strategy, which makes it particularly significant to gender equality at work debates, is that

*... the prevention of family violence requires the whole community to be involved in changing attitudes and challenging the cultures that can lead to violence, such as gender inequality, and that this includes the workplace (p. 6)*

While both male and female partners face family violence, 17 per cent of all women aged 15 and above face violence from a partner, as compared to 6 per cent of all men above 15 years of age, according to ABS Personal Safety data (ABS, 2016). The strategy states that "violence against women in Australia is driven by gender inequality".

The strategy therefore seeks to create a work environment where victims of gender based family violence feel safe to discuss and seek help to deal with their situations. The strategy reinforces the department's commitment in the VPS agreement that sets out how people experiencing family violence will be supported (Part 7, Sec. 52).

The DoT Parental Leave Policy aligns with Part 7, Sec. 55 of the VPS Agreement. The Parental Leave policy recognises that women are more likely to have parental care responsibilities. The policy defines eligibility for people of all genders for a broad range of parental leave entitlements as well as application processes.

The DoT Flexible Working Arrangements Policy aligns with Part 2, Sec. 8-10 of the VPS Agreement. It provides for the right to negotiate for flexible working arrangements to suit both the employer's and employee's needs. Once again, the policy recognises that it is mostly women who need greater flexibility as they bear greater responsibility for domestic and care duties. The policy acknowledges that flexibility, unless appropriately recognised and written into terms of employment, will lead to disruptions to career progression and unfavourable remuneration.

# Summary findings

There is a policy dilemma which often characterises strategies to correct historical socio-economic disadvantage: the need for exercise of cautious fairness. This type of thinking expects that fairness in the present should necessarily ignore or, at best, tolerate the history of unfairness leading to the situation.

The DoT is clearly caught in this dilemma even though its policies are all comprehensive and well-constructed. They clearly articulate the issues and designate measurable targets.

Strengths observed include:

- The DoT is active in addressing gender inequality in the workplace as illustrated by the number of policies and strategies already in place.
- The range of policies reviewed is sufficient to promote gender equality at the DoT workplace as envisaged by the Gender Equality Act 2020.
- The target objectives in relation to gender equality are articulated.
- The need for regular auditing and monitoring of progress is recognised, especially in the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.
- The duties and responsibilities of senior managers are spelled out.
- There seems to be sufficient budget allocation for implementing the strategies, which receive the support of senior DoT executives.

Barriers to gender equality progress include:

- The absence of defined gender quotas in recruitment and promotions to facilitate a leap towards greater gender equality.
- In its articulation of gender equality policies, the DoT has necessarily stayed within the limits of the provisions of the VPS Agreement. The Agreement articulates employers' obligations from a position of fairness in recruitment and promotion, irrespective of the institutional history of gendered inequalities. The I&D Strategy, for example, explicitly states that it is about equity as opposed to equality. This automatically prevents any consideration of quotas and other potentially radical measures to reduce discrimination and reduce the workplace gender gap. The notion of a gender-blind workplace and gender-neutral recruitment and promotion structures and processes shapes most existing organisational gender policies, including the DoT's I&D Strategy.
- The WIT strategy, which sets the main gender equality policy, tends to be sector general as opposed to DoT specific. Indeed, the accompanying initiatives and programs are more focused on promoting gender equality outcomes in the private sector. This facilitates the fulfilment of one of the Act's obligations: to drive change beyond the public sector. However, a preoccupation with the private sector potentially undermines progress within the DoT.



# 5. Workplace gender inequality, key causes, and influences

This section is developed from the analysis of the interviews and focus groups conducted in phases two and three of the study. The participants discussed their views on the key causes and sustaining factors of gender inequality at the DoT workplace.

Four factors considered key in shaping workplace gender inequality with specific reference to the DoT emerged across the interviews and focus groups. The participants discussed these as both enablers and potential obstacles, depending on prevailing practices. The factors are organisational leadership and resource availability and allocation; embedded male cultures and attitudes; recruitment and progression structures; and assumptions underpinning employment and workplace arrangements.

## Organisational leadership and resource allocation

Leadership has long been identified in the literature as one of the key ingredients for successful cultural change and for providing a blueprint for an organisation's future (Eagly & Chin 2010). When shifting traditional and embedded cultures and structures, the will, experience, and commitment from all levels of leadership is critical. From the interviews and focus groups, there was a common view of a strong commitment and support from the Secretary and the executive team for the workplace gender equality agenda. All the executives interviewed expressed, first-hand, a strong interest to see gender inequalities eliminated and seemed clear on how this might be achieved, while acknowledging the challenges involved. According to both the executive interviewees and focus group participants, support and commitment from the Secretary and Ministers towards adopting gender equality strategies and programs contributed to increasingly positive cultural change within the organisation.

The influential role of leaders was discussed in various ways including:

- Leaders as gender policy influencers
- Leaders as coordinators and facilitators of gender equality programs
- Leaders as role models and mentors, and
- Leaders as facilitators and allocators of resources for gender equality programs.

Particularly, the presence of women in senior leadership positions was acknowledged, especially by focus group participants, as an important influence for younger women starting out and for those women aspiring to senior leadership roles.

To this end, what was described as a current gender balanced leadership team was also described as important in creating positive change. At the time of the study, two out of five DoT Deputy Secretaries were women.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Transport and the ministerial team, as well as the senior leadership, was credited for a recent increase in resources allocated towards cultivating gender equality, and for adopting and implementing the

flagship WIT 2021 strategy in close collaboration with senior private industry executives.

We have quite a passionate leader in that space, who's a male, but - and whose been trying a number of things to build diversity in his team. The latest he's come up with is that he's going to employ - female employees in discrete areas across that business.

Notwithstanding this positive feedback, there was some critical self-reflection from the executive interviewees as well as criticism levelled at the leadership from staff focus groups.

- First, the recent departure of two female Deputy Secretaries was seen by some managers and staff as the culmination of lack of adequate appreciation of women in top leadership positions. The popular view was that it is one thing to promote women, or appoint them, to senior positions, and a completely different thing to support and sustain them there. Some argued that a prevailing masculine culture and gendered attitudes made it difficult for many women to remain in those positions for long. Some even argued that despite developing a robust process for career progression, the opportunities for senior women in the department were limited.

That's true and we've lost some good women - Deputy Secretary women as a result of that. If you were to ask them about their experience, one of the reasons why they left was they didn't feel an equal at the table and were never given acting opportunities and weren't really embraced like they needed to be embraced, I would say.

[we] need to stop tiptoeing around the fact and be vocal about it. When we lose two female DepSecs, and there is no discussion about why they left, perhaps that could be the start of a bigger discussion at all levels.

- Second, there was a view by interview and focus group participants that senior executive management commitment and accountability did not necessarily filter through to all levels of management. According to many, this was because implementing workplace gender equality initiatives on the ground was mostly left to the discretion of individual managers without a common understanding of the reasons, processes and anticipated outcomes or necessary guidelines for all managers to embed positive change. Some focus group participants explained that they did not always see the same commitment and accountability from their immediate managers as expressed in executive management rhetoric.

I don't believe my leaders hold themselves accountable, because they see the problem as bigger than them.

- Third, proactively developing, promoting, and driving gender equality initiatives and programs was not the priority of the majority of managers. As explained by some, the successful delivery of operational goals (for example, contracted projects) took precedence. Although there were gender champions appointed across different divisions, it was not clear to many focus group participants, including some managers, what their actual role was and how well they were resourced to achieve workplace gender equality objectives.

The focus is 100 per cent we're a delivery organisation. The focus is delivery and that's potentially how it should be but the - it's not a core responsibility to develop a pipeline of female senior leaders, it's a side thing.

it's [gender equality] not a KPI I look at on a daily basis, to be honest. I'm looking at this morning, did my trains run on time and did my buses run on time, and how many self-harm episodes I've got on the network at the moment because of the mental health crisis around lockdown. My day is filled with stats and monitoring performance, but I'm not monitoring this one on a regular basis, probably.

It is worth noting that the leadership has, however, had to deal with the challenge of integrating different cultures because of the amalgamation of previously separate entities to form the current DoT. As one executive explained, some



of these entities are characterised with strong traditional male cultures and structures that will need significant time, effort, and financial resources to change.

Overall, participants recognised the steps senior leaders were taking to improve gender equality in the workplace. Executive managers understood that their role required them to use their influence to lead more equitable workforce outcomes. Executive managers were also hampered in this project. Inadequate time resources caused executive managers to prioritise operational responsibilities with gender equity improvements a lower order of importance.

Focus group participants noted the lack of attention, be it conscious or unconscious, paid to gender equality in the workplace and the implications of these deficiencies. Focus group participants highlighted the scarcity of women in senior roles and the silence from leaders when women exited senior positions. Further, a strong theme critiquing middle management's lack of understanding and awareness of the importance of gender equality and insufficient skill sets to address and improve gender outcomes also featured in focus group discussions.

## Suggested actions

- DoT allocates resources to developing activities specifically designed to promote and support gender equality efforts, particularly in pursuit of a fundamental change in culture.
- DoT prioritises gender equality and embeds a workplace gender equality mindset by actively promoting DoT's stance on workplace gender equality. The objective is to ensure DoT's stance is adopted by everyone in the organisation as a matter of habit and preference. Constant messaging about DoT's stance is essential. Socio-cultural reengineering activities must also be constant, if not continuous, as culture change of this kind cannot be achieved through sporadic and unsystematic action.
- DoT encourages and empowers executive managers to frequently lead discussions with their direct report team on the importance of workplace gender equality, and the value it brings to operational outcomes.
- DoT sets specific KPIs on achieving gender equality for all managers.

# Embedded male cultures and attitudes

The second factor highlighted by interview and focus group participants was embedded and traditional male cultures and attitudes. These were generally seen as the main sources of gender based stereotypes and unconscious biases, which undermine workplace gender equal recruitment and promotion outcomes, remuneration, job allocation and assignment, and performance evaluations (Foley, Cooper & Mosseri 2019; WGEA 2018). This problem was discussed and illustrated in various ways:

- Misinformed and culturally influenced opinions of women's presumed deficiencies have the capacity to, and have historically played a role in, distorting perceptions around competency, performance and by extension, the ways in which employment opportunities are diminished, jobs are allocated, and performance is measured and remunerated.
- In the allocation and rewarding of performance, certain typically masculine traits such as assertiveness and aggressiveness were valued more than traits commonly associated with women. Many participants pointed out a lack of aggressive approaches to the pursuit of senior roles, which were considered coming naturally to most men, tended to disadvantage many women. This is also strongly illustrated in the literature (e.g., Bear & Babcock 2017; Phelan, Moss-Racusin & Rudman 2008).
- Moreover, many interview participants, especially but not exclusively women, discussed the prevalence of unconscious bias across various levels and groupings within DoT, and the asymmetric treatment of traits traditionally accepted as masculine when exhibited by men and women.
- Several participants explained that embedded male cultures reinforced the systemic and organisational barriers to achieving workplace gender equality. One example described cases of unconscious bias in the context of meetings where female colleagues have been ignored or their contributions treated flippantly. Another (male) admitted that his own 'blokey' behaviour in the past had betrayed his unconscious bias, while yet another speculated that the organisation's male dominated culture might have contributed to her being overlooked for certain career opportunities for which she was well qualified.
- The problem of gendered stereotypes was strongly highlighted, particularly, in focus groups whereby participants described its effect as a barrier to workplace gender equality. In one such discussion, a seemingly harmless practice where managers, team leaders and individuals opened email messages with 'Dear Gents' was described as common. Such language was seen as the manifestation of a deeply rooted traditional male culture and the automatic assumption that colleagues would be men, thus largely discounting the existence of female colleagues.
- Particularly, the dominant language in those engineering and transport operations-oriented sections and occupations considered traditionally male, was noted as having an exclusionary masculine history. One male participant observed 'the word transport is synonymous with things like trains and trams, buses, which are all seen as being very male'. This participant also highlighted how this narrow construction of the sector hid 'the reality which is there's a lot of other skills involved that sit behind the kind of heavy engineering that you think of when you think of transport'. Accordingly, this created and embedded a particular workplace image and profile that discouraged entry or undermined retention of women.

Department of Transport is an asset intensive organisation, so traditionally a lot about being technical engineering type people and we know that engineering still has a majority of male in the engineering workforce.

- Managers also described the existence of unconscious bias in many facets of DoT's operations, and particularly in recruitment processes. Though much less compared to the recent past, managers highlighted the tendency to attribute the promotion of women to senior positions as a numeric 'tick box' exercise rather than representing a meritorious outcome. According to one manager there was an assumption that women in senior leadership positions were not there necessarily on merit, the corollary of which was the questioning of women's skills. This





circumstance was attributed to the numeric dominance of men in these positions that simultaneously assumed men's competence and women's incompetence.

- Though the environment was increasingly different as a result of more women occupying such positions and their presence in senior decision-making teams, other interviewees, both men and women, noted that for senior roles men dominated decision-making positions. Even in those divisions and sections that employed equal numbers of women, decision-making was almost always controlled by men. According to one interviewee

*Across our group, we're probably about 40 per cent female, which is about - not too bad, but it's not represented very well through our senior areas.*

Depth of traditional male culture and attitudes was not the same across all sections. Several participants explained that some divisions were more male-dominated, as a result of cultural and structural legacies, and that these were the most difficult to change. One interviewee noted that occupational gender segregation was, for example, stronger in the MTIA than other parts of the wider DoT:

*That's a totally different story over there [MTIA]. So, they don't have any female – any senior people leading the projects, and they never have. It feels very blokey when you're there, and you feel gendered. When you walk into that room, you feel that you're a senior female walking in, and the guys are like – you know, it's quite different.*

Another interviewee explained that at PTV and VicRoads, which were integrated into the DoT in 2019, men dominated most of the technical occupations traditionally considered male. According to interviewees, they were engineering-based male-dominated agencies whose male cultures were deep rooted.

The effect of such cultures was that few women sought jobs there, and even when they did many tended to exit early as a result of a culture that undervalued women and denied them career opportunities based on their gender. Part of what sustained the problem was the attribution of 'male' or 'female' to occupations and roles. For example, occupations were either 'hard' or 'soft' whereby 'hard' technical engineering roles were considered male while 'soft' communication, HR and customer service roles were automatically considered female. One male participant was of the view that this arrangement was 'a better representation of what the real world looks like'. According to this occupational dichotomy, females in 'hard' roles were always, or at least initially, considered outsiders, which severely affected retention rates for women. In relation to this gendered occupational segregation, one focus group participant recounted a personal experience:

*... my manager told me that as a policy advisor I was a dime a dozen and he wasn't prepared to fight for me to be put up in the salary range. Whereas a male colleague who came in at the equivalent level was put up to the next band.*

Piercing this cultural arrangement for 'outliers' remains a task for DoT. Implied and explicit decisions taken to elevate men's skills and competencies, and diminish women's skills and competencies, are present in various layers of decision-making and behaviours across the DoT. These responses raise questions for how the DoT can implement

## Suggested actions

- DoT provides mandatory training workshops for all staff on conscious and unconscious biases, benevolent and hostile sexism, and stereotypes in workplaces.
- DoT provides training opportunities for all managers responsible for staff recruitment, especially in male-dominated divisions. These could include regular expert-led seminars and workshops on workplace gender inclusivity; bonding retreats and related social activities; and social training for managers on managing gender-related issues. (There are nuanced differences between DoT divisions and sections regarding workforce gender profiles and experience of gendered spaces. For greatest effect, training opportunities must be division/section specific.)
- DoT leads conversations on merit-based recruitment, unconscious biases and disadvantages women face due to historical, social, and cultural impediments that stop them entering and remaining in the sector.

# Recruitment and progression structures and processes

Recruitment and promotion practices in the workplace represent one of the gender equality indicators that must be the subject of a defined entity's workplace gender audit. This is because without gender sensitive recruitment and promotion processes, gender inequalities in employment and the workplace will continue. For an organisation intending on tackling gender inequalities, reforming these structures and processes is key.

At the DoT, recruitment structures and processes follow the guidelines set for all government departments and for the public service generally. Thus, transparency, fairness and equal opportunity are key aspects. This was acknowledged by all interview and focus group participants. Management interviewees emphasised the need for gender diversity on recruitment panels and the inclusion of a HR representative. The purpose of this approach was to break the tradition of 'like employing like', in this case males employing males, with the inclusion of a HR representative as an additional check to mitigate against any gender bias that might occur.

However, the issues of embedded and historical gendered disadvantage, and traditional gendered attitudes regarding skills, competency and abilities, lead to unconscious biases, as discussed previously, which take time to eradicate. Interviews and focus groups highlighted aspects of these processes which perpetuated gender inequalities including:

1. The language in job descriptions, particularly for technical roles, which, according to some, *"are as if written with male recruits in mind"*.
2. The writing of position descriptions is mostly left to section or unit managers without professional HR oversight. A focus group participant described this practice as enhancing recruitment disadvantage for women, particularly in sections seen as traditionally male so that position descriptions included fixed views about how the role was to be conducted such as 'shift work and out of hours work and needing to be there at all time[s] and being available'. The participant observed that these specifications could easily discourage most women who might interpret them as seeking to recruit a particular gender - male.
3. It was also suggested that HR did not conduct regular audits of advertisements to investigate why fewer women responded to particular job advertisements. The assumption, it seemed, was that this was as a result of 'pipeline issues', i.e., the availability of qualified and interested women.

*Never have I had anyone from HR say hey why don't we just reword these sentences to make them more equitable or... we only got one female applicant out of the 75 for that job so we must have done something wrong. Maybe we should actually relook at it and advertise it again to attract some more female candidates.*

4. The composition of recruitment interview panels was, as a result of the traditional dominance of male managers, almost always male-dominated. This, according to both management interview and staff focus group participants, potentially disadvantaged female applicants.
5. Likewise, promotion panels mostly comprised male managers, with similar potential results.
6. The emphasis on fair and merit-based recruitment processes was seen as potentially disadvantaging women, since the majority of applicants for many positions, especially in technical and engineering sections, were men. The likelihood of recruiting a man was therefore higher than a woman.
7. Likewise, because there were more men than women in the organisation, and particularly in management positions, there was a higher chance of promoting a man than a woman hence the gender imbalances in management. As explained by one manager, *"unfortunately, it sometimes comes down to numbers and it's about the pipeline issues we discussed"*.



Inequality in representation of women in the organisation was mostly attributed to what was described as a recruitment pipeline issue. This means a limited number of qualified women applying for the jobs advertised, particularly in more technical, traditionally male-dominated areas. This was the view expressed by mostly management interviewees. One manager, for example noted, *“usually we’ll have 30 or 40 applicants and there might be two or three females in that pool”*. Most of the interview participants believed the pipeline issue has its roots in societal perceptions that transport is a ‘blokey’ industry and hence few women are attracted to. This perception was apparently applied to the DoT even in non-technical roles. However, in staff focus groups, the view was that the pipeline of qualified and experienced female applicants was not being actively managed.

*Perhaps we have enough women in the pipeline, but we don’t manage the pipeline properly, so we don’t know. We don’t actively manage that pipeline. So, for example, we don’t have like a leadership career continuum or a guide that says if you want to make it to the next level in your current level, you should be aiming to do these things, and then that would help you put yourself in a position where you are more promotable.*

## Suggested actions

- DoT revisits the recruitment process, including the gender composition and profile of interview panels. Diverse panel members are essential to counter the potential effect of underlying unconscious biases.
- DoT ensures professional HR oversight to ensure job descriptions are gender sensitive and do not discourage or disadvantage aspiring women and girls. Recruiting managers should also be specifically trained on gender balanced recruitment processes and how to manage unconscious biases in the process.
- DoT conducts regular audits and monitoring of job descriptions and job advertisements to ensure inclusive language is used. Required qualifications should be revised to be more appealing to female candidates.
- DoT ensures that the practice of fairness and meritocracy in employment and recruitment is moderated by consideration of historical labour market disadvantage. Some level of positive discrimination, perhaps recruitment and promotion quotas, is necessary to correct embedded and historical disadvantage.
- DoT encourages executives to cultivate and manage an effective pipeline into varied roles for qualified women. Effective practices could include establishing graduate positions for entry-level roles and providing women with improved and equal access to opportunities to act in senior positions.
- DoT sets specific KPIs for all managers on achieving gender balance in their unit/section workforces and in leadership to encourage deliberate consideration of gender during recruitment and promotions.

# Workplace flexibility

Workplace flexibility represents one of the gender equality indicators that must be the subject of a defined entity's workplace gender audit. According to Goldin (2014), job flexibility refers to several related temporal dimensions:

- the number of hours worked
- the times of the day and week during which hours are worked
- work schedule predictability, and
- the ability to organise and change one's own work schedule.

These dimensions of flexibility are reflected in the VPS Enterprise Agreement 2020, which makes a commitment to providing a range of flexible working arrangements to give workers some control over when, where, and how work is performed, while recognising that not all forms of flexibility are suitable for all roles at all times. It is also important to note the range of circumstances that are accounted for in the DoTs 'Flexible Working Arrangements' policy and the blurring of part-time jobs with flexible work. The former accounts for when hours or days of work are to be worked whereas the latter describes how work arrangements can be undertaken such as working off-site. In the interviews and focus groups, the advantages of flexible working arrangements were clearly highlighted in relation to providing women the ability to juggle their employment and domestic responsibilities more easily:

... you're in meetings until five o'clock or something, and you're often - I know from my experience, I'm the one saying, I've got to go. I've got to go pick up my kids. No, I can't stay. It's \$2 per minute per child if I don't go now. I think that probably puts people off, and they think, I'll just sit here until my kids are older, because it's too much stress. Because it is stressful at times.

It was generally agreed that a key measure of progress towards achieving gender equality at the DoT was a growing culture and practice of greater workplace flexibility. Many of the interviewees noted that their immediate areas had sought to offer greater flexibility to employees to allow them to achieve a better work-family life balance and that this was increasingly an important feature of the work environment. Particularly, the rate of the shift towards flexi-work arrangements and their benefits for parents, especially mothers, during the Covid-19 pandemic-related lockdowns were emphasised.

However, the prevailing conceptualisation of flexible working was also seen as potentially undermining women's career progress and creating the situation for unequal employment and work outcomes. One focus group participant represented this dilemma as follows:

If I reflect on my experience, I have xxx children, which is probably more than most, but that means that compared to all the men that I went to - I studied engineering with - I've spent about five years out of the workforce, and I've worked part time for about five years. So, you're behind to begin with, and you're also - while I was part time, and it's not everyone's experience, I really was given (\*\*\*) work to do, to be honest, in the department. It's a long time ago, but I was given rubbish to do.

Although she clearly benefitted from a flexible working arrangement, her experience of work and career progress were clearly compromised. This view was commonly shared and expressed in various ways.

- Discussions regarding workplace flexibility were apparently mostly linked to part-time work and discussed, more often, as a preference for individual women to manage their unpaid work responsibilities. This, according to some, perpetuated the historical assumption that women lack labour market commitment. This is illustrated in the reference to "... I think that that probably puts people off, and they think, I'll just sit here until my kids are older..." in the interview quoted above. Another participant observed that "... when we talk about women, we exclusively talk about flex work, parental leave, and support to raise kids. Stereotyping and profiling".



- It was generally felt that women's opportunities for career advancement and pay rises were compromised because of the career breaks and part-time work arrangements.
- Some participants observed that the prevailing gendered systems and attitudes to employment, automatically assumed men's ability to hold senior, ongoing leadership roles. Constant reference to women's parental and domestic responsibilities and the need for flexible work arrangements bore the underlying connotation that women necessarily needed to take career breaks and perform domestic duties to enable men to undertake the breadwinner role.
- According to some in the focus groups, there was always a sense of women being "accommodated" in the workplace, through flexible working arrangements, which undermined their capacities and did not equate to fair work opportunities and, in some cases, their confidence. For example, a focus group participant related a personal experience where the organisation was not strongly supportive when she returned from work following a career interruption associated with rearing children, which also supports the reference to "... while I was part time, ..., I really was given (\*\*\*) work to do, to be honest, in the department" in the interview quoted above.

In spite of the above, there was an optimistic view from mostly women but also some men, in the interviews that shifting to working at home during the covid lockdowns had dispelled historic presumptions that home working was of lesser importance than working in an office. Managers, apparently, realised that working at home did not equate to diminished outputs or lower commitment to work.

## Suggested actions

- DoT actively promotes flexible work arrangements for men as a positive strategy for removing the stereotypical perception or belief that part-time jobs are designed for women.
- DoT revisits the design of flexible work arrangements to ensure that it does not, inadvertently, undermine women's experience of work, career advancement and earning.
- DoT examines the capacity of all roles to be undertaken through a range of flexible arrangements to suit all employment arrangements.
- DoT assesses impediments and opportunities for wide use of job-sharing opportunities, especially in senior management positions.
- DoT regularly monitors part-time employees' role allocations and job assignments to ensure their roles are appropriately valued rather than undervalued.

# 6. Assessment of policy and strategy implementation

Policies are as good as the effectiveness of their implementation. Research has demonstrated many situations where potentially effective policies and strategies have failed as a result of poor or ineffective implementation. Some influences of policy implementation failure include lack of management commitment, lack of resources, top-down approaches and misaligned or poorly designed implementation programs (Hudson, Hunter & Peckham 2019).

We have seen, in section four, that the DoT has in place strong workplace gender policies and strategies. The discussion in executive interviews and staff focus groups centred on how effectively they were being implemented, and how they might bring about positive change to individual and organisational experience of workplace gender equality.

The I&D policy clearly identifies strong commitment, and sponsorship from the executive team for effective implementation. There was a strong view among management interviewees that the DoT leadership team was strongly committed to, and supportive of, the initiatives to improve workplace gender equality, including changing the underlying legacy culture that sustains it. One major concern for the executive team, apparently, was to ensure increased awareness and consciousness of the ills of gender inequalities at the workplace across the organisation. This was seen as the way to build, according to one interview, *“a gender sensitive organisation, where gender awareness and fairness was culturally engrained”*.

Executives were engaged in implementing the policies in several ways:

- First, each of the Deputy Secretaries were appointed as an ‘Executive Champion’ of each of the five identified target groups - women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, LGBTQ, CALD and people with disability. Therefore, each of the Deputy Secretaries acted as the influencer and role model in supporting identified groups, including women, and implementing the change initiatives.
- Second, they worked closely with the Business and People division, actively participated in I&D activities, and presented at various awareness events reflecting their specific target group.
- Third, Deputy Secretaries, not in their Executive Champion roles, were also required to ensure gender inequalities were eradicated in their respective divisions.
- Fourth, there was a reporting requirement whereby each Executive Champion made regular reports to the Secretary. This helped in regular monitoring of progress, identifying issues and challenges, and allocation of necessary resources.

The greatest benefits of the implementation arrangements above, and of executive involvement, were to gradually increase awareness, and to provide platforms and encourage more robust discussions about the disadvantages and challenges the identified target groups faced in the organisation.

One of the interviewees described how this had empowered an initially small group of women, working in regional offices, to step forward and share their experiences of dealing with biases in promotions. This led to them suggesting “a roadmap forward on how the managers were required to act” in order to foster I&D. This group apparently received effective support and encouragement to present their views to the Directors team.

These activities are considered vital. One interviewee agreed with the progress, although they felt that there was more to be done:

... we've got a long way to go. But our internal People and Culture inclusion and diversity program is probably where we're getting the most tangible support and progress through that. That was a really good - that came from women saying, it's not good; this isn't a good environment.



Notwithstanding, this level of executive commitment and support, there were several weaknesses identified which had the potential to undermine effective implementation and the achievement of desired outcomes:

- First, there was a view among staff and management that the change culture cultivated by the executive team was largely top-down and did not effectively reach the lowest levels of the structure. This was despite the awareness activities described above.
- Second, although significant and successful efforts had been made to ensure gender balance at the senior leadership levels of the organisation, this was not the case at the lower levels where middle management was still male dominated. This view was strongest among focus group participants (staff) but also echoed by several executive managers in interviews. The view was that this undermined the visibility of women leaders as role models and mentors that was necessary to encourage confidence among women aspiring to senior roles.
- Third, there was a view that implementation of policies, strategies and initiatives lacked a clear blueprint; that most managers, and even Executive Champions, were mostly left to their own devices so there was no common approach. According to one executive interviewee:

The will is there but there's no ability for us to translate that will into meaningful action. That's what I think is missing. So, without that, everyone is just walking blindly hoping for the best but not being able to reflect and go 'here's where I need to make that change'. That's - to me that's a problem. There's all the goodwill but – male champions of change are wonderful - but unless we really trickle that down it's not going to make a difference.

- Fourth, for managers, particularly middle managers, there was insufficient training about gender equality management which would support their efforts in their specific areas. Such training, it was felt, would enhance their capacity in terms of knowledge and skills to support the effective implementation of the strategies. Participants suggested DoT must include compulsory training programs, especially for managers, for example to understand issues of unconscious gender biases, their impacts on recruitment, promotion, and job assignments processes, and how to change them. This was echoed by several focus group participants working in the engineering and technical divisions, such as:

people are willing to make changes, but the department does not have practical policies on training to assist them (managers) particularly around gender equality in recruitment e.g., unconscious bias.

- Fifth, gender equality awareness action was mostly constructed around major occasional organisation level events, such as International Women's Day. Focus group participants argued that although these types of events increased awareness, they had a superficial feel and, by extension, impact. They could not, in their view, contribute to long-lasting change. Participation in these events was voluntary and, as observed by female participants, mainly attracted women – tantamount to preaching to the converted. One said that:

... it seems like initiatives, even like this focus group, or any other type of voluntary program that involves gender equality, get a lot of women that tend to go, who are obviously very passionate about gender equality. But we don't see a great deal of male colleagues, perhaps, because it is optional, and there's no clear incentive for them to do it. Time, work, it all seems to be a factor as an excuse not to get involved in these types of discussions.

- Sixth, there was widely shared concern that there were no specific requirements and accountabilities set for managers to achieve workplace gender equality. Although specific targets were set in both I&D and WIT strategies, these were not specifically built into managers' performance expectations. They therefore did not have specific goals to compel them to make particular efforts within their teams. This was problematic considering implementing the strategies was left largely to managers' discretion. In this context, managers were likely to focus effort on achieving immediate and pressing operational goals and pay little attention to matters of I&D. Managers also admitted that the pressure of meeting operational KPIs mostly left little time or resources to dedicate to gender equality concerns.

I think that... I can only do what I'm responsible for and in terms of making clear my expectations to my team,



my direct reports and my division generally. I think that's what we need to do, and I think that the senior leadership of the organisation needs to make its expectations clear. Now that's certainly with respect to gender balance. It's with respect to diversity sort of more generally.

- Managers were clearly not required to meet any particular measurable gender equality progress goals or targets within specific timelines. Even in the newly launched I&D and WIT strategies with specific targets to make significant increases in women's participation, there was little direction as to how they would be achieved. According to an executive interviewee, they mostly comprised generic statements of objectives and aspirations.

I have heard a lot about promoting gender equality within the Department, but I am unaware of any actual blueprint to achieve our goal.

Because of the significant emphasis on gender targets as a way of achieving gender equality, the next section is dedicated to a deeper examination of the nature of targets set and the processes of monitoring and auditing to ensure

## Setting strategic targets, monitoring, and auditing progress

Setting and implementing clear and realistic targets was considered one of the most important steps to achieving gender equality and overcoming the historical disadvantages women face. Thus, they formed a large part of discussions with participants, particularly the executive. This section is dedicated to this topic.

Section 11 of the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2020 requires defined entities to undertake regular workplace gender audits which involve measuring progress against gender equality indicators, including workforce gender composition and women's representation in senior positions at all levels of the organisation. Although the Act does not stipulate use of gender targets or quotas, Section 17 states that the Regulations may prescribe targets or quotas relating to workplace gender equality.

The DoT's I&D Strategy contains a 50 per cent organisation-wide target for female representation, and a 50 per cent target for women in leadership roles, notably VPS5 and above, by 2023. We developed a model to evaluate the implied assumptions around the gender representation of new hires for the DoT to achieve this overall representation target by 2023. Based on the latest data available for the organisational workforce as of 30 June 2021, total employment was 4,683, including 2,093 women or 44.7 per cent of the workforce. The modelling was based on the following assumptions for the next two financial years: natural growth in the workforce of 2.2 per cent per year<sup>1</sup> and a separation rate of 10 per cent per year<sup>2</sup>. Our modelling suggests women will need to constitute around 70 per cent of new hires from June 2021 to June 2023 to achieve the 50 per cent target of equal gender representation.

Setting the 50/50 target is ambitious and recruiting women as 70 per cent of new hires might be unachievable and unrealistic unless the right strategies and roadmaps are designed. At the time of the interviews, the participants were not aware of any specific strategy.

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1- Based on the 2.2 per cent rise in full time equivalent employment for the VPS between in the 12 months to June 2020. Retrieved on 29/10/2021 from <https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/data-facts-visuals-state-of-the-sector/employee-numbers/>

2- Based on the separation rate for the overall VPS in the 12 months to June 2020. Retrieved on 29/10/2021 from <https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/data-facts-visuals-state-of-the-sector/employee-turnover-and-mobility/>





Obviously, there's targets set within the strategy and it's fine to set targets. But the challenge with targets is you've got to have a really clear plan on how you're going to go about achieving that target. What do you expect is going to be delivered out of providing, for example? So, you've got a target, you've got a strategy for want of a better description. But how do you move - how do you translate the strategy into the target?

Also, since the targets were set at the broad organisational level, there was not a specific target for each division. Not setting specific targets for each division presents several risks, including complacency on the part of some managers, especially in traditionally male-dominated divisions. They are likely to remain male-dominated because, according to one interviewee, there was an embedded view that "it is too hard to recruit women" and that, after all, "... when it comes down to the wire, it doesn't matter who is doing the work, as long as it is done". By extension the organisation is likely to find it easier to continue recruiting women into those areas already viewed as 'female'. This would further extend occupational gender segregation. Many management interviewees concurred, as illustrated by the following view:

The targets - 50 per cent this, 30 per cent that by 2025, 2030 - they're not granular enough to be meaningful on a day-to-day basis. Something about better granularity of that - I think there's one in there about a 10 per cent per annum increase in women in technical roles or something. It would be nice to even have a dashboard on that - how are we going on that?

In one interview, one of the executive managers came to the realisation of how important specific targets could be, particularly when embedded into performance evaluation.

Honestly, I... it now strikes me that I would not pay specific attention to the issue... it is absent and, not unimportant and I see it, but you forget when it is not, you know, a deadline, a KPI.

Like the manager just quoted, several other participants indicated targets were more likely to be effective when coupled with greater transparency and accountability. There were suggestions that measurable targets should be cascaded down to the division and group levels and into managers' work plans and KPIs.

I feel like cascading them down - anything that makes it more everyone's business and everyone's problem is more likely to be successful.

Another explained that, although gender equality KPIs might initially feel uncomfortable and perhaps attract opposition from managers, he was comfortable that they will be eventually accepted, saying that:

... our sector and our industry senior leaders have got all sorts of targets about all sorts of things all the time and they deliver them excellently. I don't think that having a gender equality one is stretching them far, far out of their comfort zone.

Monitoring was another major point raised. There was a view that regular monitoring of gender targets was lacking at the DoT; that even where monitoring was undertaken, it was not as highly prioritised as KPIs associated with operational performance metrics. Clear cascading of targets and regular monitoring would ensure managers were accountable for progress towards gender equality. As one participant explained, "... accountability for achieving those targets [was] the actual issue". Several participants supported using regular audits, scorecards, and greater progress measurement.

Though not opposed to implementing gender equality targets in a granular and cascaded manner, some interviewees and focus group participants expressed concerns.

- They explained that gender targets might lead to some negative sentiments if they were not well designed, implemented and measured, and if attention was not paid to lifting awareness in ways that increased organisational buy-in. For example, recruitment and promotion directed at women as part of implementing targets might lead some members of the workforce to feel women were getting an easy ride, and perhaps the feeling those recruited or promoted did not necessarily deserve the roles.

- This could potentially increase, rather than reduce gender tensions, especially in traditionally male occupations.
- Furthermore, in divisions like engineering, limited availability of women applicants with the required skills might make it difficult to meet targets. Thus, targets had to be translated and implemented according to division and section, considering prevailing opportunities and challenges. Given such pipeline challenges exist, it is necessary to grow the pool through proactive outreach efforts to schools, universities, and colleges to bring in suitable women as apprentices and trainees.

Overall, targets were endorsed strongly by all executive interviewees for several reasons, including:

- The potential to help focus people's attention on the key quantitative aspects of the problem
- The potential to accelerate cultural change, particularly in areas historically heavily over-represented by men, such as engineering occupations.

For effectiveness, there was a need to seriously consider both structural and cultural requirements and obstacles in applying targets. Some of the key considerations in driving effective change through targets include setting realistic targets, ensuring appropriate allocation of managerial responsibilities, providing adequate resources, designing effective auditing and monitoring systems, and cultivating awareness and whole-organisation buy-in.

## Suggested actions

- DoT sets realistic and achievable targets across all divisions and ensures that targets remains in place as a cornerstone of securing gender equality and ending gender segregation.
- DoT sets gender equality targets for each division and section, and annually reviews all targets for each division and section. Focusing targets in this way, rather than establishing targets for DoT as a whole, means nuanced differences between divisions and sections are responded to.
- To effectively implement targets and related tracking and reporting processes, DoT links targets to the managers' KPIs.
- DoT monitors targets regularly throughout the year rather than annual reporting only.
- DoT increases awareness of the efficacy of targets and leads conversations on the importance of targets, with particular attention to male-dominated divisions.



# 7. Intersectionality

Gender inequalities at work are a serious issue for all women. However, it is an even greater issue when other social, economic, or physical disadvantages come into play. Intersectionality is a theory first proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. The theory explains how the nature and extent of socio-economic disadvantage or privilege is influenced by the intersection of a person's physical, social, and political identities (Runyan, 2018). Although there are many of these identities or characteristics, some of the main ones include gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, and disability.

While all women are generally historically disadvantaged at work and in the labour market, the experience is magnified for women who also experience discrimination based on personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, nationality, etc. For example, a white, educated, middle-aged woman is likely to have better opportunities than a woman from a minority ethnic background, a woman with disability, or a woman from the LGBTIQ community.

Although there is growing academic literature about the disadvantage at the intersection of gender and other characteristics, policy and industry debate has lagged. Furthermore, although many organisations in both private and public sectors have increasingly paid attention to gender inequality and sought to address it through different strategies, intersectionality is rarely considered. Thus, the policy debate and action on gender focuses on women as a homogenous group. The danger in this is that many women at various intersections are left out. In Australia, Aboriginal women experience greater disadvantage, yet that level of specific consideration is often missing from debates and actions (Australian Human Rights Commission 2020).

According to this study, the DoT is not exempt from this oversight. Very few executive managers interviewed reflected on or discussed intersectionality in relation to workplace gender inequality. All the interview participants were asked to describe their teams in terms of their gender diversity characteristics and broadly reflect on the different kinds of challenges that women faced in their workplace. Only one executive recognised intersecting characteristics in addition to gender and the enhanced difficulties experienced at the intersections. All other executive managers only considered gender as a diversity characteristic when providing an estimate of gender configuration in their teams.

Only one executive manager discussed intersectionality at significant length, pointing out that, not considering intersectional challenges faced by women meant that certain women could potentially be left behind – such as CALD women, Indigenous women or women with disability – unless a specific focus is established. She also provided data on the percentage of CALD and Indigenous team members.

What this absence of reflection on intersectionality indicates is that it was not a challenge that features strongly in the organisation's policy debates and, by extension, in the design of diversity policies and action. Intersectionality was, however, raised more prominently in the focus groups. The discussions clearly illustrated that women who also belonged to other marginalised groups experience gendered discrimination in specific and magnified ways. From these discussions and the views of the CALD champion, it became clear that consideration of intersectionality was in its infancy.

Unfortunately, although the I&D Strategy acknowledged the issue, it does not provide direction on what specific actions were required to address the associated workplace disadvantages. Further, in discussions with managers about implementing workplace gender policies, little was presented in the form of specific programs or initiatives to ensure that women at the intersections of disadvantage were not left out and behind.

While assigning a Deputy Secretary as the champion of each of the identified groups contributes to increasing awareness for that specific diverse group, it ignores the intersectional relationships. As articulated earlier, each champion mostly focused on their identified group because that was what was being measured as part of their KPIs. This siloed approach consequently leaves people with intersectional characteristics out. One focus group participant provided the strongest indication of how these women might be experiencing their workplace in certain sections of the workforce.

*I'm not even working in the engineering space, and in my team, there are serious issues about how women are treated, especially women with other characteristics.*

Some female focus group participants who have additional marginalised identities indicated that women with these characteristics are treated differently and may be the subject of increased bias in role assignments, progress and promotions. Apparently, they were more likely to experience greater challenges in promotion to senior roles (VPS level 6 and above) despite of their qualifications and experience.

The available data is limited and therefore this report does not generalise experiences due to the localised cultures of divisions and teams. However, based on the views of the few who raised the intersectionality issue, it does not appear to have been considered so thoroughly at the DoT. There is also a lack of relevant data on the intersecting characteristics of the workforce and, by extension, little policy visibility of the issue. With sufficient data it would be possible to conduct a cross-analysis and map the intersectional staff composition in each division. This practice would help DoT to provide the appropriate support for women with diverse characteristics and experiences.

## Suggested actions

- DoT includes intersectionality characteristics in the policy formulation processes, and, by extension, in the final design of diversity policies and related actions.
- DoT actively leads conversations on intersectionality within the executive team.
- DoT revises the Executive Champion role and approach in implementing its Inclusion and Diversity Strategy so that the Executive Champion role encompasses intersectionality considerations.
- DoT starts collecting data on aspects of intersectionality in its workforce and uses these data to frame, implement and monitor support designed to support managers and employees across the organisation to improve the work environment for all.



# 8. Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to assess the effectiveness of the DoT's progress toward workplace gender equality. The assessment was set against objectives of the Gender Equality Act 2020 which requires defined entities to make real and measurable positive workplace change. Transparency and reporting underpin legislative obligations.

The study was developed in three phases: documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews with key executive managers, and focus group interviews with non-executive staff. The documentary analysis contextualised the extent of gender inequality in Australia before focusing on the establishment and objectives of the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020. Interviews with executive managers examined operational opportunities and impediments to achieving improved gender equity outcomes. Focus group interviews with staff members focused on understanding staff experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of DoTs actions toward implementing gender equity policies and outcomes in the workplace.

In the analysis contained in sections 3 to 7, findings are developed and recommendations drawn in relation to:

1. The ways in which organisational leadership and resource allocation hinder or facilitate progress towards gender equality at the organisation and workplace. The key conclusion is that although there is evidence of strong executive and senior management commitment to, and support for, gender equality, there are glaring shortcomings in which that leadership is applied throughout the organisation to cultivate effective and lasting change.
2. The persistence of traditional male cultures and attitudes in the organisation and their impact on workplace gender inequality. The key conclusion is that such embedded cultures and attitudes influence unconscious biases which shape the day-to-day experiences of inequalities for women at work.
3. Recruitment and promotion processes and systems which, informed by the unconscious biases highlighted above, undermine women's entry into DoT jobs, stay in the jobs and advance in their careers. The key conclusion is that unless conscious attention is paid to these structures and systems to ensure equality and fairness, real and lasting change will continue to be elusive.
4. Workplace flexibility arrangements are increasingly implemented at the DoT workplace, to the benefit of many women (and men) who need to juggle various responsibilities. While this are good developments, their implementation must be careful so as not to lead to counterproductive outcomes. For example, there is the likelihood of women (who mostly take advantage of the flexible work arrangements) being seen as less committed to work and therefore systemically penalised through gender pay gaps and slower career progression. Furthermore, employment flexibility implemented through casualisation, in the long run further disadvantages the intended beneficiaries as they are segregated into mostly insecure, part-time and lower paid jobs.
5. The effectiveness with which policies and strategies for workplace gender equality are implemented. In section 4 it was established that the DoT has, in place, strong policies which could potentially engender the required shift in culture to facilitate effective gender equality. However, gaps were also noted in the ways they were implemented with the conclusions that poor implementation could easily undermine potentially good policies and strategies. There were gaps in the ways managers' accountability for gender equality progress is established and monitored; how awareness is established throughout the organisation; how gender targets are set and monitored.
6. Intersectionality. Although not much data was collected in relation to this issue, the absence of data was enough evidence to suggest that it was not given appropriate attention. Not addressed, there is significant potential for many women at intersections of disadvantage to be left behind and thus leading to further division of women into different layers and level of disadvantage.

From these broad conclusions several recommendations are developed for the DoT:

## Recommendation 1 - Initiate, resource, and support culture change, and embed a workplace gender equality mindset

### Suggested actions:

- DoT allocates resources to developing activities specifically designed to promote and support gender equality efforts, particularly in pursuit of a fundamental change in culture.
- DoT prioritises gender equality and embeds a workplace gender equality mindset by actively promoting DoT's stance on workplace gender equality. The objective is to ensure DoT's stance is adopted by everyone in the organisation as a matter of habit and preference. Constant messaging about DoT's stance is essential. Socio-cultural reengineering activities must also be constant, if not continuous, as culture change of this kind cannot be achieved through sporadic and unsystematic action.
- DoT encourages and empowers executive managers to frequently lead discussions with their direct report team on the importance of workplace gender equality, and the value it brings to operational outcomes.
- DoT provides training opportunities for all managers responsible for staff recruitment, especially in male-dominated divisions. These could include regular expert-led seminars and workshops on workplace gender inclusivity; bonding retreats and related social activities; and social training for managers on managing gender-related issues. (There are nuanced differences between DoT divisions and sections regarding workforce gender profiles and experience of gendered spaces. For greatest effect, training opportunities must be division/section specific.)
- DoT provides mandatory training workshops for all staff on conscious and unconscious biases, benevolent and hostile sexism, and stereotypes in workplaces.

## Recommendation 2 - Build structures and implement resources, systems, and processes required for removing biases in recruitment, promotion and role assignments

### Suggested actions:

- DoT revisits the recruitment process, including interview panel composition and profile of interview panels. Diverse panel members are essential, however women representation on panels should not be limited to HR representatives.
- DoT ensures professional HR oversight to ensure job descriptions are gender sensitive and do not discourage or disadvantage aspiring women and girls. Recruiting managers should also be specifically trained on gender balanced recruitment processes and how to manage unconscious biases in the process.



- DoT conducts regular audits and monitoring of job descriptions and job advertisements to ensure inclusive language is used. Required qualifications should be revised to be more gender-neutral and appealing to female candidates.
- DoT ensures that the practice of fairness and meritocracy in employment and recruitment is moderated by consideration of historical labour market disadvantage. Some level of positive discrimination, perhaps recruitment and promotion quotas, is necessary to correct embedded and historical disadvantage.
- DoT encourages executives to cultivate and manage an effective pipeline into various roles for qualified women. Effective practices could include establishing graduate positions for entry-level roles and providing women with improved access to opportunities to act in senior positions.
- DoT sets specific KPIs on achieving gender equality for all managers on achieving gender balance in their unit/section workforces and in leadership to encourage deliberate consideration of gender during recruitment and promotions.

## Recommendation 3 - Set realistic targets and clear means of achieving them

### Suggested actions:

- DoT sets realistic and achievable targets across all divisions and ensure that targets remain in place as a cornerstone of securing gender equality and ending gender segregation.
- DoT sets gender equity targets for each division and section, and annually reviews all targets for each division and section. Focusing targets in this way, rather than establishing a single target for DoT as a whole, means nuanced differences between divisions and sections are responded to.
- To effectively implement targets and related tracking and reporting processes, DoT links targets to the managers' KPIs.
- DoT monitors targets regularly throughout the year rather than annual reporting only.
- DoT increases awareness of the efficacy of targets and leads conversations on the importance of targets, with particular attention to male-dominated divisions.

## **Recommendation 4 - Increase awareness about the value of flexible work arrangements for both women and men, and provide sufficient capacity for managers to actively promote and implement such**

### **Suggested actions:**

- DoT actively promotes flexible work arrangements for men as a positive strategy for removing the stereotypical perception or belief that part-time jobs are designed for women.
- DoT revisits the design of flexible work arrangements to ensure that it does not, inadvertently, undermine women's experience of work, career advancement and earning.
- DoT examines the capacity of all roles to be undertaken through flexible part-time work arrangements.
- DoT assesses the impediments and opportunities for the implementation of wide use of job-sharing opportunities, especially in senior management positions.
- DoT regularly monitors part-time employees' role allocations and job assignments to ensure their roles are appropriately valued rather than undervalued.

## **Recommendation 5 - Increase awareness of, and responsiveness to intersectionality characteristics**

### **Suggested actions:**

- DoT considers intersectionality characteristics in the policy formulation processes, and by extension, in the final design of diversity policies and related actions.
- DoT actively leads conversations on intersectionality within the executive team.
- DoT revises the Executive Champion role and approach in implementing its Inclusion and Diversity Strategy so that the Executive Champion role encompasses intersectionality considerations.
- DoT starts collecting data on aspects of intersectionality in its workforce and uses these data to frame, implement and monitor support designed to enable managers and employees across the organisation to improve the work environment for all.





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# Appendix A - Workplace gender equality problem

## The national gender equality problem

Workplace gender inequality is an enduring, global socio-economic problem. Despite significant strides made over many decades, most Australian workplaces continue to exhibit gender inequality. On a positive note, there has been a significant expansion in women's labour market participation over the course of six decades, from 35 per cent in 1978 (Strachan, French & Burgess, 2010) to 48 per cent (including full-time, part-time and casual employment) in 2021 (WGEA, 2021).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) workforce participation figures show, as of January 2021, 48 per cent of all employed persons were women, 25.8 per cent were in full-time employment and 21.4 per cent in part-time employment (ABS, 2021a). However, gender inequality continues to show up in Australian workplaces. Australian women continue to experience a pay gap in ordinary full-time earnings compared with their male counterparts. The Australian national gender pay gap stood at 13.4 per cent in 2020. The pay gap is trending down from a peak of 18.7 per cent in 2014 (ABS, 2021b).

Women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions, particularly higher up the leadership ladder (see also WGEA, 2021). Figure 2 demonstrates this problem. In 2020, women represented only 18 per cent of all CEOs and only 32.5 per cent of key management personnel.

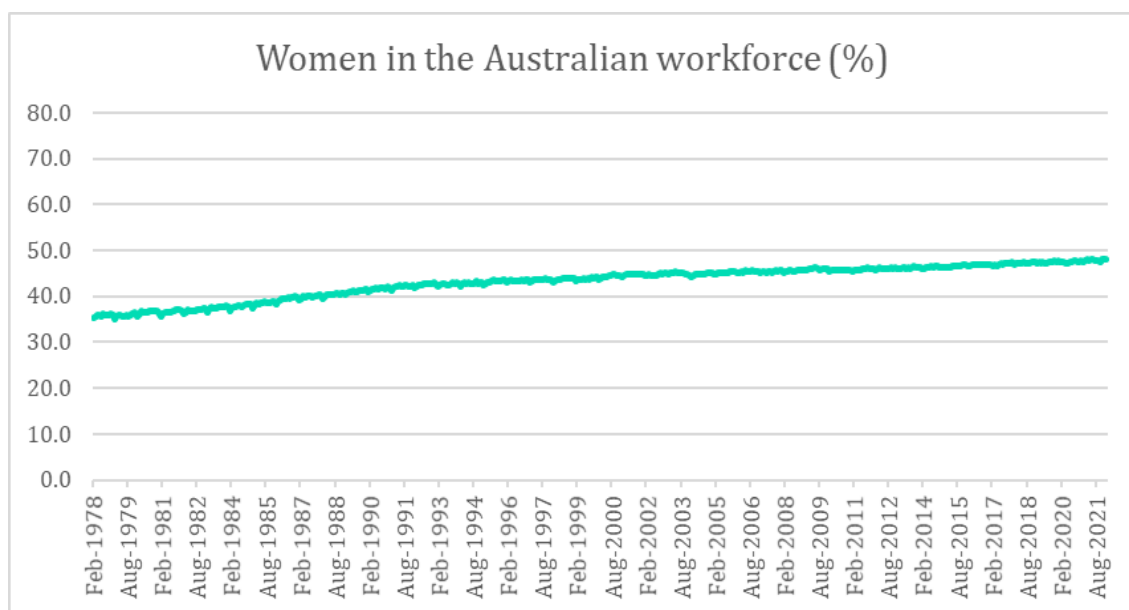


Figure 7 - Women in the workforce from 1978 to 2021 (%)

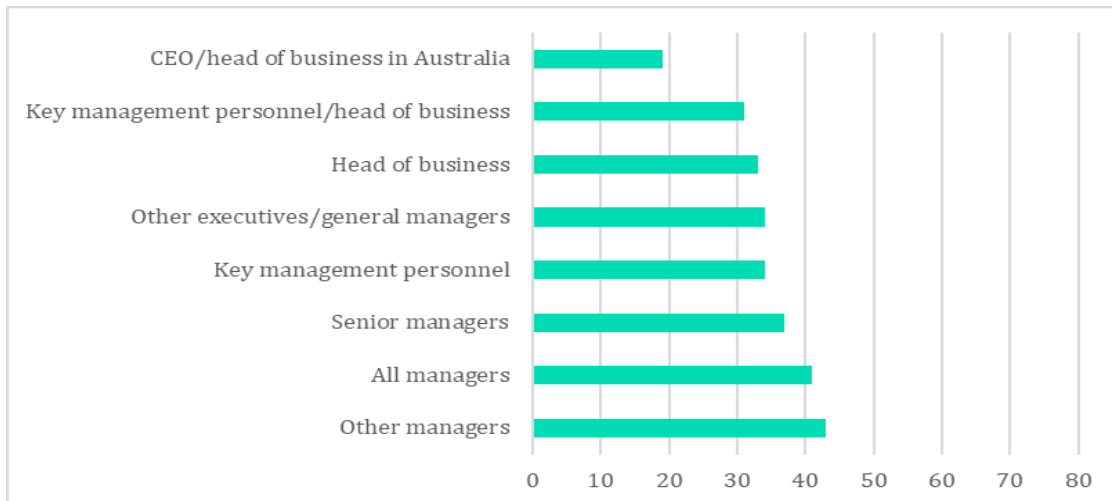


Figure 8 - Women's representation in management and leadership roles, 2020 (%)

Women continue to dominate part-time and casual employment (ABS, 2020), which contributes to lower retirement benefits and generally lower comparative pay. Women's part-time and casual participation is because they comprise the majority of unpaid and un-costed primary caregivers in Australian households. This has a general impact on their participation in the labour market but also on the pay gap (ABS, 2021b). Women experience sexual assault and sexual harassment, socially and in the workplace, at higher rates than men. The Australian Human Rights Commission 'Respect@Work' report released in 2020 set out causes and costs of sexual harassment noting that gender inequality across workplaces and society drives inequitable treatment (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020).

The issues outlined above suggest a combination of social, economic, and cultural workplace and non-workplace factors that amount to, and arise from, gender inequity. The result is that women's life outcomes are continually undermined and diminished. In recent years, academic, social and policy debate has focused on how to meet gender equality targets in society, including in the labour market and the workplace. This debate has intensified since Australia's adoption of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 that articulate gender equality targets in the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development which specifically addresses equality for women and girls (United Nations, 2015)

Developing organisational approaches that recognise and respond to the lived experiences of women in the workplace is key to improving gender equality in the workplace and its associated benefits. However, research has also demonstrated that several internal factors converge to impede organisations' ability to develop effective approaches towards gender equality. Sharp et al (2012) argue that the sexual politics of labour must be addressed to inform policy change. Examining diversity approaches for engineers in Australian based firms the authors argue "too often it is only women who are seen to be gendered; men are unmarked by gender" (2012, p. 557). Thus the entry point for organisations when addressing diversity is to step away from the male worker as the normative. Addressing cultural diversity in the workplace, Syed and Kramar (2010, p. 104) conclude that:

*... major barriers to implementation include: a lack of recognition of the business benefits of diversity, a lack of accountability and commitment by senior managers, a general lack of awareness of diversity issues, and a lack of resources and effective tools for implementation.*

It is argued that developing deeper understandings of how women and minority groups experience the workplace will lead to better and stronger policies, processes and procedures to manage labour market opportunities. These debates have shaped Australia's national policy and legislative approach to tackling gender inequality.

# Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020 in national historical context

*In light of the above, the Australian government has, since the 1980s, taken legislative action to address gender inequalities at work, encourage inclusiveness in the workplace and improve labour market outcomes for women. The first major legislation was the federal Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986, which:*

- 1. Required certain employers to develop and implement affirmative equal opportunity programs to promote equal opportunity for women in employment*
- 2. Mandated the establishment of the Affirmative Action Agency and the office of the Director of Affirmative Action, and for related purposes necessary for effective implementation.*

*In section 8(1), the 1986 Act spelled out the necessary actions required of employers to develop and implement their affirmative action programs, with emphasis on: consultation with (women) employees; coordination with relevant unions; collection of employment data related to number of employees, gender composition, types of jobs performed, by gender; identification of discriminatory practices and patterns of inequality within the organisation; and clear objectives and effective monitoring of progress.*

*The Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (the WGE Act) is the current federal legislation. It represents the third iteration, the second being the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 (Sutherland, 2013). The Affirmative Action Agency, established under the Affirmative Action Act 1986, has now been replaced by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). The WGEA oversees implementation, support and reporting requirements of defined entities (that is, non-public sector employers with more than 100 employees).*

*The WGE Act sets out a framework that supports achievement of better gender equity outcomes by requiring assessments of the progress and success of gender equity policies and programs (Smith & Hayes, 2015).*

*Further, the current regulatory framework broadens interpretations of gender equity to provide for men taking on more unpaid caring responsibilities which, it is argued, contributes to better outcomes for women in the workplace (Sutherland, 2013). In essence, the WGE Act, supported by the WGEA, sets out how organisations can move from stated values and principles in policies, programs and services to measuring and embedding these principles in organisational operations and decision-making. Ultimately the objective is to culturally embed gender equality rather than organisations continuously working to meet legislated equality obligations in the workplace.*

*Despite the reasonably longstanding legislative structures for engendering cultural change in workplaces, and for removing structural and institutional barriers to women's full inclusion, Cassells and Duncan (2021, p. 8) observed:*

*... apathy exists in efforts to increase the number of women on Boards, to narrow the gender pay gap through regular audits, and the implementation of policies and practices that help make workplaces more gender equitable.*

Specifically, Cassells and Duncan argued that poor compliance with requirements to conduct regular gender pay gap audits is an impediment to inclusive workplaces. Gender audits provide organisations with a wealth of information to assess where gender pay gaps exist and how occupational segregation manifests in their workplaces. Moreover, workplace employee audits enable organisations to understand how other personal traits, commonly referred to as intersectional characteristics, act to limit people's employment opportunities.



# Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020

In 2015, the Victorian Government took a different approach to addressing gender inequality establishing the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV). The terms of reference gave a wide-ranging mandate to the RCFV to assess causes of family violence, identify gaps in social services, survey responses of the police and judicial system, and recommend to government ways to reduce family violence (State of Victoria, 2016a). The resulting report identified myriad causes and outcomes of family violence with the resulting 227 recommendations setting out a comprehensive approach to respond to the unequal and uneven treatment of people based on gender.

Principally, the RCFV established that family violence is gendered. Women comprise 75 per cent of the state's family violence victims (State of Victoria, 2016a). Stereotypes that demean and disadvantage women and girls are a major contributor to family violence. The diminution of women and girls across all aspects of life has contributed to poorer social, economic, political and cultural outcomes.

As an outcome of the RCFV's published recommendations, the Victorian government established Victoria's first ever gender equality strategy. This strategy, 'Safe and Strong' (State of Victoria 2016b), contained a commitment by the Victorian government to establish legislation to reform how government can use its sphere of influence to develop gender equal workplaces. After broad community consultation, which identified barriers to women and people with intersectional characteristics achieving full equality in the community, the government enacted the Gender Equality Act 2020. The Act came into effect on 31 March 2021.

## The GE Act 2020: scope, provisions and obligations

Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020, hereafter referred to simply as the Act, is the first of its kind: state-based legislation tackling gender inequality. While not entirely novel considering the pre-existing federal WGE Act, it does seek to address identified deficits in the federal legislation and to inform a more focused framework. In this respect, the Victorian approach includes an additional marker – intersectional characteristics – that defined entities are obliged to account for. In Part 1, the legislation recognises that a person's experience of gender discrimination or disadvantage may be compounded by discrimination on the basis of other characteristics, such as Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and other attributes.

The Act is very targeted and clearly defines who is covered by the Act, what their legislative obligations are, and how they are to report on their gender equity actions.

Some key provisions of the Act include:

- It applies to defined entities, which are typically public sector organisations with more than 50 employees. This definition includes public sector organisations, local governments and universities established under a Victorian statute.
- The defined entities have positive obligations under the Act to actively consider, alter and implement policies, programs and services to address gender and intersectional gaps. To achieve this structural change, the defined organisations are required to: (1) consider and promote gender equality; and (2) take necessary and proportionate action towards achieving gender equality.
- The entities are required to develop gender impact assessments and undertake gender equality audits using the gender equality indicators. The Act puts strategic emphasis on auditing and reporting to ensure gender inequality is at the forefront of organisational thought, and that there is regular tracking of progress. Through constant auditing, few gaps in policy and action plans are likely to go unnoticed.
- The entities are further required to produce a Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP), drawing together quantitative and qualitative data, which details the outcomes of the organisation's gender impact assessments and gender

audits. The GEAP is intended to align the organisation’s progress against the gender equality principles set out in Part 1 of the Act.

- Importantly, the Act further provides for the establishment, and details the responsibilities, of a Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner to oversee the implementation of the Act.

Ultimately, these key provisions and others compel the defined entities to achieve “reasonable and material progress” towards workplace gender equality and enable the Gender Equality Commissioner to monitor this progress.

Problems inherent with a process-based response to gender equality in contrast to an outcomes-based approach are evident in the persistent workplace gender deficit for women. While many processes exist across workplaces to address gender inequality, embedded inequity remains. The reporting mechanisms contained in the Act provide defined entities and the Commissioner with the opportunity to move from constant oversight, a function of the federal WGE Act, to action. This shift is at the core of the Victorian government’s project to reduce gender inequality in all its forms. It is in this context and against this background that this project was commissioned to assess the DoT’s gender equality situation and the policy and practice capacity to meet the Act’s obligations.

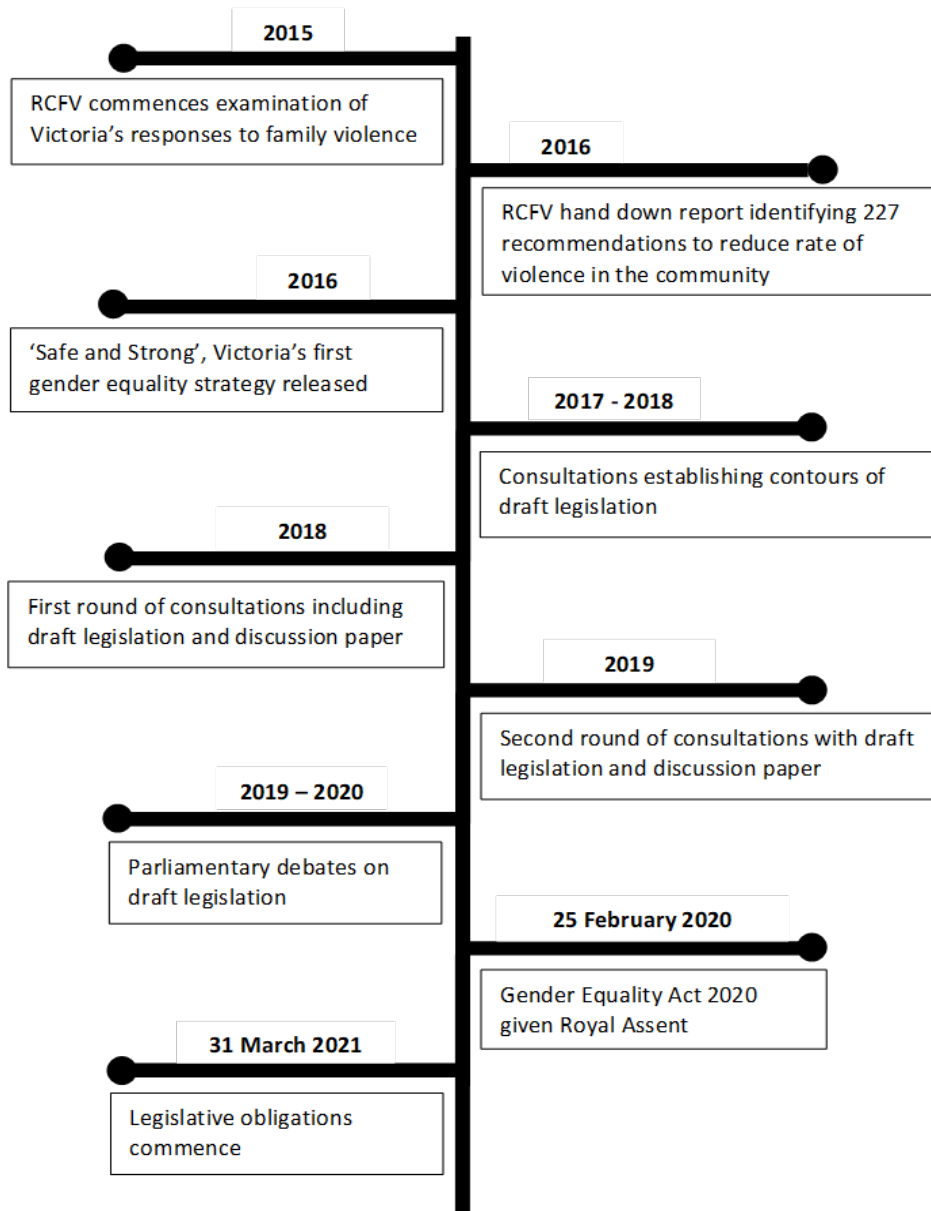


Figure 9 - Timeline for establishment of Gender Equality Act 2020



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## Contact us

Gender Matters Research Theme  
Global Transport and Logistics Research Group  
College of Business  
Tel. +61 3 9925 5261

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## RMIT University

GPO Box 2476  
Melbourne VIC 3001  
[rmit.edu.au](http://rmit.edu.au)

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