

From Research to Workplace Change: Gender Equity Challenges Facing Australian Workers in Gender-Segregated Industries, Through a Tasmanian Lens

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia has made meaningful progress on workplace gender equality, but inequity remains embedded in how work is structured, valued, accessed, and rewarded. Women continue to experience gender pay gaps, occupational segregation, leadership barriers, unequal caring expectations, workplace sexual harassment, safety risks, and cultures that were not designed with equal participation in mind.[1][3][7]

These issues are especially visible in gender-segregated industries. In male-dominated sectors, women may face barriers to entry, limited mentoring and progression, unsuitable facilities or PPE, unsafe reporting environments, rigid rosters, and informal workplace cultures that affect retention as much as recruitment.[28][29] Addressing these barriers matters for workers, employers, unions, and communities. Gender equity is not only a fairness issue; it affects workforce participation, safety, skill retention, organisational performance, and the quality of working life.

The current reform environment is moving beyond awareness and compliance toward prevention, transparency, measurable action, and systems-level change. For Tasmania, this requires place-based implementation that reflects smaller labour markets, regional workforces, close industry relationships, and the importance of worker trust.

This brief examines those challenges through a Tasmanian lens, with particular attention to gender-segregated industries, the local policy and organisational ecosystem, Unions Tasmania's Gender Equity Works project, and practical implementation considerations.

Gender equity work succeeds when research is converted into practical, trusted, worker-informed change that employers, unions, health and safety representatives, and workers can actually use.

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CURRENT STATE OF WORKPLACE GENDER INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Australia has made measurable progress on workplace gender equality, but significant gaps remain across pay, leadership, safety, job design, and retention. These gaps are not isolated problems. They reflect structural patterns in how work is valued, organised, accessed, and rewarded.

Pay Gaps Reflect Structural Inequality

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reports a 21.1% average total remuneration gender pay gap across WGEA-reporting employers, meaning women earn approximately 79 cents for every \$1 earned by men. Over a year, this equates to an average difference of \$28,356.[1] A narrower Australian Bureau of Statistics measure, based on full-time adult ordinary time earnings, places the national gender pay gap at 11.5% as of November 2025, with women earning \$247.20 less per week than men on average.[2]

These figures reflect more than unequal pay for the same role. They are shaped by occupational and industry segregation, women’s overrepresentation in part-time and insecure work, barriers to advancement, and unequal distribution of unpaid care.[3] WGEA data also shows that gender pay gaps are higher in men-dominated industries, where the

midpoint of average employer gender pay gaps is 15.6%, compared with 5.1% in women-dominated industries.[4]

Leadership, Progression, and Retention

Leadership inequality compounds these pay gaps. Women hold 43% of manager roles in WGEA-reporting employers, but only 22% of CEO roles and 21% of governing body chair positions.[1] Women managers also earned 22.8% less in total remuneration than men managers in 2024–25.[5] These disparities matter because leadership structures influence promotion pathways, access to high-value work, workplace culture, flexibility norms, and accountability for change.

Retention data suggests that representation alone is not enough. WGEA reports that women make up 43% of managers but 46% of voluntary resignations from manager roles.[6] Workplaces therefore need to address not only whether women can enter leadership, but whether they can remain, progress, and lead sustainably.

Safety, Flexibility, and Care

Safety remains central to workplace gender equality. The Australian Human Rights Commission's 2022 national survey found that one in three Australian workers had experienced workplace sexual harassment in the previous five years, while only 18% of incidents were reported.[7] Safe Work Australia frames sexual and gender-based harassment as a workplace hazard capable of causing psychological and physical harm, requiring proactive prevention under work health and safety principles.[8] It also emphasises that training and policies alone are not reliable controls; prevention may require redesigning work, systems, environments, supervision, reporting pathways, and workplace culture.[9]

Flexible work and caring responsibilities are closely connected to these outcomes. WGEA data shows women are much more likely than men to work part-time or casually, while men are more likely to work full-time.[6] Flexibility can support participation and retention, but when it is treated mainly as an accommodation for women rather than a normal feature of good work design, it can reinforce career penalties. Similarly, when men face cultural or financial barriers to taking leave or working flexibly, unpaid care remains unevenly distributed.

Together, these patterns show that workplace gender inequality is produced through interconnected mechanisms: pay, job design, safety, care, leadership, culture, and retention. Addressing it requires more than compliance or awareness. It requires practical workplace change that improves entry pathways, prevents harassment, supports shared

care, strengthens accountability, and ensures women can progress safely and fairly across all industries.

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Australia's workplace gender equality framework is governed by overlapping federal, state, anti-discrimination, workplace relations, and work health and safety obligations. Together, these laws increasingly frame gender equality as a matter of transparency, prevention, worker safety, and fair access to secure, valued work.

Federal Reporting and Target-Setting

The **Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012** establishes the national reporting framework administered by WGEA. Private sector and Commonwealth public sector employers with 100 or more employees must lodge annual gender equality data between 1 April and 31 May.[10] Reporting is structured around six Gender Equality Indicators, including workforce composition, governing body composition, equal remuneration, flexible work and caring arrangements, consultation with employees, and sexual harassment, harassment on the ground of sex, and discrimination.[11]

Recent reforms strengthen this framework for larger employers. From 2026, employers that directly employ 500 or more people in Australia must select three gender equality targets from WGEA's target menu and either meet each target or demonstrate improvement by the end of a three-year cycle.[12] This moves the framework beyond disclosure alone and toward measurable organisational action.

Workplace Rights, Prevention, and Safety

The **Fair Work Act 2009** also now operates as part of the gender equality framework. Through the Secure Jobs, Better Pay reforms, gender equality became part of the Fair Work Act's objectives, and the Fair Work Commission is required to consider gender equality when making relevant decisions, including minimum wage decisions and matters involving historically undervalued work.[13]

The **Sex Discrimination Act 1984**, as amended through Respect@Work reforms, creates a positive duty for employers and persons conducting a business or undertaking to eliminate, as far as possible, workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination, sex-based harassment, hostile workplace environments on the ground of sex, and related victimisation.[14] This is a significant shift from complaint-response toward prevention.

Work health and safety obligations reinforce that shift. Sexual harassment and gender-based harassment are not merely interpersonal misconduct; they are workplace hazards

capable of causing psychological and physical harm. Employers must therefore identify risks, implement controls, and address work design, systems, supervision, reporting pathways, and workplace culture, rather than relying only on policies or one-off training.[15]

Tasmania's Anti-Discrimination Framework

In Tasmania, the **Anti-Discrimination Act 1998** prohibits discrimination and other specified conduct and provides pathways for investigation, conciliation, and inquiry into complaints.[16] The Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner administers the Act, investigates and helps resolve complaints, provides education and training, and promotes practices free from discrimination, sexual harassment, and other prohibited conduct.[17]

Tasmania's *Motion for Respect* report demonstrates why this state framework matters in practice. The report examined workplace culture in Tasmanian Ministerial and Parliamentary Services and documented discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying, barriers to reporting, gaps in policy frameworks, and the importance of leadership, training, accountability, and safe reporting pathways.[18] For workplace gender equity projects, this reinforces a practical lesson: legal compliance is only the floor. Effective change also requires culture, systems, leadership, and worker trust.

NOTABLE EFFORTS TO COMBAT WORKPLACE GENDER INEQUALITY

Australia's reform landscape is moving from voluntary awareness toward transparency, prevention, measurable action, and workplace-level accountability. These efforts are not confined to one legal scheme. They operate through national reporting systems, workplace relations reforms, anti-discrimination duties, practical employer guidance, and Tasmanian policy tools.

National Reform Efforts

One of the most visible national reforms is WGEA's publication of employer gender pay gaps. Employer-level pay gap transparency is intended to help boards, executives, workers, investors, and the public assess whether organisations are making progress, while target-setting reforms create stronger expectations for large employers to act on reported gaps rather than simply disclose them.[19][20]

The Australian Government's *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* also places economic equality and security at the centre of national reform. It links gender pay gaps to patterns of work and care, women's overrepresentation in part-time, low-paid, and

insecure work, barriers to career advancement, and occupational and industry segregation.[21] This framing is important because it treats pay inequality as a systems issue, not only a remuneration issue.

Respect@Work implementation has created a parallel prevention framework. The Australian Human Rights Commission's positive duty guidance states that organisations must take proactive and appropriate measures to eliminate relevant unlawful conduct as far as possible, and that "simply responding to individual reports as they arise is not enough." [22] This shifts workplace sexual harassment and sex-based discrimination work toward prevention, leadership accountability, risk management, and culture change.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's gender pay equity guidance supports this practical approach. It defines gender pay equity as equal pay for work of equal or comparable value and links best practice to legal compliance, staff attraction and retention, organisational performance, training, promotion, flexible work, and transparent pay systems.[23]

Tasmania-Specific Efforts

Tasmania has also developed policy tools that support workplace and economic gender equality. *Equal means Equal: Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022–2027* is the Tasmanian Government's five-year framework for improving outcomes for women and girls across safety, health and wellbeing, economic security, leadership, and participation.[24]

Tasmania's Gender Budget Statement and Gender Impact Assessment Toolkit further show an effort to embed gender analysis into ordinary policy and budget processes, rather than treating gender equality as a standalone issue. The Toolkit is designed for people working on policies, programs, services, or projects and supports gendered analysis from planning through delivery and review.[25]

Tasmania's Respectful Workplaces resources also provide practical tools for organisations seeking safer, fairer, and more inclusive cultures. The course and supporting materials are intended for workplaces of different sizes and sectors, including frontline workers, team leaders, managers, HR staff, executives, boards, and volunteers.[26]

Finally, the Women on Boards Strategy demonstrates measurable progress in women's leadership. Tasmania reached 50% women's representation on Tasmanian Government boards and committees in March 2025, achieving gender parity for the first time.[27] While board parity does not resolve workplace inequality, it shows the value of setting clear goals, tracking progress, and embedding successful initiatives into business-as-usual practice.

GENDER-SEGREGATED INDUSTRIES

Gender segregation remains one of Australia's strongest structural drivers of workplace inequality. WGEA describes the Australian labour market as "highly gender-segregated" by both industry and occupation, with patterns that have persisted over decades.[28] This matters because industry and occupation shape pay, training access, safety risks, promotion pathways, job security, flexibility, and whether workers are treated as belonging.

Barriers to Entry and Progression

In male-dominated industries, women may face barriers before they are even hired, including narrow recruitment pipelines, stereotypes about physical capacity or cultural "fit," limited apprenticeships or entry pathways, and few visible women in senior or technical roles. Once inside, disadvantage can continue through informal systems: who is mentored, who receives technical training, who is allocated overtime, who is sponsored for promotion, and whose concerns are taken seriously.

These barriers also affect retention. Increasing women's entry into male-dominated industries will not produce gender equity if workplace systems push them out. Common retention issues include inadequate facilities, ill-fitting PPE, rigid rosters, isolation, harassment, bullying, lack of family-friendly work design, and informal promotion practices.

Safety, Culture, and Economic Impact

Safety is central to this issue. Safe Work Australia identifies sexual and gender-based harassment as a workplace hazard capable of causing psychological and physical harm.[29] It has also released resources for managing gender-based violence risks in construction, recognising that risks can be embedded in site culture, supervision, physical environments, and reporting systems.[30]

Gender segregation also reinforces economic inequality. WGEA data shows that gender pay gaps are higher in men-dominated industries, where the midpoint of average employer gender pay gaps is 15.6%, compared with 5.1% in women-dominated industries.[31] These gaps are not simply the result of individual choices. Choices are shaped by access to training, workplace design, safety, care responsibilities, and whether industries are prepared to retain workers who do not fit the historic norm.

For gender-segregated industries, equity work must focus on systems, not symbolism. Increasing women's participation requires safer workplaces, appropriate facilities and equipment, transparent progression, accountable leadership, meaningful worker

consultation, flexible job design, and cultural change that treats women as ordinary workers, not exceptions.

TASMANIA-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

Tasmania requires place-based gender equity work. National patterns matter, but local implementation must account for Tasmania's smaller labour market, regional communities, industry relationships, and close union, employer, government, and training networks. In this context, barriers can be more visible, but solutions may also depend more heavily on trust, credibility, and practical collaboration.

Smaller Labour Markets and Regional Workforces

Tasmania is Australia's smallest state by population, with a workforce spread across Hobart and regional communities.[32] This can make workplace gender inequality more relational. A worker's access to training, promotion, mentoring, safe reporting, or alternative employment may be shaped not only by policy, but by local reputation, employer networks, transport, housing, care responsibilities, and the limited number of comparable jobs in some regions.

For women in male-dominated industries, these dynamics can intensify barriers. If there are few employers in a field, leaving an unsafe or exclusionary workplace may mean leaving the industry, relocating, or accepting lower-paid work. This makes retention, safe reporting, and cultural change especially important.

Policy Progress and Practical Gaps

Tasmania has an active gender equality policy framework. *Equal means Equal: Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022–2027* sets a state framework for improving outcomes for women and girls, including economic security, safety, health and wellbeing, leadership, and participation.[33] Tasmania has also developed gender budget statements and a Gender

Impact Assessment Toolkit, which aim to embed gender analysis into ordinary policy, budgeting, program design, and review.[34]

However, workplace change still depends on implementation. Policy frameworks can set direction, but industries need practical tools: suitable facilities, properly fitted PPE, transparent progression, flexible rosters, safe reporting systems, trained supervisors, and leadership accountability.

Trust, Worker Voice, and Local Partnerships

In Tasmania, effective gender equity work should avoid a one-size-fits-all model. Smaller communities and industry networks may make workers more cautious about speaking openly, particularly where complaints could affect reputation, future employment, or relationships with supervisors and employers. Consultations benefit from being safe, confidential, and worker-centred.

The advantage is that Tasmania's scale can also support practical collaboration. Strong union networks, local employers, training providers, government agencies, and community organisations can help translate research into workplace-specific changes. The most effective approach is likely to be relational and iterative: listen to workers, identify local barriers, test practical tools, adapt them with employers and health and safety representatives, and build trust through visible follow-through.

SPOTLIGHT: UNIONS TASMANIA'S GENDER EQUITY WORKS PROJECT

Gender Equity Works is the most directly relevant Tasmanian initiative for this brief as it focuses on the specific challenge of converting gender equity research into practical workplace change in male-dominated industries.

What It Is

Gender Equity Works is a Unions Tasmania project focused on improving safety, inclusion, and opportunity for women working in male-dominated industries across Tasmania. Unions Tasmania describes the project as “turning research into practical change in Tasmanian workplaces.”[35]

The project sits within the Federal Government's Advancing Gender Equality in Gender Segregated Industries grant program, which supports practical workplace and industry-level action on flexibility, safe and dignified amenities, and inclusive workplace

cultures.[36] Gender Equity Works is led by Unions Tasmania, supported by the ACTU, and intended to provide free public access to its materials.[35]

What It Has Done

The project has completed a research phase involving workers, employers, unions, and training providers across utilities, electrical construction, and transport.[35] Its research report captures the lived experiences of women working in gender-segregated industries in Tasmania, with findings and practical recommendations for employers, unions, and policymakers.[35]

Media reporting on the report stated that the research surveyed 63 workers and found 64% identified gender segregation as a significant issue in their industry. Reported barriers included ill-fitting PPE, inadequate facilities, inflexible rosters, informal promotion processes, and dismissive workplace cultures.[37] These findings are important because they show that participation barriers are not only about recruitment. They are also about whether workplace systems are designed to retain women safely and fairly.

Goals and 2026 Implementation

Unions Tasmania states that Gender Equity Works is designed to develop tools that help Tasmanian workers and employers expand workplace flexibility, address health and safety risks affecting women, shift workplace culture through WHS-driven change, and lead with clarity and confidence.[35]

The next phase focuses on practical resources. Unions Tasmania says early 2026 resources include short online training modules for employers, workers, and health and safety representatives, focused on recognising risks, strengthening workplace culture, and turning insight into action. It also identifies a practical toolkit to help workplaces assess current practices, identify priorities, and track gender equity progress over time.[35]

The next phase of Gender Equity Works is therefore not simply communications or training delivery. It is an implementation challenge requiring stakeholder trust, practical tools, WHS literacy, evaluation discipline, and the ability to convert lived experience into measurable workplace change.

TASMANIAN ORGANISATIONS ADDRESSING WORKPLACE GENDER INEQUALITY

Tasmania's workplace gender equity ecosystem includes unions, legal services, government, regulators, training providers, and industry bodies. Their roles are distinct but

connected: worker voice, legal advice, prevention, policy, training pathways, and industry culture.

- **NAWIC Tasmania** supports women in construction through state chapter activity and national advocacy. NAWIC's policy priorities include women's participation, leadership, gender pay gap reduction, retention, and fairer industry culture.[44]
- **Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Tasmania** administers anti-discrimination functions and has led major workplace culture work, including *Motion for Respect*, which examined discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying in Tasmanian Ministerial and Parliamentary Services.[41]
- **Tasmanian Government / Department of Premier and Cabinet — Women** leads key state gender equality initiatives, including *Equal means Equal: Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022–2027*, gender budget work, the Gender Impact Assessment Toolkit, Respectful Workplaces resources, women's leadership initiatives, and grants.[40]
- **TasTAFE / Tradeswomen Australia initiatives** have supported women's entry into non-traditional trades. TasTAFE supported Tradeswomen Australia's *Supporting Women to Succeed* project in North West Tasmania, a 12-month cultural change program for employers seeking to recruit trade-ready women and build healthier workplace cultures.[42][43]
- **Unions Tasmania** leads Gender Equity Works, focused on safety, inclusion, and opportunity for women in male-dominated Tasmanian industries. Its work links gender equity with worker voice, WHS-informed culture change, training, and practical workplace resources.[38]
- **Worker Assist Tasmania** partners with Women's Legal Service Tasmania to deliver Working Women's Centre Tasmania. This places the Centre within Tasmania's broader worker-rights support system, especially where gendered workplace harm overlaps with employment rights, compensation, entitlements, and reporting concerns.[39]
- **Working Women's Centre Tasmania / Women's Legal Service Tasmania** provides support for workplace sexual harassment and other workplace issues, including workers' rights and entitlements. It offers free, confidential legal advice, representation, referrals, education, advocacy, and prevention work across Tasmania.[39]

This ecosystem is key. Workplace gender inequality cannot be solved by one organisation alone. Effective reform depends on coordinated roles: unions amplify worker experience, legal services protect rights, government sets direction, regulators support accountability, training providers build pathways, and industry bodies help shift culture from within.

WHAT PRACTICAL WORKPLACE CHANGE REQUIRES

Effective gender equity work requires implementation discipline, not just values alignment. The strongest workplace changes are practical, worker-informed, measurable, and built into ordinary systems: recruitment, supervision, rostering, facilities, WHS processes, reporting, promotion, training, and evaluation.

Worker Voice and Trust

Consultation must begin with workers' lived experience, especially women, apprentices, trainees, health and safety representatives, and workers who may face intersecting barriers. Safe Work Australia states that managing sexual and gender-based harassment risks requires consultation with workers and their representatives at every step of the risk management process.[45] This is essential because workers often know where formal policy diverges from daily practice.

Trust also matters. Workers may not report unsafe conduct if they fear retaliation, reputation damage, career consequences, or being labelled difficult. Consultation should therefore include confidential channels, clear feedback loops, and visible follow-through. Without follow-through, consultation can become extractive: workers share risks, but nothing changes.

Accountability, Leadership, and Risk Controls

Gender equity must be owned by leadership and embedded into governance. The Australian Human Rights Commission's positive duty guidance identifies standards including leadership, culture, knowledge, risk management, support, reporting and response, and monitoring, evaluation, and transparency.[46] These standards are useful because they make prevention an organisational responsibility, not an individual burden on affected workers.

A WHS lens is particularly important in male-dominated industries. Safe Work Australia makes clear that sexual and gender-based harassment is a workplace hazard and that training and policies alone are not effective or reliable controls.[45] Practical controls may include redesigning work, improving supervision, strengthening reporting systems,

addressing isolated work, ensuring suitable facilities, providing properly fitted PPE, changing roster practices, and intervening in hostile team cultures.

Tools, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Training is still useful, but only when connected to action. Workers, managers, employers, and health and safety representatives need tools that clarify what risk looks like, how to respond, who is accountable, and how progress will be measured. WGEA's gender strategy guidance emphasises measurable objectives, accountability, and clear responsibility for implementation.[47]

Evaluation should be built in from the start. Useful indicators might include participation and completion of training, worker confidence in reporting pathways, availability of suitable facilities and PPE, promotion and retention data, flexible work uptake, complaint trends, safety observations, and qualitative feedback from workers and HSRs.

In practice, workplace gender equity succeeds when it becomes part of business-as-usual management: consulted, resourced, monitored, reported, and improved. Advocacy can identify the problem, but implementation determines whether conditions actually change.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The next phase of Gender Equity Works will require a practical implementation approach: structured enough to support governance, reporting, and evaluation, while flexible enough to respond to worker experience, industry context, and stakeholder feedback.[48]

Mapping the Work

A strong starting point would be clear stakeholder mapping across unions, employers, workers, health and safety representatives, training providers, government, and relevant community or legal services. This would help identify who needs to be engaged, where decision-making sits, which workers may face the greatest barriers, and where early collaboration is most likely to produce useful change.

That mapping should sit alongside a clear project plan: milestones, deliverables, responsibilities, timelines, budget controls, risk points, reporting requirements, and feedback mechanisms. The purpose is not to over-engineer the work, but to ensure that practical tools and engagement activities are delivered consistently and can be adapted as new evidence emerges.

Testing Practical Tools

Training resources and workplace tools are most effective when they are grounded in real workplace conditions. For Gender Equity Works, this means translating research into materials that help workers, employers, and health and safety representatives recognise risks, improve workplace culture, and address practical barriers such as facilities, PPE, rostering, reporting pathways, supervision, flexibility, and psychological safety.

Pilot testing would be valuable before broader rollout. Selected workplaces or industry groups could provide feedback on whether resources are clear, relevant, accessible, and usable in day-to-day work. This would also help identify where tools need to be adjusted for different industries, workplace sizes, or regional contexts.

Measuring and Sustaining Change

Evaluation should be built into implementation from the outset. Useful measures could include participation in training or forums, worker confidence in reporting systems, employer actions taken, HSR engagement, changes to facilities or procedures, flexible work uptake, retention patterns, and qualitative feedback from workers.

Sustainability also matters. Gender Equity Works will have the greatest impact if its resources remain useful beyond the grant period. That means documenting lessons learned, assigning responsibility for updates, and embedding tools into ordinary union, employer, and WHS practice. The goal is not simply to produce resources, but to support practical, worker-informed changes that Tasmanian workplaces can continue using.

CONCLUSION

Workplace gender inequality is sustained through systems: pay structures, job design, leadership pathways, safety risks, caring expectations, workplace culture, and access to opportunity. Addressing it requires more than awareness, compliance, or one-off training. It requires practical change that workers trust and workplaces can apply.

For Tasmania, this means place-based implementation: listening to workers, engaging unions and employers, addressing industry-specific barriers, and translating research into tools that improve daily working conditions. Gender equity work succeeds when evidence becomes action: safer reporting pathways, better facilities and equipment, fairer progression, flexible work design, accountable leadership, and measurable improvement.

The strongest outcomes will come from worker-informed change that is practical, credible, and sustained beyond a single project cycle.

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