

Progressing gender equality in the Australasian rail industry

Challenges and supportive practices

Report commissioned by



National Women in Transport



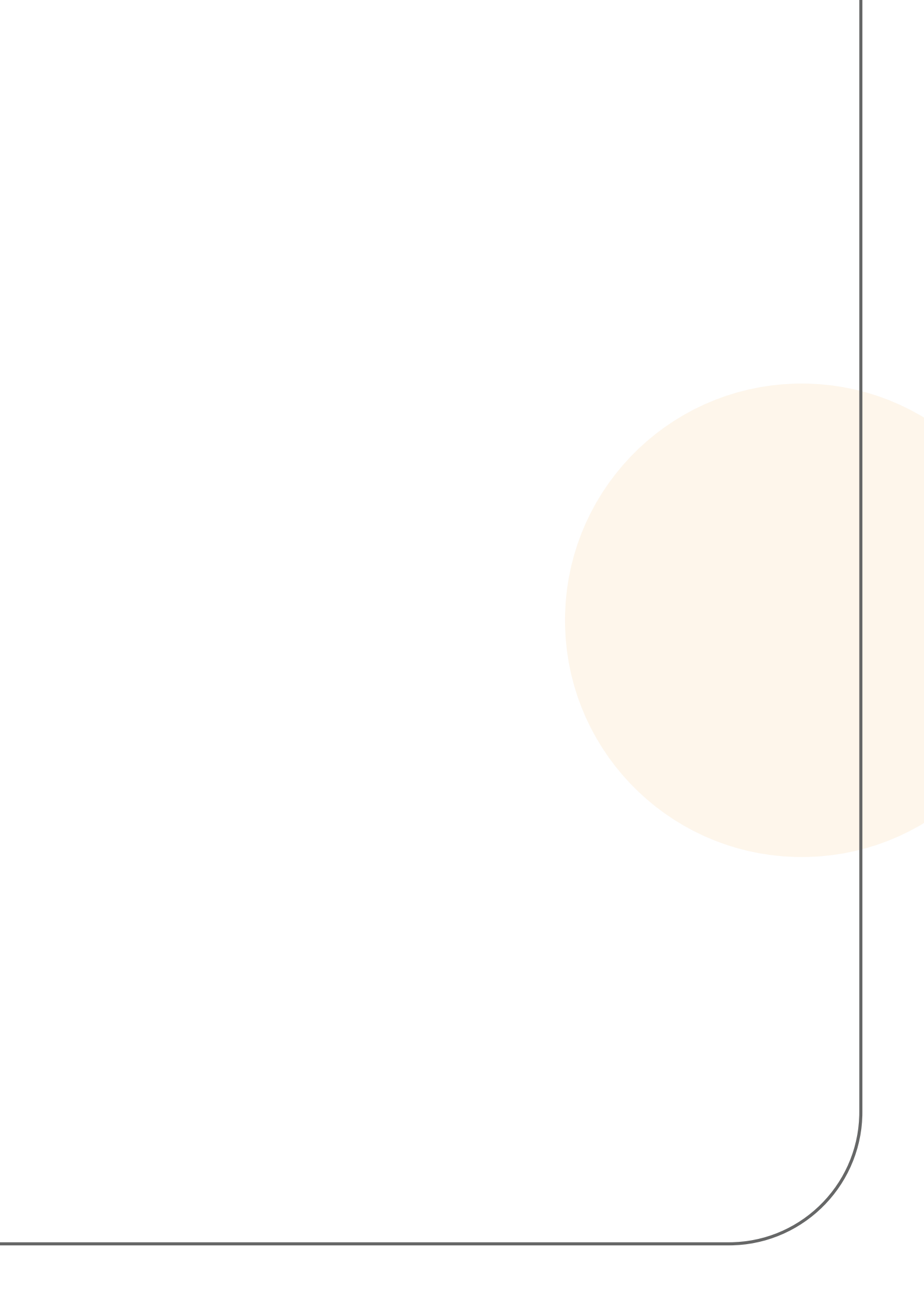
Prepared by

Diversity Partners

Creating Inclusive Cultures

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia, and their continuing connections to the land, waters and communities. We pay our respects to them and to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Diversity Partners is an Australian consulting firm specialising in diversity and inclusion research, strategies and leadership education. Since being founded in 2009 by Chief Executive Officer Dr Katie Spearritt, Diversity Partners has grown to be one of Australia's leading diversity and inclusion consultancies, guiding more than 600 organisations - ranging from blue-chip companies to small and medium organisations - to improve diversity and inclusion in their workplaces. Diversity Partners is passionate about building workplace cultures where employees feel respected and valued, new ideas are welcomed, breakthrough insights are generated, and the workforce profile is representative of diverse customers and communities.



Message from the Australasian Railway Association CEO

Rail plays a key role in the country's sustainable transport network, but we must first future-proof our workforce and attracting and retaining more women will underpin our success.



The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) is the peak body for the rail industry in Australia and New Zealand, and advocates on behalf of 230 member organisations. Our members cover every aspect of rail, including:

- The passenger and freight operators that keep essential rail services moving;
- The track owners, managers and contractors that deliver a safe and efficient rail infrastructure network;
- The suppliers, manufacturers and consultants that drive innovation, productivity and efficiency in the rail industry.

The ARA is committed to fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion within the Australian rail industry, with a strong emphasis on promoting opportunities for women in rail.

It is well established that a gender-balanced workforce drives improved performance and innovation, and the Australian and New Zealand rail industry is no different.

I am incredibly proud of the ARA's program of work underway to break down barriers for women to create a thriving, diverse and skilled workforce, which is one of five strategic priorities in our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

It is essential that industry and government doubles down on efforts to make rail an attractive career choice for women if we are to address the impact of a retiring, male-dominated workforce and worsening skills shortages.

The ARA, on behalf of the rail industry, regularly conducts research to inform its program of work to support gender diversity and workforce inclusion.

This research, commissioned by the ARA and National Women in Transport and conducted by Diversity Partners, is critical to understanding employees' experiences in the workplace and best practice initiatives to ensure a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

The feedback from individuals has provided far greater clarity on the current challenges within rail and will help industry to recognise the need for more urgent effort to position rail as an employer of choice for women.

While the representation of women in the rail workforce has improved in recent years, from 17 per cent in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2023, we are still a long way from achieving a sustainable workforce that meets future transport needs, and one that provides a supportive environment enabling women and gender diverse people to not only feel included but to thrive.

This report shows that while many organisations have clear practices in place to support inclusion, we cannot move forward in a meaningful way until we fully address the systemic barriers to female participation.

Through more than 570 survey responses, as well as in-depth interviews, focus groups and written submissions, this report draws together a collective body of evidence on Australian and global best practice.

It builds on the ARA's Gender Diversity Data Report 2024 and is part of extensive work underway by the ARA's Women in Rail Committee, informed by the ARA Women in Rail Strategy.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in the survey and focus groups in contributing to this very valuable research. It will provide an important platform for future policies and programs to enhance diversity and inclusion.

I encourage all rail organisations to consider implementing the recommendations of the report, and to partner with the ARA in working collaboratively with industry colleagues to ensure our workplaces and industry are as inclusive, safe and rewarding as possible.

Caroline Wilkie
CEO, Australasian Railway Association

Message from the National Transport Commission Chair

At the National Transport Commission we recognise that rail has some work to do to become an industry of choice for more women.



At the National Transport Commission (NTC), we recognise that rail has some work to do to become an industry of choice for more women.

It's why our National Women in Transport and National Rail Skills Hub work is so important – and why we partnered with the Australasian Railway Association to undertake this research into the current barriers to gender diversity in the rail sector.

The NTC's National Women in Transport is a partnership initiative between government and industry that aims to showcase, support, and increase the number of Australian women working in transport.

You can't be what you can't see, so National Women in Transport runs a Speaker Bureau that puts a spotlight on some outstanding women leading transport across Australia. Having more women represented on panels and at events is one way we can make change and inspire women to be part of the transport sector. But there is still a lot of work to be done and developing evidence helps us chart the way.

The *Progressing gender equality in the Australasian rail industry* report delivers some important insights. Most importantly it shows that taking active steps to improve diversity delivers better results. Where industry participants have gender diversity objectives and supporting strategies, the dial is being shifted.

I'd encourage you to think about how we can learn from others and work more collectively to tackle rail's gender diversity challenge and create the workforce we need for the rail industry's future success.

Carolyn Walsh
Chair, National Transport Commission

Executive Summary

The Australian and New Zealand rail industry should be proud of the progress it has made towards greater diversity and inclusion over the past decade but there is much more to be done.

Women's representation in the sector has been growing, albeit slowly from 17 per cent in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2023. However, the experiences of the current workforce highlighted by this research indicate that there is still much more to do.

Numerous local and global studies show diverse and inclusive workplaces bring substantial benefits including innovation, better decision making and improved safety outcomes.

Improving diversity will also assist in addressing the current skills shortages. With \$155 billion in transport infrastructure planned from 2022-2037, the sector needs to recruit 70,000 workers. It is critical to build diverse and inclusive workplaces that support the attraction, retention and progression of all genders in order to meet this shortfall.

To make the most of the opportunity to drive progress in building a more diverse and inclusive workforce, there needs to be a considered and concerted effort in not just attracting, retaining and promoting women in the workforce but also removing barriers that limit creating an inclusive experience and the opportunity to play an equal part in the sector.

The organisations that are making strides are those that have made significant investment and commitment relating to diversity and inclusion initiatives.

An important finding from the consultation with industry is that 89 per cent of women and 96 per cent of men agree or strongly agree that they enjoy working in the rail sector and 81 per cent of women and 85 per cent of men see themselves staying in the industry in the next five years.

Women who work in the sector value the sense of purpose in helping people travel safely, the variety and breadth of innovative work and the increasing diversity of the workforce. In essence, it is not the type of work or the industry *per se* that is a barrier to attracting, retaining and promoting women, it is the challenges and negative experiences they face in the workplace.

These barriers include:

- A lack of understanding of diversity and inclusion challenges in the industry and awareness of the lived experiences of others;
- Unconscious bias;
- The profile of the current rail workforce being predominantly male and ageing;

- Poor culture due to exclusionary behaviours, lack of psychological safety, and experiences of harassment, discrimination and bullying;
- Limited flexible working arrangements;
- Inadequate bathroom facilities at some sites and stations.

Barriers

Progress on diversity and inclusion in the rail sector is inhibited by a perception shared by some that there are no barriers for women, that diversity efforts are wasteful and that they undermine notions of merit-based employment. This view diminishes the experiences of many women who participated in this research, for whom exclusionary language and behaviours are part of their everyday reality.

Historically, in Australia and globally, rail has been a man's world. Lingering associations of men and rail continue to limit diversity progress. Both men and women who responded to the survey for this research rated the perception of a traditional male-dominated culture as the biggest challenge to achieving greater diversity in the industry.

Historically, in Australia and globally, rail has been a man's world but this is changing.

But it is more than just perception. The male-dominated culture can lead to challenging experiences for many women in the sector. Women report significantly more negative experiences of exclusionary behaviours, bias, harassment, and discrimination than men. Among women survey respondents, 56 per cent said they have experienced negative gender bias in the past year. For men, 23 per cent experienced negative gender bias.

While women reported experiencing negative gender bias across all sectors of the rail industry, they are more likely to experience negative gender bias in the traditionally male-dominated freight or heavy haul sector, and among the infrastructure contractor sector.

Exclusionary behaviours for women and gender diverse people in the rail sector take different forms - from devaluing their contributions to gender role stereotyping. Bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment is more likely to be experienced by women working in the freight and heavy haul rail sector than other sectors.

This experience of bias and discrimination is even more challenging for women who identify as LGBTIQ+ and women with disability. For women from different cultural backgrounds, casual sexism and racism can sometimes make for a hostile workplace.

A higher proportion of men than women in the rail sector agree that they can voice a differing opinion to their manager without fear of repercussion. A higher proportion of men than women agree they feel safe to challenge inappropriate behaviour at work.

At a more fundamental level, the challenge of adequate infrastructure, including basic facilities such as toilets at some sites and stations, continues to hold back progress on diversity and inclusion.

Supportive practices

Many larger organisations in the sector have accelerated their focus on gender equality over the past decade, publicly sharing their plans and targets, often as part of a wider 'diversity and inclusion' strategy. Recognising there is no quick fix, they have adopted a systemic approach, which is vital to sustain gender equality (and broader diversity) progress in the rail sector.

Government social procurement frameworks that incentivise suppliers to adopt and maintain inclusive and sustainable business practices are also playing a major part in driving progress.

Some organisations in Australia and overseas are starting to conduct gender impact assessments (and in some cases diversity impact assessments) so that gender is a consideration in the design of processes and services. This is not just an important way to design gender-sensitive programs and services, but also highlights the value of gender-balanced teams in the workforce to provide inputs to these assessments. These types of audits can also identify opportunities to improve facilities so that women and gender diverse people feel safe and supported at work.

Industry promotion of how the rail sector is helping to deliver sustainable and accessible transport solutions and connect communities, and the breadth of roles available in the sector, also helps attract women to the sector.

Industry promotion of the sector's role in helping to deliver sustainable and accessible transport solutions and connect communities, and the breadth of roles available in the sector, helps attract women to the sector.

Another practice helping attract women to the sector is a shift away from the traditional mindset that job candidates must have rail experience, especially technical qualifications, and expertise, to work in rail. Skills such as customer service and communication are increasingly promoted, helping to expand the talent pipeline.

Innovative programs to attract women to the sector are another supportive practice. These include partnerships

with schools, industry organisations and high-profile national women's sporting organisations, as well as targeted media campaigns to attract women.

Many organisations are also working to minimise bias in their recruitment process by advertising roles in a broad range of ways and setting targets at shortlisting stages.

Recruiting more women and gender diverse people is a step in the right direction to greater gender diversity in the sector. What is just as essential is transforming workplace cultures to embrace diversity, so all genders experience a safer and more supportive workplace.

Education on respectful behaviours is an increasing feature of some organisations' training programs and - given the types of exclusionary behaviours and gender role stereotypes that continue to be experienced by many women - must be a priority for all organisations in the rail industry. This can be achieved through programs, communications and events by organisations and industry associations.

Education on respectful behaviours is an increasing feature of some organisations' training programs and must be a priority for all organisations in the rail industry.

Another important factor is men who are allies and sponsors - those who actively promote diversity and inclusion, and who support opportunities for high potential women through job rotations, lateral appointments and shadowing senior leaders on major projects.

Mentoring and networking programs in organisations across the industry that enable women to connect with other women in the industry are highly valued. Within organisations, employee resource groups that enable communities with shared experience and interest to collectively drive change are another supportive practice. These initiatives appear particularly important in this sector because of the lower levels of psychological safety experienced by women.

Other important initiatives are innovative, flexible working practices in frontline and non-frontline roles, increasing use of parental leave and flexible work arrangements by men, and increasing choices of industrial workwear and uniforms.

While these factors help drive broader organisational and industry change, it is also important to recognise the positive impact of small, relatively new, and tangible symbols of inclusion in workplaces in the rail sector - for employees and passengers. Some shared how visibility of people with gender pronouns helps them feel safer at work. Rainbow lanyards and badges are helping promote inclusion. Some customer service staff in rail organisations that are part of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower network have been trained to help passengers with invisible disabilities and wear Sunflower supporter badges to show their familiarity with the program.

Recommendations

Most employees want more leadership and action on diversity and inclusion. 'Improved leadership on diversity and inclusion in my workplace' was a top rating priority by survey respondents for the sector to take meaningful steps towards being more diverse and inclusive.

Individuals at all levels of the rail sector have their own leadership role to play in supporting inclusive workplaces. This includes educating themselves on diversity issues, sharing their experiences and acting as ambassadors for inclusion within their organisations.

The efforts of individual leaders and employees must be supported by systemic practices at both the organisation and industry levels to achieve greater and more consistent progress.

These practices are offered as ideas for progress over time. We recognise that implementation will vary, depending on organisation size, resourcing, and organisational maturity in efforts to support a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace.

Recommendations for organisations

1. Develop gender equality strategies which are underpinned by clear targets and key performance indicators – not just for the organisation but for individual leaders.
2. Promote the use of gender impact assessments to create safe and inclusive spaces and practices that further the understanding of diversity and inclusion.
3. Partner with the ARA to promote the benefits of working in the rail sector – including creating targeted campaigns to attract women.
4. Minimise bias in the recruitment process through education of hiring managers, advertising in a range of non-traditional recruitment sources, and using new digital tools to reduce gender-stereotyped wording and attract broader talent pools.
5. Provide education on respectful and inclusive behaviours in the workplace that supports new legislative requirements in Australia whereby employers have a positive duty to actively prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination, and other relevant unlawful conduct.
6. Support male allies to sponsor and champion change, providing visible leadership on diversity and inclusion.
7. Invest in mentoring opportunities and networking programs that allow women to connect with other women.
8. Support employee resource groups that allow communities of shared experience and interest to collectively drive change and education initiatives.

9. Continue to promote the use of flexible working arrangements that support employees of all genders to balance work with other responsibilities, including caring responsibilities (in both frontline and non-frontline roles).
10. Promote gender equitable policies and facilities that help to ensure employees have equal access to parental leave, protective equipment and clothing, and appropriate facilities on sites.

Recommendations for the industry

1. The ARA to lead the establishment of an industry Code of Conduct on respectful behaviours and a commitment to eliminating harassment and discrimination.
2. The ARA to provide industry-wide education on inclusive leadership.
3. The ARA to encourage member firms to participate in the Champions of Change Coalition program and investigate the establishment of a Champions of Change Rail Group.
4. The ARA to partner with industry to consider targets for working towards greater gender diversity in different sectors across the industry.
5. The ARA to continue to facilitate industry wide mentoring program and provide networking opportunities.
6. The ARA to partner with industry to continue to raise the attractiveness of the sector to women and gender diverse people via a Work in Rail campaign.

Collectively, the recommendations and examples of best practice highlighted in this report support the industry to develop and retain a skilled, thriving and diverse workforce that reflects the needs of its users and attracts the best talent across Australia and New Zealand.

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Part one:

Setting the scene

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) Women in Rail Strategy Committee's 2023-2026 strategy aims to enhance gender diversity across all facets of the industry, from attracting women to rail, ensuring retention, and fostering continuous development of women into leadership roles, management positions, and other non-management roles.

Building 'Industry Knowledge' is one of four strategic areas of focus. This report contributes to this goal by:

- Thoroughly investigating the barriers and challenges hindering women's entry, retention and progression in the rail industry;
- Emphasising the benefits and advantages of achieving gender parity and fostering women's leadership within the rail industry;
- Exploring practical best practice initiatives and providing actionable recommendations that can be implemented across the rail industry to foster greater gender diversity and allow women to thrive and lead, drawing inspiration from successful practices in various industries both within Australia and globally.

"This is a pivotal moment in the Australian and New Zealand rail sector. Organisations must adapt to new ways of working and heightened expectations of inclusive work cultures. The future of the rail sector depends on people with different skills, backgrounds, and experiences working together respectfully."

Dr Katie Spearritt, Chief Executive Officer, Diversity Partners.

1.2 Research Methodology

Employees from across the ARA's 230 member organisations were invited to take part in this research in different ways:

- Across the industry, 573 people contributed through confidential survey responses and verbatim accounts of their experiences working in rail. Participants were asked a range of demographic questions to learn more about intersectional experiences based on gender, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability. The demographic questions were completed by 505 people.¹
- Women and gender diverse people were invited to participate in six focus groups. Sixty-five people took part in focus groups divided into sectors of Passenger, Heavy Haul and Freight, Suppliers and Consultants, Infrastructure Contractors, and two others for people working across the industry. Participants were asked about initiatives helping to progress gender equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as barriers to progress across the rail industry. They came from organisations of varying sizes and held diverse roles spanning engineering, management, project delivery, project design and management, operations, sales and marketing, customer service, human resources, and consulting.
- Eleven women executives and subject matter experts from the ARA's Women in Rail Committee shared their perspectives on industry best practices and opportunities in a workshop. Organisations represented included GHD, McConnell Dowell, Wabtec, UGL, National Transport Commission, Metro Trains Melbourne, Laing O'Rourke, Arup, and Alstom.
- Some employees and organisations also volunteered their perspectives through written submissions and one-on-one interviews.

Other data sources included:

- Organisation annual reports and public statements, including awards;
- Rail sector research in Australia, New Zealand and other international markets;
- Research into practices of organisations that hold an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality citation from Australia's Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA);
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency data explorer;
- ARA's Gender Diversity Report: Survey Results of the Australian Rail workforce, published in March 2024. The survey is based on the WGEA questionnaire for the reporting period of 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The survey was circulated to more than 230 ARA member organisations and 45 ARA members responded (20 per cent of potential respondents).

¹ The 505 people who completed the demographic part of the survey had the option of 'prefer not to say' on all questions. The survey was completed by 330 women, 150 men, 3 non-binary people, with 14 people choosing 'prefer not to say' and 8 people choosing 'I use a different term'. Ten people (2 per cent) identified as trans, non-binary or gender diverse. Describing their cultural identity, 265 people (52 per cent) have an Anglo Celtic background, 100 people (20 per cent) have a European background, 100 people (20 per cent) have a non-European background and 7 people (one per cent) have an indigenous background. 29 people (six per cent) of respondents identified as having a disability. 47 people (9.3 per cent) identified as LGBTIQ+.

The age range with the highest representation was 35 – 44 years. 92 per cent of respondents work full-time in the sector. Most respondents (460 people, 91 per cent) work predominantly in an office, with 35 (7 per cent) respondents indicating their work is 'predominantly undertaken outside an office involving a greater degree of physical activity or manual labour'.

Where we did not receive more than five responses for demographic groups, we have not published employee experience results. This included women from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and non-binary people.

1.3 Report Framework

The report is organised around consistent themes generated in focus group discussions, survey analysis and feedback, and research on best practices. It draws on leading practices of employers in the sector, including several that hold a WGEA Employer of Choice for Gender Equality citation in Australia.² Examples of innovative practices from rail organisations in New Zealand, Germany and the United Kingdom are also included.

Note on Terminology

Noting that language is always evolving, this report generally uses the acronym LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, Intersex, Queer, and Asexual). This is 'an inclusive umbrella abbreviation of diverse sexualities, genders and sex characteristics.'³ However, terminology varies among companies and countries. This report uses the acronym used by the research source and therefore is not always consistent.

'Gender diverse' is an umbrella term that 'includes all the different ways gender can be experienced and perceived. It can be used to refer to people questioning their gender, those who identify as trans/transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, gender non-conforming and more.'⁴

Note on Quotes

Quotations from survey respondents and participants in the focus group are shown in italics.



² Since 2014 in Australia, the Employer of Choice for Gender Equality (EOCGE) citation from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) has provided employers with a benchmark for leading practice and publicly recognises their commitment to achieving gender equality in their organisation.

³ **Inclusive Language Guide**, Victorian Government, October 2023.

⁴ **Glossary of LGBTQ+ terms**, ACON Pride Training.

1.4 Introduction

Australia's rail network is the sixth largest in the world and the rail industry contributes \$30 billion to the Australian economy, employing about 165,000 people in metropolitan and regional areas. It is made up of about 900 businesses that span passenger services, rail freight, track owners and managers, manufacturers and suppliers, and consulting services.⁵

Australia's rail industry is also an important growth sector, with record levels of rail infrastructure investment planned in the next decade. While this represents a considerable opportunity for organisations across the sector, there is a critical skills shortage that must be addressed to meet this demand.

About 70,000 jobs are required to be filled, in areas ranging from customer services and administration to engineering and trades. Increasing digitalisation and other new technologies require an evolving mix of skills across the industry with an increasing need for problem-solving and critical thinking.

This recruitment is taking place in the context of other industries that are also competing for similar skills to meet their current skills shortfall too.

The ARA identified a 'thriving, diverse and skilled workforce' as one of five strategic priorities in its 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.⁶ To meet this need, the rail industry must attract and retain a more diverse workforce and compete with other industries seeking similar talent. That is why a focus on gender balance, diversity and inclusion is critical to the industry. Some national leaders have said the industry will stagnate without it.⁷

While the industry can be proud of progress it has made toward greater diversity and inclusion over the last decade, there is more to do. If individuals, organisations, and industry bodies can capitalise on this opportunity to drive progress and build an inclusive and diverse industry, it is likely that future generations will view this as a watershed moment in Australia's rail sector history.

That aspiration will require a considered and concerted effort not just to attract, retain and promote women in the workforce, but also to remove the barriers that currently limit their opportunity to play an equal part in the sector.

If individuals, organisations and industry bodies can capitalise on this opportunity to drive progress and build an inclusive and diverse industry, it is likely that future generations will view this as a watershed moment in Australia's rail sector history.



5 Australasian Railway Association, **Building Australian Rail Skills for the Future**, March 2022.

6 Australasian Railway Association, **Strategic Plan 2022 - 25**

7 John Cranley (National Rail Leader at GHD), 'Occupational gender segregation in the industry', Committee for Economic Development (CEDA) **Opinion Article**, 7 December 2023.

1.5 The benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce

The future growth of the Australian rail sector relies on attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. A second, equally crucial component, is creating an inclusive and equitable experience for everyone who works in the sector.

Numerous local and global studies show diverse and inclusive workplaces bring substantial benefits, including innovation, better decision-making and improved safety outcomes.⁸ Some organisations in the sector have conducted their own research on the benefits of diversity and inclusion. For example, BHP, the global resources company headquartered in Australia, reported its diverse and inclusive teams are:

- Better on safety – with up to 67 per cent lower injury rate;
- Better on productivity – with up to 11 per cent better adherence to schedule;
- Better on culture – with 28 per cent lower unplanned absence and up to 21 per cent more pride in their work.⁹

For the passenger rail sector, attracting and retaining a more diverse workforce has the additional benefit of reflecting the diversity of people who regularly travel by train. For all sectors, it helps meet workforce shortages to build, deliver, operate and maintain an efficient, safe and sustainable railway.

These benefits were recognised by employees in the sector who completed the survey (see Figure 1) and participated in focus groups as part of this research.

The benefits of diversity and inclusion from an employee perspective (captured through survey responses and focus groups) highlight a variety of benefits, ranging from a greater ability to understand service users to improving employee satisfaction and financial performance.

Reflect the diversity of people who use rail services	51.66%	296
Innovate our processes	46.77%	268
Meet the demand for workers to fulfil vacant positions	40.49%	232
Enhance service delivery	36.30%	208
Make robust decisions	36.30%	208
All of the above	38.39%	220
None of the above	6.46%	37
Other (free text)	9.95%	57

Figure 1: Benefits of greater diversity in the rail sector (right hand column shows number of people who responded)



8 Kevin Dolan, Dame Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince, 'Diversity wins – How inclusion matters', McKinsey & Company, May 19, 2020 Report. See also McKinsey & Company, *Delivering Through Diversity*, 2018.
9 BHP Inclusion and Diversity Storybook: Partnering for Change, 2020.

Focus Group Feedback

Better understanding the needs of users

“Diversity in any sector facilitates a well-rounded approach to delivering customer and business outcomes. This is particularly relevant to the passenger rail side of the QR business. Maintaining a diverse workforce not only strengthens the way in which QR conducts business but also enables us to better serve our customers. By having a diverse workforce we can plan, deliver and maintain services that account for the various needs and rights of our customers.”

“From a mass transit perspective, having diversity among the employees in the industry enables it to better understand and meet the needs of a diverse customer base. Diversity of staff in the freight market allows for varied ideas and thoughts providing broad scope view of issues and solutions.”

Improving outcomes, performance and innovation

“Greater diversity has been proven to avoid groupthink and improve quality. Greater diversity has been proven to improve financial performance.”

“Improves the depth and breadth of information, experience and knowledge shared, and promotes social inclusion, along with the continued advancement of social progress.”

“Reduces potential of homophily of thought and allows a greater diversity of ideas and inputs.”

“Diversity of thought is proven to contribute to making good business decisions – the more perspectives we have the better our outcomes.”

Supporting employees

“When we feel safe to be ourselves at work, we work at our best.”

“Without inclusion, diversity is fruitless. People need to feel a sense of belonging, safety and connection at work to thrive and stay.”

Attracting new talent to the sector

“The sector will become more relevant and attractive to younger talent that is concerned with and passionate about gender and cultural diversity, which would also help to alleviate the ageing workforce issue for most rail companies.”

1.6 Growing representation of women in leadership roles and across the sector

The representation of women in the rail workforce in Australia increased from 17 per cent in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2023¹⁰. This level of representation is higher than Europe's railway sector workforce¹¹, in which women represent approximately 21 per cent, the United Kingdom (16.4 per cent) and the United States (less than 10 per cent).¹²

Women in rail workforce, Australia	
2014	17%
2023	28%

Women hold on average a quarter of management positions in the Australian rail industry. The percentage of women CEOs grew from 10 per cent in 2017 to 26 per cent in 2023, as the ARA's latest survey of gender diversity reports shows.¹³ In the same period, the percentage of women in the most senior executive positions increased from 21 per cent to 33 per cent.¹⁴ The representation of women in all management categories has increased between 2017 and 2023.

Despite these increases, the representation of women managers in the rail sector (25 per cent) still lags the national average of 42 per cent across all industries.

Women hold 24 per cent of non-managerial positions in rail (compared with 52 per cent across all industries). They dominate clerical and administrative positions (61 per cent) and are least represented as labourers, machinery operators and drivers, technicians and trade positions.

The ARA survey also shows that, within the rail sector, the highest proportion of women is in the consulting sector (39 per cent). The lowest proportion is in the rail manufacturing and supplier sector (13 per cent). The passenger operator sector has the highest proportion of women managers (29 per cent), and the lowest proportion of women managers is in the rail supplier sector (16 per cent).

Overall, more women are being appointed and promoted: women were awarded 34 per cent of new appointments (via both external and internal recruitment) in 2023, up from 30 per cent in 2017. Thirty-six per cent of all promotions were awarded to women, up from 20 per cent in 2017.

Fewer women are leaving the sector in 2023. Women represented 20 per cent of total resignations, down from 29 per cent in 2017.

Key Data Points

- The representation of women in the industry has grown from 17 per cent to 28 per cent in a decade
- Women now hold a higher proportion of management and executive roles than in 2017
- Within the industry, the highest proportion of women is in the consulting sector (39 per cent). The lowest proportion is in the rail manufacturing and supplier sector (13 per cent)
- More women are being appointed and promoted and, generally, fewer women are leaving in 2023 than in 2017.

Through concerted efforts, several member companies of the ARA have achieved significant increases in gender diversity over the past decade. A selection of these companies across different sectors are highlighted on the next page.



¹⁰ ARA, Gender Diversity Report: Survey Results of the Australian Rail workforce, March 2024

¹¹ European Commission, 'European Commission announces Women in Rail award', 8 March 2022.

¹² GHD, 'Women in Rail: accelerating opportunities for women in the rail industry', 2023.

¹³ The Australasian Railway Association, Gender Diversity Report: Survey Results of the Australian Rail Workforce, March 2024. The ARA, on behalf of the rail industry, collates diversity data to benchmark the rail industry against the national average and to measure the progress over time within the rail industry. The survey questions are designed to build on data already collected to ensure a complete representation of the Australian rail workforce. The survey was circulated to more than 220 ARA member organisations. Forty-five ARA members responded (20 per cent of potential respondents). Due to the small number of organisations reporting non-binary employees, they were not included in the analysis.

¹⁴ Reported as 'Key Management Personnel' to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Metro Trains Melbourne

The representation of women at Metro Trains Melbourne in Victoria has more than doubled in the past decade: from 12 per cent in 2009 to 31 per cent in 2023. In 2009, Metro had 26 women train drivers, less than five per cent of its driver team. Metro now has more than 500 women train drivers, making up 37 per cent of all drivers.¹⁵

2009	12%
2023	31%

Sydney Trains

Women represented 23 per cent of the workforce, and 24 per cent of leadership positions in 2023.¹⁶ Women trainees increased from 21.6 per cent to 53.3 per cent between 2017 and 2022 and the percentage of women in non-frontline roles increased from 25.1 per cent to 41 per cent. Sydney Trains won an award for its diversity initiatives in 2023.¹⁷

Under Sydney Trains' Train Crewing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion program, female trainees increased from 21.6 per cent to 53.3 per cent between 2017 and 2022.

Queensland Rail

Women made up 26 per cent of the workforce and leadership¹⁸ in 2023, up from 20 per cent in 2015.¹⁹

2015	20%
2023	26%

KiwiRail

KiwiRail is one of New Zealand's largest employers with staff operating in more than 50 towns and cities. Women represented 21 per cent of the workforce in 2023, up from 18 per cent in 2021.²⁰

2021	18%
2023	21%

Aurecon

In 2017, women represented 29 per cent of Aurecon's total workforce.²¹ The organisation achieved its national workforce target of 35 per cent female representation by 2019 and women now represent 39 per cent of the workforce.²²

2017	29%
2023	39%

ARTC (Australian Rail Track Corporation)

ARTC set a target to increase women's participation in the workforce to 33 per cent by the end of June 2024. The percentage of women has grown from 17 per cent in 2015²³ to 31 per cent in 2023.²⁴

2015	17%
2023	31%

John Holland

In 2019, women represented 21 per cent of John Holland's workforce and 36 per cent of their graduate program.²⁵ That has grown to 25 per cent overall, with women representing 46 per cent of the 2024 graduate intake.²⁶

2019	21%
2023	25%

BHP

In 2016, BHP set a public aspiration to achieve a gender balanced workforce by the end of FY2025. In 2016, 17.6 per cent of BHP employees globally were women, and 16.5 per cent of employees in Australia were women. By the end of 2023, the representation of women more than doubled to 36.2 per cent globally, and to 33.4 per cent in Australia.²⁷

BHP (Australian operations)

2016	16.5%
2023	33.4%

15 Metro Trains [website](#), 'Women at Metro'.

16 Sydney Trains [Annual Report](#), 2022-23.

17 Sydney Trains awarded for diversity and survey, [Rail Express](#), 14 September 2023.

18 Queensland Rail [Annual and Financial Report](#), 2022-23.

19 Queensland Rail [Annual and Financial Report](#) 2014-15.

20 KiwiRail [Half Year Report](#) 2024; [KiwiRail integrated report](#) 2021.

21 Case Study: [Elevating women in STEM](#), Aurecon, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2023.

22 WGEA Data Explorer, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data-statistics/data-explorer>

23 ARTC [Corporate Plan](#) 2019-20.

24 ARTC, [Gender Pay Gap Employer Statement](#), 2024.

25 John Holland 'Building Resilience' [2019 Sustainability Report](#).

26 John Holland [Gender Pay Gap Employer Statement](#), February 2024.

27 Gender Pay Gap Report [BHP Australia Employer Statement](#), 2024

1.7 The benefits of working in the rail sector

Working in the rail sector brings many benefits to employees. Among survey respondents, 89 per cent of women and 96 per cent of men either agreed or strongly agreed they enjoy working in the rail industry (see Figure 2).

When asked in the focus groups what they most enjoyed, many women shared their pride and sense of purpose in helping people travel safely. Many also highlighted the variety of opportunities and increasing diversity and inclusion in the sector.

This sense of purpose, breadth of opportunity and an increasingly diverse and inclusive workplace helps drive retention. The survey conducted for this research shows that 81 per cent of women and 85 per cent of men currently working in the rail sector see themselves staying there for the next five years (see Figure 3).

Among survey respondents, 89 per cent of women and 96 per cent of men either agreed or strongly agreed they enjoy working in the rail industry.



Focus Group Feedback

A deep sense of purpose

"We have a profound purpose. We build and upgrade stations and that impacts people's lives. Whether it's accessible rails, elevators, different pick-up points for parents, it is life changing and there is an impact in the community."

"I can see projects I have designed being constructed now, and it's amazing to be a part of that."

"When you're in transport, we tend to be givers of experience."

Variety and breadth of innovative work

"I thought rail would be quite old fashioned, but it's so fast-paced and innovative. You can see projects happening everywhere."

"In 20 years, my learning and growth in this industry has never stopped."

"The skills that you learn aren't limited to Australia. You can get a job in rail all over the world."

"The industry is always evolving, moving forward."

Increasing diversity and inclusion

"Younger male engineers work alongside female engineers throughout their education and apprenticeships, and as a result are more accepting and supportive of women in the workplace."

"It's fascinating to be in an industry that is definitely changing in diversity and inclusion."

Work enjoyment and impact on retention

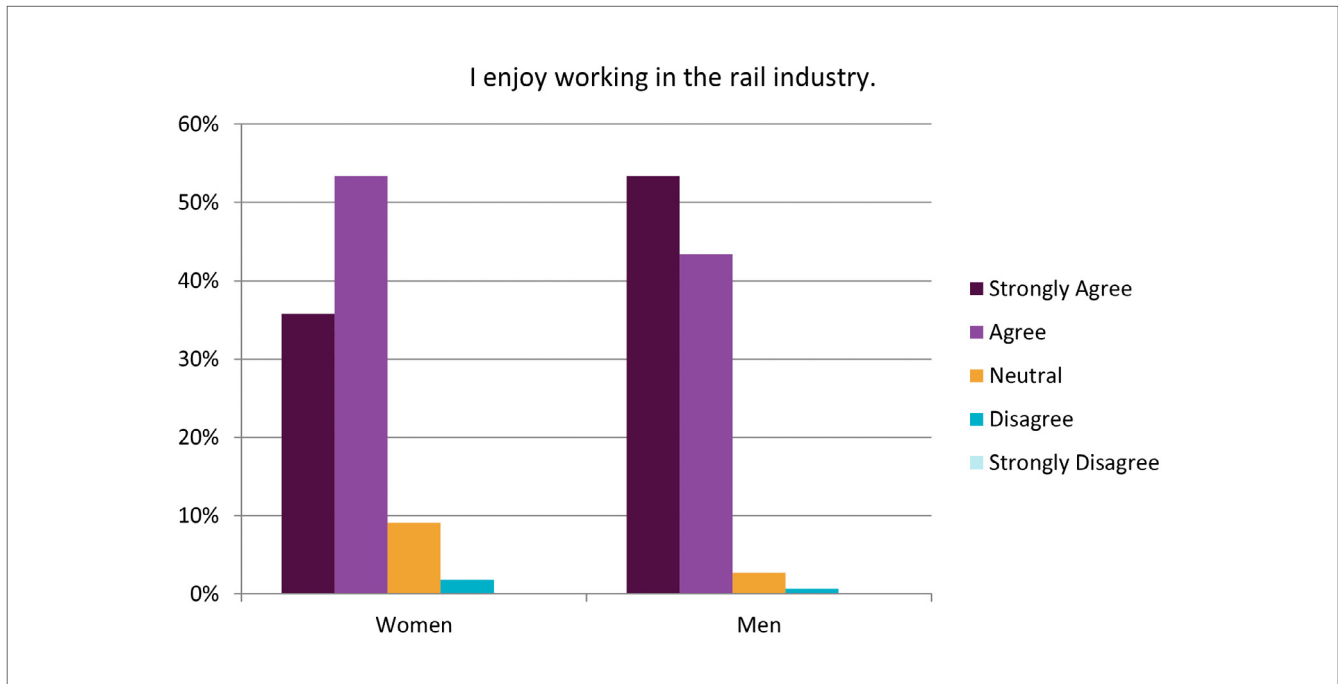


Figure 2: Experience of working in the rail industry

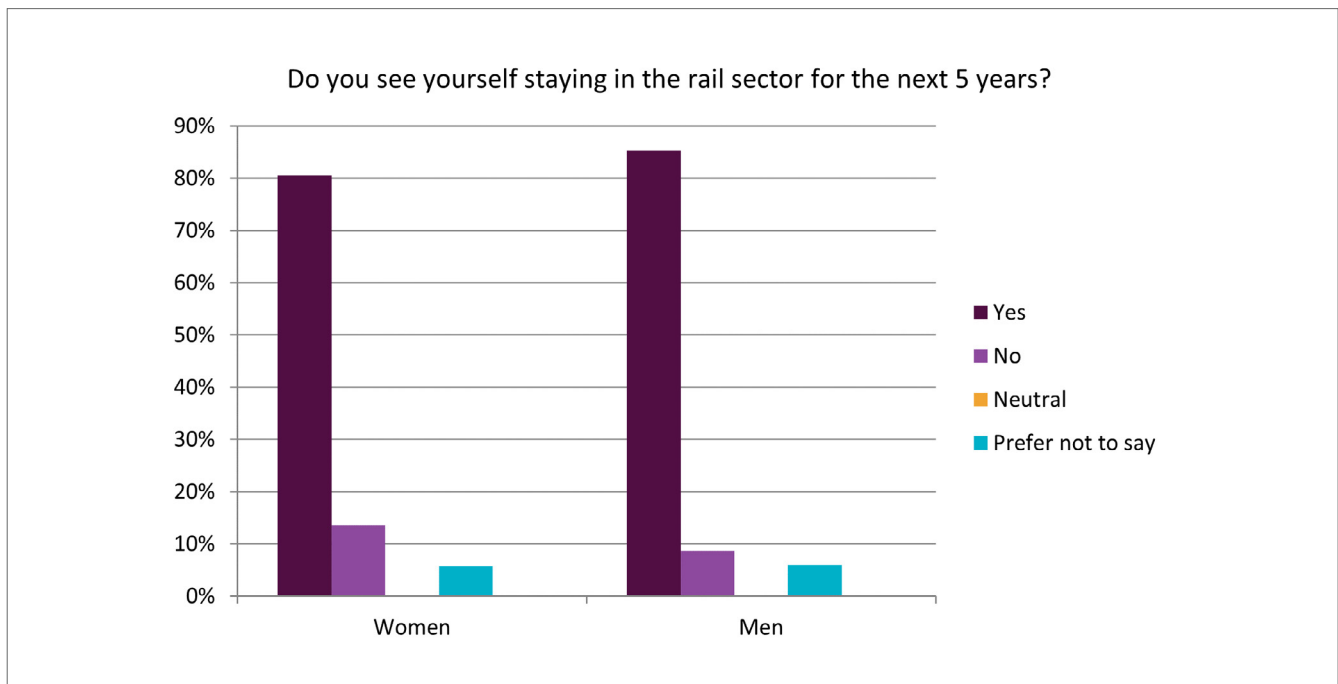
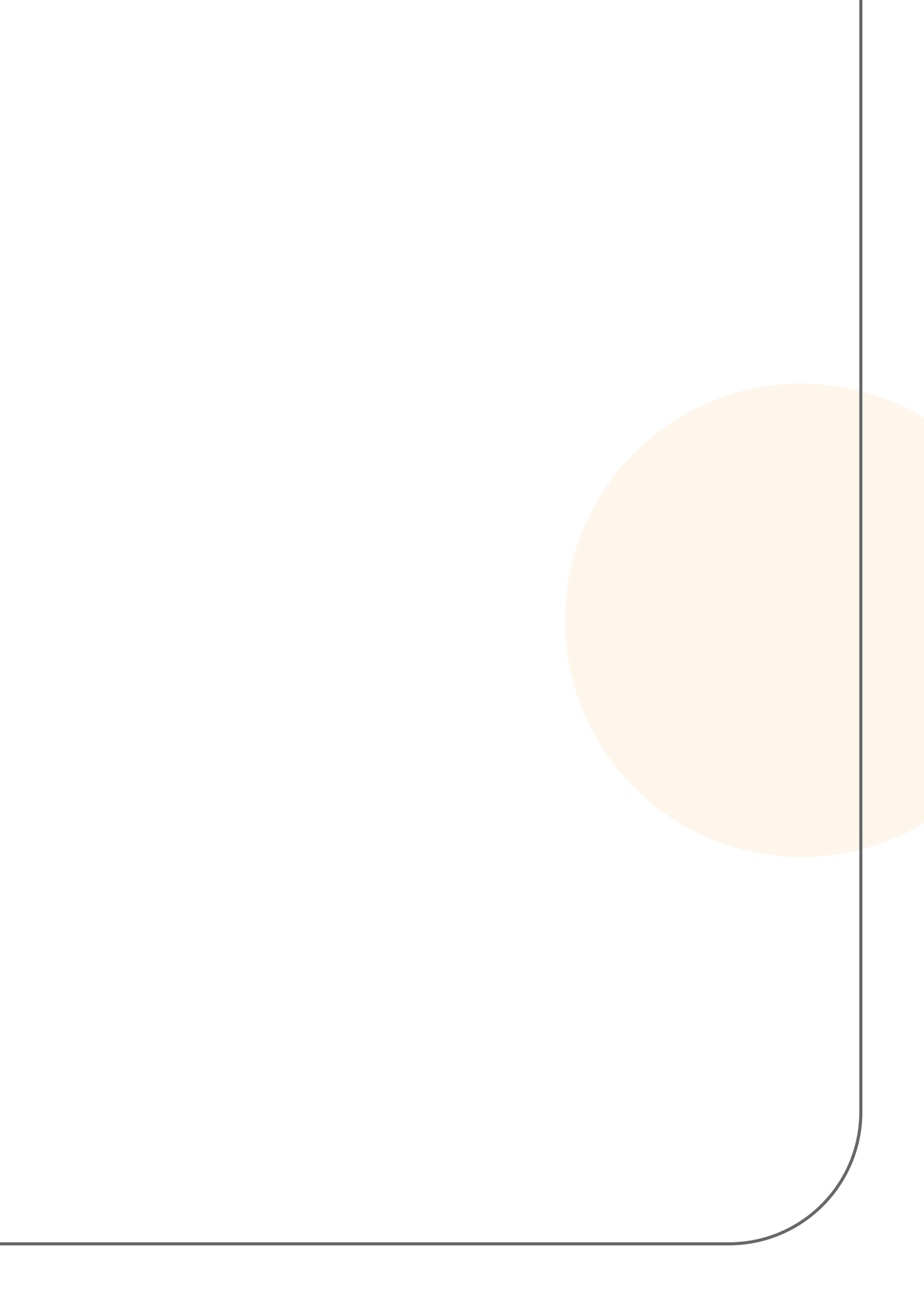


Figure 3: Retention





Part two:

**Barriers hindering
women's entry, retention
and progression in the
rail industry**

The rail industry is enjoying unprecedented growth and transformation that will benefit communities for decades to come. Attracting and building a diverse workforce is essential to meet future workforce demand, but significant challenges remain in achieving this.

These obstacles include blind spots about the challenges facing women, as well as lingering traditional associations of men with rail. They also include unconscious gender biases, exclusionary behaviours, and unlawful behaviours such as harassment and discrimination. These have no place in any industry.

This section of the report examines some of the barriers hindering the recruitment, retention and progression of women in the rail industry.

2.1 The challenge blind spot

Ironically, one of the greatest challenges to diversity and inclusion is the view that there are no challenges. This is held by some who responded to the survey as part of this research. They perceive that candidates are selected through 'capability-based selection criteria', that 'hiring is as close to unbiased as I've ever seen', that 'we treat people all the same', and there are 'ample opportunities for all people in the industry'.

This view extends to a perspective that focusing on diversity and inclusion is a waste of time, and can, in turn, lead to discrimination against white Anglo-Saxon men, as the survey responses below illustrate.

These perspectives highlight the importance of education to help everyone in the sector understand how diversity and inclusion initiatives benefit everyone at work – through making workplaces more respectful and fairer. The engagement of men in diversity and inclusion progress is a supportive practice, as section 3.6 highlights, and many men are already playing an advocacy role to support more diverse and inclusive workplaces.

The perspective that there are no barriers overlooks ways in which unconscious biases (such as stereotyping and affinity bias) can impact who is selected for jobs and promotions. They also diminish the experiences of people whose lived experiences include everyday sexism, racism, homophobia or ableism at work.

Range of survey responses suggesting no challenges



No barriers

"There is no challenge to achieving (diversity and inclusion) other than having people willing to apply and work in rail. There are no barriers."

"Prior to all of this PC nonsense of recent years, there was an inclusive, caring rail family."

"The rail industry has a diverse range of people as it is. Trying to achieve a 'greater diversity' is a forced agenda. I believe there are ample opportunities for all people in the industry, and seeing any distribution of people represented more is simply part of the fact that specific demographics might not like parts of the industry which may include living away from home, working in harsh environments and irregular work hours."



Waste of time

"Please stop wasting time and resources on social engineering programs and get back to core business."

"Thankfully my organisation has not succumbed to the DEI agenda. It's beyond obvious that people are hired for their professional merits."

"People that like rail will come to rail and these people actually need encouragement and support ... These same people, like myself, are repulsed by anything other than a meritocracy and they will leave if you let the DEI agenda reign supreme."



Discrimination against men

"The push for gender equality has created a new class of person that is now being discriminated against...the white Australian male."

"Nowadays, a middle-aged white guy cannot be promoted. We are expected to be the engine room of our company but are barred from any public face and cannot get a promotion as that would slow our target gender profile of leadership."

"Sometimes, it feels like the contribution we male, older, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexuals make to this industry aren't important any longer."

"The victims of gender oppression are often men and can be real victims of gender discrimination."

The view that there are no barriers is not supported by the findings of the survey conducted as part of this research, experiences shared in focus groups, or data on workforce representation.

Women in the rail sector report significantly more negative experiences at work than men, including exclusionary behaviours, bias, harassment and discrimination, as section 2.5 explains in more detail. As one survey respondent shared:

“Experiences can really vary across the industry. Some people have great leadership teams who support diversity - others do not. I believe there is a general perception that diversity progress is okay, it will get better with time, and overt discrimination doesn’t happen anymore. This perception is false - it impedes progress, and we need industry leaders to step up to give the issue urgency - this means accepting the uncomfortable truth that there is a lot of conscious and unconscious sexism and racism in the industry (as well as other forms of discrimination).”

In contrast to the view that diversity efforts are wasteful, some acknowledged the commissioning of this survey and report were critical:

“Thank you for this survey. It is absolutely necessary. It’s the first step towards creating change.”

“Appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the survey. There is much work to be done as an industry, which also needs to be genuine.”

“It’s a great industry to work in and there should be lots of space for a diverse and competent workforce. I applaud this exercise to try to find a way to bring about some change.”

Highlighting that concepts of ‘merit’ can be problematic, a recruitment specialist who participated in this research reported that some hiring managers continue to request men for roles.

“I work with so many clients (in recruiting) that have gender targets in place that they want to meet. I also work with clients, for blue collar roles who say to me, “There are all men down there, so I want a man to fill the role”. This still happens.”

For some women and men, the barriers are seemingly impenetrable.

“It’s not a glass ceiling in the rail industry, it’s a big steel reinforced ceiling.”

“I’ve worked in a male dominated industry for most of my career, and yes, I am a male. It doesn’t bother me but I’m not sure that I would like my wife or daughters to work in this industry as it stands.”

“It’s not a glass ceiling in the rail industry, it’s a big steel reinforced ceiling.”

2.2 Traditional perceptions of the industry

The need to improve the profile of rail as a fulfilling career option, particularly for women, has been highlighted in recent industry studies. For example, GHD’s research found primary and high school students have ‘little to no awareness of what the rail industry offers in terms of careers, beyond train drivers and station drivers.’²⁸

This report also noted an absence of information for those studying engineering about how their degree could be applied to the rail industry. That lack of awareness is compounded by imagery that perpetuates a male-dominated industry, as some survey respondents highlighted.

“Awareness of the industry is not keeping up with the fast-paced industry change.”

“(A barrier is) the messages we are giving children at a very young age – pictures of men working in rail, no women, ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’, ‘Bob the Builder’.”

“(The problem is) attracting females to the industry from a young age – (we need to promote) not just Thomas the Tank Engine but Kathryn the super conductor.”

“The biggest challenge to overcome is perception and culture. Perception being that women are not able to achieve within the industry unless they take on a corporate role due to the male dominance within the sector.”

Both women and men who completed the survey rated the perception of a male-dominated culture as the biggest challenge to achieving greater diversity in the industry. This perception reflects the reality that the sector is male dominated at all levels, including leadership, and this in turn creates a challenge to attracting and retaining women: ‘limited visibility of diversity in senior roles’ was noted as a barrier by 62 per cent of women and 37 per cent of men.

“More visible diversity at a senior level. In my workplace, diversity is broadly valued and we have a great, flexible workplace that values family balance and differing needs of our staff, however the senior leadership team is not a particularly diverse bunch.”

“Just need more diversity in leadership. That’s all. Everything will be solved if we achieve this.”

Some survey respondents drew attention to changing expectations relating to diversity and inclusion between senior people who have been in the industry for some time, and newer recruits.

“There has definitely been a change in the rail industry over the last 10 years to be more inclusive. It is difficult though as there is a significant age difference between very senior technical staff (near retirement), and

²⁸ GHD, *Women in Rail: Accelerating opportunities for women in the rail industry, 2023.*

younger expertise. The older staff have much less tolerance towards inclusivity, and at the same time it is difficult to recruit female staff and encourage diversity at the senior level. Particularly with technical resources. This also makes it hard to have the right mentors and role models for junior female staff."

For fields that are highly technically specialised, a continuing challenge is the lower proportion of women graduating in technology and engineering related roles, as many shared in the survey.

"Rail is a niche industry, there is a lack of diversity coming from schools to universities and out into employment. This needs to be addressed at school level then there can be a change at employment levels."

"Engineering at universities is still male dominated. Need greater gender balance in the pool of candidates in the first place."

Women constitute 16 per cent of Australian engineering graduates, and only 13 per cent of the engineering workforce.²⁹ But the proportion of women studying engineering in Australia is growing, with some universities - such as The University of Sydney and The University of Queensland - having boosted the proportion of women students to a third.³⁰

2.3 Perceptions of tokenism

Scepticism towards gender equality targets can lead to the view that women are often 'token' appointments.

"Women in senior roles are seen as token selection, even if they are chosen on merit."

Qualified women can face challenges in being perceived as 'diversity hires' rather than competent professionals, and that can result in having to prove themselves repeatedly.

"I feel if I took my name/gender off my CV, my ability & experience wouldn't be questioned in the same way."

"Unconscious bias is a daily constraint. Continuous questioning and proving of technical expertise are tiresome."

"Women need to prove themselves for every single point of view offered during a discussion, that same point of view is accepted without hesitation if it's given by a man."

"People refused to talk to me due to being female, people questioned my education and intelligence due to being female, people didn't respect me due to being female. People felt like they could talk down to me due to being female. I've worked in both blue- and white-collar workforces."

"I have been in the industry for more than 20 years, and I thought tokenism would improve in that time. But it hasn't - it still happens. We get comments or questions like 'it's your hormones', 'you're being too soft', 'you are too emotional', 'are you in an admin role?'"

Even celebratory events on diversity can be seen by some as tokenistic or performative.

"Celebrations can have a negative effect as they are seen as performative. Most women would prefer career opportunities, a better salary, flexible work conditions and respectful cultures to be acknowledged as valuable members of the industry. A celebratory event without showing real change can be discouraging."

While gender-based targets can create perceptions of token appointments, this can be addressed through education and communication about the ways in which unconscious bias can impact hiring practices and notions of 'merit'.

"The perception of tokenism continues to be a barrier both for diverse people coming into the industry but also for senior managers to directly recruit from those groups. Greater education of the established workforce needs to work to break down that perception."

Setting gender targets is important as companies with clear quantifiable targets tend to achieve higher diversity levels (see section 3.1). The survey results show that women are more supportive than men of using targets to achieve greater diversity and inclusion in the industry, perhaps due to their greater awareness of gender biases that can impact recruitment. Targets were a priority for 44 per cent of women, but only 17 per cent of men.



29 Engineers Australia, *Women in Engineering: Identifying avenues for increasing female participation in engineering, by understanding the motivators and barriers around entry and progression*, June 2022.

30 The University of Sydney [website](#), 'Women in Engineering' and the University of Queensland [website](#), 'About Women in Engineering'.

2.4 Exclusionary behaviours and gender role stereotyping

A range of exclusionary behaviours and gender biases in workplace cultures continue to inhibit diversity and inclusion progress in the rail sector. Fifty-four per cent of women in the survey reported 'poor culture' as a barrier to achieving greater diversity, compared with 27 per cent of men (noting that respondents could select multiple responses).

These results highlight an important difference in the way that men and women experience workplace cultures in the rail industry. Men have a more positive view and experience of the culture and opportunities. For example, 77 per cent of men respondents agreed that all genders have the same opportunities to develop skills and experience in the rail industry, while only 35 per cent of women respondents agreed (see Figure 4).

Men have a more positive view and experience of the culture and opportunities across the industry than women. While 77 per cent of men agreed that all genders have the same opportunities to develop skills and experience in the rail industry, only 35 per cent of women agreed

Exclusionary behaviours based on gender are often referred to as casual sexism. Evidence of these behaviours in the rail sector highlights why education on respectful behaviour and supporting the role of 'active bystanders' or 'upstanders' is so important to accelerate diversity and inclusion progress.

"[The challenge is] men's perception of my abilities as a woman. They look at me and think I am young and mustn't have been in the industry long or have much experience. It takes me quite some time and explaining for them to realise I have more than two decades of experience in signalling. Whereas my experiences of a man meeting another man of the same level is they automatically assume they are experienced and give them immediate respect."

"Gender stereotyping is a huge challenge. If I share an opinion the older men think I am being emotional."

"Unconscious bias is probably the most common issue - people making assumptions about my ability to take on a role due to family commitments i.e. that because I am a mother, I would only work part time or need more time off, or not be interested in opportunities - assumptions and comments that my husband, also a parent, never experiences."

"There have been times (particularly earlier on in my career) where unconscious bias has made project members assume I was notetaker/ tea maker rather than the workshop facilitator."

Among survey respondents, 56 per cent of women said they have experienced negative gender bias in the past year. For men, 23 per cent experienced negative gender bias. Notably, 63 per cent of men either disagreed or strongly disagreed they had experienced negative gender bias, whereas only 29 per cent of women felt the same way (see Figure 5).

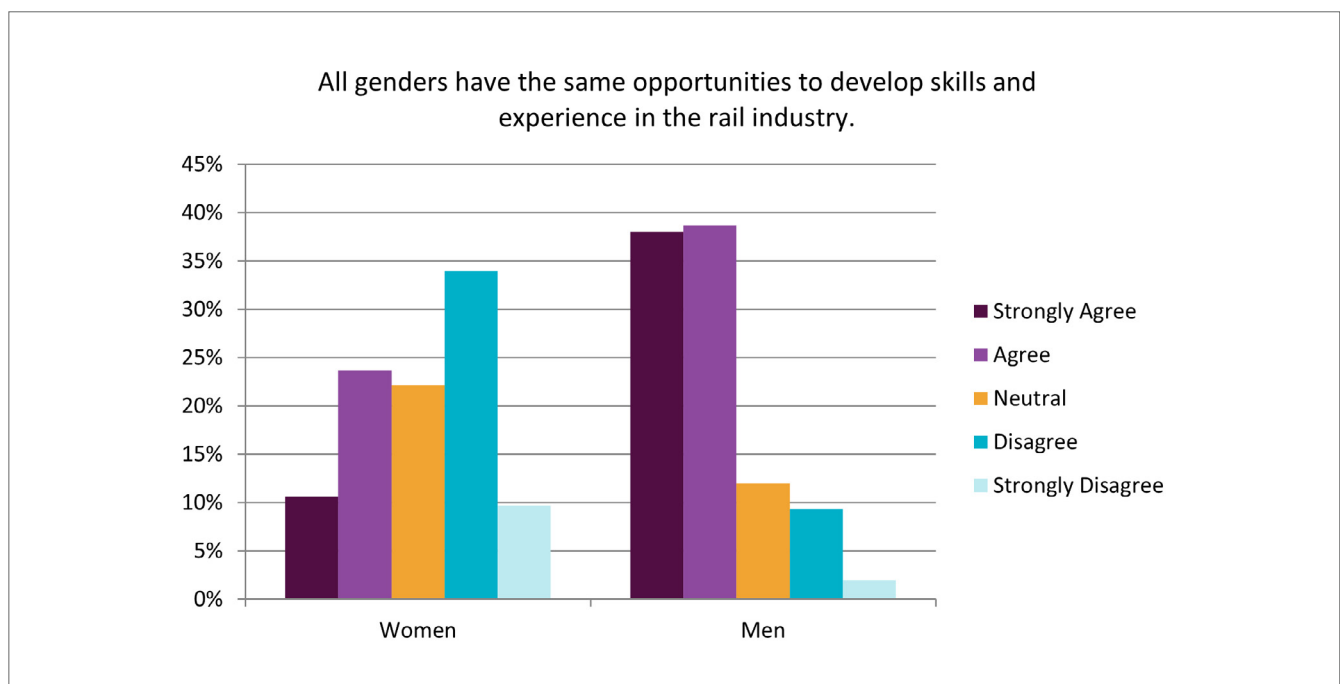


Figure 4: Opportunities to develop skills and experience

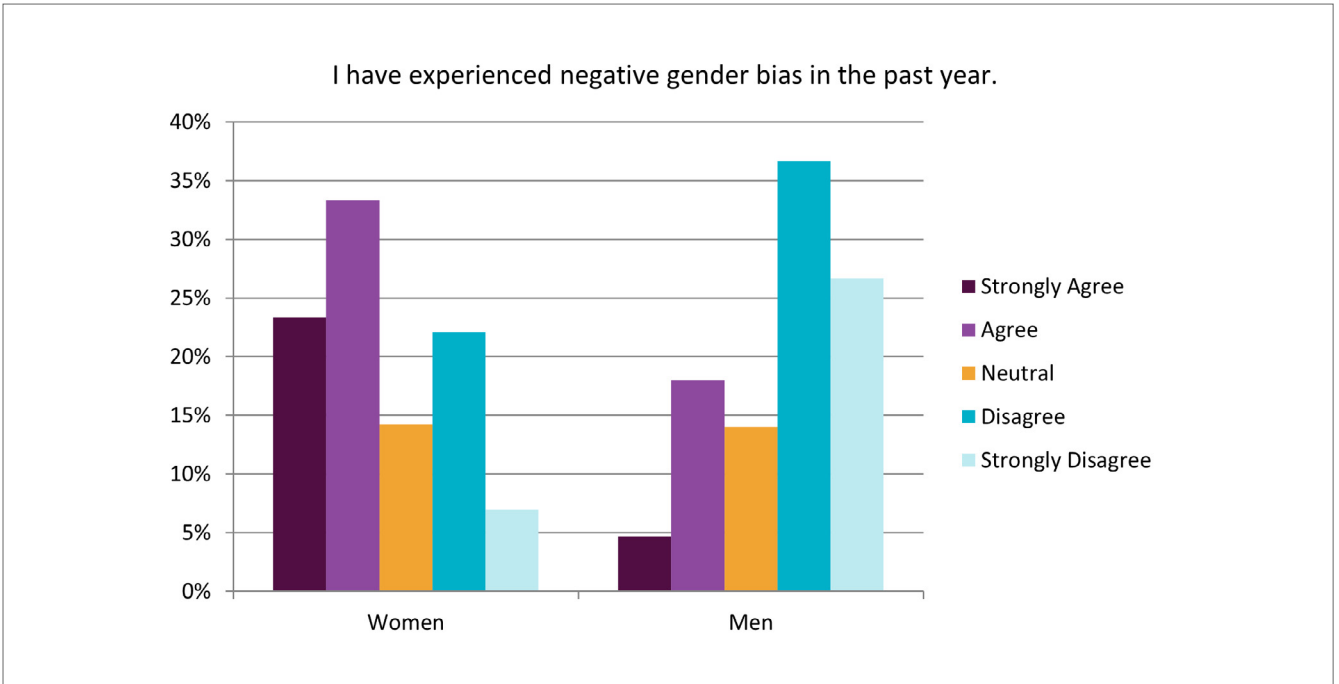


Figure 5: Experience of negative gender bias

Fifty-six per cent of women have experienced negative gender bias in the past year. Twenty-three per cent of men have experienced negative gender bias in the past year.

While women reported experiencing negative gender bias across all sectors of the rail industry, they are more likely to experience negative gender bias in the freight, heavy haul and infrastructure contractor sector.

Table 1: Percentage of women who strongly agreed or agreed with the question 'I have experienced negative gender bias in the past year', by sector

Sector	Women - Percentage who strongly agreed or agreed
Passenger	52%
Freight and heavy haul	65%
Suppliers	50%
Infrastructure contractors	60%
Consultants	49%



Examples of exclusionary behaviours

Exclusionary behaviours in the rail sector take different forms – from devaluing or diminishing the experience of women to gender role stereotyping. The following comments come from focus group participants, survey respondents and written submissions.

The responses also highlight the importance of the ARA's commitment to providing the opportunity for women to share their experiences.

Devaluing women's voices

"Being called 'young lady'."

"Old school stereotype of being a man's domain, being dismissed and not listened to."

"Being interrupted when speaking."

"'Boys club' and the backlash I experience when I speak up on literally any topic. I am 'emotional' and will 'blow up'".

"I have so often had the experience of not being heard in a meeting. I'll say something and then five minutes later a guy will say the same thing and everyone is like 'yeah, that's a good idea'. I ended up enrolling a supportive male colleague to help me by setting him up before the meeting to openly acknowledge what I said."

"As I have progressed in my career I have found that the percentage of men in senior positions that actively try to damage their female colleagues reputations has increased. Women who raise issues or concerns are labelled as problems or hysterical. Women are not listened to and not promoted."

"Females are treated as emotional if they voice their concerns and point of view while males in the same position are considered assertive."

"I have overheard conversations, where the opinion was voiced, that female leaders are 'puppets' of male leaders."

Overlaying sexism and racism

"There is so much inappropriate behaviour in the office – I have examples of misogyny and racism – it is much more blatant than I expected."

"Whenever any diversity days or celebrations occur there is relentless mocking about it within my workplace."

"I have seen all female, colourful redundancy pools while all the middle-aged white men seem to end up safe. I have seen overt discrimination and targeting of refugees, people speaking in their second languages, and people of colour."

Gender role stereotyping

“Being given tasks that are not part of my role.”

“Feeling like they need to over-explain when it’s very clearly not needed.”

“Being told to ‘leave the emotions aside from the discussion’.”

“Loud confident men are usually heard more than considered thoughtful voices whatever gender - challenging our stereotypes of what is considered credible or leadership is behind other industries.”

“I don’t always feel respected. I have heard the comment ‘this is not a woman’s role’.”

“Biased (conscious and unconscious) toward females in the workforce – also being younger. The assumption that you don’t know what is happening in the field, don’t have adequate experience.”

“Many women have made it in our industry because they may be more ‘male’ without the softer skills that women have – but it’s important that we have women with the softer skills. We tend not to value the softer skills as much at the leadership level.”

“I see high achieving women being victim to tall poppy syndrome – cut down to size so that they don’t threaten or outperform the men. I have seen proficient women becoming victim to ‘performance punishment’ – being given extra responsibilities with resulting extra hours, but no additional pay or bonus.”

“[We need] steps to break the stereotype that women can’t do the same things as men. [The industry] desperately needs to control gendered language, our policies even refer to train drivers as ‘he’.”

Affinity or similarity biases in recruitment

“As a consultancy, we find that when we present our female employees for potential roles with the client, the client often says that the employee does not have ‘culture fit’.”

“It seems that people in the rail industry like to work with people they have previously worked with. The culture seems to be to rebuild what has been done before, the way it was done before, with the people that have done it before. This narrows down the circle of employees.”

“I see bias playing out in insidious, non-overt ways – priority jobseekers being told they’re ‘just not the right fit’ – the fit being white, male and English as their first language. This behaviour is often just brushed over as ‘he’s a tough one, just engage different leaders instead’.”

“I’ve experienced and witnessed a lot of favouritism and nepotism. People are happy to replace you without notice, and usually it’s a friend of theirs that is male and gets on with ‘the boys’.”

The perception that the workplace is supportive and inclusive also differs among women from different identity groups. Women with disability and women who identify as LGBTIQ+ are less likely to agree there is an inclusive and supportive culture in their workplace, as Table 2 and 3 show.³¹

It can be difficult to fully understand the challenges faced by people with different lived experiences in finding supportive and inclusive workplaces. Just as men have a more positive view of the culture than women because they have not experienced the same types of challenges in the rail sector, the survey results show that women with lived experiences of disability and women who identify as LGBTIQ+ are less positive than women overall.

That is why creating opportunities for individuals to share their experiences and be part of designing strategies for changes is so important.

Table 2: Percentage of women who strongly agreed and agreed with the question 'There is an inclusive and supportive culture for people with disability in my workplace.'

	Who strongly agree and agree
All	45%
Women	35%
Women with disability	23%

Table 3: Percentage of women and women who identify as LGBTIQ+ who strongly agree and agree with the question 'There is an inclusive and supportive culture for people who identify as LGBTIQ+ in my workplace'.

	Who strongly agree and agree
All	64%
Women	60%
Women, LGBTIQ+	44%

The proportion of women from non-European backgrounds³² who agreed there is an inclusive and supportive culture in my workplace for people from different cultural backgrounds in my workplace was similar to the proportion of women overall. However, their experience of bullying and discrimination is slightly higher than women overall, as section 2.7 shows.

"As a young, Asian female working in project management, I think it's difficult to be heard in a room full of older, predominantly Caucasian males. It's a mix of inexperience but also a way of expression that makes me feel like I need to change the way I present myself to suit the others."

Table 4: Percentage of women from non-European backgrounds who strongly agree and agree with the question 'There is an inclusive and supportive culture for people from different cultural backgrounds.'

	Who strongly agree and agree
All	74%
Women	67%
Women/non-European	66%

³¹ The survey also sought experiences of other under-represented groups. However, the number of non-binary people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who completed the survey was under the minimum reporting number of five.

³² 'Non-European backgrounds' included Southeast Asian, North-East Asian, South and Central Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and North African, Sub-Saharan African and Oceanic and Pacific Islander.

2.5 Lower levels of psychological safety

The prevalence of these types of exclusionary and discriminatory behaviours can diminish psychological safety for women. Psychological safety refers to an environment where it is safe to speak up with ideas, questions or concerns without fear of retribution and is considered essential to high performing teams.³³

A higher proportion of men than women in the rail sector agree that they can voice a differing opinion to their manager without fear of repercussion.

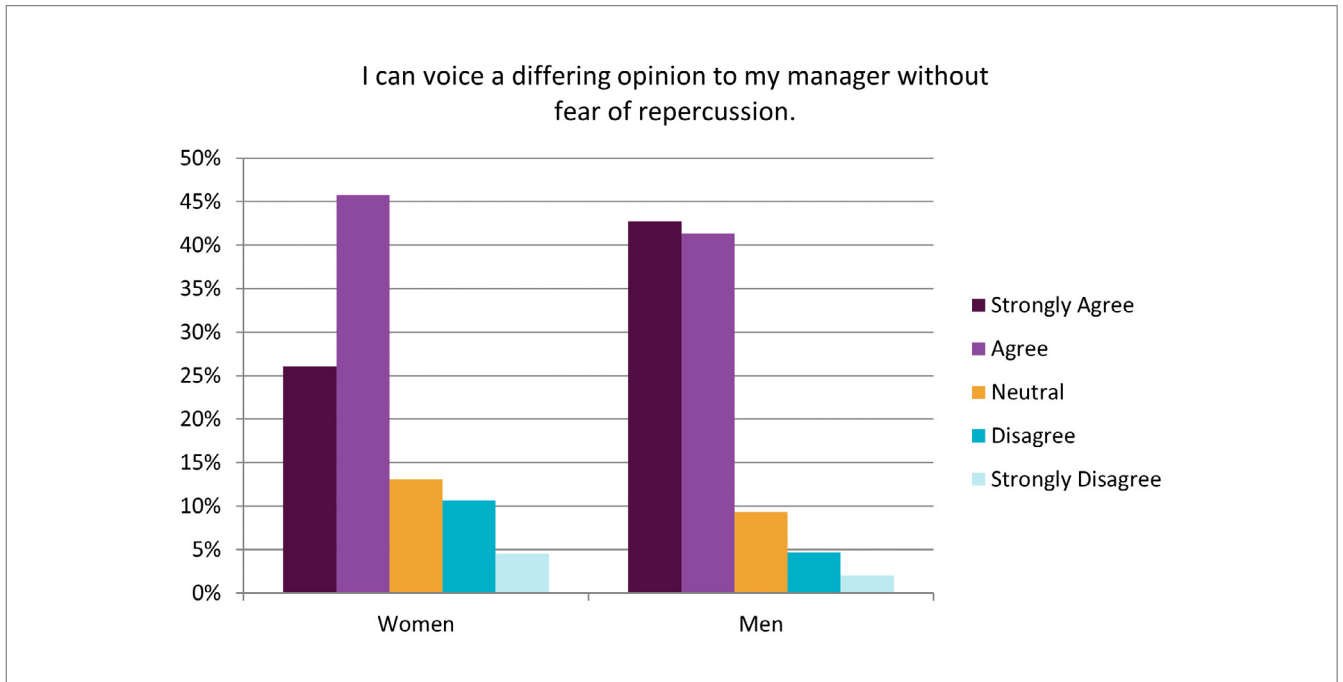


Figure 6: Measure of psychological safety by gender

Experiences of a lack of psychological safety were shared by some in more detail:

"There is a culture of silencing anyone who speaks up in my experience. You are moved on or pushed out. A lot remain silent on experiences because they have either experienced it or watched others experience it. You need to fly under the radar of these people. It is why so many women (including myself) do not climb any ladders."

"We are good at inclusion and diversity, and we want women and other forms of diversity – but then when under-represented groups then speak up, they are often told to not rock the boat and not speak up."

"I have had pretty confronting experiences. As a woman if I speak up on site it is risky. I have been taken off site before for speaking up too much and being assertive towards a man. As women we have to cop it on the chin."

"I work for an organisation that actively promotes diversity, but senior leadership is toxic towards women, if they speak out they are undermined and defamed. When it is the very top of organisations, women do not feel empowered. There must be consequences for there to be change and other men need to call out bad behaviour."

When it is challenging to speak up at work, employee resource groups and mentoring programs that connect women with others can be particularly beneficial for support and validation, as section 3.7 outlines.

33 Amy C. Edmondson, *The Fearless Organisation: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*, 2018.

2.6 Harassment, discrimination and bullying

Men are more likely to hold the view that harassment is not tolerated in their organisation. Ninety-six per cent of men agreed with this view, while only 77 per cent of women agreed.

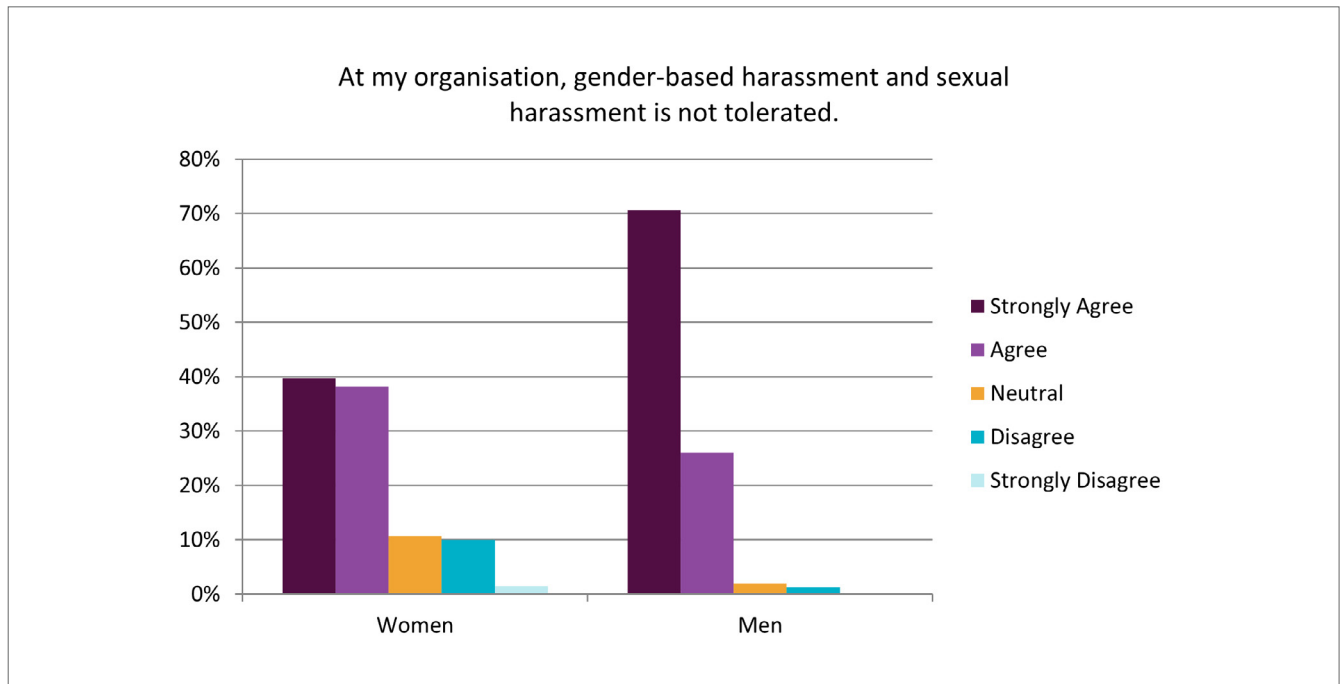


Figure 7: Gender-based harassment and discrimination

The reality is that women are much more likely than men to experience bullying, discrimination and harassment in the rail sector. This can take different forms, from inappropriate jokes to unwelcome sexual advances, with many examples shared in the survey and focus groups.

Sexual harassment is least likely in the consulting sector, which has the highest percentage of women.

"I have often felt that I am called out for being the only woman in the room. For example, men trying to be polite but are being sexist (with no ill intent). Recently a manager said in a large meeting where I was the only woman, 'excuse me x I'm about to swear'."

"In project work there is a lot of aggressive behaviour when there is disagreement on ways forward, there is still gendered bias on how to meet requirements where a female / priority group is not understood, considered or listened to. These behaviours escalate with the value of the project."

Table 5: Experiences of bullying, discrimination and harassment

During the past 12 months, have you personally experienced bullying?	During the past 12 months in your current organisation, have you personally experienced discrimination at work?	During the past 12 months in your current organisation, have you personally experienced sexual harassment at work?
25% of women said yes	32% of women said yes	8% of women said yes
9% of men said yes	12% of men said yes	1% of men said yes

Sexual harassment is more likely to be experienced in the freight or heavy haul sector, and least likely in the consulting sector, which has the highest proportion of women.

In response to the question ‘During the last 12 months in your current organisation, have you personally experienced sexual harassment at work?’, the proportion of women who said ‘yes’ is shown in table 6.

Table 6: Experiences of sexual harassment by sector (women)

Passenger	6%
Freight or heavy haul	15%
Suppliers	6%
Infrastructure contractors	7%
Consultants	3%

A higher proportion of men (85 per cent) than women (62 per cent) who responded to the survey agree they feel safe to challenge inappropriate behaviour at work.

The broader findings highlight that many men are likely to be oblivious to the experience of discrimination and harassment and have little experience of gender biases. This can lead to inaccurate perspectives that there are no challenges to diversity and inclusion in the industry (as noted earlier), and that everyone has equal opportunities to progress.

The survey results also suggest women who identify as LGBTIQ+ and women with disability have a particularly challenging experience in the rail sector. Women who identify as LGBTIQ+ reported the highest rates of bullying, discrimination and harassment of marginalised groups.

These findings are consistent with national surveys on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces showing that the risk of sexual harassment is much greater for people who already experience higher rates of disadvantage and discrimination. This is particularly true for workers who identify as LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people with disability.³⁴

Table 7: Experiences of bullying, discrimination and harassment

Responses to the question: ‘During the last 12 months in your current organisation, have you personally experienced bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment at work?’

	Bullying	Discrimination	Sexual Harassment
Men	9%	12%	1%
Women	25%	32%	8%
Women/ non-European	27%	34%	6%
Women/ LGBTIQ+	50%	62%	21%
Women with disability	36%	45%	14%

Noting that the survey was predominantly completed by employees in the white-collar sector, the findings also highlight that sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying remain a reality for many women in the white-collar sector as well as the blue-collar sector.

2.7 Access to flexible work arrangements

Several people spoke about the benefits of greater flexibility in working hours and locations since the pandemic. There is some concern those benefits may be lost as some companies return to traditional working arrangements post COVID.

“My company has just announced a five-day return to office mandate, despite all research stating this disproportionately impacts women and primary caregivers. Women across the organisation are sharing how this impacts them, their caring responsibilities, increases their costs, their time spent commuting (much longer for those who live far out of the city), exercise and work life balance. This will definitely impact women and priority job-seekers prospects to join the industry via my organisation and I would recommend women go elsewhere to a company with more inclusive and progressive policies.”

Flexible work arrangements are significant to both men and women in the rail sector. Most survey respondents said they have the flexibility they need to manage work and other commitments, and this was particularly so for men.

³⁴ ‘Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces’ (National Survey 2022), reported in Australian Human Rights Commission, **Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984** (Cth), August 2023.

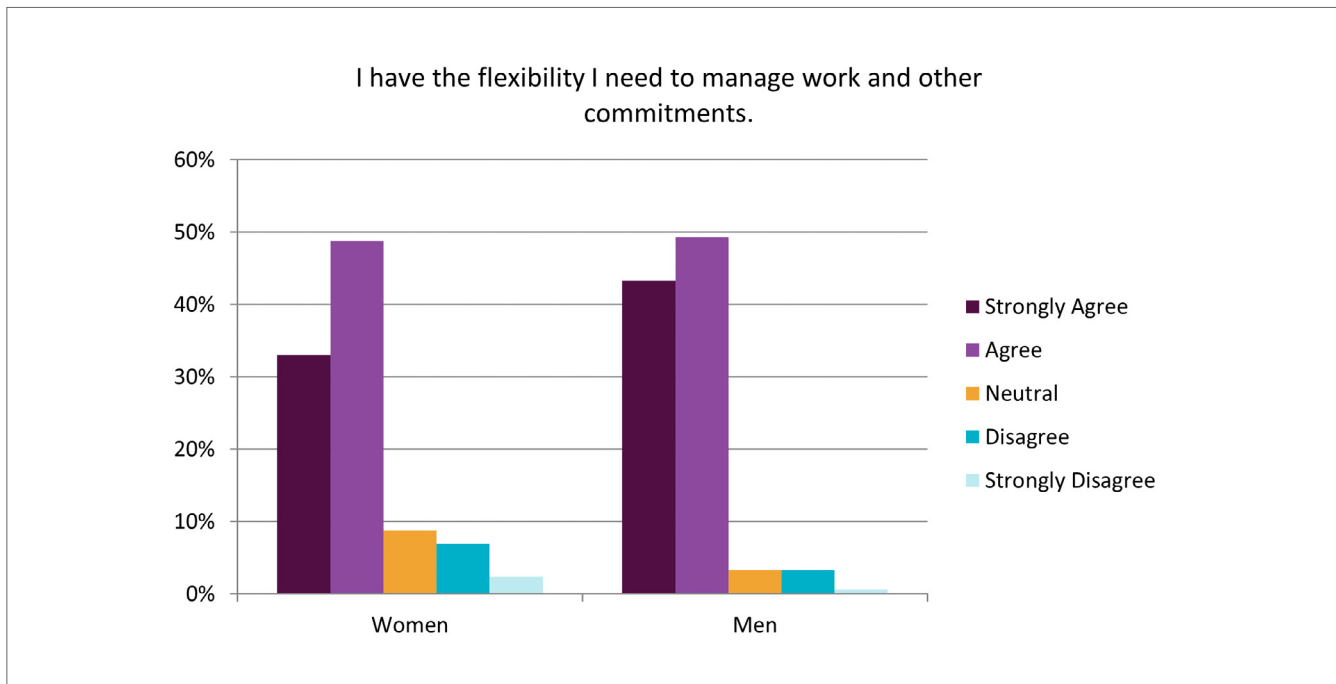


Figure 8: Flexibility to manage work and other commitments

There are challenges to wider utilisation of flexible work arrangements in the industry, with several people acknowledging that some roles are, by nature, inflexible.

“The hours are tough, particularly on site-based roles. For a family with two full-time working parents or single parents, the hours are difficult particularly on weekends. There are not many options for childcare outside of 7.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday.”

However, as section 3.9 of this report shows, many organisations are providing more flexible arrangements for frontline, shift and site-based roles, such as flexible rosters, shift swapping, job shares, compressed work weeks and split shifts.

2.8 Inadequate facilities

The provision of basic facilities, such as toilets, sanitary bins and private areas for breastfeeding, remain a significant challenge for some women in the sector. These barriers have also been highlighted in strategies to help promote women in the construction sector in Australia. For example, Victoria’s Women in Construction Strategy has set out actions to address the lack of amenities which presents not just a health and safety risk but affects women’s sense of belonging in the workplace.³⁵

Focus group participants and survey respondents emphasised the challenges created by a lack of adequate facilities. In the rail sector, these occupational health and safety hazards must be addressed to support the recruitment and retention of women and gender diverse people.

“In a client context I have experienced the lack of female facilities, which shocked and disappointed me. This is a basic step that should have been rectified decades ago. I do not experience the same issues in my organisation.”

“Some stations and sites don’t have female accessible bathrooms or any bathrooms.”

“I’ve been told to ‘pick a bush’ when needing to go to the toilet.”

“We now have a factory women’s bathroom which has allowed for an apprentice female fitter and a female factory worker.”

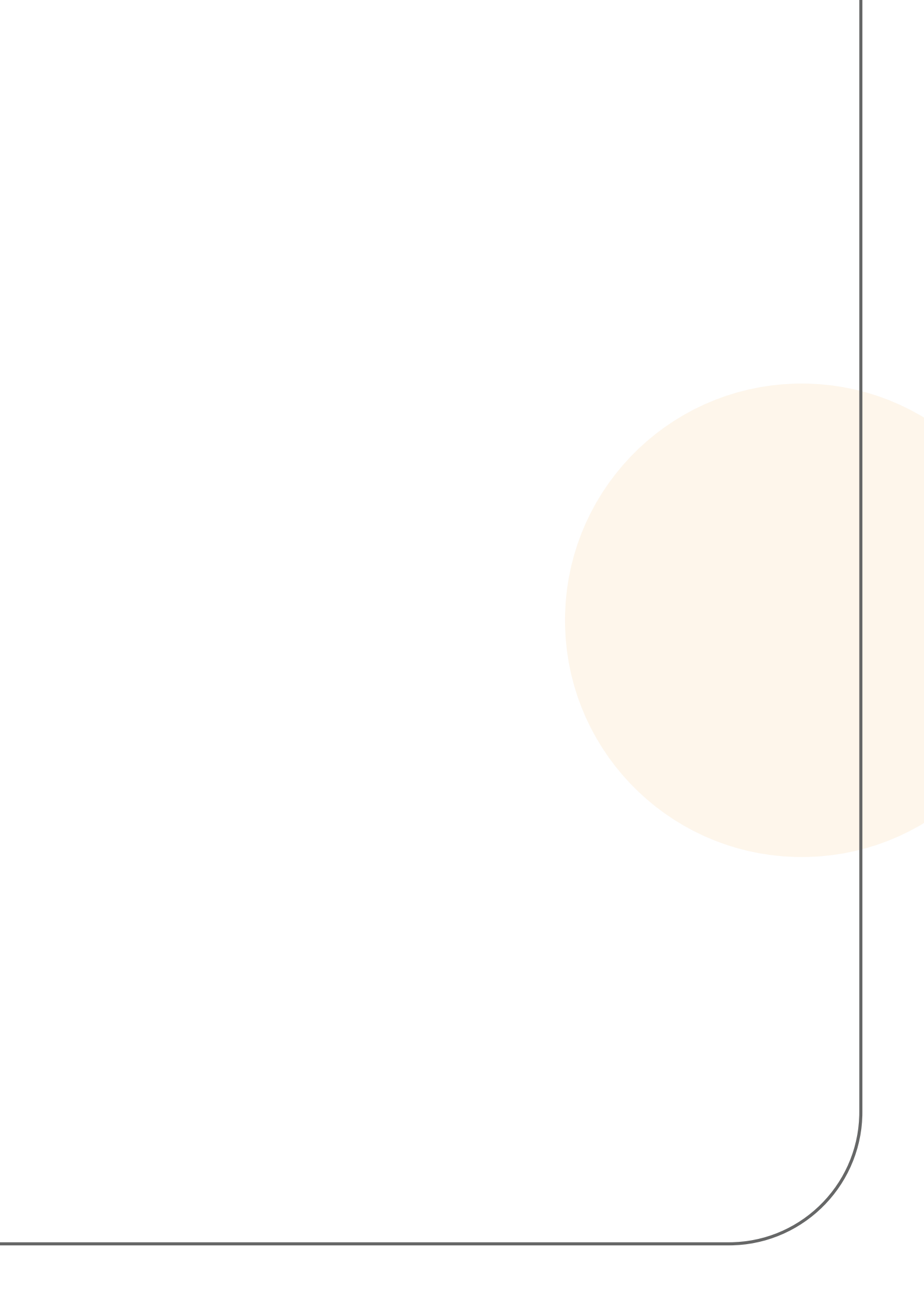
“Gender diverse people are often put in the too hard basket, particularly when it comes to bathrooms.”

“As a gender diverse person, it is hard to get access to clean and safe bathrooms. This is also an environment I would not feel comfortable to disclose my situation to anyone.”

“I have to think about which site I am going to and make sure I won’t need to access a bathroom in some locations because there isn’t one.”

“I’d really like us to work on getting more diversity in at ground level roles. I feel like simple things stop women going into the rail corridor (like lack of toilet facilities).”

³⁵ Victoria’s Women in Construction Strategy, 2019-22.





Part three:

**Supportive practices
to progress gender
equality**

This section of the report highlights examples of practices that contribute to greater diversity and inclusion.

While many of these practices have been employed by larger employers in Australia's rail sector, most can be scaled appropriately for use by smaller consultancies, suppliers and manufacturers.

The first part of this section focuses on practices that help attract women to the sector.

3.1	Gender equality strategies and targets
3.2	Gender impact assessments
3.3	Promoting the benefit of working in the sector
3.4	Targeted campaigns to attract women



3.1 Gender equality strategies and targets

Help to address barriers of:

- Under-representation of women in the workforce and in leadership;
- Lack of awareness of barriers;
- Unconscious gender biases in recruitment;
- Lack of accountability for progress.

In the rail sector, many larger organisations have increasingly prioritised gender equality, diversity and inclusion over the past decade. Some have publicly shared their inclusion action plans and targets for under-represented groups.

Several people who responded to the survey as part of this research referenced these types of systemic efforts.

“We have a culture which encourages, supports and celebrates diversity. When done right, it becomes second nature within an organisation’s DNA.”

“We have an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee; we have a Gender Equality Action Plan (both at a corporate level and at the project level) and we are held accountable to deliver on diversity and inclusion within the workplace.”

“My organisation has six diversity-based councils with executive sponsorship and volunteer participation across the organisation that are responsible for developing meaningful action plans to improve each year.”

In Australia, organisations recognised as Employers of Choice for Gender Equality (EOCGE) consistently demonstrate a strategic approach to gender equality. In the rail sector, those holding an EOCGE citation in 2023 include Arup, GHD, John Holland Group, Laing O’Rourke, AECOM, Aurecon, Jacobs Group, SMEC Australia and WSP.

This strategic approach aligns with the approach of many organisations towards health and safety efforts. Some survey respondents called for more of this:

“Gender diversity needs to be seen as a core issue like safety and not a ‘nice to have’ that you can address after the more important issues.”

“Treat the issue like a safety issue and promote the types of behaviours that are not acceptable and the behaviours that are acceptable.”

Gender equality strategies are based on data showing gender composition in the workforce, including recruitment pipelines, and retention at all levels. Gender pay gap data is also crucial for targeted action.

Of those member organisations surveyed for the ARA Gender Diversity Data Report 2024, 91 per cent of respondents had conducted a gender pay gap analysis within the last 24 months. This was up from 44 per cent since 2020-21.³⁶

Since 2021, Victorian public entities have been required to conduct this gender composition analysis, including an intersectional lens, as part of their gender equality action plans. For example, organisations such as V/Line, Suburban Rail Loop Authority and VicTrack outline tangible actions, measures and responsibilities to improve gender balance, close pay gaps and eliminate sexual harassment and discrimination in their plans.

Organisations that actively demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion are more likely to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds. This includes sharing bespoke statements from chief executive officers outlining why and how the company embraces diversity, rather than standardised sentences about diversity and inclusion.³⁷

A focus group participant noted how their organisation’s inclusive values and diversity objectives drew them to their role, especially appreciating visibility of people with gender pronouns, which made them feel ‘safer and more comfortable’.

Organisations that actively demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion are more likely to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds.

Leader measures and organisation targets

The integration of gender equality key performance indicators (KPIs) into People Managers’ performance metrics is a leading practice among EOCGE citation holders.³⁸ Nearly half of the 45 ARA member organisations that completed a gender diversity survey of their data and practices in 2023 have set KPIs for managers relating to gender equality.

36 For 2022-23, the WGEA Rail Transport sub-division median base salary gender pay gap was 11.6 per cent, and median total remuneration gender pay gap was 18 per cent. These are both lower than the national median gender pay gaps of 14.5 per cent for base salary and 19 per cent for total remuneration. Source: WGEA Data Explorer.

37 Interview with Professor Andreas Leibbrandt from Department of Economics, Monash University, Diversity Partners, **News and insights**, 14 July 2023.

38 Fitzsimmons, T.W., Yates, M.S. & Callan, V.J. **Employer of Choice for Gender Equality: Leading practices in strategy, policy and implementation**. Brisbane: AIBE Centre for Gender Equality in the Workplace, 2020.

KPIs typically focus on:

- Gender representation at management and leadership levels;
- Quantitative goals (other than those relating to representation), such as those relating to hiring and promotion, gender pay gaps, flexible work, parental leave take-up and incidents of gender-based harassment or discrimination;
- Qualitative goals, such as how well they have fostered employee engagement, an inclusive culture and positive attitude towards gender equality.³⁹

Setting organisation targets is important. Studies in Australia have shown that companies with clear quantifiable targets tend to achieve higher diversity levels. Targets are used contextually in key areas to drive and embed substantive change.⁴⁰

It is encouraging that more than half (55 per cent) of the surveyed organisations have set targets to increase the number of women in management positions.⁴¹ Another recent positive step has been the introduction of targets for speakers at Australian rail conferences to achieve better gender balance.

Australian organisations exemplifying this trend include:

- The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), which aims for women to represent one third of the workforce by mid-2024 as part of its Environmental, Social and Governance Strategy;⁴²
- BHP, which has a publicly stated goal to achieve a gender-balanced workforce (40:40:20) by the end of FY2025;⁴³
- John Holland, with a Gender Equality Strategic Plan that employs a 40:40:20 framework across recruitment and development to achieve gender equity targets, including greater representation of women in leadership positions;
- Aurecon, that has diversity targets for gender, people with disability, Indigenous Australians and Māori people, and veterans.

Many international organisations have also set targets, reflecting a global push for greater gender equality in the workplace.

- Diversity award-winning German rail organisation, Deutsche Bahn, aims for women to represent 30 per cent of managers by the end of 2024.⁴⁴

- Britain's Network Rail set a target in 2019 for women to represent at least 26 per cent of the workforce and 30 per cent of leadership positions. The organisation also set targets around ethnicity, disability, and LGBT+ to be achieved by 2024.⁴⁵
- Global employer Alstom aims to have women make up 28 per cent of manager, engineering, professional and senior leadership roles by 2025.⁴⁶

Government mandates

Government social procurement frameworks are also incentivising suppliers to adopt and maintain fair, inclusive and sustainable business practices. For example, Victoria's 'Building Equality' policy requires contractors to meet project-specific gender equality targets in the construction sector.⁴⁷ This is supporting progress in rail organisations, as highlighted by some participants in this research:

"The softer things help create change like training. But fundamentally it's the statutory requirements and organisations that mandate diversity from their suppliers that makes the difference."

"It is when organisations demand diversity from their suppliers that you start to see change happen."

39 **WGEA Policy and Strategy guidance: Gender composition of the workforce**

40 Fitzsimmons, T.W., Yates, M.S. & Callan, V.J. **Employer of Choice for Gender Equality: Leading practices in strategy, policy and implementation**. Brisbane: AIBE Centre for Gender Equality in the Workplace, 2020.

41 ARA Gender Diversity report: Survey Results of the Australian Rail workforce, 2024.

42 ARTC, **Environmental, Social and Governance Report**, 2022-23.

43 **Gender Pay Gap Report**, BHP Australia, 2024.

44 **Deutschebahn.com, Diversity Dimensions**. Also see European Commission, **'European Commission Announces Winners of Women in Rail Award'**, 2022.

45 **Network Rail Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**, Everyone Matters, 2019 – 2024.

46 **Alstom.com, Diversity and Inclusion**.

47 Victorian Government **Building Equality Policy (BEP)**.

3.2 Gender impact assessments

Help to address barriers of:

- Under-representation of women in the workforce;
- Inadequate infrastructure and/or lack of safety among sites and stations for women and gender-diverse people;
- Lack of understanding and/or respect for different lived experiences.

Gender impact assessments are another supportive practice for gender equality in the rail sector. Victorian rail public operators have been required to develop gender impact assessments since legislation was introduced for all Victorian public sector entities in 2020.

Gender impact assessments are designed to help organisations think critically about how policies, programs and services that have a 'direct and significant impact on the public' will meet the different needs of women, men and gender diverse people.

These assessments highlight the importance of gender diverse teams in designing appropriate facilities and services used by diverse population segments in Australia and New Zealand's rail sector. While externally focused, these assessments have the additional benefit that leaders and designers of rail projects are building their understanding of differing lived experiences.

Gender impact assessments represent global best practice. Britain's Network Rail introduced Diversity Impact Assessments in its 2019-24 Diversity and Inclusion strategy to 'provide us with assurance that we understand how we affect diverse communities and what we are doing to create a positive impact.'⁴⁸

In 2022, Spain's FGC won a European Commission rail award for its initiative against sexual harassment in the workplace, which included the transport user in mind. The organisation undertook a security audit of stations and introduced several measures to improve safety outcomes, including improved lighting, updating signage to avoid gender stereotypes and creating an app to facilitate the reporting of harassment.⁴⁹

Gender Impact Assessment example

An example of an assessment leading to the application of gender-sensitive design principles is the decision to construct a pedestrian overpass instead of an underpass at a train crossing at a suburban Melbourne location to maximise the safety of students from a nearby girls' school and university.



⁴⁸ Network Rail Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, 'Everyone Matters', 2019 – 2024.

⁴⁹ European Commission, 'European Commission Announces Winners of Women in Rail Award', 8 March 2022.

3.3 Promoting the benefit of working in the sector, including targeted programs to attract women

Helps to address barriers of:

- Skills shortages;
- Under-representation of women in the rail sector;
- Traditional associations of men with technical roles;
- Low representation of women in STEM education and careers.

Recruiting people from industries outside of rail is a supportive practice to improve the representation of women and diversity in general as well as helping to address critical skills shortages.

Recent research by GHD has demonstrated the importance of promoting the industry's new technologies, broad range of roles, and opportunities to contribute to connected communities in attracting these candidates.

"Changing the industry's image is crucial to attracting and retaining talent. Rail has a great story to tell. It's an industry that is helping to decarbonise economies, delivering sustainable and accessible transport solutions, connecting communities, and creating liveable cities."⁵⁰

"Rail is not just the people doing track design, overhead or power design. It's also people doing urban design, branding for new trains and stations, it's art, graphic designers, communication professionals. This industry has so much more beyond the technical."⁵¹

(Rebecca Want, Sydney Market Leader, Transport at GHD)

Part of this effort has involved changing the traditional mindset that you must have rail experience, especially technical qualifications, and expertise, to work in rail. As Narelle Rogers from the National Transport Commission shared, *'Intentional disruption is important so that we hire beyond the industry to get talented women.'*⁵²

This 'intentional disruption' is a hallmark of progressive employers in Australia.

Australian Employers of Choice for Gender Equality are 'characterised by a willingness to undo organisational structures and practices that inhibit the progression of women and undermine employee engagement generally.'⁵³

Everyone can help promote the benefits, as one survey respondent said:

"Men are dads, brothers, husbands etc. that can promote rail to the females in their lives, but many people are unaware of the career pathways that are available in rail."

Engineering and consulting firm, Systra ANZ, is one organisation that has taken an active role in promoting the benefits of a competency-based skills assessment model 'as opposed to the existing reliance on years of experience to determine suitability for a role'. Systra says this 'will improve opportunities for junior-mid career women in rail, especially those who have made a career jump from other industries.'⁵⁴

Some participants in focus groups noted how 'soft' skills (such as communication and interpersonal skills) were increasingly valued, helping attract people with different thinking approaches and lived experiences.

Customer service skills are particularly promoted in the passenger services sector, and this has helped to attract more women. Sydney Trains promotes 'service' and 'willingness to help' as key qualities in their recruitment messaging: *'If you love working with people, believe in customer service, have an interest in trains and transport, then consider working with us.'*⁵⁵

In some rail organisations, many women from the aviation industry have moved into customer-facing roles following the pandemic.

The Work in Rail website, an initiative of the ARA, promotes the benefits of working in the sector with significant imagery and content on diversity and flexible working. This is an effective way to attract people from different backgrounds, including industry backgrounds.⁵⁶

50 GHD Women in Rail Report, November 2023.

51 GHD Women in Rail Report, November 2023.

52 'Women in Rail' Committee Workshop conducted as part of this research project, February 2024.

53 Fitzsimmons, T.W., Yates, M.S. & Callan, V.J.

Employer of Choice for Gender Equality: Leading practices in strategy, policy and implementation. Brisbane: AIBE Centre for Gender Equality in the Workplace, 2020.

54 Systra ANZ Written submission.

55 Transport.nsw.gov.au, **Careers with Sydney Trains.**

56 **workinrail.net.au**, an initiative of the Australasian Rail Association.

A career full of variety

There are many ways to build a career in rail. Whether you've just left school or have years of experience in a different industry, the options are endless.

If you don't have any experience, there are many rail organisations with great training programs and apprenticeships.

Once you launch your career, it could take you anywhere.

There are so many roles to explore and innovative projects to get involved in – all while building skills for life.



Example from the Work in Rail website, an initiative of the Australasian Railway Association

The National Rail Skills Hub is another initiative with the purpose of making it easier for graduates and professionals to start and progress a career in rail. The hub profiles different roles in rail, defines training pathways to 30 of the most in-demand jobs, and attempts to address rail skills and training gaps. 'From signallers to cyber engineers, rail needs more people with all kinds of skills. We're making it easier for you to start a career in rail and gain skills that you can use across Australia.'⁵⁷

Targeted campaigns to attract women

To improve the profile of rail as a fulfilling career option, some organisations in the sector have led targeted campaigns to attract women, particularly in male-dominated areas. Metro Trains' recruitment campaign to attract women train drivers is one successful example. In 2009, women train drivers represented less than five per cent of drivers. That has since increased to 37 per cent in 2023.

During the 'Women in Rail' consultation workshop, Elina Islamova from Metro Trains highlighted the success of the initiative:

"The campaign around women train drivers worked really well. It was targeted recruitment that helped attract more women drivers. We have done a lot of stories on this to profile women and give potential future employees an idea that it is a pathway you can take."⁵⁸

Metro Trains also provides a detailed step-by-step guide of recruitment process on their website. This can be particularly important for women who are more likely to opt out of the hiring process if they lack sufficient information about how it works.⁵⁹

Other organisations in Australia and overseas that have developed innovative programs to attract women and other under-represented groups to the rail sector beyond

passenger operations are highlighted on this page.

- The Downer Group established the 'Women on Track' program to provide a dedicated channel for women to find entry-level roles in the rail industry. The program provides paid traineeships to women from Melbourne's northern and western suburbs, including on-the-job experience at two rollingstock projects, rotating between the world's largest tram refurbishment project and the High-Capacity Metro Trains Project for the Victorian Government.⁶⁰
- Victoria's Level Crossing Removal project, a project office of the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority, is leading an 18-month program for refugee and asylum seeker engineers working on major transport infrastructure projects. The industry-first program aims to bridge the gap faced by new Australians in matching their international qualifications to Australian workforce requirements.⁶¹
- John Holland's partnership with the AFLW Competition, announced in 2022, provides career pathways for women athletes. Athletes are provided training, mentoring and flexible working arrangements. John Holland's Chief Executive Officer said the scheme was a 'game-changing partnership as we look to disrupt the business-as-usual approach to recruitment within our industry and get more female talent within our ranks.'⁶²
- German Rail (Deutsche Bahn) held a month-long campaign in 2023 to attract more women into rail. This is part of the organisation's long-term strategy to achieve gender balance. The 'DB on Tour' recruitment campaign included 'on-site information events and social media to enable seven women from seven professions and seven regions to share their experiences of working in rail, including a train driver, a civil engineer and a trainee operations controller.'⁶³

57 [Railskillshub.gov.au](https://railskillshub.gov.au), Growing a rail force for the future (2024), National Rail Skills Hub.

58 'Women in Rail' Committee Workshop conducted as part of this research project, 6 February 2024.

59 Tara Sophia Mohr, 'Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified', *Harvard Business Review*, August 25, 2014.

60 Downer Group website, 'Women on Track', 2023.

61 Victoria's Big Build, **EPIC program**.

62 'John Holland and the AFL announce a game changing partnership for AFLW', 25 August 2022, John Holland [website](https://www.johnholland.com.au).

63 International Railway Journal, 'DB goes on tour to promote women in rail', March 2023.

Both survey respondents and focus group participants emphasised how important it is to promote the industry as a rewarding career prospect to women students at schools and universities. Some examples include:

- The Victorian trainee program allows Year 11 and 12 high school students to work on Suburban Rail Loop Authority (East) sites two days a week over two years.⁶⁴ The program provides work experience to girls studying science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).
- Transport for NSW's Sydney Trains division works to educate women students about the career opportunities it offers, including visiting schools to talk to students about considering Sydney Trains as a career choice, liaising with careers advisors, and attending careers events. These events and activities enable Sydney Trains to provide relevant information to girls considering careers in science, technology, engineering and/or mathematics via a trade course or engineering degree.⁶⁵
- As part of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy, Systra ANZ has worked with Tech Girls and now with She Maps to combat gender bias by encouraging more school-aged girls to study STEM.⁶⁶



64 Victorian Government, Suburban Rail Loop, 'Supporting the next generation of women in construction', 15 October 2023.

65 NSW Government Public Service Commission, 'Increasing diversity in the transport cluster', 2021.

66 Systra ANZ written submission.

3.4 Minimising bias in the recruitment process

Helps to address barriers of:

- Affinity biases in which hiring managers gravitate to people like them;
- Gender stereotypes that limit opportunities for women.

The rail sector, like many others in Australia and New Zealand, is increasingly recognising the impact of unconscious biases on recruitment and promotion decisions. Actions to mitigate this bias in recruitment include education for hiring managers, advertising in a range of non-traditional sources, forming gender-balanced hiring panels for senior roles, and using new technologies to remove gendered language and reach wider talent pools.

“In the past people recruited people that looked like them. That is why we need unconscious bias training – it makes a difference and makes you more aware.”

A range of employers are taking steps to minimise bias:

- John Holland’s Inclusion Strategy has a commitment to ‘advertise roles in a broad range of ways and make sure a diverse range of candidates are represented at shortlist stage’;⁶⁷
- One of the four pillars of BHP’s Inclusion and Diversity strategy is ‘uncovering and taking steps to mitigate potential bias in our systems, behaviours, recruitment and talent management policies and processes’;⁶⁸
- Alstom has invested in education for people managers to ‘highlight bias and ensure gender equity approaches to progression within our company and when hiring decisions are made’;⁶⁹
- Transport for NSW has set a target of 40 per cent female representation in senior roles and requires senior executive and senior manager interview shortlists to comprise at least 50 per cent suitable female candidates. If a shortlist does not meet this requirement, an exemption request must be made. Advertising guidelines have been established that include reviewing job advertisements to minimise gendered language to ensure roles appeal to women.⁷⁰

While the initiatives outlined so far help to expand the pipeline of women to enter the rail sector, this is only one aspect of creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce across the rail sector.

The next section outlines practices to help *retain* and *promote* women into leadership roles.

The importance of cultural change was a consistent theme among survey respondents, especially as organisations work more pro-actively to source more diverse candidates.

“Our industry is not ready for meaningful GEAP (Gender Equality Action Plan) targets set by our clients... We will see a high demand for gender diverse leaders who will be set up to fail.”

“Create a culture which supports and encourages all to participate - without getting the cultural foundation correct, any “surface level” improvements won’t be enduring.”

“Better educate the next three generations about what amazing opportunities there are in rail, supported by workforce culture “waking up” (or “growing up”) and understanding diversity benefits everyone and every business.”

“A cultural change is needed.”

67 John Holland **Gender Equality Strategy Plan**, 2021-2025, (2024 Progress Update), March 2024.

68 **Gender Pay Gap Report**, BHP Australia, 2024.

69 Alstom Gender Pay Gap **Employer Statement**, February 2024.

70 ARA **Gender Diversity Report**, 2022.

3.5	Education on respectful, inclusive leadership and behaviours
3.6	Male allies and sponsors
3.7	Mentoring and Networking Programs
3.8	Employee Resource Groups
3.9	Flexible working arrangements
3.10	Gender equitable policies and practices

3.5 Education on respectful, inclusive leadership and behaviours

Helps to address barriers of:

- Exclusionary behaviours for women, such as devaluing or diminishing their experiences on an everyday basis;
- Lower levels of psychological safety experienced by women in the sector;
- The continuing prevalence of bullying, discrimination, and harassment, particularly for marginalised and under-represented groups.

Providing education to all leaders and employees on inclusive behaviours and practices is essential to the rail sector’s journey towards embracing diversity. For many in the industry, as part two of this report highlighted, these exclusionary behaviours remain part of their everyday experience.

For those people who completed the survey as part of this research, education on respectful behaviours and biases rated as a high priority for the industry to continue to take meaningful steps towards becoming more diverse and inclusive. Some 65 per cent of women and 59 per cent of men nominated it as a priority (noting respondents could choose more than one).

For the rail industry to continue to take meaningful steps towards being more diverse and inclusive, what actions would you prioritise? Sixty-five per cent of women and 59 per cent of men said education on respectful behaviours and biases.

Some organisations such as GHD, Metro Trains, Jacobs, Arup, and Rio Tinto have taken steps to educate their employees on unconscious bias and inclusive leadership behaviours over the past decade. Inclusive leadership is now recognised as a critical capability for organisations adapting to diverse customers, markets, ideas and talent.

Signature strengths of inclusive leaders include a visible commitment to diversity, humility, awareness of bias, curiosity about others, cultural intelligence and collaboration.⁷¹

Some survey respondents referenced the need for this different type of leadership when asked about improvements to the sector.

“Hold up alternative models of leadership that don’t rely so much on authority, intimidation and a “tough it out” mentality.”

“Be open minded and compassionate.”

Deloitte’s inclusion model shows that ‘fairness and respect’ is foundational to the experience of inclusion.⁷² Many employers are prioritising education for all employees on respect at work to combat bullying, harassment and victimisation in the sector, and to encourage people to act when they observe or experience sexual harassment.⁷³

Examples include:

Programs at Aurecon and Jacobs have improved respect at work and empowered people to call out exclusionary behaviours. These programs are profiled on page 37.

In the passenger sector, Queensland Rail leaders participated in a full day ‘QR Respect’ program and a new mechanism for complaints management called ‘Safe Station’ was implemented, including a dedicated team to triage and manage complaints.⁷⁴

A collaboration between BHP, Rio Tinto and Fortescue was set up in 2022 to educate new entrants to the sector about the impact of sexual harassment, bullying and racism, including how to recognise and report these behaviours.⁷⁵ This is particularly important because the survey conducted for this research showed that bullying, discrimination and harassment are more prevalent in the freight and heavy haul sector.

71 Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus, ‘Why Inclusive Leaders Are Good for Business, And How to Become One’, **Harvard Business Review**, 29 March 2019.

72 Juliet Bourke and Bernadette Dillon, ‘The diversity and inclusion revolution’ **Deloitte Review**, January 2018.

73 Education on respect at work is also one component helping meet the new ‘positive duty’ for organisations to eliminate harassment, a new legislative requirement of organisations in Australia from December 2023.

74 Queensland Rail **Annual and Financial Plan**, 2022-23.

75 Rio Tinto, BHP and Fortescue launch pilot program to create safer workplaces, **BHP website**, November 2022.

Recognising that change does not happen organically, it is important that senior leaders undertake, and champion, education on inclusive leadership and bias. As several survey participants commented:

"We need specific boardroom and leadership education - this is the level with the most influence - who think the current status quo is acceptable."

"Our industry leaders need the most education on how to improve diversity - they talk about the general issues well, but lack a sense of urgency, and when it comes to the specifics, discriminatory decisions are still made."

"Provide forums where culturally diverse and gender diverse leaders can share their stories and challenges and share how they have overcome their challenges. This would provide [an opportunity for] employers and industry leaders [to be] more aware of biases and will provide individuals hope and courage to continue fighting the biases."

"Amplifying women and CaLD voices at leadership level. This is where the decisions get made and unfortunately, when the leadership don't understand the issue, they can't support the solutions."

"I have spent 2+ years pushing as hard as I can in this space and have faced massive pushback from senior management. I have managed to move things inches when our organisation needs to move significantly in this space. It's frustrating, as this work is often on my own time and benefits our organisation."

"Raise awareness about the privilege given to others. If you belong to that privileged group, you tend to minimise the situation."

Learning opportunities don't have to be limited to education programs. Industry events also offer an important opportunity to educate people about acceptable behaviours.

"At broad audience events (gala dinners, AusRAIL conference, etc) give visibility of the type of behaviours that are still part of the industry and are not acceptable. Lack of awareness of what is sexist or inappropriate is a common issue, and the types of people making these comments are unlikely to attend sessions on the topic."

"An ad campaign that calls out the biased behaviours that make work harder for women. Treat the issue like a safety issue and promote the types of behaviours that are not acceptable and the behaviours that are acceptable."

Broader learning opportunities for employees that support cultural awareness, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and disability awareness are also considered important (by survey respondents and broader research) to support diversity and inclusion. Some employers, like John Holland, celebrate days of significance for diverse groups to promote understanding and offer multicultural leave exchange.⁷⁶

Initiatives such as Metro Trains' Sunflower Program⁷⁷ in which customer service staff are educated to help passengers with invisible disabilities and wear a Sunflower supporter badge to signal their familiarity with the program, can also foster respect and understanding for colleagues with disabilities.

Company pride groups also provide guidance on respectful language to make the workplace inclusive and safe for LGBTIQ+ staff. For example, VIBE (visibility and inclusion in the built environment) is WSP's global network for LGBTQ+ and the Australian group works with local pride organisations to deliver events and training.⁷⁸



⁷⁶ John Holland Inclusion Strategic Plan 2023-25

⁷⁷ Ruby MacKinnon, 'Metro launches Hidden Disability Sunflower program', Metro Trains website, 29 June 2023.

⁷⁸ Wsp.com, Embracing an inclusive and diverse culture that promotes equity.

Organisation case studies of education on respectful behaviours

Aurecon

Aurecon developed a campaign to encourage employees to act when observing or experiencing sexism or sexual harassment, in conjunction with VicHealth (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation) and the Behavioural Insights Team.⁷⁹ This involved:

- Conducting a pre-campaign survey to determine employees' experiences of sexism and sexual harassment, both personally and as a witness. The survey asked employees about their views on Aurecon's current state of tolerating or not tolerating these behaviours, and the consequences of being an active bystander, among other questions;
- Developing 'social norms' of what 'most people at Aurecon' would do. This applies behavioural science principles to encourage behavioural change. For example, an individual is more likely to intervene if they read that a high percentage of colleagues would intervene if they witnessed the telling of an inappropriate joke;
- An email campaign that included education about sexism and sexual harassment, with a statement on social norms and Aurecon's position, as well as reporting mechanisms.

This campaign had positive outcomes, including a decrease in people agreeing with statements such as 'If I intervene people might think I'm too sensitive and I'm overreacting to the situation' and 'I don't think there's much I can do about sexism or sexual harassment at Aurecon'.

Jacobs

Jacobs introduced a program in 2020-2021 for leaders to explore the benefits of inclusion, and the impacts of barriers such as biases and exclusionary behaviours. This led to their 'Everyday Respect' Program which included:

- Two-hour 'Courageous Conversations' sessions where people impacted by exclusionary or disrespectful behaviours shared their experiences with employees and people leaders;
- One-hour People Leader learning sessions to share an Everyday Respect Toolkit;
- A 'Leading the Change' session where leaders led conversations with their teams.⁸⁰

Among the findings was the value of the Champions of Change **Leadership Shadow**⁸¹ as a tool to help leaders articulate their commitments to lead change. This model includes four elements, asking leaders to consider 'what I say', 'what I do', 'what I prioritise' and 'what I measure' to promote diverse, respectful and inclusive workplaces, and is applied in several Australian organisations as part of their inclusive leadership education.

Rio Tinto

After a report that found 28 per cent of women had experienced sexual harassment while working at the company, an 'Everyday Respect' program was developed, and is now integrated into new and existing leader and culture change programs. In 2022, Rio Tinto trained 91 per cent of more than 7,000 leaders in the foundations of building psychological safety and moving from 'bystander' on inappropriate behaviour to an 'upstander'.⁸²

One initiative by Rio Tinto has been the introduction of the 'Purple Banner'. One of the focus group participants in this research project described the effective use of the Purple Banner as 'exactly like a safety incident to put a title on what behaviours are respectful and what aren't'. It is used in response to a psychosocial incidence (such as racist remarks or disrespectful behaviour) to engage the team in conversation and help change behaviour. The team activity can include, for example, reflections on the impact and an opportunity to brainstorm more respectful language or behaviours.

According to a leader at Rio Tinto: 'The purple banner is like a safety notice ... it goes to a pre-start meeting, a supervisor's got to have a conversation, engage the crew and talk about it. Twelve months ago, 18 months ago, that is not a conversation that could happen in a pre-start meeting.'⁸³

79 Champions of Change Consult Australia, **Everyday Respect**.

80 Champions of Change Consult Australia, **Everyday Respect**.

81 The **Leadership Shadow** was first published in 2014 by Champions of Change in collaboration with Chief Executive Women and based on an adaptation of a model provided by Pine Street, the leadership development group of Goldman Sachs.

82 Riotinto.com, **Everyday Respect**.

83 Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA, Business Pulse, '**Getting your head around psychosocial hazards**', August 2023.

3.6 Male allies and sponsors

Help to address barriers of:

- Perceptions that diversity and inclusion efforts disadvantage men;
- Men who are bystanders to inappropriate behaviour;
- Perceived inequities in opportunities to develop skills and experience.

Male CEOs and senior executives who are active allies in supporting gender equality and diversity play a key part in progressing gender equality in the rail sector, both through their participation in specific programs and networks, and through their day-to-day practise of leadership. This visible leadership is noticed and appreciated by many women who participated in this research.

Focus group participants shared how male leaders calling out misogynistic behaviour makes a significant difference in contributing to more respectful and inclusive workplace cultures. Many people want to see more of this, as shared through survey responses:

“(We need) males in managerial roles to lead by example and not join in on inappropriate behaviour. A lot of workers just roll their eyes at any speech about being inclusive.”

“People follow the behaviours set out by leadership and often when leadership do not see value or do not make the effort to be inclusive this behaviour is replicated throughout a team. We also need to recognise the role men have to play in creating a more diverse and inclusive culture and bring them on the journey with us.”

“Advocacy, including our Male Allies, ensures that this is going to become a non-issue in the lifetime of some of our delivery people.”

“Much of the change we need to support women in the industry and pave the way for true gender equality and acceptance of gender diversity, cultural diversity and disability-positive workplaces can only happen with the active and consistent support of male allyship and changes to the attitudes of the ageing workforce we currently have that will likely not retire for another 20+ years.”

In addition, men who are active sponsors of women's career development help improve the representation of women in senior and/or non-traditional operational roles. This includes identifying opportunities for high-potential women through job rotations, lateral appointments, and shadowing senior leaders on important projects.

These activities help to build the visibility of women in the industry and counter unconscious biases that can see men 'tapped on the shoulder' for roles and promotions, as some women in focus groups said they had observed.

John Cranley, GHD National Rail Leader, is an industry advocate for improving diversity. He says it is imperative for leaders, employees and community to recognise the benefits of improving women's representation and calls on executive leaders to do more to sponsor emerging women leaders as part of succession planning.⁸⁴

“The rail industry has a lot to offer women who are looking for a rewarding and meaningful career. With a huge pipeline of work, there are plenty of opportunities for anyone who wants to join.”
(John Cranley, GHD National Rail Leader)

The Champions of Change Coalition, established in 2010 in Australia originally as 'Male Champions of Change', provides a leadership template for the rail sector.

Many CEOs, secretaries of government departments and community leaders have been involved in the Champions of Change Coalition, and sector-specific programs have been established in construction, architecture, energy, health and sport. The mission of the Champions of Change Coalition is 'to step up beside women to help achieve gender equality and a significant and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership'.⁸⁵

“We also need to recognise the role men have to play in creating a more diverse and inclusive culture and bring them on the journey with us.”

⁸⁴ John Cranley (National Rail Leader at GHD), 'Occupational gender segregation in the industry', Committee for Economic Development (CEDA) **Opinion Article**, 7 December 2023.

⁸⁵ Champions of Change Coalition, championsofchangecoalition.org.

3.7 Mentoring and Networking Programs

Help to address barriers of:

- Lower levels of psychological safety experienced by women;
- Predominance of men in leadership roles;
- Higher likelihood of women experiencing harassment and discrimination in the sector;
- Lack of awareness about opportunities in the sector.

Women who participated in the focus groups and survey frequently shared how much value they place on networks for women and on mentoring programs (both formal and informal), where they meet other women in the industry and learn from their experiences.

"I have created and maintained an incredible network of women within a heavily male-dominated industry. The regular issues faced has improved the bond and relationships."

"When you find women working in the rail sector there is a great and supportive community - just need the networking opportunities to connect and get to know each other."

Mentoring programs provided by the ARA and National Association for Women in Construction (NAWIC) were referenced specifically. The Women in Rail lunches hosted by the ARA showcase 'a lot of strong people willing to stand up and talk about the hard things that men may not know about', one participant said.

The ARA Women in Rail Committee was founded in 2016 to 'spearhead the industry's focus on this critical issue and create new opportunities for women to network, share information and access professional development designed for people forging their careers in rail.'⁸⁶

This is important because highly visible women role models in the industry help address the problem in male-dominated workplaces that 'you can't be what you can't see'. One focus group participant shared how she had organised an informal catch-up for women before an AusRAIL conference to meet with other women. "When 80-85 per cent of people at the conference are men, [it is] intimidating. As a female going to conferences can be daunting, especially when you don't know any other women there."

Highly visible women role models in the industry help address the problem in male-dominated workplaces that 'you can't be what you can't see'.

These types of informal initiatives and formal programs are particularly important for women when they are the only woman on a team or worksite. Within workplaces across different sectors, women who are the only woman in their team or level are more likely to experience microaggressions, bullying and discrimination than when they work with other women.⁸⁷ This experience is likely to be worse for women from culturally and racially marginalised backgrounds and women with disability.

Program examples:

The ARA's Women in Rail Mentoring Program is for women rail professionals looking for tailored career development guidance. Participants are paired with experienced male or female mentors from the sector. Mentees spend up to two hours every week gaining advice and support from their mentor as well as 25 hours of training, reading and webinars.

Victoria's Women in Transport Mentoring program has the aim 'to give mentees a fresh avenue for development as they progress through their career in transport, and to give mentors an opportunity to share their experience and discover just how much they have to offer.'⁸⁸

Queensland Rail has introduced a new podcast - 'Train of Thought' - for women 'to elevate conversations about women in the workplace at Queensland Rail'.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ ARA website, **Supporting diversity in rail**.

⁸⁷ Kevin Sneader and Lareina Yee, 'One is the loneliest number', **McKinsey Quarterly**, 29 January 2019.

⁸⁸ Victorian Government **Women in Transport Mentoring Program**.

⁸⁹ Queensland Rail **Annual and Financial Report 2022-23**.

Mentoring programs are a rewarding process for both mentees and their mentors. Mentors gain insight into other areas of business, a new network and an increased understanding of the challenges different employees face, as some participants have shared.

"I have had incredible mentors – they have made a huge difference."

"The ARA mentoring program provided an excellent opportunity to build a network."

While mentoring programs for women are valuable, it is important they are not a singular focus of diversity efforts. When this happens, it can perpetuate the notion that women need 'fixing' and undermine the systemic focus required to transform workplaces. This was highlighted by participants in this research.

"It is also becoming commonplace that women are being asked to fix the issues with diversity in workplaces through things like mentoring programs where women who are already underpaid and overworked are then asked to volunteer their time to support young women. We all do this because we understand its importance and a number of us didn't have that opportunity, but it's more unpaid work that we are being expected to do."

"While women benefit from mentoring programs, the real change needs to happen in the culture that (male) leaders develop."

While mentoring programs for women are valuable, it is important that they are not a singular focus of diversity efforts in the rail sector. When this happens, it can perpetuate the notion that women need 'fixing' and undermine the systemic focus required to transform workplaces.



3.8 Employee Resource Groups

Help to address barriers of:

- Lower levels of psychological safety experienced by women;
- Exclusionary behaviours and higher rates of harassment and discrimination experienced by marginalised groups;
- Lack of awareness of differing intersectional experiences.

Global research shows the value of effective employee resource groups (ERGs) for countering exclusionary behaviour at work.⁹⁰ ERGs are ‘internal communities of employees with shared identities and interests.’ Some survey respondents highlighted the importance of these networks when asked about actions to prioritise to take meaningful steps towards being more diverse and inclusive:

“Building strong networks for all types and genders (not just women/men), where one can come together to exchange freely and safely about day-to-day barriers within work/career etc. and support each other with tips or just morale.”

Effective groups clearly communicate their purpose and goals, align each ERG’s activities with the company-wide DEI strategy, and have strong organisational support so that ERG leaders are recognised for the additional work they do on top of their regular responsibilities. The external impact of ERGs is also important: *“Through ERG inputs, companies better understand their customers and are able to cater products to underrepresented groups. ERGs also help reform business operations, for example, when members of underrepresented groups call attention to unfair processes.”*⁹¹

The support and sense of community that Employee Resource Groups provide can also lead to an increase in the number of people feeling safe to share their identity. A good example of this comes from Downer NZ (see example).

Example: Employee Resource Group

Downer NZ formed a ‘StandOut Community’ in 2022 ‘to provide a safe place for Rainbow employees at Downer to come together, connect and share experiences, resources and support’. The need for a support network was identified when a senior manager described her experiences as a married lesbian woman in the workplace. Since then, self-identified Rainbow community members working at Downer increased from five to 30 people.⁹²

Although the model of ERGs across all industries in Australia and overseas is a focus on one identity category, sharing across ERGs can promote intersectional understanding so that people from marginalised groups have a stronger voice in the rail sector. John Holland, for example, promotes its various ERGs on its website, including its Pride Network, Celebrate Women Network, GROW Network and Ability@John Holland.⁹³

A leading practice in the global rail sector is Germany’s Deutsche Bahn’s model of employee resource groups, where each member of the Board personally sponsors one of its six employee resources groups⁹⁴. In 2019, the UK’s Network Rail had six employee networks with over 3,000 members across the company and the Chair and Chief Executive are among the company’s diversity and inclusion champions⁹⁵.

⁹⁰ Natacha Catalino, Nora Gardner, Drew Goldstein, and Jackie Wong, ‘Effective employee resource groups are key to inclusion at work’, **McKinsey & Company**, 7 December 2022.

⁹¹ As above.

⁹² **Case Study 2023 Diversity Awards** NZ, Diversity Works NZ.

⁹³ Johnholland.com.au, **Inclusion, diversity and equity**.

⁹⁴ Deutschebahn.com, **Diversity in the DB Group**.

⁹⁵ Network Rail **Diversity and Inclusion strategy**, Everyone Matters, 2019 – 2024.

3.9 Flexible working arrangements

Help to address barriers of:

- Skills shortages;
- Under-representation of women;
- Challenges for working parents in balancing work and family.

Flexibility in the location of work and flexibility of job hours is a key to attracting and retaining people with caring responsibilities. This is particularly critical to support the retention of women because in many cases they continue to shoulder greater responsibilities of family care.

“Covid really changed and challenged working behaviours and diversity, prior to covid there was no flexibility, and now the workplace is more diverse thanks in part to flexible working arrangements.”

“The inclusion of flexible working arrangements and policy changes have supported attracting more diversity into the rail industry.”

“Flexible work significantly makes workplaces more attractive to young people and women in particular. Good parental (both parents) leave policies and family friendly workplaces (i.e management styles and recognition of parents and carers/life/work balance) also are attractors for women (and men!)”

The survey conducted as part of this research highlights flexible working arrangements are highly valued by men and women in the rail sector (see Figure 9).

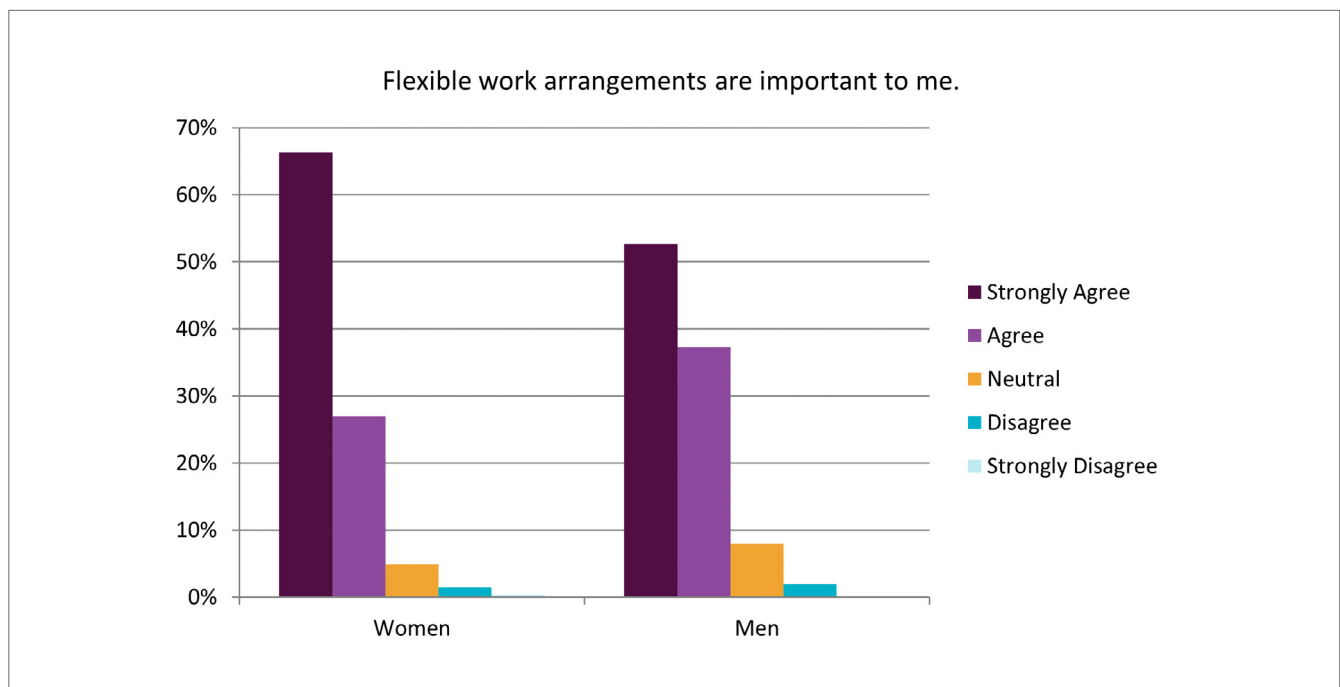


Figure 9: Flexible work arrangements

Figure 9: Flexible work arrangements

For frontline, shift and site-based roles, a Champions of Change Coalition report found that innovative flexible work practices are bringing benefits such as reaching untapped labour, attracting and retaining talent, speeding up recruitment into vacant roles, and safety improvements.⁹⁶ Types of flexible arrangements can include flexible rosters, shift swapping, job shares, compressed work weeks and split shifts.

For non-frontline roles, many participants in the survey and focus groups talked about the significant value of having options to work remotely since the COVID pandemic. Remote and hybrid working is particularly helpful to support retention of parents following parental leave.

The ARA's Gender Diversity Data Report 2024 showed that, in 2023, 79 per cent of the 45 members that responded to their survey on gender equality practices had formal policies or strategies for flexible working arrangements. Leaders are held accountable for improving workplace flexibility in 40 per cent of those member organisations, up from 28 per cent in 2019.⁹⁷ These are positive signs of progress in the rail sector.

Access to flexible working is profiled by many larger organisations, such as Sydney Trains, Metro Trains, John Holland, Aurecon and BHP. Aurecon was an early adopter of the 'all roles flex' model and encourages its teams to agree to and document guidelines and expected behaviours such as core collaboration hours.⁹⁸

'Family-friendly' rosters, where staff work school hours, have also been a feature of the resources sector for some time to help attract more women. FIFO rail workers on mine sites also benefit from extended weekends between more intense rostered work.

The inclusion of flexible working arrangements and policy changes have supported attracting more diversity into the rail industry.



96 Champions of Change Coalition, **Shifting Expectations: Flexibility for frontline, shift and site-based roles**, 2022.

97 ARA, Gender Diversity Report: Survey Results of the Australian Rail workforce, March 2024

98 Liam Hayes and Amanda Vining, 'Employers and flexibility: what does this look like long-term?' 4 October 2022, aurecongroup.com.

3.10 Gender equitable policies and facilities

Help to address barriers of:

- Under-representation of women;
- Challenges for working parents in balancing work and family;
- Unconscious biases that can impact talent development practices;
- Industrial workwear and uniforms traditionally focused on men's needs.

Policies that support greater diversity and reduce gender biases, ensuring employees have equal access to parental leave, talent development opportunities, and appropriate protective clothing and facilities were

highlighted by focus groups and in the broader research as enabling progress.

Small changes, such as 'keeping female bathrooms open for longer hours', can make a big difference. In one case, the link between provision of facilities for women and recruitment of women was direct:

"We now have a factory women's bathroom which has allowed for an apprentice female fitter and a female factory worker."

The table below shows a range of policy initiatives that help support gender equality in the sector.

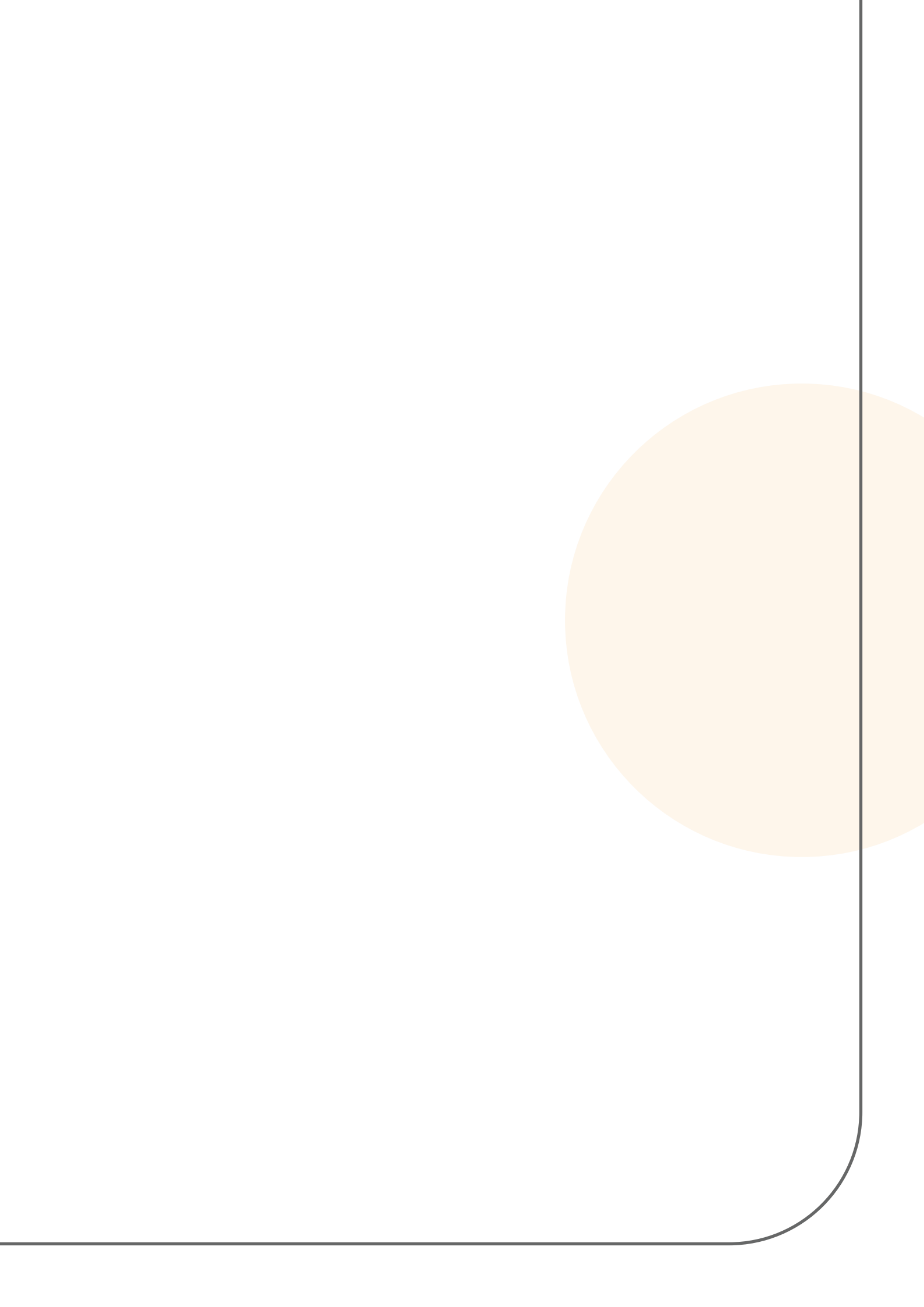
Table 8: Gender-equitable initiatives

Initiatives	Data points and examples
<p>Gender-equal parental leave</p> <p>The impact of parental leave on women's career progression can be significant. Introducing more equitable policies like gender-equal parental leave can reduce the stigma associated with caregiving, facilitates women returning to their career sooner, and enables both men and women to balance work and family commitments more effectively, contributing to a more inclusive workplace culture that enhances employee satisfaction, engagement and retention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 per cent of organisations in the ARA Gender Diversity Data Report 2024 give employer-funded paid parental leave of 14 weeks to females and 90 per cent of organisations give 14 weeks paid parental leave to men.
<p>Promoting shared leave and flexible work arrangements to men</p> <p>Encouraging men to take parental leave by profiling men who are on leave or recently returned and/or setting targets for utilisation of flexible work arrangements helps to support gender equality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thirty-eight per cent of organisations surveyed for the ARA Gender Diversity Data Report 2024 identified they were actively working to increase the number of men who were utilising flexible working arrangements. Eleven per cent have set targets for men's engagement in flexible work. • In 2019, no organisations had set targets.
<p>Formalising policies on performance management, training and development, succession planning and talent identification.</p> <p>Formalisation of these policies is important to reduce gender biases that can impact decision-making in talent management and succession processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARA Gender Diversity Data Report 2024 shows the rail industry lags the Australian industry average on having formal talent development policies.⁹⁹
<p>Gender equitable clothing</p> <p>Ensuring all employees have appropriate uniforms and Personal Protective Equipment is an important part of helping them feel valued in the workplace.</p> <p>Clothing 'designed by women for women' was raised in a focus group, recognising that industrial work wear has traditionally focused on men's needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BHP is one company that has worked closely with its material supplier to redesign work wear from 18 ranges to 52 ranges, including unisex options.¹⁰⁰ • Outside of Australia, Germany's Deutsche Bahn has gone further, offering 'gender-nonconforming clothing' to all employees in 2023 so employees can choose their own clothing 'regardless of their biological sex or gender identity.'¹⁰¹

99 ARA Gender Diversity Report, 2024

100 BHP inclusion and diversity storybook, February 2020.

101 DB website.





Part four:

Recommendations

This report has highlighted several successful initiatives taking place across the industry. However, more work is needed to break down persistent barriers holding women back from entering, staying and progressing in the rail sector and to enable a more diverse workforce where all genders feel valued.

The rail sector must now build a culture of respect across workplaces and create the allies, employee groups and mentoring opportunities that can educate and empower people to champion that culture.

Participant priorities

‘Improved leadership on diversity and inclusion in my workplace’ was a top-rating priority by survey respondents – particularly women – for the sector to take meaningful steps towards being more diverse and inclusive.

Many rail sector leaders, CEOs and executives have publicly shared their commitment to diversity and inclusion, and many people who participated in this research referred to individual leaders who had supported their career progress.

For more consistent progress, the efforts of individual leaders must be supported by systemic practices at both the organisation and industry levels. Alongside visible leadership, men and women ranked education on respectful behaviours and mentoring programs among the top three priorities for diversity and inclusion progress.

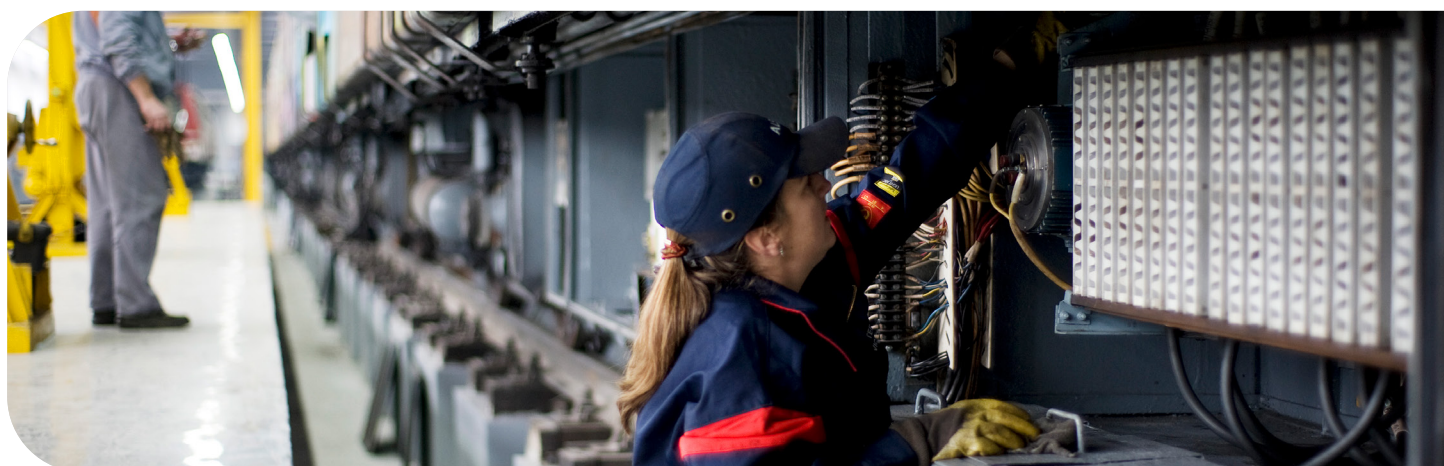
What women prioritise for the rail industry to take meaningful steps towards being more diverse and inclusive*

Improved leadership on diversity and inclusion in my workplace	68%
Education on respectful behaviours and unconscious bias	65%
Mentoring programs	53%
More inclusive infrastructure such as increased lighting for safety, steps to improve accessibility	44%
Encouraging gender diversity targets	44%
Education on diversity such as cultural awareness, LGBTIQA+ inclusion	43%

What men prioritise for the rail industry to take meaningful steps towards being more diverse and inclusive*

Education on respectful behaviours and unconscious bias	59%
Mentoring programs	59%
Improved leadership on diversity and inclusion in my workplace	43%
Education on diversity such as cultural awareness, LGBTIQA+ inclusion	40%
More inclusive infrastructure	37%
HR support	25%

(Note: respondents could choose more than one).



Key Recommendations

4.1 Individuals: The 'I' in Inclusion

Everyone can play a role in creating a more diverse and inclusive rail sector. As one survey respondent highlighted:

"We need to embed diversity and inclusion into our workplace culture. It is similar to having a strong safety culture, where everyone understands the importance of safety and that they have responsibilities to act safely. Everyone is responsible for fostering an inclusive culture. It is not the responsibility of only HR or managers."

There are many small things individuals can do in their everyday lives that support organisation and industry efforts to promote respect, diversity and inclusion.



1. Build your understanding:

- Think about your team and consider if it contains diverse perspectives and backgrounds that could help you generate new ideas and reflect the broader community using rail services. If your team does not contain a range of perspectives, think about steps you can take to improve diversity;
- Consider how a reliance on the 'way we've always done things around here' in rail can discourage new innovative practices and diminish the contribution of people from diverse backgrounds;
- Take part in education programs to learn about respectful and inclusive behaviours;
- Educate yourself about differing cultures, religions, gender identities, sexualities, and disabilities;
- Adopt a mindset that views diversity of background and thinking as a source of team strength that can be used to achieve better performance;
- Hold space for difference: expect your colleagues to think and act differently from you and see it as an opportunity to learn from them.

2. Be an inclusion ambassador:

- Use inclusive language and demonstrate respectful behaviour;
- Personally challenge inappropriate or exclusive behaviour (where it is safe to do so);
- Share practices you are learning (and unlearning) that help you be more inclusive of people from differing backgrounds;
- Practice curiosity to avoid gender and cultural stereotypes;
- If you are a team leader, do not assume that treating everyone the same will give your employees equal opportunity – think about whether there are some actions you can take (for example, providing flexible work hours or providing simple adjustments) so all employees can participate more fully in the workplace.

4.2 Organisation recommendations

For organisations to continue to make progress on diversity and inclusion and build a more gender-balanced sector, this report recommends 10 key practices. These practices are offered as ideas for progress over time. We recognise that implementation will vary, depending on organisation size, resourcing, and organisational maturity in efforts to support a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace.

Practices	Detailed recommendations
<p>1. Develop gender equality strategies and set targets.</p>	<p>1.1 Ensure senior leaders have a visible role in developing and promoting the strategy.</p> <p>1.2 Set gender diversity targets for the organisation.</p> <p>1.3 Set KPIs for managers relating to gender equality based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender representation at management and leadership levels; • Quantitative goals, other than those relating to representation, such as those relating to hiring and promotion, gender pay gaps, flexible work, parental leave take-up and incidents of gender-based harassment or discrimination; • Qualitative goals such as how well they have fostered employee engagement, an inclusive culture and positive attitude towards gender equality. <p>1.4 Reward leaders who are achieving progress on diversity and inclusion in their teams.</p> <p>1.5 Link the strategy to organisational goals and priorities.</p>
<p>2. Promote the use of gender impact assessments to create safe and inclusive spaces and practices that further understanding of differing lived experiences.</p>	<p>2.1 Identify key policies, programs and services that impact the public.</p> <p>2.2 Develop a gender/diversity impact assessment (with an intersectional lens) to assess how those policies and services meet the different needs of women, men and gender diverse people.</p> <p>2.3 Audit organisation sites to support the safety and needs of women and gender-diverse people.</p> <p>2.4 Implement actions to improve safety outcomes and avoid gendered stereotypes.</p>
<p>3. Work in partnership with the ARA to promote the benefits of working in the rail sector, including targeted campaigns.</p>	<p>3.1 Support industry efforts to showcase the diversity of roles in rail by promoting the 'Work in Rail' website and National Rail Skills Hub through internal and external communications and events.</p> <p>3.2 Identify opportunities to work with schools, universities, sporting organisations and community groups to attract women.</p> <p>3.3 Establish transition or entry level pathways into rail targeting women and other minority groups.</p>
<p>4. Minimise bias in the recruitment and development policy and process.</p>	<p>4.1 Provide education to hiring managers on identifying and challenging unconscious bias.</p> <p>4.2 Advertise in a range of non-traditional recruitment channels.</p> <p>4.3 Use digital tools to reduce gender-stereotyped wording and reach diverse talent pools.</p> <p>4.4 Formalise policies on performance management, training and development, succession planning and talent identification (and ensure gender equality is embedded.)</p>

<p>5. Provide education on respectful, inclusive behaviours in the workplace.</p>	<p>5.1 Through training programs, regular communications and events, educate all leaders and employees on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of inclusive workplace cultures; • Examples of unacceptable exclusionary behaviours in meetings and day-to-day interactions; • Examples of micro-validations (small, positive actions that encourage or affirm) that counter exclusionary behaviours; • How unconscious gender biases can impact hiring, performance review and succession planning processes; • Ways to be an 'upstander' to safely challenge exclusionary behaviours; • Processes to address harassment, discrimination and bullying; • Other related components to address the 'positive duty' of Australian organisations to create respectful workplaces. <p>5.2 Provide forums where culturally diverse and gender diverse leaders can share their stories.</p>
<p>6. Support men as allies, sponsors and champions of change, providing visible diversity leadership and support to encourage diversity.</p>	<p>6.1 Develop a sponsorship program where senior leaders identify opportunities for job rotations, lateral appointments and shadowing opportunities for high potential women.</p> <p>6.2 Encourage men in leadership positions to participate in organisation and/or industry champions of change programs.</p>
<p>7. Invest in mentoring and networking programs that allow women to connect with other women in the industry.</p>	<p>7.1 Invite women and gender diverse people to participate in networking opportunities.</p> <p>7.2 Develop internal mentoring programs and/or participate in industry mentoring programs.</p>
<p>8. Support Employee Resource Groups that allow communities of shared experience and interest to collectively drive change and education initiatives.</p>	<p>8.1 Establish and support employee resource groups for different groups, such as people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, culturally and racially marginalised women.</p> <p>8.2 Align the activities of employee resource groups with the gender equality and/or diversity and inclusion strategy.</p>
<p>9. Continue to promote the use of flexible working arrangements that support employees of all genders to balance work with other responsibilities.</p>	<p>9.1 Consult employees on preferred types of flexible arrangement in office, frontline, shift and site-based roles.</p> <p>9.2 Pilot initiatives.</p> <p>9.3 Promote hybrid work practices for non-frontline roles.</p>
<p>10. Promote gender equitable policies and facilities.</p>	<p>10.1 Promote shared leave and flexible work arrangements to all genders.</p> <p>10.2 Ensure women have appropriate protective equipment and clothing.</p> <p>10.3 Ensure women and gender diverse employees have appropriate facilities, including access to toilets, sanitary bins, and breast-feeding facilities.</p>

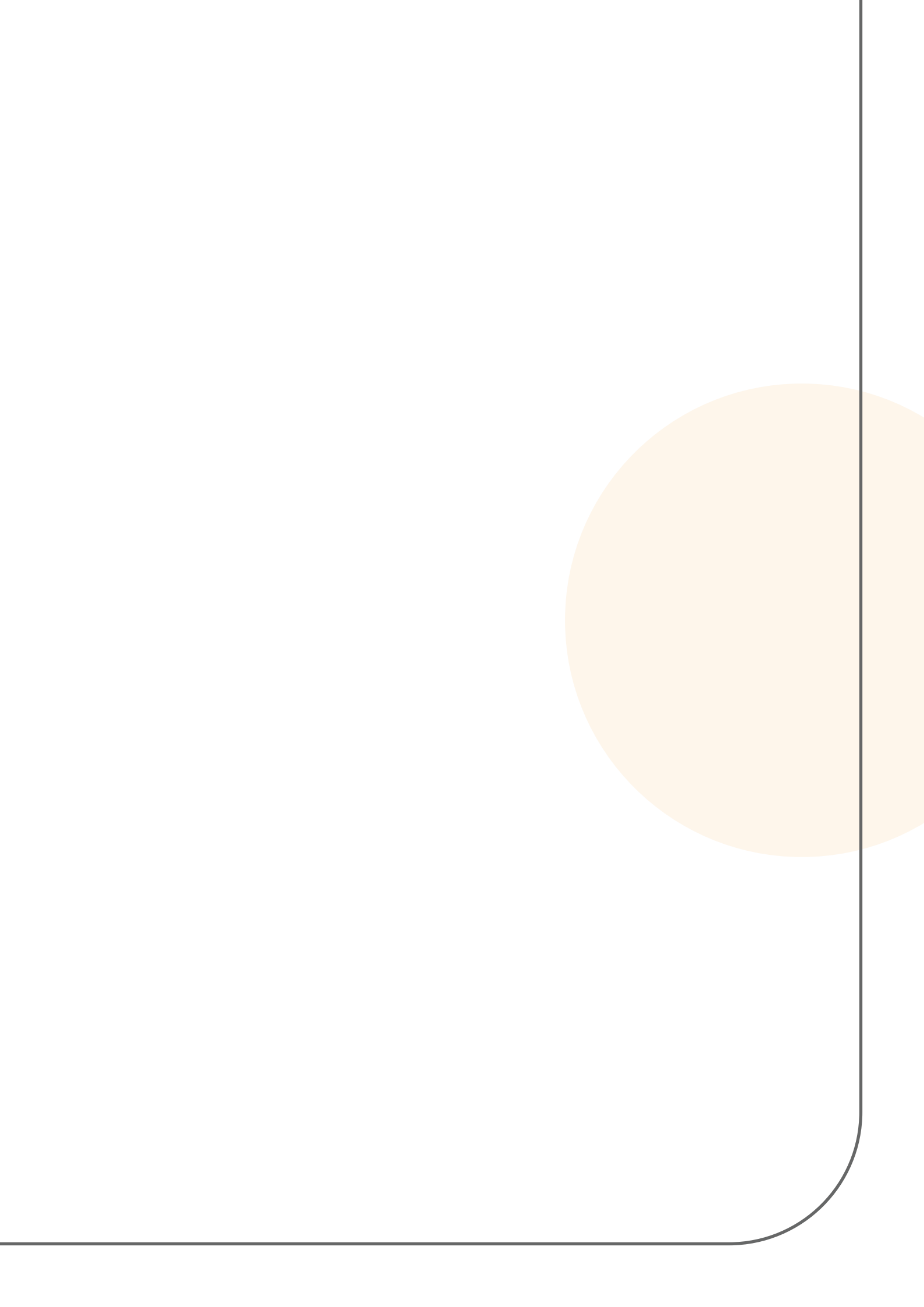
4.3 Industry Recommendations

Industry-based programs and resources are playing a vital role to support diversity and inclusion progress. These include mentoring programs and the 'Work in Rail' website promoting the benefits of working in the sector and the variety of opportunities featuring employees from diverse backgrounds.

Additional recommendations for industry consideration include the following:

Action	Why is this important?
1. ARA/NTC to consider leading the establishment of an industry code of conduct on respectful behaviours and a commitment to eliminating harassment and discrimination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because exclusionary behaviours and gender biases continue to impede diversity and inclusion progress in the rail sector.
2. ARA/NTC provide industry-wide education on inclusive leadership. Use opportunities at industry events to highlight exclusionary behaviours and unconscious biases that must be addressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because leading increasingly diverse teams requires highly developed skills such as cognisance of bias, cultural intelligence, humility and collaboration.
3. The ARA to encourage member firms to participate in Champions of Change Coalition program and investigate the establishment of a Champions of Change Rail Group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because male allies and sponsors who champion change and provide support to women build wider support for diversity and inclusion. • Because when people in power call out exclusionary behaviours, it is safer for others to do so.
4. The ARA to partner with members to consider targets for working towards greater gender diversity in different sectors across the industry (passenger operators, freight and heavy haul etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because setting clear quantifiable targets leads to higher diversity levels.
5. The ARA to continue to facilitate industry wide mentoring program and networking opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because it provides the necessary support through shared experiences.
6. The ARA to partner with industry to continue to raise the attractiveness of the sector to women and gender diverse people via the Work in Rail campaign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because targeted promotion and supporting pathways into the industry encourages a more diverse workforce.

The ARA partnered with the National Women in Transport to fund this report. National Women in Transport initiative brings government and industry together to increase the number of Australian women in transport.





Australasian Railway Association
ara.net.au

National Women in Transport
womenintransport.gov.au

Diversity Partners
diversitypartners.com.au