

Gender Compass.

Developed by Plan International Australia



Stage 2: Deep dive and messaging insights

Acknowledgement of Country

89 Degrees East and Plan International Australia acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.

We recognise that Australia cannot realise people having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes no matter their gender without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as non-Indigenous people. We recognise the leadership of communities in the fight for equality, human rights and self-determination and are committed to working towards addressing all forms of inequality.



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Plan International Australia would like to thank their generous project funding partners and supporters:



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If you are planning on using this research or would like to understand more about the results, please reach out to **89 Degrees East** (holly@89degreeseast.com) or **Plan International Australia** (info@plan.org.au)



Dr Rebecca Huntley
Director, 89 Degrees East

Rebecca Huntley is one of Australia's foremost researchers on social trends and a Fellow of the Women's Leadership Institute of Australia and The Research Society.

With a PhD in Gender Studies, Rebecca has been instrumental in addressing a major Australian research gap by developing the Gender Compass with Plan International and Heartward Strategic. Rebecca has also delivered the Climate Compass and Community Compass segmentations.

Rebecca is committed to maximising the impact of Gender Compass and regularly presents this work to corporate, government and community advocates. Rebecca believes a common framework and language for engaging Australians on this critical issue is key to realising equality.

Researcher's comment

When the foundational stage of Gender Compass was released in October 2023 it was received with enthusiasm across the gender equality sector. It was and continues to be socialised widely across government departments, NGOs, philanthropy and the corporate sector. Among the many questions that Stage 1 raised in the minds of gender equality advocates was 'what can Gender Compass tell us about how to communicate about gender equality goals across these audience segments?'

This is the central purpose of Gender Compass Stage 2, to develop, test and refine resonant messages and narratives around gender equality.

We started with qualitative research to gather a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the segments. That phase of the work, along with innovative results from a conversational AI tool, revealed common values and way of talking about this issue that engage everyone. This includes insights on how to talk to Rejectors who we cannot afford to further alienate. Dial testing reinforced the findings of the other methods and enabled us to provide clear guidance on the language and messaging principles that advocates can apply and adapt in their efforts to advance gender equality goals.

Among the many insights and take-outs from this work, the importance of empathy and listening stands out to me. In the broader atmosphere of anxiety, polarisation and misinformation in public life, continuing to try to understand people with different mindsets remains critical to advocates and communicators. Inclusive language and creating opportunities for people to work in collaboration has never been more important. And despite the current global backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion programmes, this research shows a high level of openness to discuss gender equality in a range of settings including the workplace and schools.

We are in the midst of a critical political and cultural moment, a time where those leaders and organisations committed to gender equality goals might feel disheartened. However, the results of the Gender Compass Stage 2 provide optimism and actionable guidance about how to create and continue a positive, inclusive and impactful discussion about gender equality goals for the benefit of us all.



Susanne Legena
CEO Plan International Australia

Susanne Legena is the CEO of Plan International Australia, a passionate feminist, and a champion of young people. With over 20 years' experience in corporate communications, government relations, and campaigning, she is committed to driving social change.

Susanne is passionate about design thinking and human-centred design, aiming to co-create solutions to complex global challenges like poverty, gender equality, and climate change.

Since joining Plan International Australia's executive team in 2011 and becoming CEO in 2017, she has led the organisational focus on equality for girls. She also serves as the Chair of the Emergency Action Alliance, is a Director of Community Plus, supporting community development in Melbourne's West.

A message from Plan International Australia

We find ourselves at a critical moment in history. Across the globe, we are witnessing a rollback of gender equality, with rising political instability, economic crises, and humanitarian emergencies threatening to undo decades of hard-won progress.

With increasing resistance to gender equality, we must communicate its importance, and this is where *Gender Compass* plays a crucial role. Stage 1 provided essential insights into how Australians view gender equality and offered a roadmap for engaging different segments of the community.

Stage 2 focuses on the 'moveable middle'—the Hopeful, Conflicted, and Moderate segments—those who may not yet be fully convinced but are open to change. This segment holds great potential to shift societal views, as they share core values like safety and the freedom for everyone to live to their full potential. These shared values present an opportunity for meaningful engagement, but it requires approaching the conversation differently than we would with Trailblazers.

Some of the advice in this research may be uncomfortable, as it challenges the way we've traditionally approached gender equality conversations. It may seem like a step back at times, but it's a strategic move to engage a broader audience and build long-term support for deeper, systemic change. This isn't about abandoning core values but gently shifting perceptions to create lasting change.

The stakes are high. The global rollback of rights is a warning, showing how quickly the erosion of freedoms can happen. *Gender Compass* is a call to action—to engage, listen, and act with empathy. We have the power to shape a future where gender equality is not just a goal, but a reality for everyone.

Gender Compass | Overview



Background

Stage 1 2023

HEARTWARD
STRATEGIC



Stage 2 2024

89
DEGREES
EAST

Plan International Australia set out to develop a unique tool to support gender equality advocates to target specific audiences, shift their attitudes and mobilise them to take action.

Since its launch in 2023, Gender Compass has been embraced by advocates in government, nonprofit and corporate sectors and is playing an essential role in helping to shift harmful attitudes by guiding effective communication with different sections of the Australian community.

Gender Compass Stage 1 (2023) aimed to map where Australians are at on the issue of gender (in)equality, segmenting them based on their attitudes and beliefs and profiling these segments in terms of broad experiences, behaviours and values.

Gender Compass Stage 2 (2024) was about digging deeper to get to the heart of who the segments are, to understand what shapes their attitudes and beliefs and how best to communicate with each segment on this issue.

Stage 2 of this important research was conducted using a mixed methods approach, split in two phases.

The initial qualitative phase, conducted in October 2024 in partnership with Heartward Strategic, got to the heart of each segment. Focus groups and analysis of responses to a conversational AI tool revealed what shapes the beliefs of each segment and, most critically, which values, words and examples make gender equality a more salient issue.

The quantitative phase was conducted in November–December 2024. It consisted of a survey and dial test to further explore themes surfaced in the qualitative phase and refine our understanding of the language and framing of gender equality that works (and doesn't work) with each segment.

This report provides a brief outline of key qualitative findings but focuses predominantly on findings from the survey and dial test. Findings from Stage 2 have informed the development of a Messaging Guide.

Stage 1 Recap | Segmentation



Stage 1: Segmentation

In 2023, we aimed to map where Australians are at on the issue of gender (in)equality, segmenting them based on their attitudes and beliefs and profiling these segments in terms of broad experiences, behaviours and values.

Methodology:

- Online survey of 2,522 Australians, aged 16 and older.
- Age, gender and location quotas were applied to ensure the final sample represented the Australian public.
- As much as possible, existing validated questions, statements and response options were used within the questionnaire.



HEARTWARD
STRATEGIC

Heartward Strategic was commissioned to design and implement the research and analyse and interpret the results, with Dr Rebecca Huntley acting as advisor and supporting the socialisation of Gender Compass.

Core segmentation questions

Responses on a 10-pt scale to 11 core attitudinal questions determine allocation to a Gender Compass segment.

1. How close or far is Australia from achieving women having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men?
2. There are no gender-based differences in skills and talents.
3. Men are discriminated against on the basis of their gender.
4. I support transgender and non-binary people having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as cisgender people.
5. I feel like I can't speak openly about my views on gender.
6. Equality doesn't make sense when there are basic biological differences between males and females.
7. There are fewer women than men in leadership positions because of gender discrimination.
8. Men have more opportunity than women to earn the main household income.
9. Families function well and children are best supported when mothers do the caring and fathers earn the income.
10. There's no harm in men making jokes about women when they are among other men.
11. Gender equality won't be achieved in Australia unless people of all genders take actions to support this issue.

Trailblazer 19%

For the Trailblazer segment, the issue of gender equality is salient and vital. They are hopeful about the issue and strongly support measures to address inequality yet are also frustrated, concerned, and think equality remains a fair way off.

According to the Trailblazer segment, gender equality is everyone's business. Their strong views are informed by their lived experience of gender inequality, with nearly three quarters reporting personally experiencing harmful impacts.

People belonging to the Trailblazer segment are mainly cisgender women, somewhat younger, and are much more likely to identify as LGBTQIA+. They are slightly more likely to live in regional areas. They are educated, growth-oriented people, who cherish fairness and equality over other values.



% based on 2023 survey (Base n=2,522)

Hopeful 24%

Equality is important to the Hopeful segment, they are well aware of persisting inequality and largely support measures to address it, but their views and voices are less insistent and less urgent than the Trailblazers.

Most have experienced negative impacts because of their gender, mainly relating to inequalities in caring for home or family. In relation to gender equality, hopefulness is the dominant feeling for this segment, though they also feel concern and a sense of uncertainty. The Hopeful place a high value on fairness and equal opportunity, but also value feeling safe and caring for others.

The Hopeful segment are more likely to be cisgender women and tend to be older than the other segments.



% based on 2023 survey (Base n=2,522)

Conflicted 12%

Gender equality is important to the Conflicted segment, but action to address it is less so, since they are unaware of many of its impacts and believe we are very close to achieving it.

Overall, they feel positive or neutral about gender equality and hold mixed views – both traditional and progressive. This segment see gender equality as an issue for men too.

Equality and fairness are not core values and the Conflicted are the only segment aware that their gender has, on balance, advantaged them, rather than had negative impacts.

The Conflicted segment are mostly younger, cisgender men. They tend to be more urban, educated, employed, from a diverse religious or cultural background, and have young families.



% based on 2023 survey (Base n=2,522)

Moderate 23%

The enthusiasm of the Moderate segment towards the issue of gender equality is restrained. This mildly positive neutrality is evident in their hopeful, content feelings and lukewarm response to any change initiatives.

For this segment, the importance of the issue is impacted by their lack of awareness of its impacts and their focus on other priorities.

Overall, this segment have personally experienced some negative impacts of gender inequality but fairness and equality are not values they hold dear. They place higher value on personal freedom, safety and security, and caring for others.

The Moderate segment reflects most population demographics, though cisgender women are slightly overrepresented.



% based on 2023 survey (Base n=2,522)

Indifferent 6%

Gender equality is not on this segment's radar.

Predominant feelings are neutrality or uncertainty, their awareness of the impacts of gender inequality is low, and when it comes to support for specific initiatives, most refrain from expressing a view either for or against.

Gender inequalities have had a negative impact on far fewer than in any other segment. This segment is the least likely to value equality and fairness and the most likely to value fun and loyalty.

The Indifferent are the smallest segment. They are similar to population demographics, except for their lower levels of education.



% based on 2023 survey (Base n=2,522)

Rejector 17%

The Rejector segment believe gender equality is no longer an issue and that change for equality for women has gone too far.

It is men's experience of gender discrimination they are concerned with (yet may not express openly). They feel neutral or content about gender equality, are broadly unaware of its contemporary impacts and are the least supportive of any change initiatives.

Some report experiencing negative mental health impacts as a result of their gender. The Rejector segment tend to be cisgender men, educated at TAFE or college, slightly older and based outside cities.

This is the segment most likely to value respecting tradition, rules and norms, freedom and economic security.



% based on 2023 survey (Base n=2,522)

Topline tensions



Topline tensions

Stage 2 of Gender Compasses surfaced a broad range of conflicting and at times contradictory beliefs that Australians have about gender equality. To effectively navigate and respond to these tensions, communicators must first understand them.

Most Australians think gender equality is important.

But... inequality is under-recognised. Many people think we are close to achieving equality in Australia and that women are treated fairly in most areas of life. If Australians don't see the imbalance (inequality), gender equality solutions seem overblown (and potentially unfair).

Most people agree we should treat every person fairly, no matter their gender.

But... for many Australians, freedom, safety and caring for others are more resonant values than fairness and equality.

There is broad recognition that gender equality benefits everyone.

But... Australians are not on the same page about what gender equality means and looks like.

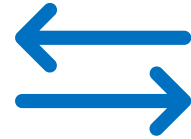
There is broad recognition of a shared problem (rigid gender expectations holding us back).

But... people of all genders can struggle to recognise the challenges faced by people of a different gender to them. Men especially exhibit a limited understanding of women's experiences of inequality.

Most are supportive of solutions aimed at addressing gender inequality.

But... the belief equality is close to being realised in Australia creates ambivalence and contributes to a lack of urgency.

Topline tensions



Many Australians are concerned about the pressures on men and boys.

But... this ranges from the harm caused by rigid ideas about masculinity to broader concerns about men coming under increasing scrutiny, with some feeling there is a 'war on men'.

Most support more opportunities and equal outcomes for women and girls.

But... many assume this means less for men and boys (zero sum game thinking). People are also sensitive to anything that feels like pitting men and women against each other – an adversarial approach does not speak to people's lived experience.

There is significant appetite for working together.

But... working together requires us to create space for men in the story, presenting their concerns alongside those of women and other groups who are disproportionately impacted by inequality.

Most people are open to discussing gender equality at work and in other settings.

But... the type of language typically used by advocates of gender equality can be polarising and risks pushing people further away.

There is potential to engage the 'movable middle' to create real change.

But... it requires us to be creative and adapt our storytelling to meet people where they're at.

Stage 2 | Qualitative insights



Qualitative overview

Different segments, same approach

In October 2024, 89 Degrees East and Heartward Strategic conducted **10 focus groups** – two per segment (except Indifferent), split by gender. These findings were analysed alongside responses to a conversational AI tool.

A deep dive into each segment revealed that **we can respond to differences between segments with similar messages.**

Examining the segments in isolation showed us that **the same types of words, stories and values** may mean slightly different things to different segments but **can still be effective.**

This phase revealed we may not have to tailor communications to each segment, but **can communicate across segments using language, frames and examples that have broader resonance.**

Note from Plan:

This is an important revelation, as advocates are rarely communicating with a single segment in isolation, but rather with a cross-section of the population.



Qualitative insights

Different starting points for different segments.

- Australians are looking at gender (in)equality through different lenses.
- Some think macro and call for solutions that address systemic bias, social constructs, and the broader culture.
- Others think micro: my household, my community, my workplace. This means they find day to day examples of inequality most resonant.
- There are also those who are tuned out or dismissive of the problem altogether.

Men feel uncomfortable and fearful, and women are worried.

- A major theme emerging from this phase was concern about pressures on men and boys.
- This ranges from concerns about the impact of "toxic masculinity" on men's mental health (and the impact on families and communities) through to concerns about men feeling "scrutinised" and afraid to say or do the wrong thing.
- Others feel that "good men" are being unfairly blamed for the actions of a few "bad men".

If we're assuming, we're losing.

- If Australians don't see the imbalance (inequality), gender equality solutions seem overblown (and potentially unfair/harmful to men).
- **Inadequate listening on both sides is a major challenge.**
- There is a need to build awareness of the different pressures on women and men and to clearly communicate how these pressures (products of a shared problem) can be alleviated by working together for a more equal world.

Bridging the empathy gap to bring people together.

- An adversarial approach does not speak to people's lived experience. Across the segments, many were sensitive to anything they saw as pitting men and women against each other.
- There is an appetite for gender equality solutions that address both men's concerns and women's concerns.



We have an opportunity to connect the dots between the barriers people of all genders face and present equality solutions as beneficial to everyone.

Qualitative insights: Messaging implications

Potential in the 'moveable middle' to create real change.

- Despite their distinct differences, the Hopeful, Moderate and Conflicted segments have many things in common: They all want to see women and men treated fairly and for boys and girls to be free to live their full potential, to feel safe and choose their own path in life.

Take a shortcut.

- To move the 'middle', we need to meet people where they're at, using resonant shortcuts that connect to people's current values and lived experience.

It's about all of us.

- Most prefer inclusive language that situates everyone in the narrative and emphasises everyone working together for collective benefit.
- Many in the 'middle' (Hopeful-Moderates-Conflicted) are put off by strong, divisive language which they see as pitting men and women against each other.
- The good news is, Trailblazers understand the need to adapt how we say things to meet people where they're at.



We need to write men into the story, but not as the main character.

The aim is not to sideline women's experience, but to invite men to see themselves reflected.

Qualitative insights: Messaging implications



Fertile ground

The qualitative phase revealed settings, themes and values that have broad resonance. We put many of these to the test by embedding them in our survey and messages.

- **Workplace** conversations about gender equality
- Leveraging **professional sport** as an example of gender equality benefits
- Education – teaching **respect and empathy from an early age**
- Demonstrate **harmfulness of rigid gender roles for men and women**
- **Inclusive communications** that lead with empathy and understanding
- **Relatable, everyday examples** of gender inequality and equality so people can see themselves and their loved ones reflected.
- **Accessible language** – translate abstract 'Trailblazer language' (e.g. *patriarchy, gender norms*) into plain English.
- Connecting to **values about freedom/opportunity/choosing own goals/respect/safety** (resonant across segments)
- Emphasising **impact on boys and men as well as women and girls**
- Opportunities for **meaningful conversations** with people 'close to them'

Stage 2 | Survey & Dial Test



Methodology



2,048
community members
surveyed (16+)

Representative sample
Quotas based on 2021 ABS census data were set to recruit a nationally representative sample by age (16 +), gender and location. This sample did not require additional weighting.



Survey & dial test

89 Degrees East fielded an online survey in November–December 2024, collecting responses from 2,048 diverse community members (16+). Age, gender and location quotas were set to ensure a nationally representative sample.

The 15-minute survey consisted of:

- Key demographic questions
- Core Gender Compass questions to enable application of the 11-statement segmentation algorithm
- **Questions exploring:**
 - Perceptions and attitudes relating to gender equality
 - Level of support for different gender equality solutions
 - Resonance and impact of specific values, frames and language
 - Responses to different examples of gender inequality and equality
- Dial testing component where respondents provided moment-by-moment ratings of five randomised audio messages which put forward different arguments relating to gender equality.
- Repeat questions to identify shifts after exposure to supporter and opponent arguments.

89 Degrees East was supported in the data collection and quantitative analysis phase by Qdos Research.

Segment distribution

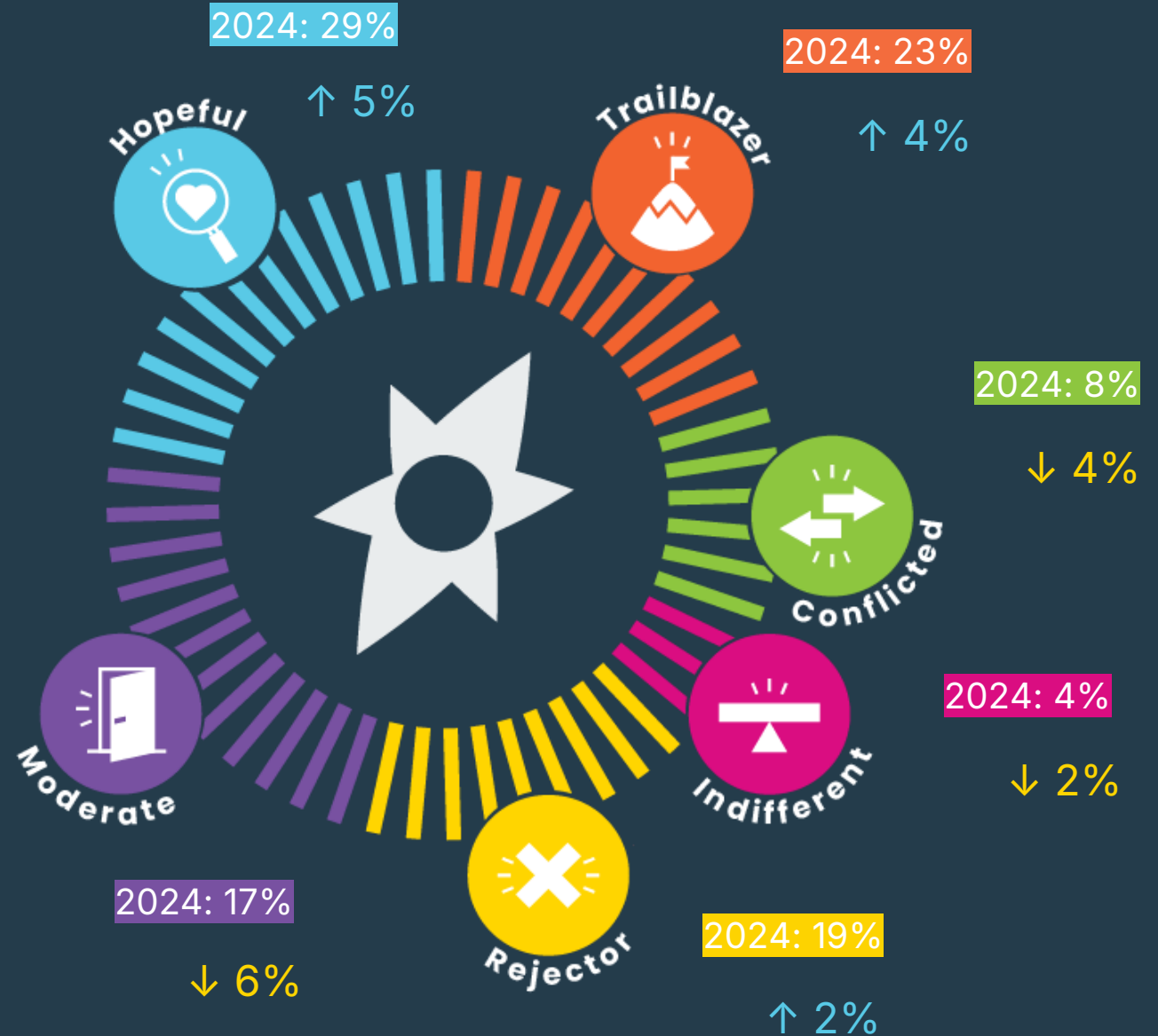
Slight shift in segment sizes.

Compared to the Stage 1 survey sample (n=2,522), the Stage 2 sample (n=2,048) consists of more Trailblazers (+4%) and Hopefuls (+5%) but fewer from the Moderate (-6%) and Conflicted (-4%) segments.

The main contributing factor to these shifts is likely random error relating to application of the 11-statement algorithm to determine the segments and in the sampling itself (i.e. by chance, this representative sample skews slightly more supportive).

This is a more likely explanation than a significant shift in Australians' attitudes towards being more supportive of gender equality than they were in June–July 2023.

Note: A recent omnibus sample collected by Heartward Strategic in mid 2024 (n=3,829) reflected a similar fallout after applying a reduced version of the Gender Compass algorithm.



The binary elephant in the room



The binary nature of the language in this report is not reflective of the researchers' views on gender but has been used to aid in the development of an understanding of views across the breadth of the Australian public on gender equality.

While advocates and other groups in the community are moving away from binary language and framing in efforts to recognise and respect non-binary and gender-diverse people, the research finds that the majority of Australians are still thinking in the gender binary.

This presents a unique challenge when seeking to understand the views of the broader Australian population on gender equality, especially when any mention of transgender, non-binary and LGBTQIA+ people can trigger a defensive response or prompt audiences to disengage. For this reason, the wording in the research instruments and tested messaging is often binary in nature ("men and women"), as are the descriptions of community attitudes and assumptions.

Evidently, there is a need to balance 'meeting people where they're at' (assumed gender binary) and ensuring that our language does not erase or block gender diverse and LGBTQIA+ people from being part of the conversation and accessing the same rights, opportunities and outcomes.

A note on intersectionality



This challenge is compounded by the need to consider intersectionality when discussing gender equality.

While the researchers and Plan International recognise the significance of intersecting identities, which can create compounded barriers—particularly for women and gender minorities who may experience not only gender-based discrimination but also racial, economic, or ableist discrimination—it's crucial to first make gender inequality explicit. Otherwise, the research finds that the majority of audiences switch off before engaging with the message at all.

Our approach starts with a focus on gender to ensure that the fundamental issues of gender inequality are addressed clearly.

We recognise that this focus does not capture the full complexity of intersecting oppressive forces such as race, class, and disability. However, by first addressing gender inequality head-on, we aim to build a foundation that will enable us to more effectively communicate and act on discrimination in all its forms, acknowledging how different systems of power intersect and shape the experiences and opportunities of individuals.

Ultimately, until all people, regardless of gender identity or other factors, have equal access to their rights and opportunities, the struggle for true gender equality cannot be fully realised. This approach lays the groundwork for expanding efforts to address multiple layers of discrimination in the future.

Results | Executive Summary



Executive Summary

A survey and dial test of 2,048 community members (16+) reveals the majority of Australians...

- **Care about gender equality.**
9 in 10 Australians say gender equality is important to them personally.
- **Value treating every person fairly.**
9 in 10 agree we should treat every person with equal respect and dignity no matter their gender.
- **Believe equality benefits our society.**
8 in 10 believe women having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men has benefits. 6 in 10 think it will benefit *everyone*.
- **Are supportive of equality solutions.**
On average, 8 in 10 Australians agree with solutions aimed at addressing gender inequality.

Certain demographics are consistently more supportive such as cisgender women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Often (but not always) agreement with equality statements is higher amongst people who may be subjected to other forms of discrimination, such as people with disability.



This all seems like good news for gender equality advocates.

So why do we still face ambivalence and resistance to efforts to advance gender equality?

Executive Summary

Ambivalence and a lack of urgency are influenced by a limited recognition of persisting inequality.

The research reveals that many Australians...

- **Care about gender equality, but think it has been addressed.**
6 in 10 believe we are close to achieving or have already achieved women having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men.
- **Value equality, but believe women these days are treated fairly.**
5 in 10 believe women in Australia are treated fairly in most areas of life and have access to the same choices and opportunities as men.

Some recognition of a shared problem and need for change.

- 2 in 3 Australians believe men and women are held back by rigid gender expectations and want to move forward.
- 2 in 3 Australians think men need to make some adjustments to their behaviour and attitudes in order for 'women to have the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men'.

There is fertile ground here and potential to emphasise that narrow ideas about 'what it means to be a man or a woman' are a shared problem that needs to be solved by working together.

But counter narratives are also resonating.

- 1 in 3 believe men are under attack and/ **being discriminated** against.
- **Message testing reveals 1 in 2 Australians find a narrative that calls for us to "stop blaming men" and accept "basic biological differences between men and women" very convincing.**



Discomfort and resistance to advancing women's rights, opportunities and outcomes is significantly shaped by these concerns.

Executive Summary

The good news

Australians are open to having this conversation.

- The vast majority believe it's appropriate to talk about gender equality topics such as fair treatment and respectful relationships in a range of settings.
- 3 in 4 Australians are open to discussing gender equality and related topics **at work**, and the most common feelings expressed in response to this scenario were **hopeful, proud, safe** and **enthusiastic**.

Significant appetite for working together.

- More than 8 in 10 Australians say we need to stop pitting men and women against each other and focus on how we can all work together.
- Dial testing results show that an emphasis on working together for collective benefit is not only motivating and inclusive but can mitigate concerns about this division.

How to have an effective conversation

We have a clearer sense of the words, values, and examples that resonate across the Gender Compass segments.

- **Lean into shared values:** *Safety/caring for others, freedom/choosing own goals and equal chance to be your best.*
- **Embrace inclusive language:** Talking about *everyone, us, working together* helps people to see themselves in the story and feel part of the solution.
- **Demonstrate the impact on women *and* men:** This makes the issue more salient and relevant to a wider audience and can mitigate 'zero sum game' thinking i.e. a focus on *more* for women can lead some to assume this means *less* for men.
- **Use relatable, everyday examples:** Rather than talking in the abstract, real examples in settings people relate to makes inequality more obvious and make the benefits of equality relevant and achievable. They also help people to recognise themselves and their loved ones in the story.

Results | Attitudes & beliefs



Attitudes & beliefs

Summary

Gender equality is important to many Australians... but what happens when many think women in Australia already have many of the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men?

- 9 in 10 Australians (89%) think women in Australia having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men is important.
- However, 6 in 10 Australians (63%) believe we are close to achieving or have already achieved women having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men. Only 1 in 10 think we are far from achieving this (9%).

Opportunity: This issue is important to many Australians.

Challenge: Limited public awareness of persisting inequality means even though Australians say this issue matters to them, if many believe this problem has been resolved, the issue loses salience and urgency. This may also undermine support for equality solutions aimed at restoring balance (may seem overblown if you don't perceive an imbalance).

Encouraging acknowledgments:

- **Everyone needs to act.** 7 in 10 (67%) think gender equality won't be achieved in Australia until people of all genders take action.
- **Jokes are harmful.** 6 in 10 (66%) reject the idea that there's no harm in men making jokes about women when among other men.
- **Unequal opportunity to earn.** 6 in 10 (62%) agree men have more opportunity than women to earn the main household income.

However, many are cautious about sharing their views. Only 1 in 3 (33%) feel they can speak openly about their views on gender.

Cause for concern:

- **Extending equality to everyone.** Only 6 in 10 (58%) support transgender and non-binary people having the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as cisgender people.
- **Anxiety about reverse discrimination.** 26% believe men are discriminated against based on their gender.
- **Equality despite biological difference.** 26% say equality doesn't make sense due to basic biological differences between men and women.

Attitudes & beliefs

Demographic variance

Certain cohorts are consistently more supportive.

In addition to the Trailblazer and Hopeful segments (and sometimes the Conflicted), these demographic groups are more likely to both recognise gender inequality *and* support equality solutions:

- **Cisgender women of all ages** (n=1,041)
 - depending on the question, it can be younger women or older women who are the most supportive of equality statements and solutions (i.e. support is not consistently higher among specific age groups of women).
- People who identify as part of the **LGBTIQA+ community** (n=176)
- People with a **university qualification** (n=860)

Lived experience plays a role.

Cohorts more likely to experience gender-based discrimination, such as cisgender women and members of the LGBTIQA+ community, are on average more supportive.

However, on certain questions we see higher levels of support among groups who may experience other or intersecting forms of discrimination such as **people with disability** (n=209).



Level of support can significantly vary by age/generation and parental status/age of children but this variance is not consistent across the survey.

Attitudes & beliefs

Demographic variance

Some groups are consistently less supportive.

Along with the Rejectors, Moderates and sometimes the Conflicted, these cohorts do not necessarily reject the idea of gender equality, or disagree with equality solutions, but are less supportive than other groups overall.

- **Cis men of all ages** (n=995)
– whether younger or older men are least supportive varies by question.
- **Members of a religious or spiritual group** (n=328)
– more likely to value conformity and traditional gender roles.

Note: Other groups, such as **people with a TAFE/Cert/Diploma qualification** (n=568) and **self-employed people** (n=104) are often less supportive, but not consistently so.

There are different drivers of opposition.

For some, opposition is shaped more by conservatism than the belief gender equality efforts have 'gone too far'.

These cohorts want to see women and men treated fairly but with minimal disruption to the traditional gender roles and family structures they value.

Includes: members of a religious/spiritual group (n=328) and culturally and linguistically diverse people (n=443).

The influence of ambivalence.

For some groups, such as the Indifferent segment, lower levels of support are more reflective of ambivalence than resistance. I.e. Higher proportion of neutral scores (4-6) dilute responses.

Results | Perceived consequences



Perceived consequences of achieving gender equality

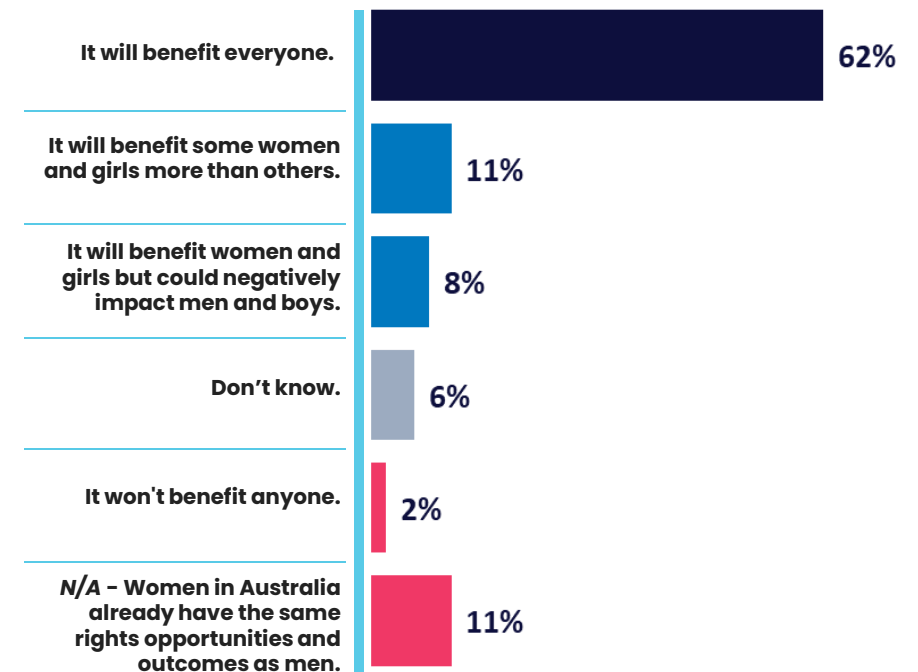
2 in 3 Australians (62%) believe everyone will benefit if Australia reaches a point where women have access to the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men.

- Certain cohorts are much more likely to think gender equality will **benefit everyone**: Trailblazers (88%), Hopeful (78%), people in the LGBTIQ+ community, cis women (66%) and people with a university education (67%).
- However, 4 in 10 are not totally convinced.
 - 1 in 10 (11%) worry this will **benefit some women and girls more than others**.
 - 1 in 10 (8%) think this **would benefit women but could negatively impact men and boys**.
 - Very few (2%) think this **would not benefit anyone**, and 6% **don't know**.

A further 1 in 10 (11%) dismiss this question as *not applicable*, believing **women already have the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men** in Australia.

This answer is more common among Rejectors (38%), self-employed people (20%), people with a TAFE/Cert/Diploma qualification (15%) and cisgender men (14%).

Q14. If Australia reaches a point where women have access to the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men ...
Select one.



Total sample (n=2,048)

Results | Forced choice



A forced-choice question **forces survey participants to select an option from the given choices.**

In this instance, participants were presented with two statements and were asked to choose the statement closest to their views.

Choices still limited // Treated fairly

1 in 2 Australians (53%) believe women still face unfair treatment because of outdated stereotypes that limit their choices and opportunities.

More likely to hold this view: Trailblazers (83%), Hopefuls (66%), people in the LGBTIQ+ community (67%), people living with disability (67%) and cis women (65%), especially Gen Z: 16-19 yr old cis women (68%) and 20-29 yr old cis women (78%).

However, 1 in 2 Australians (47%) believe the opposite - that women are treated fairly in most areas of life and have access to the same choices and opportunities as men in Australia today.

More likely to hold this view: Rejectors (83%), Conflicted (63%), Indifferent (63%), Moderates (60%), cis men (60%), members of religious/spiritual groups (59%), people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (52%) and parents of teens (55%) and adults aged 18-24 (53%).

- This reinforces findings from the qualitative phase which indicated Australians are not on the same page about persisting inequality. We cannot assume that people
 - a) perceive inequality between genders; and
 - b) link differences in outcomes to inequality rather than personal choice.
- Lived experience of advancements in gender equality may also lull people into a false sense of security - think 'we've arrived' rather than 'we still have a way to go'.

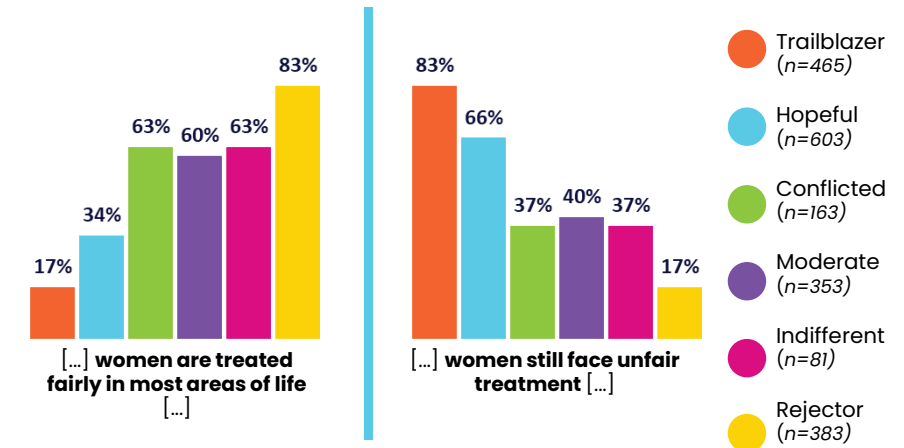
Q15 Which sounds MOST RIGHT?

In Australia, women are treated fairly in most areas of life and have access to the same choices and opportunities as men.

In Australia, women still face unfair treatment because of outdated stereotypes that limit their choices and opportunities.



Total sample (n=2,048)



Narrow gender roles // Biological differences

More than 1 in 2 (56%) Australians believe moving on from narrow ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman will make it easier for people to be their true selves and follow their dreams.

More likely to hold this view: Trailblazers (79%), people in the LGBTIQ+ community (74%), Hopefuls (67%), people with a university qualification (60%) and cis women (60%), – especially cis women under 30.

However, the counter argument appeals to many. Nearly one in two (44%) Australians think it's better for everyone if we accept that there are basic biological differences between men and women that lead people to want different things and make different choices.

More likely to hold this view: Rejectors (70%), Indifferent (59%), Conflicted (58%), Moderates (57%), cis men over 70 (55%), members of a religious group (54%), people living in QLD (50%) and people with a TAFE/Cert/Diploma qualification (50%).

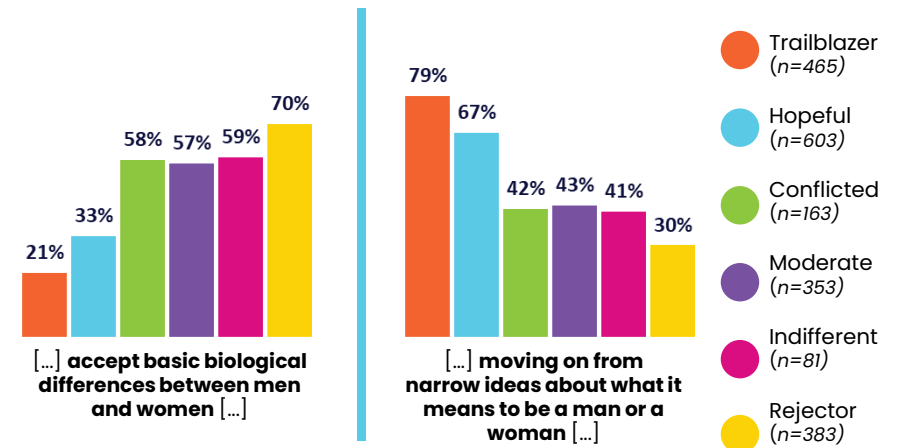
Q16 Which sounds MOST RIGHT?

It's better for everyone when we accept there are basic biological differences between men and women that lead people to want different things and make different choices.

Moving on from narrow ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman makes it easier for people to be their true selves and follow their dreams.



Total sample (n=2,048)



- This demonstrates that many Australians still attribute the different choices and paths that men and women take to differences in biology more than constructed ideas about gender. We cannot assume people recognise and agree that rigid ideas about gender contribute to persisting inequalities between men and women.

Men need to adjust // A war on men

2 in 3 Australians (68%) think men need to make some adjustments to their behaviour and attitudes in order for women to have the same rights, opportunities and outcomes as men. This reveals broad support and acknowledgement of the role that men and boys have to play in achieving gender equality.

More likely to hold this view: Trailblazer (89%), Hopeful (81%), members of the LGBTIQ+ community (77%), people with a university qualification (74%) and cis women (75%) - especially young women aged 16-19 (84%) and 20-29 (85%).

However, 1 in 3 people (32%) connect with a statement about feminists and the mainstream media waging a war on men that blames good men and innocent boys for things outside of their control.

More likely to hold this view: Rejector (65%), Moderate (40%), Conflicted (39%), self-employed (43%), parents of teens (38%), parents of young adults (41%), cis men (39%), people with a TAFE/Cert/Diploma qualification (39%) and people who identify as religious (38%).

Despite being a minority view, we cannot afford to ignore the concern that there is a 'war on men'. Failure to recognise and respond to this anxiety risks pushing these people further away.

Q17 Which sounds MOST RIGHT?

Feminists and the mainstream media are waging a war on men which blames good men and innocent boys for things outside of their control.

For women to have the same rights and opportunities as men, men need to make some adjustments to their behaviour and attitudes.



Total sample (n=2,048)



Results | Values & narratives



Resonant values statements

The Stage 2 survey confirmed that people across the segments connected most with statements evoking the resonant values identified during the qualitative phase.

We gave 2,048 respondents five values statements and asked them to choose the two *closest to their views*.

Close to 1 in 2 Australians connected with at least one of the values statements informed by the qualitative phase:

- **Every person deserves to feel safe and cared for by the people in their lives** (47%).
- **Every person deserves an equal chance to be the best they can be** (46%).
- **Every person should be free to be their true selves and choose their own path in life** (42%).

This tells us that the values of safety/caring for others, equal opportunity, and freedom/choosing own goals are resonant across the Australian community.

The statement selected least frequently was an overtly pro-gender equality statement.

29% choose **Every person deserves to be treated fairly and to grow up in a gender-equal world**.

- The explicit reference to a “gender equal world” is less likely to appeal broadly as it is issue-specific. This could explain why only 3 in 10 Australians (29%) selected this fairness/equality statement in their top two, as opposed to the more broadly resonant, universal values statement such as **Every person deserves to feel safe**.

These values are effective across the board.

When critics of gender equality action leverage similar values (freedom/ choice) it also appeals to more than 1 in 3 Australians. 36% connected with:

Every person should be free to make choices based on their natural strengths and abilities as a man or a woman.

Supporter narratives

Broad agreement with equality statements.

- 9 in 10 Australians (86%) agree we should treat every person with equal respect and dignity no matter their gender, sexuality, race or religion. Only 2% disagree.
- 8 in 10 (76%) believe gender equality is about treating every person fairly, including gender diverse and transgender people. Only 5% disagree.
- 7 in 10 (69%) think promoting gender equality will help to address other forms of inequality. Only 5% disagree.

Majority recognise impact of gender expectations.

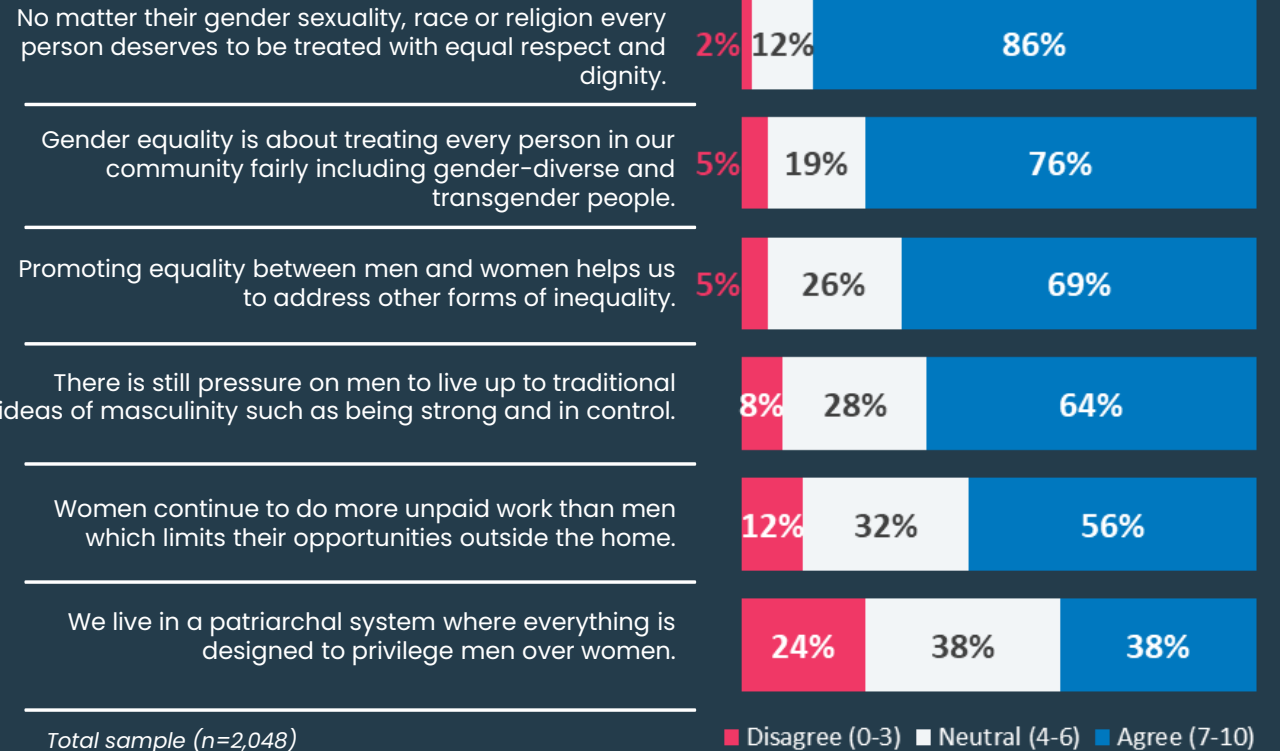
- More than 6 in 10 Australians (64%) agree there is still pressure on men to live up to traditional ideas of masculinity such as being strong and in control.
- Nearly 6 in 10 Australians (56%) believe women are still doing more unpaid work than men and that this is limiting their opportunities outside the home.

Less convinced by systemic injustice speak.

- 4 in 10 Australians (38%) think we live in a patriarchal system where everything is designed to privilege men over women. However, more than 2 in 10 (24%) reject this idea.

Q18. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

Average score: 0 'Strongly disagree' - 10 'Strongly agree'



Pro-gender equality cohorts are more likely to agree: Trailblazers, Hopefuls, people in the LGBTIQA+ community, and cis women. Conflicted agree with Trailblazer-type and Rejector-type arguments.

Counter narratives

1 in 3 Australians feel men are treated unfairly.

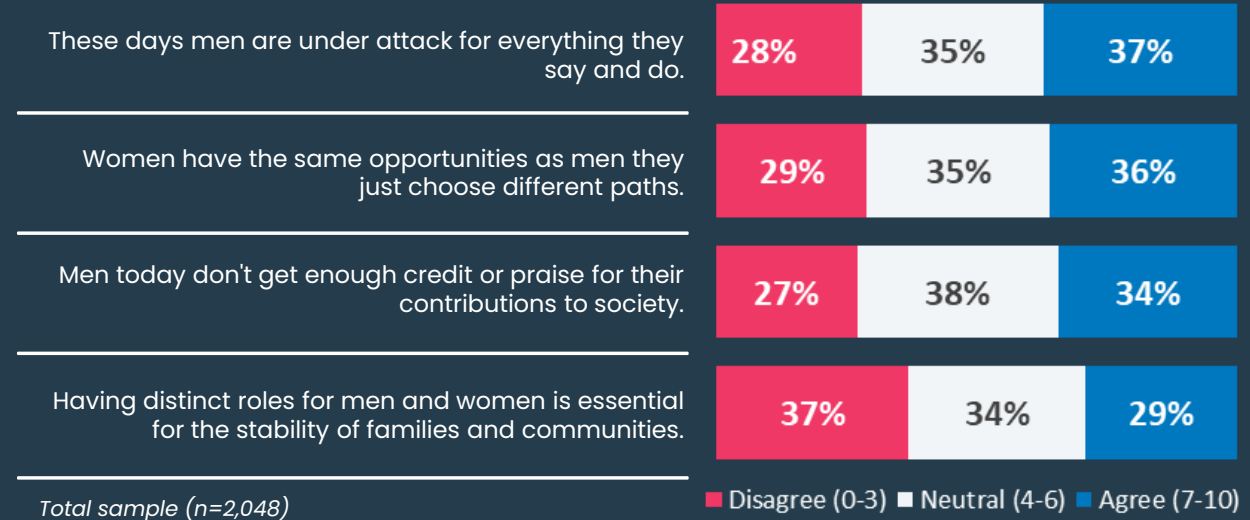
- **37%** believe men are under attack these days for everything they say and do. Only 28% disagree.
- **34%** agree men today don't get enough credit or praise for their contributions to society. Only 27% disagree.
- **29%** believe having distinct roles for men and women is essential for the stability of families and communities. More disagree (37%).

Different choices? Or different opportunities?

- **36%** think women have the same opportunities as men but *choose* different paths. Only 29% disagree.

Q18. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

Average score: 0 'Strongly disagree' - 10 'Strongly agree'



Cohorts consistently more likely to agree with opposition arguments include:

Rejectors, Conflicted, cis men - especially men over 30, people with a TAFE/Certificate /Diploma qualification and parents of teens and young adults. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and who belong to a religious group are more likely to agree with statements about the importance of traditional gender roles.

Results | Solutions



Broad support for gender equality solutions

82%

On average, 8 in 10 Australians (82%) **agree** with proposed equality solutions.

45%

Nearly 1 in 2 people (45%) *strongly agree* with these solutions, on average.

3%

On average, fewer than 1 in 20 people (3%) **disagree** with these ideas.

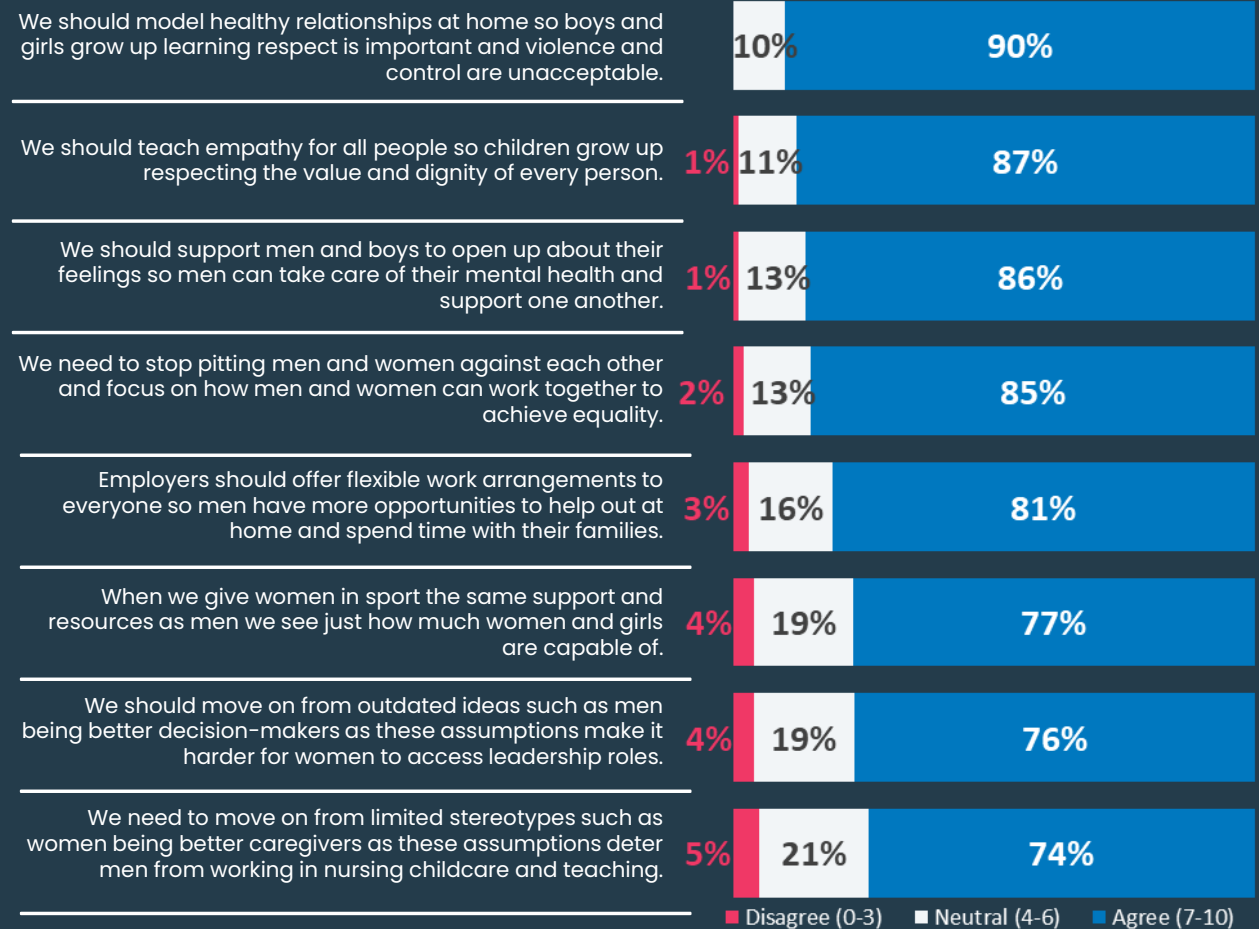
Notes: The most widely supported solutions are those expressed in positive, inclusive language that emphasise working together to benefit men and boys as well as women and girls.

Australians are **more likely to be on the fence about moving on from outdated gender stereotypes** (19-21%), though the majority still agree.

Compared to the total sample, **16-19 year old cis men** are consistently less likely to agree with proposed solutions (65% on average). This may reflect a general apathy (16-19 year old men are more likely to be on the fence - 28% on average) or a perceived lack of relevance to their everyday lives e.g. flexible work, raising kids.

Q20. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

Scale: 0 'Strongly disagree' - 10 'Strongly agree'



Total sample (n=2,048)

■ Disagree (0-3) ■ Neutral (4-6) ■ Agree (7-10)

Results | Dial testing



Introduction to dial testing

Dial testing is a method that allows researchers to capture moment-by-moment responses to content, such as ads, campaign videos or audio messages.

Dial testing mechanisms were embedded in the Stage 2 Gender Compass survey. After answering attitudinal questions, participants were presented with five gender equality audio messages in a randomised order. Participants were asked to respond to what they heard in real-time using a 'slider'. The slider is moved up or down depending on how much participants agree/disagree or are engaged/unmoved by different parts of each message.

This method provides rich data and supports researchers to understand the language, framing and examples that are most effective in building support for gender equality solutions across the different segments. It also highlights unhelpful or loaded words and phrases that can turn audiences off.

The lines on each chart represent the average level of agreement at particular moments in each message.

- The **orange line** represents the **Trailblazers**.
- The **yellow line** represents the **Rejectors**.
- The **thick white line** represents the average level of agreement of **'the middle'** – a combination of respondents in the Hopeful, Conflicted and Moderate segments.
- The responses of people in the Indifferent segment are not included in these charts.



Participants received instructions to rate "five audio messages" (not labelled). Participants rated three 'inclusive language' messages, one 'status quo' message and one 'opposition'.



Messages were randomised to mitigate order bias and risk of respondent fatigue.

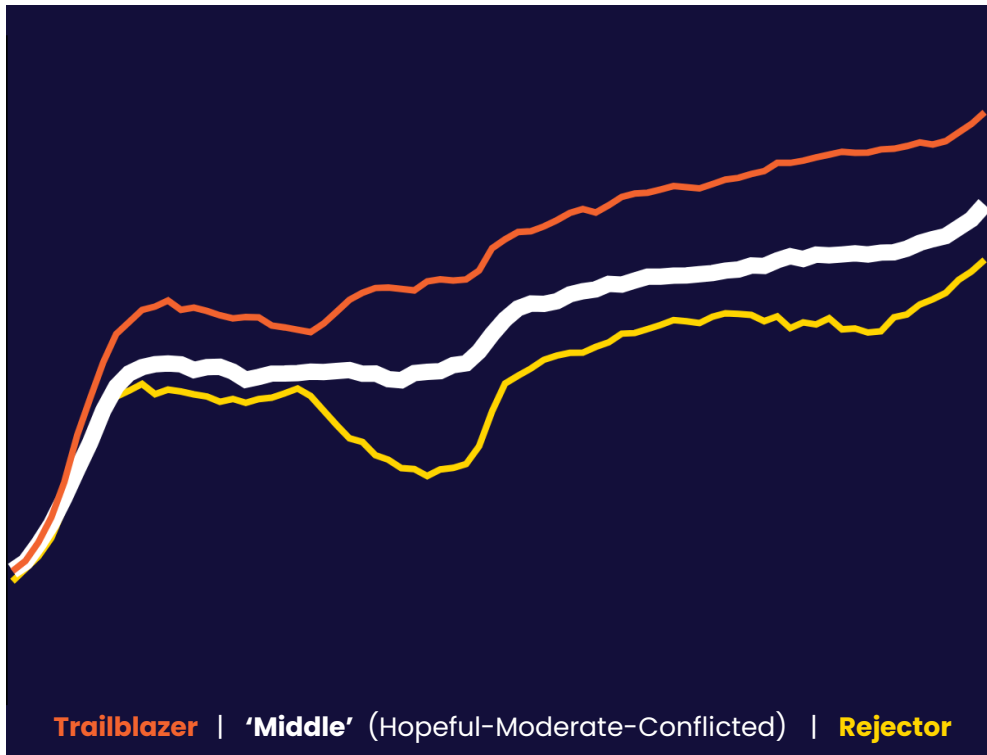


Participants who did not move the slider or moved the slider erratically were excluded.



After each message, participants were asked to rate how convincing they found the message (5-point-scale: *Not at all convincing to very convincing*).

1 Freedom to choose your own path



Every person should be free to choose their own path in life.

But outdated expectations pressure men to put work first, denying them time with their families, while women are still expected to do the unpaid work of cooking, cleaning and caring – often on top of their paid jobs.

We should all be free to live life on our own terms. Flexible work arrangements can give men more time at home to share the load and enjoy time with their kids, while access to fair pay in rewarding careers recognises women's hard work and lets them choose their own path.

When everyone is free to choose what works for them and their families, we all benefit.

Colour coding:

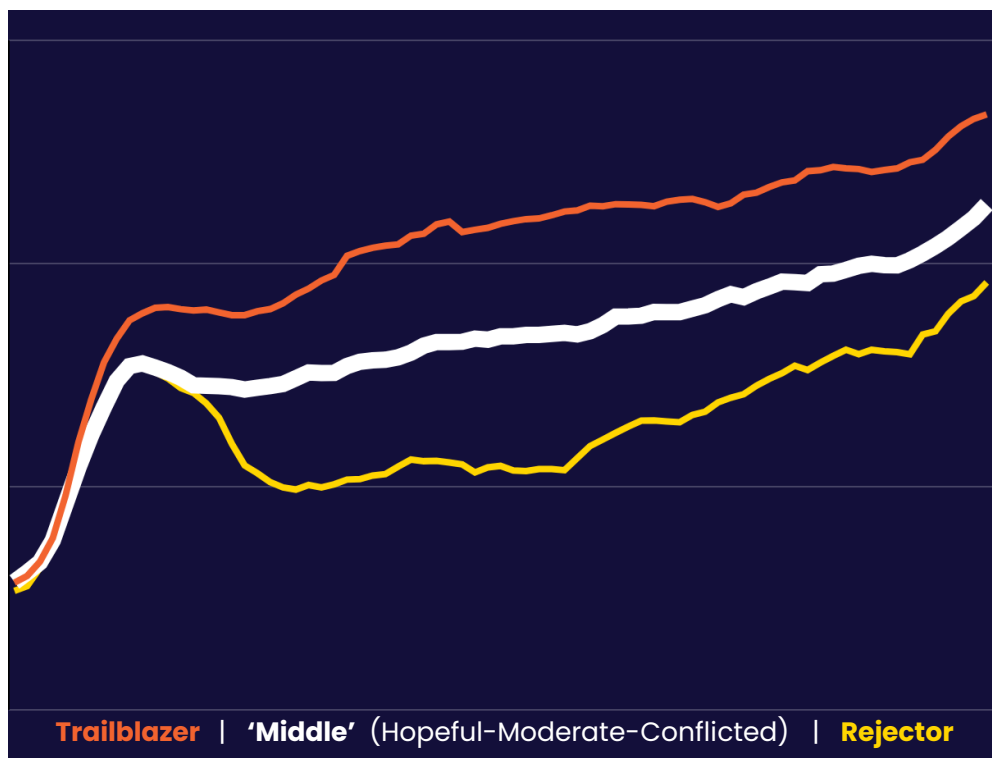
Effective with 'the middle'

Less effective with 'the middle'

[Click here to watch the video: Freedom to choose your own path](#)

2

Equal opportunity to be your best



Every person deserves an equal chance to be the best they can be.

But narrow ideas about what men and women are capable of are holding us back.

When we give women in sport the same opportunities as men, they excel. The success of the Matildas and women's AFL, rugby and cricket has given our community more of the sports we love and inspired boys and girls to pursue their goals with confidence. And when men are encouraged as much as women to pursue careers in teaching and nursing, we get more passionate, caring people teaching our kids and looking after us.

When we give every person the chance to be their best, we all win.

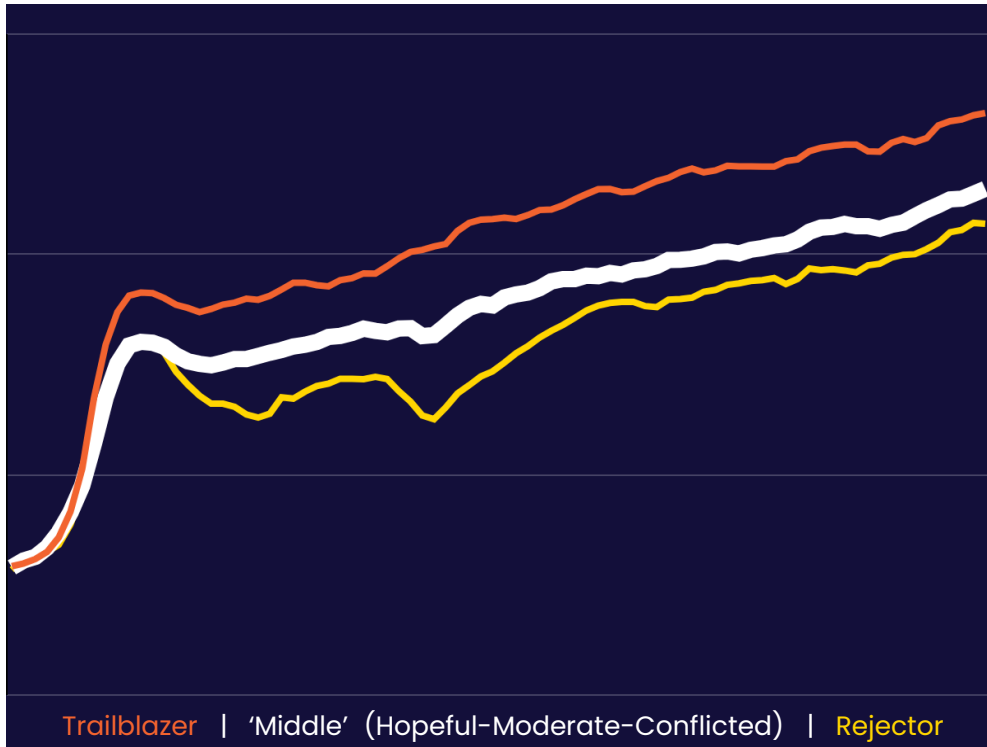
Colour coding:

Effective with 'the middle'

Less effective with 'the middle'

[Click here to watch the video: Equal opportunity to be your best](#)

3 Safety & caring for everyone



Every person deserves to feel safe and cared for.

But old-fashioned beliefs pressure many men to hide their feelings and act tough, and it's hurting their mental health. This can lead to real danger when some men think it is ok to control and even harm women.

It's time to move forward. Caring for men and boys means encouraging them to express their emotions and ask for help when they need it. Caring for women and girls starts with modelling healthy relationships and teaching consent and respect from a young age so women feel safe at home, at work and in our community.

Together, we can build a world where everyone feels safe and supported.

Colour coding:

Effective with 'the middle'

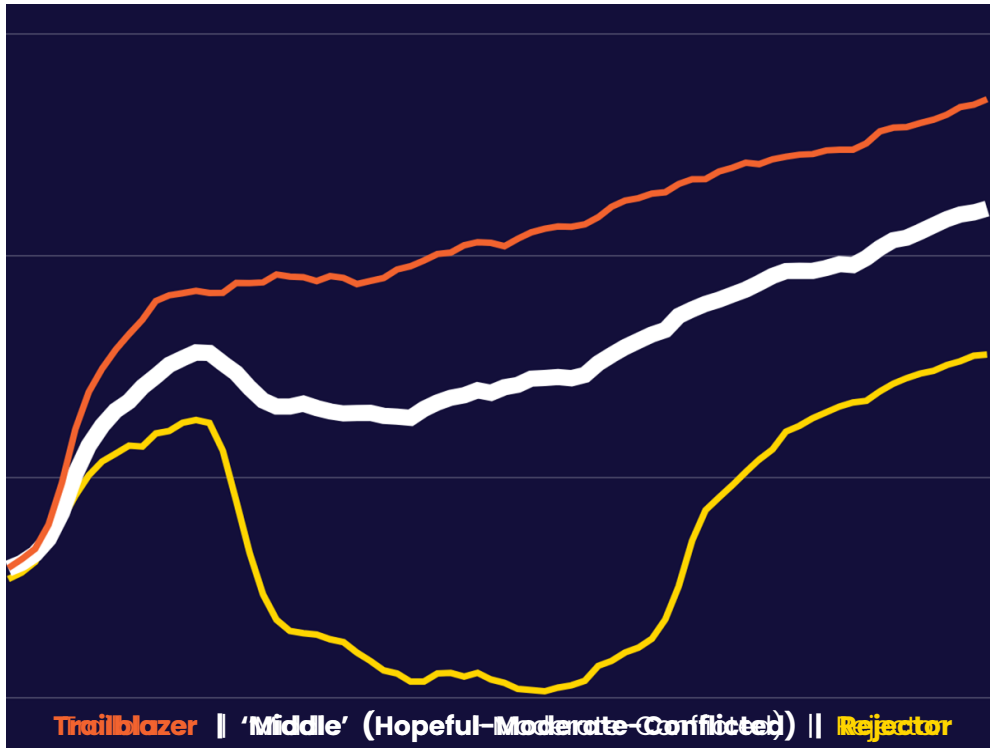
Less effective with 'the middle'

[Click here to watch the video: Safety and caring for everyone](#)

4

Structural inequality & impact on women

'Status quo' message



We want an equal future for all women, where it is not a disadvantage to be born a girl.

But women in Australia still don't have the same rights and opportunities as men. Outdated systems designed to privilege men over women put the burden of unpaid domestic work on women and deny them access to equal pay, leadership roles and basic safety.

It's time to move on. Equality starts with treating boys and girls fairly and modelling healthy, respectful relationships at home.

When we value and respect women and girls, we are on our way to building a safer and more equal world.

Colour coding:

Effective with 'the middle'

Less effective with 'the middle'

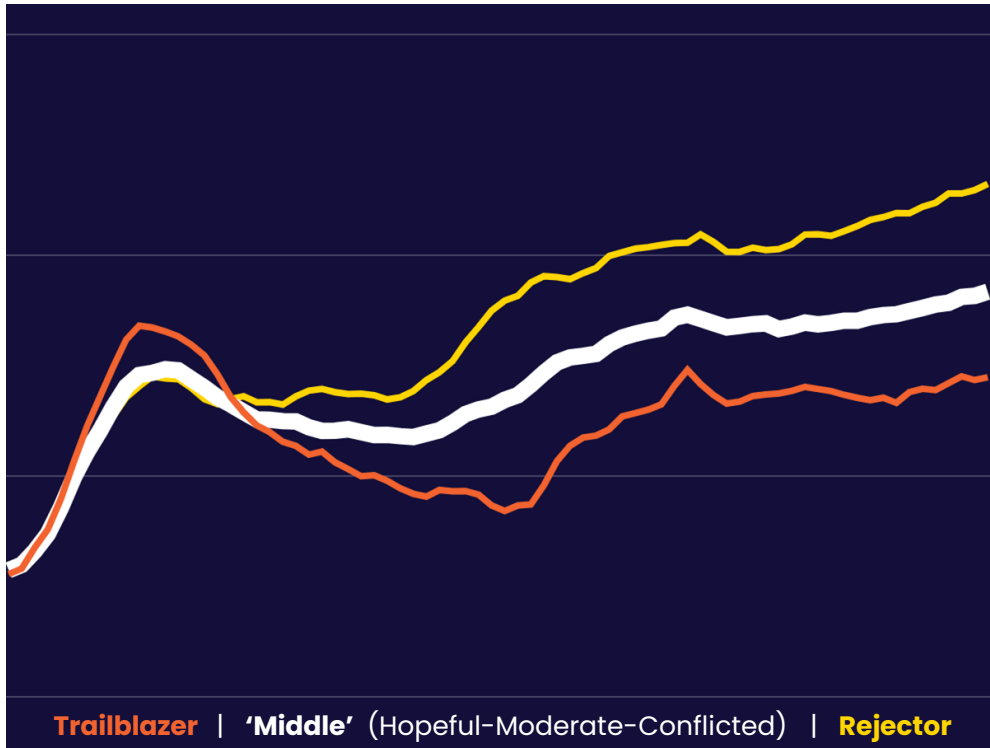
[Click here to watch the video: 'Status quo' messaging](#)

5

Freedom/respect for traditional roles

Opposition message

52%
'very convincing'



Every person should be free to play to their natural interests and strengths.

But some people want us to ignore the basic biological differences between men and women and treat everyone exactly the same, putting pressure on men and women to be something they're not.

We need to stop blaming men for everything and focus on the positive contributions of good men and women. We should value men for their strength and hard work, and respect women who choose to earn less so they can care for their families.

When men and women are free to play to their natural interests and skills, it's better for individuals, families and communities.

Note: Label reversal!

Colour coding

Effective for opponents

Less effective for opponents

[Click here to watch the video: Freedom/Respect for traditional roles](#)

Results | Messaging insights



Some of this advice may be uncomfortable to read

What you're about to read may feel uncomfortable or even confronting at times, as it challenges the way we've traditionally approached conversations about gender equality.

We understand that this shift may seem like a step back, but it's a strategic move to engage more people in the conversation, particularly the 'moveable middle.'

This isn't about retreating from core values like structural change and addressing deep-rooted inequalities, but rather about meeting people where they are, gently shifting their perceptions, and expanding support for deeper, systemic changes over time.

While we continue to prioritize structural change and encourage you to do the same, engaging this broader audience is essential to building long-term support for true gender equality.



Talking to Trailblazers



How they think

- Gender equality is both vital and urgent – believe we still have a long way to go.
- Believe the root cause of inequality lies in patriarchal systems and structures.
- Very informed and taking action.
- Recognition, especially among Trailblazer men, of the negative effects of patriarchy on men and boys.
- Value fairness and equality highly, as well as feeling safe.

How to talk to them

- Recognise systemic bias, gender roles, and patriarchy as drivers of gender inequality and **are comfortable using this language.**
- Many identify as feminists and are receptive to messaging phrased in this **familiar lexicon that centres the experience of women, girls and gender-diverse people.**
- Understand achieving change **requires us to change how we talk to reach a wider audience.**
- Just as enthusiastic about messaging that writes women *and* men into the gender equality story and replaces references to structural injustice with accessible everyday examples. **I.e. We can tell our story in different words and still energise our base.**

Talking to the Hopeful



How they think

- Characterised by their optimism – recognise that significant progress has been made but still work to do.
- Believe gender equality is both necessary and achievable.
- Feel positive about the direction we are heading in but want to include men and boys in the conversation.
- Supportive of measures to address inequality but do not share insistence and urgency of the Trailblazers.
- Place a high value on fairness and equal opportunity, but also value feeling safe and caring for others.

How to talk to them

- They are comfortable identifying with feminism and are not put off by Trailblazer language terminology such as *gender roles* and *patriarchy*. They agree with, but are **not energised by, messages focussed on women being negatively impacted by patriarchal systems** and are **put off by language that feels divisive**.
- Positive messaging that **describes a shared problem and emphasises everyone working together are enthusiastically received by this segment**.

Talking to the Conflicted



How they think

- Hold strong but often contradictory views.
- Support gender equality but Conflicted men especially think women are mostly treated fairly these days.
- Mixed views about whether differences in outcomes come from the different choices or systemic inequality.
- Blending of traditional values with progressive ideas is a defining characteristic of the Conflicted.
- Particularly concerned that traditional gender roles are being undermined and that this is negatively impacting men and boys.
- This segment values safety and security, personal freedom and caring for others over equality.

How to talk to them

- Respond best to messaging that **connects gender equality to their day-to-day experiences.**
- They are uncomfortable identifying with feminism (despite agreement with gender equality) and respond best when these **ideas are expressed in plain language and connected to their core values.**
- Turned off by abstract and confrontational language so messaging that incorporates **everyday examples and shows how gender equality benefits everyone — including men and boys — resonates most.**

Talking to the Moderate



How they think

- Stance is not fixed or impassioned.
- Most think gender equality has largely been achieved in Australia = lack of urgency and low engagement.
- Some see gender equality solutions as overblown, and potentially discriminating against men.
- Views influenced by a growing sense of discomfort and defensiveness, especially among men, who feel increasing pressure and scrutiny in response to shifting societal expectations.
- Often attribute gender differences in outcomes to individual choices, rather than structural inequality.
- Value personal freedom, safety and security, and caring for others more than they value equality or fairness.

How to talk to them

- Responds best to messaging that directly **connects to their everyday lives**.
- As they think gender equality has largely been achieved, framing the conversation in a way that makes **persisting inequality impossible to ignore** is particularly important.
- Messages that focus on **how gender equality benefits everyone**, including men and boys, are more effective as they acknowledge this segment's concerns.
- Focus on **highlighting shared values and the positive outcomes** that come with gender equality, presented in a way that feels accessible and grounded in their lived experience.

Talking to the Indifferent



How they think

- Do not feel strongly about gender inequality nor express clear opinions.
- Not resistant, but not prioritising gender equality.
- Characterised by general apathy and disengagement – not specific to this issue.
- Low awareness of drivers or impacts of inequality.
- Value safety and loyalty but are also more inward-looking and express values such as having fun and personal freedom.

How to talk to them

- **Do not show a strong preference** for particular language or messages – for this reason they are not considered part of the 'moveable middle'.
- Largely tuned out and uncertain, so using an **urgent tone or divisive rhetoric may disengage them further.**
- Messaging that **leans into the Indifferent's core values and makes gender equality accessible and relevant** will likely be most effective in building issue salience for this group.

Talking to Rejectors



How they think

- Defined by their resistance – many refuse to recognise persisting discrimination against women.
- Believe men are now the gender being treated unfairly – dismiss women's experiences as being due to personal choices, biological differences or the actions of a few bad men.
- Resistant to the suggestion of systemic bias.
- Concerned men are being demonised for being men.
- Place a much higher value on safety, freedom, loyalty and economic security than equality or fairness.

How to talk to them

- They are **highly sensitive** to messaging that appears to point the finger at men. They reject systemic injustice framing, and are **antagonised by 'Trailblazer language'**.
- Many are tuning out of mainstream channels, frustrated by what they see as a 'divisive feminist agenda'. With some seeking out content from anti-rights commentators, it is **critical to avoid further polarisation**.
- **Acknowledging the pressures and struggles men face** can help make the conversation more relatable.
- Rejectors respond most positively to messaging **grounded in their core values of personal freedom, safety and security** and agree with solutions aimed at **realising these values for men and women**.

Note:

Rejectors are defensive, dismissive and resistant when we talk about gender inequality. It will require considerable effort to convince this segment, and debating this issue risks adding fuel to the fire. Instead, we should aim to *neutralise* this segment. We can do this by communicating with the 'moveable middle' using language that doesn't antagonise Rejectors.

There are a number of specialist groups working directly with Rejectors, particularly men, to shift harmful attitudes and behaviours. This targeted work is crucial and urgent, and indeed is the only way to shift attitudes with this group.

Who are we talking to?

The latest stage of this Gender Compass research confirms that understanding what pushes people away is just as important as understanding what invites people in. The aim is to provide gender equality advocates with evidence-based guardrails to help us bring the 'moveable middle' into the gender equality conversation.

Keep energising the base!

As advocates of gender equality, we have been very effective in energising the Trailblazers and encouraging them to take action. We share their values, understand their motivations and, most importantly, have an established shorthand for communicating that helps us to get them fired up and ready to act.

We are not looking to undermine or minimise the impact of messaging used by advocates of gender equality that embraces different principles to those described in this report.

Energising supporters of gender equality is critical and speaking candidly and emphatically has proven to be very successful with audiences who care about this issue and are actively working to address inequality.

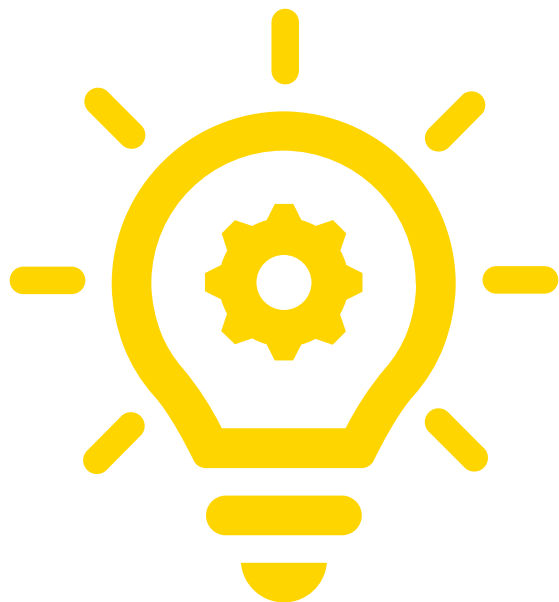


Engaging the 'moveable middle' requires us to adapt

This report is particularly focused on how to effectively engage **the 'moveable middle'** in conversations about gender equality. The 'moveable middle' refers to people whose views on gender equality are not firmly set. This includes people who do not hold strong views for or against gender equality, and those who may hold conflicting and even contradictory views. The 'moveable middle', by definition, are open to new perspectives and can be invited into the conversation and encouraged to support action to deliver equality for people of all genders.

This research confirms that the language that energises Trailblazers is not as effective for engaging other groups, in fact it can push them away.

We need to adapt our messaging to appeal to 'the moveable middle' and keep energising the Trailblazers whilst avoiding pushing Rejectors ever further away. This will support communicators to cast a wider net and bring more people in our community into the conversation about gender equality.



We brace for bad news

In all messages, agreement dips after the initial values statement as respondents brace for the 'bad news' (problem articulation).

As in any conversation where we feel a 'but...' coming, people become naturally hesitant (and less likely to agree).

People are also sensitive to judgemental language (we get defensive) hence least agreement with phrases like "*narrow ideas*" and "*old-fashioned beliefs*".

This should not deter us. Stating the problem is an important part of our message.

Less effective with the 'moveable middle'

Talking in the abstract

Abstract arguments and ideas (e.g. *systemic injustice*, *power imbalances*) often fail to engage people in the 'moveable middle' and in some cases can push away people who find this type of language inaccessible and overwhelming.

While this language still resonates with Trailblazers who are familiar and comfortable with this language, it is critical to translate these concepts into relatable and tangible examples for the 'moveable middle'.

To engage a wider audience, we need to instead use tangible examples that reflect people's day-to-day experiences. When people can see themselves and their loved ones in the story they are more likely to support equality efforts.

Replacing abstract explanations with real world examples boosts accessibility and relatability.

Q: Does "avoiding the abstract" risk making structural drivers of inequality invisible?

A: While we may use simpler language to engage a broader audience, we are still talking about the same thing.

Our research found that although talking about abstract concepts like 'structural inequality' resonate with Trailblazers and some Hopefuls, it often alienates others, rather than inviting them in. By starting with practical, everyday scenarios, we help people connect with the issue, building understanding and trust.

This approach doesn't avoid the deeper, systemic aspects of gender inequality; rather, it opens the door for more nuanced conversations over time. The goal is to make space for broader discussions, without pushing people away at the outset.

Less effective with the 'moveable middle'

Ignoring men and boys

A focus on women and girls is very effective with Trailblazers, but demonstrating how gender inequality affects men and boys is essential to making gender equality relevant and urgent for a wider audience.

Including men in the story (without making them the main character) recognises the 'moveable middle's' concerns about pressures on men and mitigates assumptions that more for women = less for men.

To counter 'zero-sum game thinking'—where progress for women means a loss for men—we can include men's experiences in the narrative.

Demonstrating how gender inequality impacts women *and* men is crucial to engaging a wide audience.

Q: Doesn't writing men into the story erase women's experiences and ignore the disproportionate struggles women and gender diverse people face?

A: We need to write men into the story, but not as the main character. The aim is not to sideline women's experience, but to invite men to see themselves reflected. This is particularly important for engaging the 'moveable middle' who are less receptive to messaging centred solely on women's experiences.

However, as women and gender diverse people are disproportionately impacted by inequality, it is absolutely essential to represent the experience of people of all genders.

We don't want to make this all about men, but by showing that gender inequality harms everyone we open the door to broader support and engagement.

Less effective with the 'moveable middle'

Polarising language

Language that is heavily associated with a Trailblazer worldview can alienate the middle segments and polarise Rejectors, distracting from the core message.

Segments that believe biological differences between genders and/or women making different choices to men explain inequality of outcomes are acutely sensitive to the type of language used by people who see inequality as a systemic issue. Messages phrased in the language of those they fundamentally disagree with can trigger a defensive, emotional response or prompt people to tune out as messaging doesn't feel aimed at them.

It's important to communicate the same ideas using accessible, neutral language and relatable examples that can connect with a wider audience.

Q: So, we need to stop using the language we've always used?

A: Not at all. This language still works with Trailblazers and we should absolutely continue to use it to energise our supporter base.

The issue of gender equality is central to everything we do, and the ultimate goal remains unchanged: a world where everyone, regardless of gender, has equal rights, opportunities, and respect.

What we're suggesting is that we need to communicate about gender equality in ways that resonate with different audiences. For some, this might mean starting with broader, more accessible language that focuses on shared values like safety, freedom, and potential. Once we've engaged them, we can begin to introduce more complex and nuanced discussions around structural inequality, making sure we move toward true equality for all.

More effective with the 'moveable middle'

Inclusive language

Inclusive language helps people to see themselves in the story and feel part of the solution.

We can bring people together with what we say and how we say it.

Simple words like *we*, *us* and *everyone* suggest togetherness, while phrases such as *working together* and *all of us* communicate unity. This emphasis is not only engaging and uplifting but crucially mitigates concerns about men and women being pitted against each other.

An adversarial approach does not speak to people's lived experience of loving, living with and working alongside people of all genders. Instead, men and women across the segments respond positively to messages that outline a shared problem and emphasise everyone working together for collective benefit.

Q: If we are making this inclusive, shouldn't we use gender-blind language?

A: Gender-blind language, such as every person or people in our community, has an important role to play. It is inclusive regardless of gender identity and helps to communicate universality.

However, naming men and women does play a vital role. It makes explicit the ways that men and women are impacted by gender inequality and could benefit from equality solutions. This is critical when many in the 'moveable middle' do not recognise women's experience of persisting inequality and require specific examples of how women are affected. Not mentioning gender in this context risks diluting our communications. Mentioning men and their specific experiences is also critical to help cisgender men recognise themselves and see this as an issue that is relevant to them personally (and counter assumptions that gender inequality is a 'women's issue').

Using both gendered and gender-blind language is important if we want to make our communications inclusive and engaging.

More effective with the 'moveable middle'

Make it real and recognisable

To engage the 'moveable middle', we need to meet people where they're at, using resonant shortcuts that connect to people's current values and lived experience.

Relatable examples make inequality harder to ignore whilst making the benefits of equality relevant and achievable. They also help people to recognise themselves and their loved ones in the story.

Making inequality recognisable and equality tangible is crucial to building support for solutions. If our audience does not see the inequality, they may view gender equality initiatives as exaggerated or even unfair.

To engage a wider audience, we need to translate these concepts into specific, tangible examples that reflect people's day-to-day experiences. When people can see themselves and their loved ones in the story, they are more likely to support equality efforts.

Q: Does making it real mean providing clear evidence?

A: While facts and evidence have an important role to play, on their own they don't change minds. To make inequality real and recognisable, we need to connect the issue to people's everyday experiences. This means translating abstract concepts, like systemic inequality or power imbalances, into concrete, relatable scenarios that resonate with individuals on a personal level.

Instead of just presenting statistics, we should show how these issues play out in familiar situations—whether at work, in family life, or in social interactions. By doing so, we help people see themselves and their loved ones in the story, making the issue more tangible and relevant. When people can relate to the experiences being shared, they're more likely to feel motivated to support equality efforts. This approach shifts the conversation from abstract ideas to real-world impacts, which is crucial for engaging a wider audience and building long-term support for solutions.

More effective with the 'moveable middle'

Centre the solution

Given the awareness gap (many think we are close to achieving equality), explicitly stating examples of persisting inequality is critical.

However, since guilt and shame aren't conducive to changing minds, and hopelessness undermines motivation to act, it's important to focus on what can be done to change things for the better.

Sticking to a ratio of **1 part BARRIER: 2 parts ACTION** allows us to set up our issue (inequality) but focus on motivating people with our (equality) solutions. The middle segments, in particular, respond positively to messages focussed on solutions.

Highlighting the reality of gender inequality is crucial, but effectively engaging a broad audience requires a focus on motivating people with relevant and tangible equality solutions that connect to their values.

1 part BARRIER: 2 parts ACTION

While Trailblazers are not put off by a focus on what's wrong, for the 'moveable middle' this feels too much like blaming and can make the problem feel insurmountable. This prompts people to tune out.

Making the problem (BARRIER) real and relevant, then focussing on meaningful solutions (ACTION) is most effective in engaging this group.

E.g.

BARRIER: Women's contributions continue to be devalued with women still being paid less than men for the same work.

ACTION: It's time to value everyone's contributions. We can do this by supporting all businesses to transition to transparent pay policies and providing government-funded training on fair pay practices to ensure equal pay for equal work.

More effective with the 'moveable middle'


Paint a positive future.

To inspire action across the segments, messages should put forward a hopeful vision for the future.

In all segments, people respond positively to calls to action that invite them to be part of creating a better future.

Phrases such as *it's time to move forward* convey momentum, while expressions such as *together, we can...* are unifying and neutralise concerns about men and women being pitted against each other.

By painting a picture of a better future we can build together, we encourage people to connect with and contribute to change.



When we employ resonant values statements, inclusive language, everyday examples, and emphasise the benefits of equality for men *and* women, we are in the best position to motivate Australians to work together to build a better world.

Message, Messenger, Medium

What we say matters, but who says it and how it reaches people are just as important.

The messenger and the medium through which a message is delivered can shape how a message is received.

The Gender Compass Stage 2 research explored the values, language and types of examples that are effective in engaging 'the moveable middle' on the issue of gender equality. These insights into what is more and less effective with the middle segments are broadly applicable and can support advocates to communicate with the whole community without tailoring messages to specific segments.

Further research and knowledge sharing between advocates is recommended to enhance our collective understanding of how to make the most impact. This includes testing messengers and identifying effective communication channels.



Q: Were these messages recorded in a man's voice or a woman's voice?

A: The audio messages tested in the survey and dial test were voiced by a cisgender man with a general Australian accent. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, advertising and political campaign-testing studies have shown the voices of cisgender men have broader appeal than those of cisgender women and are generally perceived as 'neutral'. This was important if we wanted to minimise polarisation and avoid prompting certain groups to tune out.

The decision to use the voice of a cisgender man for the dial testing was intentional in order to make this topic more inclusive and 'relevant' to people of all genders whilst normalising cisgender men caring about and talking about this issue.

Results | Settings



Settings

for discussing gender equality

Many are open to discussing gender equality in a range of settings.

- Nearly 9 in 10 Australians (86%) believe it's *appropriate* to talk about gender equality topics such as fair treatment and respectful relationships **at home**.
- Nearly 8 in 10 think it's appropriate to discuss this in educational settings such as **school** (78%) and **university/TAFE** (77%), as well as in the **media** e.g on TV or radio (76%) and in the **workplace** (75%).
- Roughly 7 in 10 Australians also say it's appropriate to discuss these topics in **community settings** (73%), on **social media** (69%) and in **faith settings** (65%).
- Very few think it is *inappropriate* to discuss gender equality in any of these contexts - the highest resistance is to discussing them on social media (11% say *inappropriate*) and in faith settings (10%).

Total sample (n=2,048)

Demographic variance:

- Overall, women are more likely to consider these contexts *appropriate* (81% on average) compared to men (72% on average).
- People in the LGBTQIA+ community are more likely to consider certain contexts *appropriate*: social media (81%), community settings (84%) and school (87%).
- Young men, especially 20 to 29-year-olds, are more likely to be on the fence about the appropriateness of discussing equality in these settings (25% on average).



Trailblazers are the most supportive of talking about equality in a range of settings: On average, 9 in 10 (90%) say these are *appropriate*.



Rejectors are the most likely segment to believe discussing gender equality in these contexts is *inappropriate*: social media (20%), faith settings (17%), community settings (13%) and in the workplace (13%).

Notably, the majority of this segment think these *are* appropriate contexts for discussing gender equality topics (66% on average).

The workplace

Discussing gender equality at work



3 in 4 Australians (75%) believe the workplace is an appropriate setting to discuss gender equality and related topics.

- Very few (7%) think discussing these topics at work is **inappropriate**.
- 2 in 10 are on the fence (18%) and do not consider workplaces to be an appropriate or inappropriate setting for these discussions.

Total sample (n=2,048)

Broad support across genders, though women are more supportive than men.

- 8 in 10 (80%) cis women believe discussing gender equality topics at work is appropriate, compared to 7 in 10 cis men (70%).
- Cis men under 40 are the least likely to consider the workplace an appropriate setting: 16-19 men (63%), 20-29 men (64%), 30-39 men (66%)

People from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds are open to discussing gender equality at work.

- 3 in 4 people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (73%) and people who identify with a religious group (73%) are just as likely to consider workplaces an appropriate place to discuss these topics as the total population (75%).

Note: Results may differ if more divisive examples of topics provided i.e. replacing 'fair treatment' and 'respectful relationships' with 'reproductive rights' and/or 'LGBTQIA+ issues'.

In all segments, the majority believe workplaces are an appropriate setting.

- 9 in 10 **Trailblazers** (90%)
- 8 in 10 **Hopeful** (80%)
- Nearly 8 in 10 **Conflicted** (75%)
- Nearly 7 in 10 **Rejectors** (66%)
- 6 in 10 **Moderates** (59%).
- More than 5 in 10 **Indifferent** (54%) - 38% on the fence.

There is also broad permission and positive sentiment towards discussing gender equality topics at work across a diversity of workplace sizes and types.

Feelings

towards discussing gender equality topics at work

Most Australians report positive feelings.

We asked working Australians how they would feel if gender equality topics such as fair treatment and respectful relationships were being discussed at their work.

- The most commonly reported feelings were positive: **hopeful** (52%), **proud** (33%), **safe** (32%) and **enthusiastic** (30%).
- The next most common were neither positive nor negative: **neutral** (27%) and **curious** (27%).

Note: Across demographic subgroups positive feelings were consistently more common than negative-neutral feelings.

Total employed (n=1,347)

Few express negative feelings.

People in the workforce were unlikely to express negative feelings about this scenario:

- Fewer than 1 in 10 said they would feel **awkward** (10%), **uncomfortable** (8%), **disinterested** (7%), **powerless** (4%), **offended** (3%) or **angry** (1%) if these topics were discussed in their workplace.

Note: The topic examples are fairly uncontroversial which may influence % of negative feelings. I.e. "fair treatment" less polarising than "addressing rape culture" or "trans-inclusive workplaces".

Across all segments, positive feelings are by far the most common.



Trailblazers are much more likely to feel positive: **hopeful** (66%), **proud** (46%), and **enthusiastic** (41%).



The Hopeful are most likely to feel **hopeful** (63%), **enthusiastic** (36%), and **curious** (34%).



The Conflicted are most likely to choose **hopeful** (54%), **safe** (38%), and **neutral** (34%).



Moderates are most likely to feel **hopeful** (43%), **neutral** (39%), **safe** (28%) and **curious** (27%).



The Indifferent are most likely to report feeling **neutral** (45%), **curious** (34%), and **safe** (34%).



Rejectors still *more* likely to express positive feelings (though at lower levels than other segments): **hopeful** (30%), **safe** (28%), and **proud** (27%).

Feelings

towards discussing gender equality topics at work

More likely to report specific feelings:

- Gen Z are more likely to say discussing gender equality topics at work would make them feel **safe** (39%). They are also more likely to feel **neutral** (33%).
- Cis women are more likely to feel **hopeful** (57%), especially women aged 16-19 (65%), compared to cis men (47%).
- Cis men are more likely to feel **neutral** (31%) while cis women are less likely (22%).

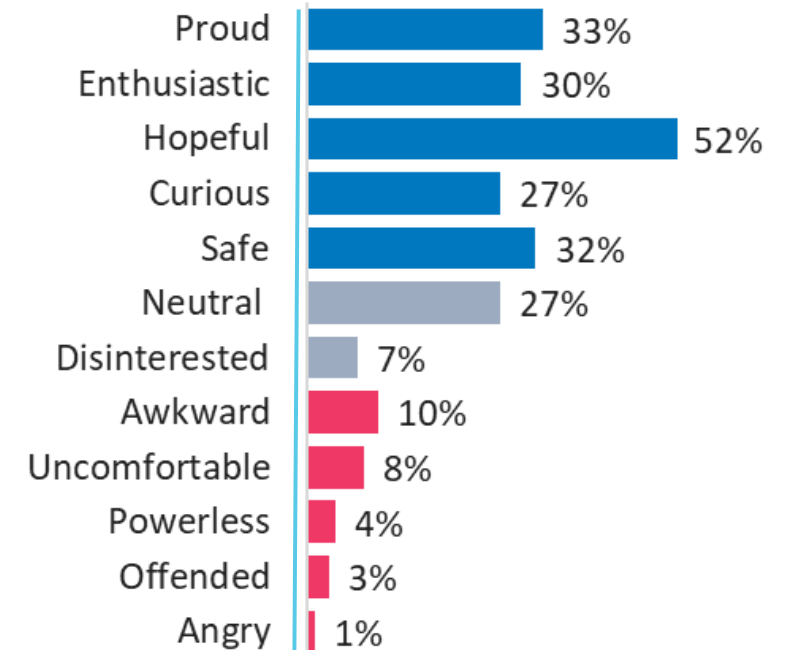
Less likely to report specific feelings:

- Groups least likely to feel **neutral** about these discussions include people who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community (18%) and people who think we are far from achieving gender equality in Australia (17%).

Note: Across the demographic cohorts, positive feelings about discussing gender equality topics at work were much more common than negative or neutral feelings.

Q29. Which of the following best describe how you would feel in the following scenario? Select up to three.

If gender equality topics such as fair treatment and respectful relationships were being discussed at my work I would feel...



% indicates proportion of respondents who selected each feeling
Total sample (n=2,048)

Attitudes

by workplace size and type

Broad support across workplace sizes and types.

Minimal difference in perceived appropriateness of discussing gender equality at work by workplace characteristics.

79% sole traders

72% small businesses (1-19 employees)

71% medium business (20-99 employees)

75% large business (100+ employees)

72% most employees work at a physical office / venue

72% most employees work remotely/from home

70% most employees travel to clients/customers

% appropriate (score 4-5)

Total (n=1,347)

Male-dominated workplaces less supportive than female-dominated.

People working in female-dominated workplaces (80%) and workplaces with an even mix of cis men and cis women (72%) are more likely to think discussing gender equality topics at work is *appropriate* compared to people working in male-dominated workplaces (68%).

Note: This is likely reflective of gender skew i.e. 75% of people working in female-dominated workplaces are cis women and 69% people working in male-dominated workplaces are cis men.



Across a diversity of workplaces, there is broad permission and positive sentiment towards discussing gender equality at work.

Workplace size, type or gender balance has minimal influence on how Australians feel about talking about gender equality at work.

Positive feelings were the most commonly expressed, in line with the total sample.

Accreditation

Dr Rebecca Huntley is a fellow of The Research Society (formerly known as the Australian Market and Social Research Society).

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If you are planning on using this research or would like to understand more about the results, please reach out to **89 Degrees East** (holly@89degreeseast.com) or **Plan International Australia** (info@plan.org.au)

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This original research was commissioned by Plan International Australia and conducted by Holly McCarthy & Dr Rebecca Huntley at 89 Degrees East with support from Heartward Strategic (qualitative phase) and Qdos Research (dial testing). The original Gender Compass segmentation was developed for Plan by Heartward Strategic.

For more information on how we could help you start a discussion and shape Australia's future, contact: research@89degreeseast.com



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