



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

Gender Economic Equality Study

Consultation Paper



Acknowledgement of Country

Jobs and Skills Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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What is a JSA study?

Jobs and Skills Australia's (JSA) capacity and cohort studies are multidisciplinary research projects and one of the primary ways JSA provides advice to government on emerging policy challenges across the labour market and skills systems.

JSA capacity and cohort studies:

- Provide detailed analysis of labour and skills supply and demand; identify labour market outcomes and disadvantage across different cohorts, and examine employment, education, training, and migration pathways.
- Bring together subject matter experts and tripartite stakeholders in dedicated study steering committees and advisory groups.
- Make recommendations on how to manage and intervene in policy challenges in line with broader government objectives.
- Are led by the independent JSA Commissioner and are at arms-length from government policy design and implementation.

About the Gender Economic Equality Study

Women's labour force participation is characterised by disparity in paid working hours, vertical labour market stratification, horizontal labour market segmentation; the undervaluation of feminised work; insecurity and precarity; and discrimination and disrespect. Australian women are highly educated, yet the influence of gendered norms shape their educational pathways and career opportunities. Women experience incomplete and disrupted learning across their lives as they juggle paid work, unpaid domestic labour, child rearing and caring for others. Strategies to change this and allow all women to thrive at work and in education must take account of their access to education, location, cultural background and other characteristics.¹

As the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce Report highlighted above, Australia's labour market and skills system is highly gendered. Gendered occupational segregation and how it intersects with and is potentially maintained by gendered divides, choices and outcomes across the education, training and skills systems is a key part of the problem.

Both are stubborn and long-standing policy challenges that negatively impact women's economic equality and hinder Australia's economy and society more broadly. For example, Australia's skills shortages are highly gendered. The Gender Economic Equality Study (the

¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2023). [A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023 - 2033](#), page 12. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government.

Study) aims to offer new perspectives, unique data insights and potential solutions for these two major intersecting policy challenges.

Growing Australia's workforce through a well-functioning national skills system can't be done without advancing equity and equality across gender and other compounding areas of disadvantage. This is why the Study will prioritise intersectional investigations across our analysis. This approach aims to provide a more detailed picture of how gendered trends intersect with other factors and identities, such as cultural background, First Nations status, caring responsibilities, [LGBTIQA+ identities](#), geography and disability across the world of work and education.

These different and intersecting factors create unique experiences, identities and communities which have an impact on what careers people hope for; what jobs they end up in; what training and education they have access to or complete; and their experiences once they enter jobs or graduate from qualifications. These experiences and identities can compound to create disadvantage and marginalisation when working and learning but can also become a source of strength, community and celebration of diversity. Our Study aims to reflect both in our findings and recommendations. We are aiming to present the real-world, complex and diverse experiences of different types of workers and students across the country.

This intersectional approach means the Study can offer deeper insights but will also face some challenges. For example, the Study can offer more informed policy recommendations on what works to tackle disadvantage and make faster progress towards gender economic equality in workplaces and training settings. However, in some cases the Study will not be able to access the 'intersectional' data we need. Some of our data sources do not accurately capture cultural and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) or culturally, racially marginalised (CARM) people. Likewise, we do not have data that represents the diversity and spectrum of LGBTIQA+ identities. We acknowledge this limits our intersectional analysis. Where possible we will be contextualising some of our Study's data limitations with qualitative research to enhance insights. Our *Data Challenges Explainer* at the end of this paper gives you more information. The key concepts explainer in the next section also uses plain English to explain some of the more technical language we are using.

How can you get involved?

JSA's approach to stakeholder engagement activities is informed by [JSA's engagement principles](#). JSA is seeking diverse views on the Study to gain a deeper understanding of gender economic equality to improve our advice to government. The Study's Terms of Reference (ToR) have been published for reference in [Appendix A](#).

This consultation invites submissions from the public on the key issues the Study will consider. *Submissions in response to this Consultation Paper are due by 5pm AEDT on Friday 7 March 2025.*

Please send your submission [via the online form](#).

Further information about JSA's current consultation activities is available on the [consultation](#) page on the JSA website. You can also contact us by emailing GenderStudy@jobsandskills.gov.au.

Key Concepts Explainer

- **Occupational gender segregation** is a term that explains how jobs and industries across the economy are divided (segregated) along gender lines. For example, there are far more women in nursing than construction whereas jobs like accountants and retail managers have an approximately even split of men and women.
- A **longitudinal** approach refers to examining the same group of individuals over longer or different periods of time. For example, employment outcomes 5 or 10 years after graduating from a training course.
- The **gender pay gap** is the difference in earnings between women and men, expressed as a proportion of men's earnings. For example, if women earn an average of \$800 a week, and men earn an average \$1000 a week, the gender pay gap would be 20%.
- The **leaky pipeline** refers to the progressive loss of individuals across specific career pathways from schooling into late career. For example, the loss of women from masculinised STEM career pathways or men leaving care sector jobs due to discrimination.
- **Cohort/Demographics:** groups of people, identities or communities. Demographics include characteristics such as age and gender.

Consultation guiding questions

The questions below are to help you make submissions and are aligned with the Study ToR. The questions are not intended to be prescriptive, and you do not need to respond to each one. Individuals looking to share their lived experience, government bodies and private organisations are all encouraged to participate.

The purpose of the consultation is to seek advice on how JSA can further refine the Study focus and find new evidence to explain and understand why jobs are as gendered as they

are, and how the career and training choices people make and the outcomes they experience are linked. This means we are focusing on both the experiences of women *and* men in our Study. For example, women's experiences when they work as an electrician and men's experiences when they work as a social worker, or indeed the social and cultural factors in why they are discouraged to do so. JSA is aware there is significant academic research and policy activity in this area so submissions identifying occupational or industry specific research, promising policy practices or case studies within the broad scope of the Study are encouraged.

The Study is also seeking comment on the development of the JSA Gender Framework, an agency driven and policy-area specific (labour market and skills) guide to gendered and intersectional analysis.

Written submissions may also highlight other issues, so long as they remain relevant to the Study's ToR. The Study has been designed to fill evidence gaps and will be looking at issues and 'live' developments in the current and relevant industrial and policy context. For example, the national [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#), the Fair Work Commission's (FWC) current [Gender Undervaluation Priority Awards Review](#) and recent developments such as multi-employer bargaining and research releases from the FWC pay equity panel. For example, A Hidden History of Aboriginal Women's Work in the Community Controlled Health Sector.²

New Perspectives on Occupational Segregation

The Study is seeking to offer new perspectives and fill evidence gaps on occupational segregation, with a focus on:

- A whole of economy analysis that offers a more detailed categorisation of or new indicators for occupational segregation (which jobs are mostly made up of women or men) to monitor progress towards gender economic equality. This is to support the national Working for Women Strategy.
- Changes in the gender split of occupations and jobs over time and across different age groups to examine gendered trends over the life course.
- Intersectional and longitudinal investigations of occupational segregation trends and related gender pay gaps over time.
- The gendered implications of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' new [Occupational Standard Classification for Australia \(OSCA\)](#) which replaces the previous classification (the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of

² N. Young et al. 2024, '[A Hidden History of Aboriginal Women's Work in the Community Controlled Health Sector](#)', Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research and UTS Business School, Accessed 14 February 2025.

Occupations (ANZSCO)) and means changes to how we count, describe and analyse the jobs people work in, and train for, across the economy.

Guiding questions that support the development of this topic include:

1. How has gendered occupational segregation changed over time in the Australian labour market and is it likely to change into the future?
2. What trends and patterns are part of Australia's highly gender segregated labour market? For example, is the labour market also divided along CALD or CARM lines (as best we can analyse with the data we have) or other factors such as socio-economic status or geography?
3. What are the implications of new and expanded occupations included in OSCA for understanding the gendered nature of the labour market into the future? For example, what jobs mostly made up of women will we now be able to count and analyse? How have the descriptions of some jobs changed? How does this reflect changes in gender norms over time?
4. What does the leaky pipeline, job mobility and gender pay gap (i.e. the difference between the earnings of men and women) look like in highly gendered or more gender balanced occupations and industries? The leaky pipeline is a term that refers to the progressive loss of women and girls across career pathways from early schooling into late career.³ That is, the high turnover and retention specific to highly gender segregated occupations (often in discussion of masculinised STEM occupations). The Study will also investigate barriers for men and boys participating in jobs and training which are mostly made up of women.
5. What are the policy implications of some of these gendered labour market trends and what can we learn from intersectional investigations into them? For example, are there different policy lessons, enablers or challenges that we can identify by looking at the impact of geography and socio-economic status in addition to sex/gender when looking at economic outcomes?

Education, Skills and Training Divides and Intersections

The Study will examine gendered divides in the education, training and skills systems using JSA's access to linked education, training, tax and census data. This means data around how much people get paid, what course they are studying, how old they are and other demographic factors like sex and migrant status. There will be a particular focus on:

³ Buckles, K 2019, '[Fixing the Leaky Pipeline: Strategies for Making Economics Work for Women at Every Stage](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.33.1.43)'. Journal of Economic Perspectives, no. 1, accessed 28 January 2025, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.33.1.43>; Department of Industry, Science and Resources. (2022). [Snapshot of disparity in STEM](#), page 1. Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Australian Government.

- How the education, training and skills systems intersect and even maintain occupational segregation and other gendered labour market trends.
- Intersectional and longitudinal investigations of education, skills and training outcomes over time, choices and pathways including post-qualification gender pay gap data.
- The leaky pipeline in different levels of gender segregated occupations and the policy implications of these trends.

Guiding questions that support the development of this topic include:

6. How is education and training gender segregated across the entire skills system? Is it also divided along CALD or CARM lines (as best we can analyse with the data we have)?
7. How do these divides across the education and training system map to the types of qualifications people hold? For example, diplomas or post-graduate degrees.
8. How are education and training outcomes gendered (based on employment, pay, income support and further study indicators) and what does this look like for different groups of people?
9. How do women's career paths affect their incomes?
10. Do people completing qualifications in either female or male-dominated industries actually end up working in those highly-gendered jobs? What are the trends, challenges and policy implications?
11. What do post-training gender pay gaps look like at different time periods and across different cohorts and occupations?

Across the Study

Guiding questions that support the development of both topics include:

12. How do caring responsibilities and other supply side factors affect women's economic equality over the life course in particular industries or occupations? Supply side factors focus more on the worker, whereas demand side factors focus more on the employer. For example, individual education and training choices compared to gender-biased recruitment or sexual discrimination on the demand/employer side.⁴
13. How does gender inequality look different across a variety of occupations, industries or education and training settings?
14. What case studies or policy success stories are there in this area that are worth further investigation or highlighting?

The JSA Gender Framework

JSA is developing a Gender Framework which will be an agency specific guide, like other broader but whole-of-government gender responsive budgeting and policy impact assessment guides. These guides encourage and embed more focused gendered analysis on policy issues and challenges. The JSA Gender framework's objective is to do the same across JSA's work and our tripartite stakeholders to better understand, analyse and reform the world of work, education and training.

Guiding questions that support the development of this topic include:

15. Which JSA products do you use, and where would intersectional and/or gender data be a useful addition?
16. Which intersectional cohorts (groups of people, identities or communities) should JSA prioritise (in addition to gender)?
17. Are there examples of how we should talk, collaborate and engage with different experts or communities to better incorporate research and lived experience into all our work?
18. What are the most gendered or racialised labour market and skills frames, classifications, indicators and methodologies that JSA should be aware of?
19. Are there any further recommendations for JSA to maximise visibility of and access to improved ongoing gendered intersectional analysis?

⁴ For further detail on the difference between supply and demand side factors and their role in maintaining occupational gender segregation see: Women's Economic Outcomes Senior Officials Working Group 2024, ['Background Paper: Analysis of Supply-Side Drivers using HILDA data'](#), Australian Government.

Data Challenges Explainer

Distinct concepts of sex and gender

The terms sex and gender are interrelated and often used interchangeably within the general community. However, they are two distinct concepts: Sex is understood in relation to sex characteristics. Sex recorded at birth refers to what was initially determined by sex characteristics observed at birth or infancy. Gender is about social and cultural identity, expression and experience.⁵ This Study will use this ABS definition.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is about capturing and recognising the diverse and multiple identities different people and communities can hold. Like other concepts in our Study, it is debated and is used to identify marginalisation and disadvantage but also strength, community and diversity.

From a marginalisation perspective: intersectionality means acknowledging the most significant, multiple, intersecting and compounding forms of disadvantage, discrimination, oppression, privilege, and inequality in our society. It assumes that both disadvantage and advantage are closely linked to different aspects of lived experience, identity, status and social characteristics. These characteristics generally fall under the broad categories of gender, cultural/ethno-racial identity and background, socio-economic status, geographical location and other demographics like sexual orientation, disability and age.⁶ Further definitions of intersectionality are also available on the [WGEA](#) and [UN Women Australia](#) websites, and in the Office for Women's [Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment](#). This definition highlights how diverse and intersecting identities also can be a source of strength and 'enrich' people's lives. It states:

Intersectional analysis can provide insights into the causes of inequalities through the identification of compounding and interlocking advantages and disadvantages faced by diverse communities. The term 'intersectionality' was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race and gender interact to shape black women's employment experiences in the United States. It refers to the interconnected nature of different characteristics and

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2020). [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables](#). Accessed 7 January 2025

⁶ Nicol, S. and Kim, J. (2023). [Gender budgeting and intersectionality](#). OECD; UNICEF. (2017). [Gender Equality Glossary of Terms and Concepts](#). UNICEF.

circumstances such as race, income, class, disability, sexuality and gender as they apply to a given individual or group. These characteristics and circumstances overlap and create an interdependent system of discrimination or disadvantage. Intersectionality is sometimes applied to acknowledge both the ways in which intersecting identities can lead to the suffering of oppression and discrimination but that can also enrich individual's lives (UNICEF; scholarship by Crenshaw, [OECD Gender budgeting and intersectionality](#)).

The Study is open to multiple definitions of intersectionality to inform our approach and encourages stakeholders to include advice on this in submissions.

The debates and limitations of CALD

This Study acknowledges the limitations of and debates around the term CALD and common ABS data variables like Country of Birth, Language Other than English (LOTE) and Ancestry. While CALD has been widely adopted in the literature to capture the experience of culturally diverse individuals, there have been recent calls to shift language from CALD to Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM). Research shows that the majority of CARM women prefer a different classification than 'CALD', as this term felt problematic by not mentioning race, which is a key characteristic of their experiences.⁷ CARM refers to people who cannot be racialised as white who face marginalisation and discrimination due to their race, culture or background. For example, CARM groups include people of Black, Brown, Asian or any other non-white background.⁸

The ABS [Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity](#) includes a Minimum Core Set of Cultural and Language Indicators that consists of four concepts:

- Country of Birth of Person
- Main Language Other than English Spoke at Home
- Proficiency in Spoken English
- Indigenous Status.

Where possible, the Study will use combinations of ABS variables from the above standards and balance their limitations with the ability to develop insights. We will also consider other variables such as time since arrival and Standard Australian Classification of Countries ([SACC](#)).

⁷ Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O'Leary). (2023). [Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership: A framework for \(intersectional\) organisational action](#), Diversity Council Australia.

⁸ Diversity Council of Australia (DCA). (2023). [Words at Work: Should we use CALD or CARM?](#)

APPENDIX A: Study Terms of Reference

Overview

As part of its functions under the *Jobs and Skills Australia Act 2022*, Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) is undertaking a Gender Economic Equality Study (the Study).

This Study will analyse and explore the intersections between two key policy challenges for progressing gender economic equality: horizontal occupational segregation and gendered divides, choices and outcomes across the education, training and skills systems. The Study will prioritise intersectional investigations of the trends and barriers across both and potential policy levers to manage them.

This focus on increasing gender balance across the labour market and the intersectional approach is aligned to Priority Area 3 of the [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#). Together with the [National Cabinet priority](#) to improve 'gender balance across the labour market', the study will align with current Government priorities and provide recommendations on next steps to advance gender equality.

In line with JSA's tripartite mandate and under the guidance of JSA's Ministerial Advisory Board, the Study will work with key stakeholders through targeted engagement and collaboration including through a study Steering Committee.

JSA will present the final deliverables to government in 2025 and will publish consultation, framework and spotlight papers throughout the Study.

Governance and Consultation

The Study will be underpinned by close engagement and consultations with industry stakeholders, including peak bodies, employers, unions, educational skills and training institutions. Governments at all levels and Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs), where necessary, will also be consulted. JSA will plan stakeholder engagement to leverage existing processes where possible to minimise stakeholder burden.

For example, JSA will leverage existing governance arrangements, including Australian Government Gender Data and [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#) Interdepartmental Committees, and provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to the Study through public submissions and expert forums. The Study's Steering Group has a membership reflecting diversity and a depth of perspectives on how the labour market, skills systems and social demographics, identities and disadvantage interact. It includes experts and representatives from industry, unions, government, advocacy groups and scholars. The membership of the Steering Committee and stakeholder consultation have been planned to ensure a diversity of members and voices. The Steering Committee is chaired by JSA Deputy Commissioner, Megan Lilly.

JSA will brief the Australian Government Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, and Minister for Women on the Study's progress when requested or needed.

Broad Scope

This Study will aim to deliver new perspectives on the intersections between gendered occupational segregation and education, training and skills divides including but not limited to:

- New and more detailed whole of economy categorisations and/or indicators of occupational segregation;
- Historical analysis of occupational segregation trends, insights on future trends and policy lessons or implications of both where possible;
- The implications of new Australian Bureau of Statistics occupation classification for understanding gendered labour market trends ahead of the 2026 census;
- Analysis of how the national skills system affects women's equality through a focused analysis of post-training outcomes (in relation to pay, occupational mobility, further education and welfare) are gendered and what this looks like for different cohorts;
- Exploration of leaky pipeline trends post-training and the different policy implications for both highly gendered or more gender balanced occupations;
- Intersectional, longitudinal and post-qualification gender pay gap data that is distinct from existing ABS and Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reporting;
- Insights into gender economic equality, through an age cohort and life course lens where possible, to better identify the lifetime disadvantage of gender economic equality and the appropriate policy reforms needed;
- A JSA Gender 'Framework' to embed gendered and intersectional analysis across labour market and skills insights, policy development and stakeholders;
- Intersectional insights on all the above where feasible;
- Case studies to inform study recommendations and the policy implications of data insights. For example, on:
 - a. education and training barriers in particular industries or as faced by more disadvantaged cohorts;
 - b. the highly gendered nature of supply and demand in specific occupations;
 - c. the impact of migration or tax settings on gender economic equality;
 - d. promising government, industry or other policy levers to support workers in highly gendered occupations and mitigate the leaky pipeline.

This scope fills relevant policy evidence gaps while showcasing JSA's unique data assets and cementing a point of difference in a busy and significant academic research and government policy space. For example, the national gender strategy, the Fair Work Commission's (FWC) current [Gender Undervaluation Priority Awards Review](#) and recently announced review into examining part-time work in all awards in 2025 will progress as the Study is active. The FWC pay equity panel is also actively releasing research on gender pay equity, occupational segregation and gender undervaluation which the Study is incorporating. The [National Plan to End Violence against Women](#) and associated work including the [Final Report in Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave](#) and the [Rapid Review Prevention Approaches](#), which identifies employment participation as a prevention lever, is also notable.

Furthermore, Closing the Gap initiatives and the national gender strategy all mandate the need for intersectional data. The Women's Economic Equality Taskforce identified intersectional pay gap data as a key missing evidence gap.⁹

This intersectional approach aims to better describe the complexity of barriers and potential enablers to progress women's economic equality across different cohorts with compounding forms of disadvantage and thus identify more nuanced policy recommendations to enact change. For example, the different employment, education, skills and training barriers or outcomes migrants, single mothers or culturally and linguistically diverse cohorts face.

This approach is also consistent with JSA's broader legislative remit, which identifies a focus on priority cohorts (such as First Nations Australians and people with disability), gender equality, insecure work and regional Australia. JSA may identify labour market and skills issues across cohorts which require further research and will fall outside the scope, remit or timing of this Study.

The Study will use both qualitative and quantitative research methods and extensive consultation with stakeholders to provide recommendations to government on progressing gender economic equality.

Process

JSA will publish spotlight papers with interim findings and the JSA Gender Framework throughout the Study before presenting its final deliverable to government in 2025. JSA will publish the final deliverables and recommendations shortly thereafter.

⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2023). [A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023 - 2033](#), page 22. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government.