# Message from the Commissioner

I am pleased to share some of the latest insights into the state and nature of gender equality in Victoria's public sector.

The data, published on the Commission’s publicly available [Insights Portal](https://insights.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/application-dashboard), reveals the many ways gender inequality continues to play out in our public sector workplaces.

Reporting this information publicly is important for transparency. The data highlights the areas that duty holders – those organisations covered by the Gender Equality Act 2020 - must focus their efforts to make their workplaces safe and fair for all employees. It also means employees, unions, and the broader community can hold organisations to account.

Making meaningful progress towards gender equality in workplaces and in the broader community is challenging. It requires persistent leadership commitment, solid resourcing, tenacious focus and strategic effort.

I have been inspired by the commitment of many passionate gender equality professionals and advocates who are working hard to create fairer workplaces and communities in Victoria.

However, despite their efforts, too many of these people are working without adequate leadership commitment and resources to ensure their organisations can make the meaningful progress required on each of the workplace gender equality indicators in the Act in every two-year period. Senior leaders and governing bodies must lead the way towards gender equality in their workplaces. In many organisations, greater oversight of gender equality obligations, and increased resourcing is needed.

While the latest data reveals some small positive progress in relation to the gender pay gap, women in leadership, and men taking a greater amount of parental leave, there remains much to be done.

The lack of progress in reducing the experience of sexual harassment is disappointing given the significant policy and legislative focus on sexual harassment in recent years. Sexual harassment is a serious workplace health and safety issue and must be addressed by leaders and governing bodies as a priority.

More needs to be done to undertake gender impact assessments on key policies, programs and services. Duty holders can play a transformative role in addressing gender inequality in our community – but this potential is not being realised. While understanding of the value of gender impact assessments is growing, I will be sharpening my focus as a regulator to make sure duty holders apply a gender lens to the work that needs it most.

This is the first progress report and progress audit that duty holders have submitted under the Gender Equality Act. Many organisations have been focusing on setting up the systems and processes they need to progress and report on gender equality actions. I have taken this into account when assessing compliance, opting for a lenient approach with a focus on educating duty holders in this reporting period.

I expect to see much greater progress reported in the next 2-year period, when organisations have had more time to embed their practices and refine their strategies.

While we still have a lot of work to do, I am heartened by the efforts of organisations that have demonstrated compliance and made genuine strides towards progress in this reporting period. Each organisation that reports to me is on their own path to gender equality, and every strategy, gender impact assessment, and action that supports gender equality is a step in the right direction. Only through our collective efforts will we bring about change.

**Dr Niki Vincent**

Commissioner
Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector

# Introduction

The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector has published the latest gender equality data and progress reports from nearly 300 public sector organisations. Collectively these organisations (‘duty holders’) employ around 450,000 Victorians.

The publicly available [Insights Portal](https://insights.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/application-dashboard) shows gender equality data for each duty holder and industry. Progress reports submitted by each duty holder are also available.

The latest data is from the second workplace gender equality audits conducted by duty holders under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Act). Duty holders must report their audit data to the Commissioner every two years as part of their Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAPs) and progress reports.

The data covers seven gender equality indicators:

* Gender composition at all levels of the workforce
* Gender composition of governing bodies
* Gender pay equity
* Sexual harassment
* Recruitment and promotion
* Leave and flexible work
* Occupational gender segregation

# Compliance with the Gender Equality Act 2020

The Gender Equality Actapplies to almost 300 Victorian public sector organisations (duty holders) that have 50 or more employees, including universities and local councils. [The Act requires](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/what-you-need-to-do-to-comply) duty holders to promote gender equality and plan for, report on, and collect data about progress towards gender equality in their workplace.

All duty holders who were required to submit a 2023 progress report and progress audit to the Commission did so.

The Commissioner and her small team completed multiple reviews of each duty holder’s progress report and audit data to assess compliance. Thirty-one duty holders resubmitted their audit data to meet compliance standards after receiving feedback from the Commission.

This is the first progress report that duty holders have submitted under the Act. Because of this, the Commissioner has taken a lenient approach to compliance in this reporting period. The Commission has given all duty holders detailed feedback. This will help them improve gender equality planning, actions, and reporting in the future.

The Commissioner expects to see much greater progress reported in the next 2-year period, when duty holders have had more time to strengthen their practices and strategies.

# Key findings

As noted in the Commissioner’s message, making meaningful progress towards gender equality is challenging. It requires persistent leadership commitment, solid resourcing, tenacious focus, and strategic effort.

Duty holders under the Act vary in terms of sector, size, regionality, and resourcing. We know these factors can affect each organisation’s gender equality progress. This was considered throughout the compliance review process.

## Progress made in implementing Gender Equality Action Plans

Most duty holders reported well on their progress in implementing their GEAP strategies, with around 96% demonstrating compliance on this obligation.

## Progress made against the workplace gender equality indicators

In the reporting period, many duty holders focused on setting up new processes, resources and practices to support gender equality initiatives. While more time is needed for many organisations to demonstrate quantitative progress against the workplace gender equality indicators, it was promising to see that many showed thoughtful and reflective approaches to gender equality and identified where and how to make improvements. Some effectively applied an intersectional approach to their gender equality reporting.

The proportion of organisations that demonstrated compliance – that is, showed that they had made progress, or provided acceptable reasons for not making progress as required under the Act – for each of the workplace gender equality indicators was:

* Gender composition of governing bodies: **88%**
* Gender composition at all levels of the workforce: **74%**
* Recruitment and promotion: **69%**
* Gender pay equity: **67%**
* Leave and flexibility: **67%**
* Gendered workforce segregation: **63%**
* Workplace sexual harassment: **60%**

## Reporting on gender impact assessments

Most duty holders (69%) were assessed as having met the obligation to undertake gender impact assessments (GIAs) on their public policies, programs and services.

However, the Commissioner set the compliance bar low for this first progress report. Duty holders were assessed as compliant if they reported accurately that they completed a GIA on at least one program, policy or service. This means that a duty holder could achieve compliance regardless of whether they fully complied with the requirement to complete a GIA on all programs, policies and services with a direct and significant impact on the public.

Almost a third (31%) of duty holders did not demonstrate compliance on this obligation. Issues included:

* organisations reporting no GIAs with no permitted reason provided
* organisations reporting GIAs on internal policies, programs, and services that did not meet the *direct and significant impact on the public* threshold
* organisations reporting actions that did not relate to gender and/or were not clearly described.

The Commissioner will be raising the bar for compliance and looking for significant improvement in GIAs in the next reporting cycle.

## Adequate resourcing and leadership

Many duty holders reported that they did not have enough resources to implement their gender equality work. However, the Act *requires* that organisations adequately resource the development and implementation of their GEAP.

For some organisations there was a lack of oversight of the reporting process. Some very poorly completed progress reports were not signed off at a senior level.

Duty holders need to make sure their obligations under the Act are overseen by their governing body. The Commissioner provided feedback reports to board chairs as well as chief executives and other key contacts. This will now be our standard practice for reporting back to duty holders. This is an important way to ensure that obligations are being managed appropriately at board level – as should be the case with all legislation – and that the board and executive commits appropriate resourcing to complying with their obligations.

# Analysis of audit data: Preliminary outcomes

For information about how we have used our data to produce these results, see [Appendix: Understanding our data](#_Appendix:_Understanding_our).

## Pay gap

Overall, the median base salary and median total remuneration gender pay gaps in Victorian public sector organisations decreased slightly in 2023, compared to 2021. However, there was a small increase in the mean base salary and total remuneration gaps. Results varied by industry (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Gender pay gaps for organisations covered by the Gender Equality Act**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Scope  | Mean base pay gap (%) | Median base pay gap (%) | Mean total pay gap (%) | Median total pay gap (%) |
|  | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** |
| Whole of sector | **13.8** | **14.1** | **7.8** | **7.4** | **15.1** | **15.6** | **10.2** | **9.1** |
| Creative industries, finance, transport, other | 11.3 | 12.5 | 12.6 | 15.2 | 11.3 | 12.3 | 12.4 | 16.6 |
| Local government | 4.2 | 2.5 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 5.4 | 3.5 | 2.6 | 1.7 |
| Police & emergency services | 13.3 | 7.4 | 6.5 | 5.7 | 18.1 | 10.5 | 10.4 | 8.4 |
| Public health care | 34.3 | 31.9 | 9.6 | 7.6 | 34.0 | 32.3 | 11.4 | 12.9 |
| TAFE & other education | 7.7 | 7.7 | 11.2 | 12.5 | 8.5 | 8.3 | 11.1 | 13.6 |
| Universities | 10.0 | 10.3 | 6.6 | 7.7 | 10.3 | 10.8 | 7.1 | 6.9 |
| Victorian Public Service | 11.4 | 9.6 | 9.9 | 9.9 | 12.1 | 10.1 | 11.0 | 9.4 |
| Water & land management | 4.4 | 2.6 | 5.1 | 4.7 | 6.9 | 4.9 | 8.3 | 7.7 |

**Notes on gender pay gap data**

* ‘Base’ reflects employees’ base salary only. ‘Total’ takes into account employees’ total remuneration, including overtime and performance pay.
* The ‘mean’ is the average. The ‘median’ is the middle of a set of numbers ordered from smallest to largest. The median is not skewed by extreme values in the same way as the ‘mean’ or average is.
* 2021 results include data from 204 organisations, while 2023 results include data from 238 organisations. Improved data quality means that more organisations have met data quality standards in 2023 and therefore had their data included in 2023 results.
* 2021 data reported here may differ slightly to the results published in our Baseline Report because the figures above include additional data submitted since the Baseline Report was published.

## Sexual harassment

While the overall percentage of employees that reported experiencing sexual harassment has not changed since 2021, more women and people who self-describe their gender experienced sexual harassment in 2023 compared to 2021 (see Table 2).

As Table 2 shows, in 2023 more employees said they formally reported sexual harassment incidents to their organisation. However, organisations reported 22% fewer formally reported sexual harassment incidents. This suggests that much more needs to be done to reduce the experience of sexual harassment, to accurately collect data, and to accurately report on sexual harassment in workplaces.

***Table 2: Sexual harassment for organisations covered by the Act***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Scope** | **Percentage of respondents who said they had experienced sexual harassment (%)** | **Percentage of employees that experienced sexual harassment who said they formally reported this (%)** | **Number of formal reports of sexual harassment that organisations reported**  |
|  | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** |
| **Whole of sector** | **6** | **6** | **4** | **6** | **1,278** | **997** |
| Women | 6 | 7 | 4 | 7 | - | - |
| Men | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | - | - |
| Self-described gender | 13 | 14 | 5 | 5 | - | - |

**Notes on sexual harassment data**

* Employee experience data is sourced from People Matter Survey (PMS) results for organisations that participated in the survey and were covered by the Act (i.e. had 50 or more employees). For this data set, 2021 results include data from 267 organisations, while 2023 results include data from 269 organisations.
* The option to participate in PMS is available to organisations that may not be covered by the Act. Consequently, results for ‘whole of sector’ presented above, may differ to results for ‘whole of sector’ presented by the Victorian Public Sector Commission, which administers and delivers the PMS.
* The number of formal reports of sexual harassment reported by organisations is sourced from workforce data reported by duty holders. For this dataset, 2021 results include data from 189 organisations, while 2023 results include data from 269 organisations.
* Of the 269 organisations that reported sexual harassment data in 2023, more than half (152 organisations) reported no complaints, while 117 organisations reported one or more complaints.
* 2021 data reported here may differ slightly to the results published in our Baseline Report. Results in this report are an aggregate of individual survey response data. Baseline Report results were modelled using organisation-aggregated survey response data, as individual survey response data was not available at that time.

## Workforce and governing body composition

Women made up 66% of the total public sector workforce in both 2021 and 2023.

There was a small improvement in women represented at senior leadership levels – from 47% in 2021 to 48% in 2023 (see Table 3.1).

Encouragingly, as Table 3.1 shows, the proportion of women in CEO roles increased from 39% in 2021 to 44% in 2023.

Gender balance was maintained across governing bodies (boards) and chairs of governing bodies as Table 3.2 shows. Around half of these positions were held by women in both 2021 and 2023.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show the variations for women in leadership roles across industries in the public sector.

**Table 3.1: Women in leadership for organisations covered by the Act**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Scope** | **Women in senior leadership**(% women) | **Women in CEO roles**(% women) | **Women in workforce**(% women) |
|  | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** |
| **Whole of sector** | **47** | **48** | **39** | **44** | **66** | **66** |
| Creative industries, finance, transport & other | 47 | 44 | 43 | 45 | 51 | 53 |
| Local government | 39 | 45 | 31 | 34 | 63 | 63 |
| Police & emergency services | 46 | 43 | 17 | 29 | 36 | 38 |
| Public health care | 61 | 60 | 51 | 57 | 78 | 77 |
| TAFE & other education | 54 | 56 | 38 | 46 | 59 | 60 |
| Universities | 40 | 46 | 22 | 25 | 59 | 60 |
| Victorian Public Service | 46 | 49 | 42 | 44 | 70 | 70 |
| Water & land management | 42 | 44 | 38 | 45 | 41 | 43 |

**Table 3.2: Women in governing bodies covered by the Act**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Scope** | **Women in governing bodies**(% women) | **Women Chairs in governing bodies**(% women) |
|  | **2021** | **2023** | **2021** | **2023** |
| **Whole of sector** | **52** | **54** | **48** | **51** |
| Creative industries, finance, transport, other | 55 | 57 | 57 | 53 |
| Local government | 45 | 45 | 49 | 49 |
| Police & emergency services | 51 | 56 | 17 | 33 |
| Public health care | 55 | 59 | 46 | 47 |
| TAFE & other education | 55 | 61 | 46 | 69 |
| Universities | 48 | 48 | 44 | 22 |
| Victorian Public Service | 50 | 52 | 68 | 45 |
| Water & land management | 55 | 58 | 57 | 71 |

**Notes on women in leadership data**

* The number of organisations included in 2021 data and 2023 data vary slightly.
* Results for women in governing bodies in local government did not change from 2021 to 2023 as there was no local government election during this period. The 2024 local government election results are not reflected in this data.
* Some industry groups contain only a small number of organisations and changes in results should be interpreted with caution. Universities and the Police and emergency services industries each cover fewer than 10 organisations.
* Organisations were not prompted to identify senior leaders in 2021 audit data. For consistency, senior leaders have been defined in both 2021 and 2023 as employees in the top two levels of an organisation, with an occupation within the Manager or Professional groups.

## Paid parental leave

Women took more paid parental leave than men in 2021 and 2023. However, the average number of weeks taken by women halved in 2023 (however, see notes for differences in the way this data was reported in 2023 compared to 2021 which is likely to have influenced this apparent shift). Encouragingly, there was a small increase in average weeks of parental leave taken by men in 2023, compared to 2021 (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Paid parental leave in organisations covered by the Act**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Scope** | **Average weeks of paid parental leave taken**  |
|  | **2021** | **2023** |
| **Whole of sector** | **16.4** | **8.2** |
| Women | 19.6 | 9.1 |
| Men | 3.9 | 5.2 |
| Self-described gender | 4.8 | 5.5 |

**Notes on paid parental leave**

* For this dataset, 2021 results include data from 213 organisations, and 2023 results include data from 233 organisations.
* In 2021, some organisations reported only the portion of each employee’s parental leave that fell within the 12-month audit reporting period. Others reported the full duration of parental leave taken by each employee, even if some of that leave fell outside the reporting period. In 2023, the Commission asked organisations to take the latter approach.

## Gender impact assessments (GIAs)

In total, duty holders reported that 1573 GIAs were completed during the reporting period. This represents an average of fewer than 6 per organisation. Given that duty holders must undertake a GIA on every new or up-for-review policy program or service that has a direct and significant impact on the public, this seems low. Forty-five duty holders reported no GIAs and did not provide a permitted reason.

GIAs were completed on a broad and diverse range of work, from major Victorian government infrastructure projects to community sports programs and specialised healthcare services.

There was variation by industry (see Table 5), with local government organisations reporting the highest number of GIAs on average.

**Table 5: Average number of GIAs reported by organisations covered by the Act**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Scope** | **Average number of GIAs reported per organisation** |
|  | **2023** |
| **Whole of sector** | **6** |
| Creative industries, finance, transport, other | 1 |
| Local government | 11 |
| Police & emergency services | 4 |
| Public health care | 2 |
| TAFE & other education | 3 |
| Universities | 4 |
| Victorian Public Service | 8 |
| Water & land management | 3 |

# Next steps

The Commission is undertaking further detailed analysis of the audit data collected for 2023 to assess the progress made against 2021 data. We will publish additional insights in early 2025.

The next reporting period is from July 2023 to June 2025. Duty holders will have had more time to embed their gender equality work. The Commissioner expects to see much greater progress in the next progress reporting period.

# Appendix: Understanding our data

* The results in this report reflect audit submissions at 28 November 2024. All audit submissions have been checked for compliance with the Gender Equality Act. Additionally, all audit submissions have been checked against a standard for data quality to assess the suitability of the data for use in research and publications. The data quality standard is often more stringent than the compliance standard. This means an organisation can meet its obligations under the Gender Equality Act, but we may still not consider their data usable for research and publications. If an organisation’s data did not meet our data quality standards, it is excluded from the results reported here.
* Some organisations identified mistakes in their initial audit submissions. The results in this report reflect any corrections the Commission has received as at 28 November 2024. The results reported here may differ from those found in past publications such as the 2021 Baseline Report.
* Employee experience survey responses are available only for organisations that participated in the People Matter Survey.
* Gender pay gap and gender composition measures are calculated as ‘snapshot’ measures, as at the end of the audit reporting period.
* Sexual harassment incident counts and parental leave measures are calculated as ‘lookback’ measures, across the 12-month audit reporting period.
* Gender composition measures are stated as a percentage of all women, men and people of self-described gender. Those who prefer not to report their gender to their organisation are not included in these calculations.
* 2023 GIA data in this report excludes GIAs on policies, programs and services that the Commission assessed did not meet the threshold of having a direct impact on the public.
* All results are calculated as headline results. Headline results include data from all organisations that supplied data of sufficient quality in the reporting period. Trend results that account for differences in the composition of the data set over multiple reporting periods (organisations reporting) are likely to generate some additional insights to those presented in this preliminary report. Trend analysis results will be included in our more comprehensive insights publication in early 2025.