



Mining and  
Automotive  
Skills Alliance

# January 2025 Research Bulletin

Gender balance and  
inclusivity in the workplace  
– more red tape or  
industrial secret?



# Gender balance and inclusivity

Migrants are an integral part of the Australian workforce with nearly one in four Australian residents being born overseas and half of the population having an overseas-born parent.<sup>1</sup> In an attempt to boost productivity, address skills shortages, and build stronger communities the Australian Government has recently undertaken a review of the migration system.<sup>2</sup> This Research Bulletin investigates the role of migration and the alignment of the migration system towards the Automotive and Mining industries.

Gender balance or inclusion is an important aspect of workplace environments. Organisations that welcome and actively seek inclusivity and diversity tend to experience better talent attraction and retention outcomes, greater employee engagement and satisfaction, and even better innovation and creativity outputs.<sup>3</sup>

Australia ranks 24<sup>th</sup> (out of 148) on the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index but 64<sup>th</sup> on its *wage equality for similar work* sub-index.<sup>4</sup> This indicates the imbalance in employment and earnings for female workers in the economy. Imbalances in wages or employment towards any cohort in the workplace can have negative consequences on morale and, by extension, labour productivity. Initiatives that support greater diversity and inclusion can have the opposite effect. Furthermore, such initiatives are not only beneficial for workers as they tend to improve the quality of work life but also impart various retention, recruitment, and productivity advantages to the entire organisation.

The effects on morale are contagious. Enthusiasm and dedication spill over and envelope entire organisations.<sup>5</sup> This means that the benefits of inclusivity initiatives are not limited to the cohorts they may seemingly be addressing; rather, everyone in the workplace becomes a direct beneficiary of such initiatives.

Australia's mining sector, like most mining and traditional industries around the world, was viewed as male-dominated. However, over the last three decades, mining organisations have made an active and directed effort to reverse the gender imbalance. Specifically, of all industries employing a high proportion of female tertiary graduates, mining has gone from having the second-worst gender-pay balance to the second-best (Figure 1).

---

<sup>1</sup> Ai Group, "[Skilled migrants' contribution to the Australian workforce](#)", 2024

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, "[Migration Strategy](#)", 2023

<sup>3</sup> Tony Butler-Sims, "Inclusion In the Workplace", *Forbes*, Feb 13 2024.

<https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2024/02/13/inclusion-in-the-workplace-and-6-reasons-why-it-matters/>

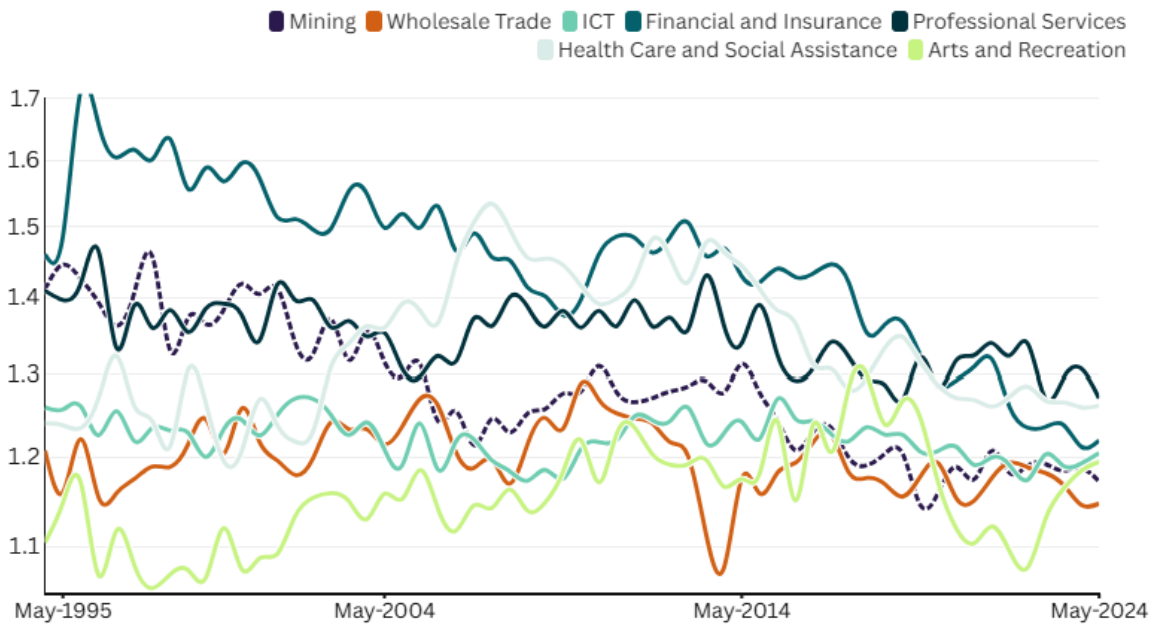
<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap 2024", *WEF*, June 2024.

[https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2024.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Heather E. Price, "Employee Morale and Organisational Climate in Schools: The Importance of Affective Coworker Relationships", *Networks, Work, and Inequality*, April 2013.

[https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/s0277-2833\(2013\)0000024011/full/html](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/s0277-2833(2013)0000024011/full/html)

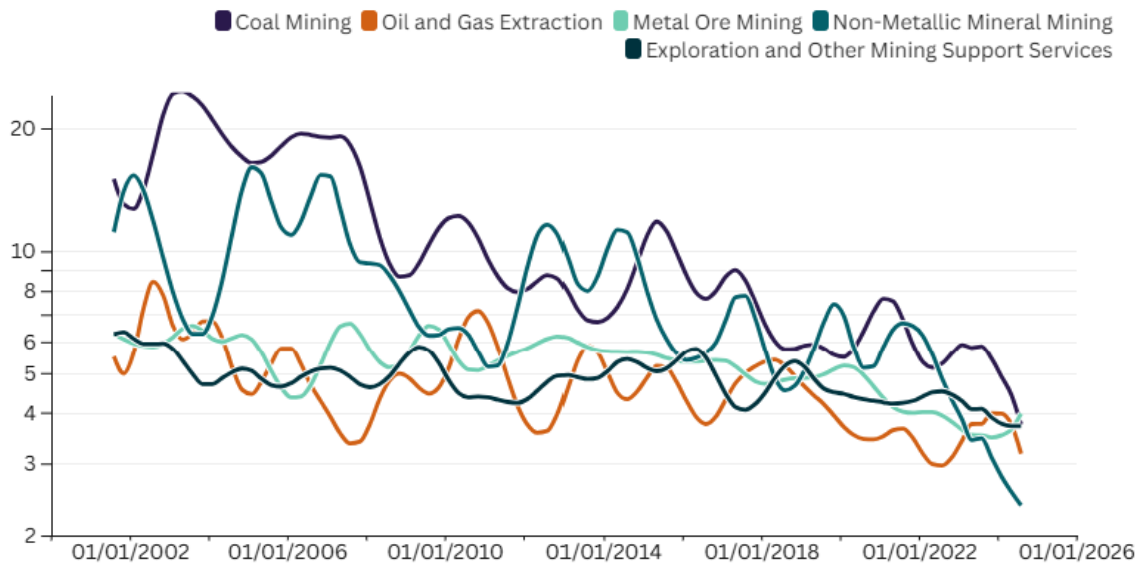
**Figure 1. Changes in industry-level gender pay gap**



Source: ABS, AUSMASA

This change in income disparity has been led by and contributed to a falling employment gap (the ratio of male to female employees) (Figure 2) in all mining sub-divisions. As more female employees enter the industry and rise along the ranks, they tend to earn more, which lifts the female income average. The rising income attracts a greater proportion of female applicants and simultaneously ensures greater retention.

**Figure 2. Gender disparity in workforce composition across industries**

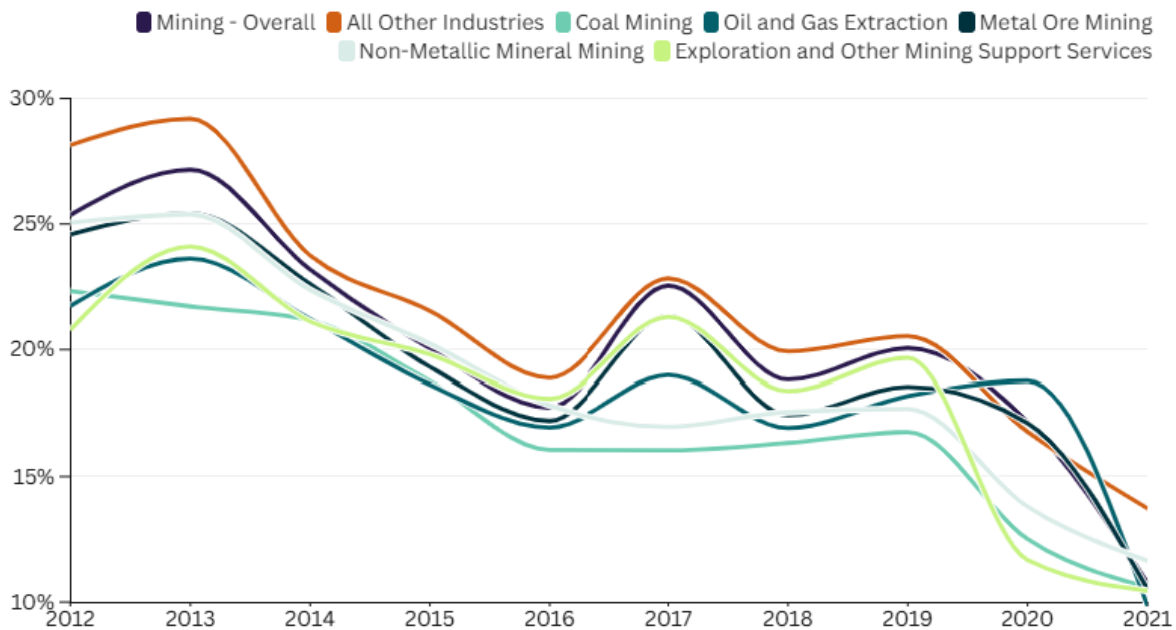


Source: JSA, AUSMASA

Directed and strategic initiatives that ensure better gender balance in employment earnings also have spillover benefits for the rest of the workforce, including, but not limited to, better morale, retention, and recruitment. These effects can be witnessed in various forms, such as greater participation of Indigenous workforces or falling turnover (Figure 3).<sup>6</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia’s (JSA) publication of labour flows allows us to compute labour turnover at an industry and sub-division level. Mining and all its sub-divisions have seen reductions in labour turnover both internally and when compared to the average turnover across Australia.

<sup>6</sup> The mining sector is the largest employer of first nations workers, with 4.6% of its workers being first nations people, with the runner-up hiring only 3.3%.  
AUSMASA, “Workforce Plan 2024”, AUSMASA, April 2024.

**Figure 3. Labour turnover across mining sub-divisions**



Source: JSA, AUSMASA

As turnover can be a serious concern for various employers, even conservative estimates suggest that replacing employees can cost up to two times the employee's salary.<sup>7</sup> There are other downsides to higher labour turnover, such as:<sup>8</sup>

- Lower employee morale
- Lost productivity
- Diminished employer brand

Ultimately, falling labour turnover is an excellent indicator of employee satisfaction and, by extension, productivity,<sup>9</sup> which is good not only for the organisation but also for the economy. Things are changing in the mining sector, as evidenced by improved employment outcomes for women and declining labour turnover. These lessons need to be analysed, studied, and made ubiquitous, benefiting not only the employees but everyone. Learnings that may unlock how Australia can catch up on equal wages for equal work, for example.

<sup>7</sup> Eagle Hill Consulting, "Employee Retention Index", *PR NEWS WIRE*, October 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Castrillon, "5 Ways companies can reduce employee turnover and retain top talent", *Forbes*, November 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Oxford University, "Happy workers are 13% more productive", *Saïd Business School, Oxford University*, October 2019. [Happy workers are 13% more productive | University of Oxford](https://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/news/happy-workers-are-13-more-productive)



**Mining and  
Automotive**  
Skills Alliance

The Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance (AUSMASA)  
is a Jobs and Skills Council funded by the  
Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

©Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance (AUSMASA)