

Research Brief

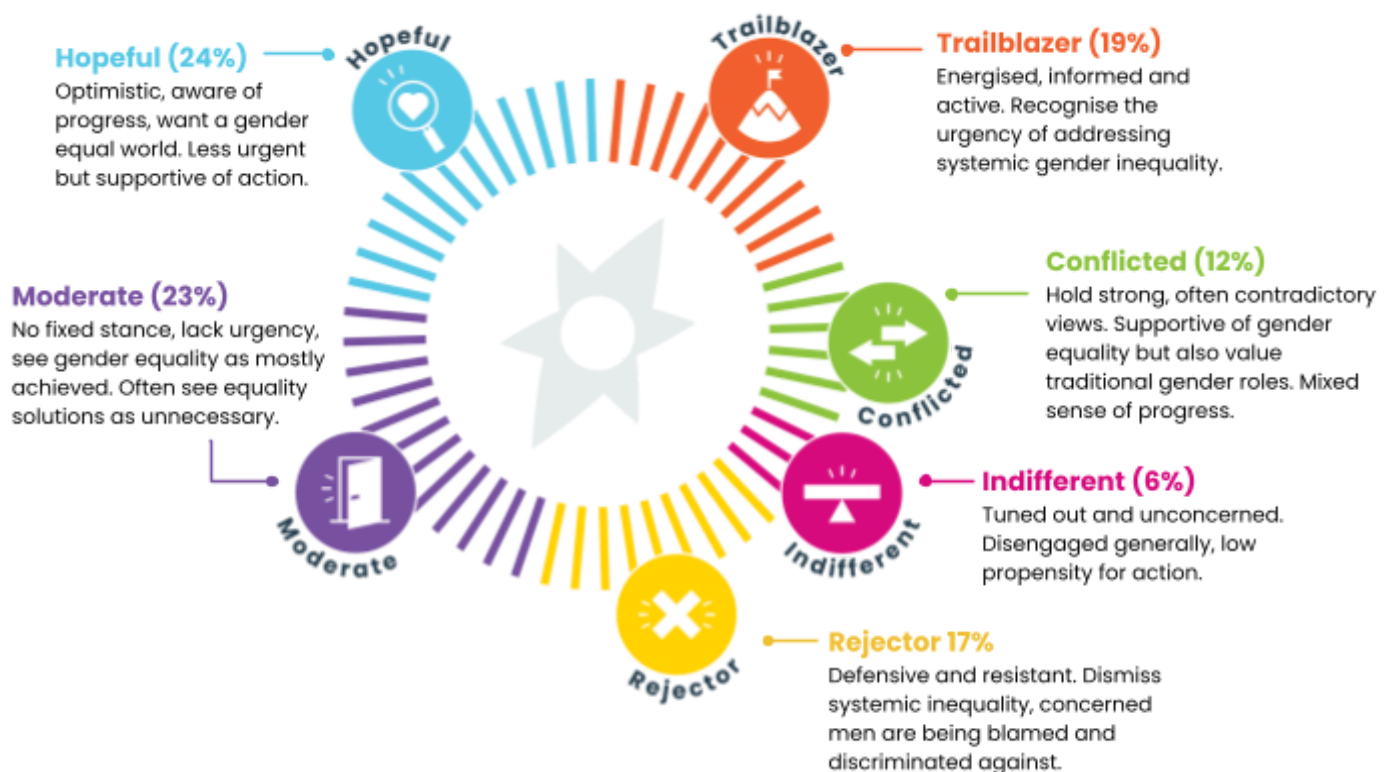
This brief outlines the latest findings from Stage 2 of the Gender Compass research. Insights have been translated into a Research Report and the *Moving the Middle* messaging guide, which were launched by Plan International Australia in April 2025.

What is Gender Compass?

Gender Compass is a first-of-its-kind study revealing what Australians really think about gender equality. This multi-stage research project was developed by social researchers, funded by philanthropy and led by Plan International Australia.

The Gender Compass tool – a unique audience segmentation that splits the Australian community into distinct groups based on their attitudes to gender equality – supports advocates with evidence to help create a more gender-equal world. Since its launch in 2023, Gender Compass has been embraced by advocates across 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 community.

Recap: The Gender Compass segments



Topline tensions surfaced in Stage 2

The latest Gender Compass research revealed a broad range of conflicting and at times contradictory beliefs that Australians have about gender equality.

To effectively navigate and respond to these tensions, they must first be understood.

1. Most Australians think gender equality is important.

But inequality is under-recognised – many think we are close to achieving it. If people don't see an imbalance (inequality), equality solutions can seem overblown and even 'unfair'.

2. Broad recognition that gender equality benefits everyone.

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

3. Most 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.

4. Widespread support for solutions aimed at addressing gender inequality.

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

5. Broad recognition of a shared problem, i.e. rigid gender expectations holding us back.

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

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

But this ranges from worrying about the harm caused by rigid ideas of masculinity to concerns about men coming under increasing scrutiny. Some feel there is a 'war on men'.

7. Most want more opportunities and equal outcomes for women and girls.

But many assume this means less for men and boys (zero-sum game thinking). Many are sensitive to anything that feels like pitting men and women against each other.

8. There is a significant appetite for working together.

But working together requires men to be included in the gender equality story. Presenting men's concerns and experiences alongside those of women and other groups who are disproportionately impacted by inequality builds issue salience and relevance.

9. Most Australians 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.

10. 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.

'Moving the Middle'

A primary outcome of the Stage 2 research has been the identification of a 'moveable middle' – the Hopeful, Conflicted and Moderate segments who are neither energised supporters nor active resisters – as a strategic target for broadening societal support.

Moving the Middle is a messaging guide for gender equality advocates that translates these findings into actionable communication strategies to engage the 'middle' segments.

The *Moving the Middle* guide proposes:

- **A focus on engaging the ‘moveable middle’.** This guide provides evidence-based guardrails to help us bring the middle segments into the conversation.
- **Adapting our language to expand our reach.** As advocates of equality, we have been very effective in motivating supporters. But the messages that energise our supporters can alienate others. By changing the way we talk about gender equality, we can meet people where they are, using language, examples and values that resonate.
- **Shifting our approach, not what we stand for.** This guide proposes adjusting the way we communicate to strategically build the consensus required to support meaningful structural change, without compromising structural equality goals.
- **Utilising a Value–Barrier–Action–Vision framework.** Lead with resonant values, clearly state the problem (gender inequality), outline the action required to deliver on the core values (equality solutions), and provide a vision for a better future.
- **Embracing a set of core messaging principles:**
 - **Lean into shared values** such as safety, freedom of choice and caring for others.
 - **Unite with inclusive language** that builds buy-in and emphasises togetherness.
 - **Write men into the story**, without centring men, to make it relevant to everyone.
 - **Make it real and recognisable** by replacing abstract terms with relatable examples.
 - **Balance the solution** with an honest framing of the problem.
 - **Avoid polarising language** that pushes people away.
 - **Paint a positive future** that inspires hope and a sense of shared benefit.

Practical implications for policymakers, executives, and advocates:

- **Use words that work:** Understand your audience and adapt your language to make gender equality topics real, relatable and accessible to increase engagement.
- **Messenger matters:** For hesitant segments, trusted peers and relatable figures are more effective messengers than activists or politicians.
- **Tone is strategic:** Leading with empathy and understanding mitigates defensive reactions and invites more constructive engagement.
- **Foster engagement:** Integrate people of all genders into stories of change.
- **Messenger matters:** For hesitant audiences, trusted peers and relatable figures are more effective messengers than activists or politicians.
- **Tailor messages:** Adapt messages to specific institutional settings —workplaces, schools, community groups — using relatable examples to build salience and trust.

Learn more

- [Download the Stage 1 Gender Compass Report](#) (2023).
- [Request access to the Stage 2 Report and *Moving the Middle* messaging guide](#) (2025).

Workplaces in focus

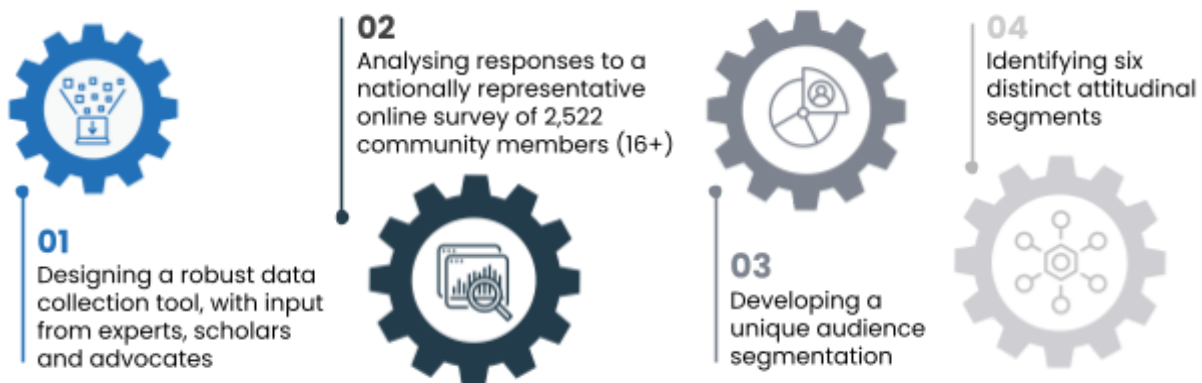
The workplace presents a real opportunity, with three in four working Australians open to discussing gender equality at work. This is consistent across workplace size, type and sector.

Tips for leaders:

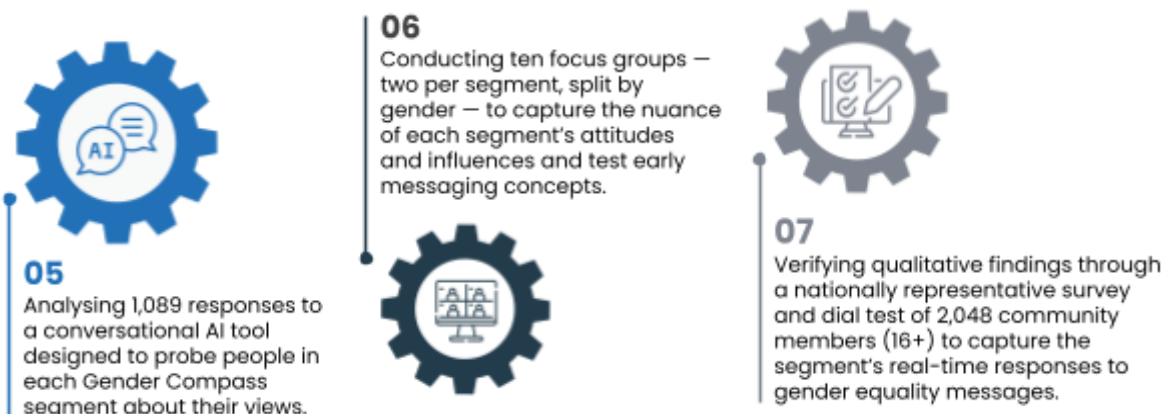
- Consider who is best positioned to lead the conversation — ask your audience.
- Start with broad, accessible topics and align with shared values.
- Draw the link between practical concerns such as respect and equal pay and things most people care about: safety, freedom, opportunity and caring for others.
- Tailor discussions to your audience — make it real and relevant.
- Create space for a safe and open dialogue to build mutual understanding.
- Ensure discussions are inclusive and respectful.
- Acknowledge discomfort and create a supportive space, free of judgement.
- To build trust and credibility, back up discussions with genuine actions.

Methodology

In Stage 1, we set out to map the diversity of Australians' views on gender equality. Data was collected in mid 2023, utilising quantitative methods:



In Stage 2, we aimed to dig deeper — to get to the heart of who the segments are, what shapes their beliefs, and how to engage them on this issue. Data was collected between October and December, 2024 utilising a mixed methods approach:



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