

**2023-2024
(WAVE 4)**



**DIVERSITY
COUNCIL
AUSTRALIA**



INCLUSION@WORK INDEX

MAPPING THE STATE OF INCLUSION IN THE AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE

SYNOPSIS REPORT

Report embargoed until 29th February 2024.

A full report of this research can be found on the [DCA website](#).

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Suggested citation: Diversity Council Australia (R. D'Almada-Remedios), *Inclusion@Work Index 2023–2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce Synopsis Report*, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.

About Diversity Council Australia

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We provide unique research, inspiring events and programs, curated resources and expert advice across all diversity dimensions to a community of member organisations.

Our belief, vision and mission

- Our belief is that diversity and inclusion is good for people and business.
- Our vision is to create a more diverse and inclusive Australia.
- Our mission is to encourage and enable Australian organisations to create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

DCA works in partnership with members to generate groundbreaking high impact diversity research that drives business improvement through providing evidence-based guidance on how to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool. DCA's research is provided for general information purposes only and is not professional or legal advice.

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“ Since DCA’s last Inclusion@Work Index was released in 2021, Australia has undergone significant change. From electing a new government to moments of euphoric national unity cheering on the Matildas and navigating the outcome of the historic Voice referendum.

While the global pandemic is firmly in our rearview mirror, workplaces are adjusting to the latest ‘new normal’, grappling with questions around flexible working, AI technology, inflationary pressures, and growing skills shortages.

Meanwhile, employees are still processing the trauma and disruption of these past few years, fuelling a growing disillusionment with traditional working arrangements.

With all this in mind, it is unsurprising that DCA’s 2023–2024 Inclusion@Work Index finds workers feeling less connected, valued and included post-pandemic.

This fourth and latest Index is uniquely positioned to capture post-pandemic Australia and provide a cohesive image of how the pandemic has impacted workplaces through comparison with wave two (2019–2020, pre-pandemic) and wave 3 (2021–2022, during-pandemic).

In a time of so much disruption and division, a focus on diversity and inclusion is more important than ever. This report addresses the unique problems of the post-pandemic workforce and lays out a case for D&I action as a proven solution. ”

LISA ANNESE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, DIVERSITY COUNCIL AUSTRALIA



WHAT IS THE INCLUSION@WORK INDEX?

DCA developed the first Inclusion@Work Index survey in 2017 to map the state of inclusion in the Australian workforce. Since then, we have repeated the survey biennially to track workplace inclusion over time. Now in its 4th Wave, DCA set out to investigate 2 questions:

1 How **inclusive** is the Australian workforce for a diversity of employees, and how has this changed over time?

2 How **exclusive** is the Australian workforce for a diversity of employees, and how has this changed over time?



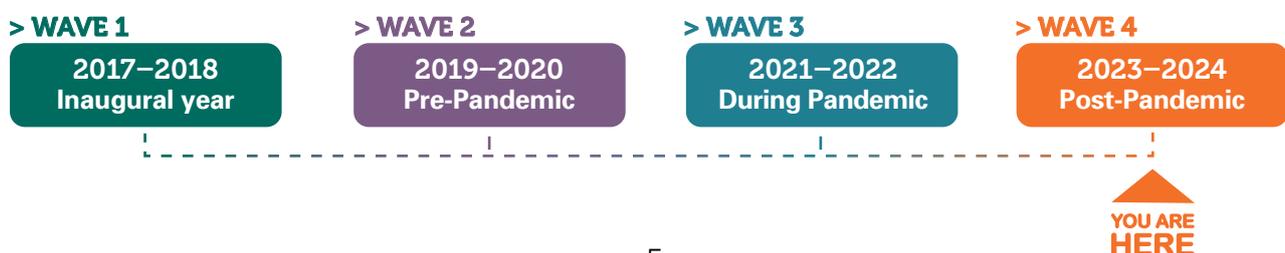
To do this, we surveyed a **nationally representative sample of 3,000 Australian workers.**

OUR ASPIRATION IS TO:

- encourage Australian organisations to **achieve inclusion** in their workplaces
- biennially **track Australia's progress** (or lack of) in creating Inclusion@Work
- encourage Australians to consider workplace inclusion in relation to a **broad set of workers** – not just men and women, but also Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally diverse and non-culturally diverse backgrounds and people from other key demographic groups (e.g. age, caring responsibilities, disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity).

WHAT IS 'WAVE 4'?

The 2023–2024 Inclusion@Work Index is the 4th Index Wave DCA has conducted since 2017.





WHAT DOES INCLUSION@WORK LOOK LIKE?

Inclusion@Work occurs when we feel respected, connected, and able to progress and contribute at work. We can experience Inclusion@Work – or lack of – from our teams, our managers, and our organisation as a whole.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Diversity is the mix of people in your organisation.

Diversity refers to all the ways in which we differ (e.g. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, age, education, gender, profession).

WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion is getting this mix to work.

Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people are respected, connected, progressing and contributing to organisational success.



WHAT IS INCLUSION@WORK?

DCA defines inclusion as occurring when a diversity of people (e.g. from different ages, cultural backgrounds, genders) are respected, connected, progressing, and contributing to organisational success.

It's important to remember that all employees experience inclusion differently. For example, being respected at work may look and feel very different for a young Anglo-Celtic Australian graduate and an older Chinese-Australian executive.

So, it's important to learn about other's identities (e.g. age, cultural background, gender) and how this may (or may not) influence our view and experience of Inclusion@Work.



Respected. Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people at work feel valued and respected for who they are.

Connected. Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people feel connected to their co-workers and so have a sense of belonging.

Progressing. Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people at work have opportunities to develop their career and progress.

Contributing. Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people can contribute their talents and energies to the organisation.



MEASURING INCLUSION

Respondents were asked a series of questions about how inclusive their team, immediate manager, and organisation was. Based on their answers, an average score out of 5 was calculated.





WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE TEAM?

An inclusive team is one where a diversity of people feel that they:



are respected and valued team members



are connected to their team



can contribute and progress at work.

WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE MANAGER?

An inclusive manager is someone who creates an inclusive team environment. For this research project, we defined an inclusive manager as someone who:



values differences



seeks out and uses a diversity of ideas



treats everyone equitably



deals with inappropriate behaviour.

WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION?

For this research project, an inclusive organisation is defined as one in which employees:



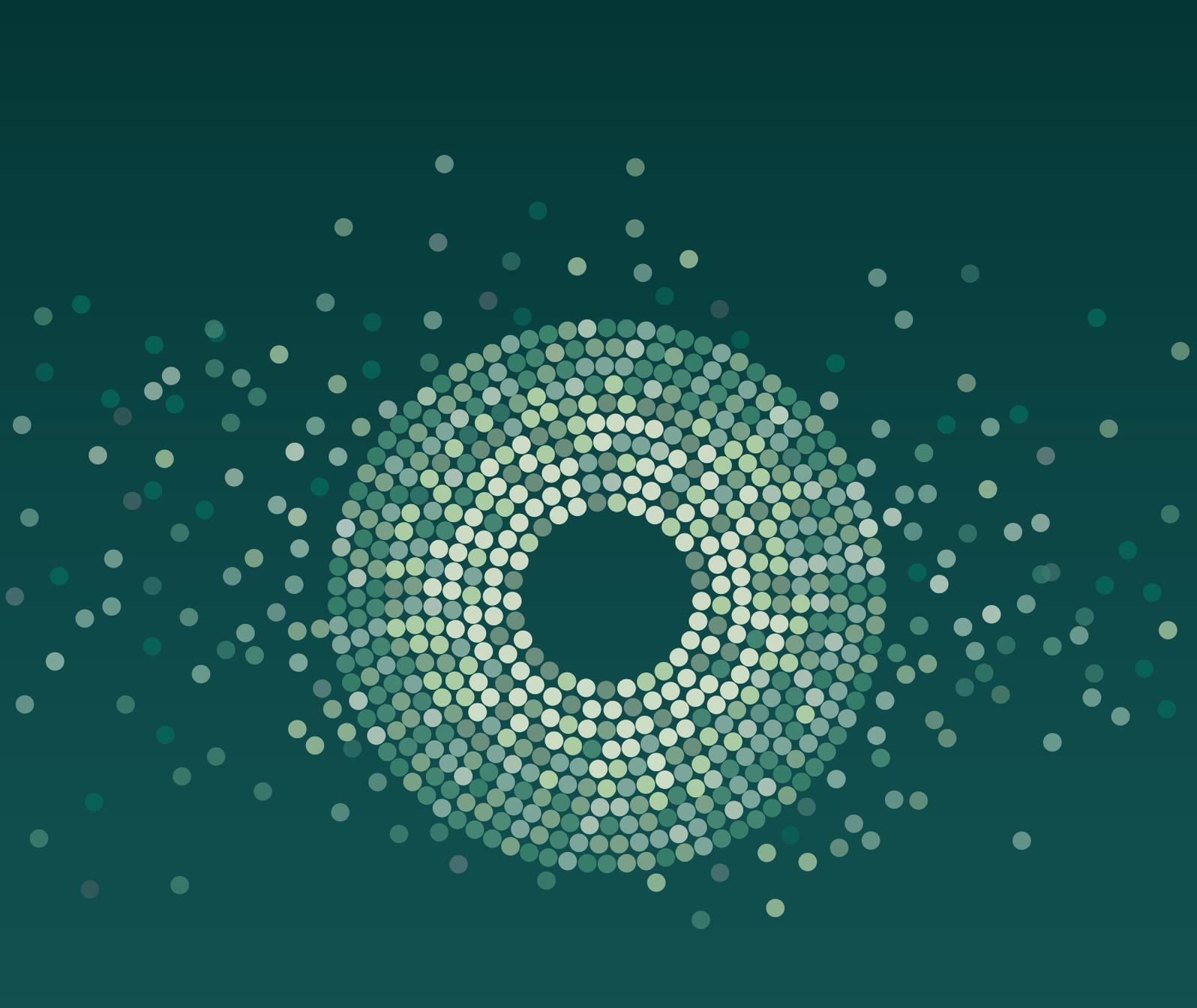
trust they will be treated fairly



feel diversity is valued and respected



report that top leaders demonstrate a genuine, visible commitment to diversity and inclusion.



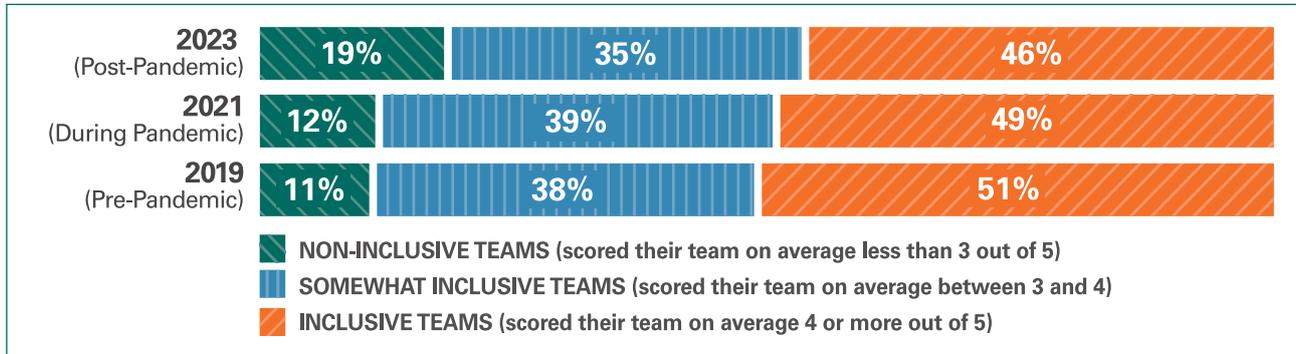
THE STATE OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

Research shows Australia has become more polarised, divided, and less socially cohesive post-pandemic.¹

The results of our Inclusion@Work Wave 4 suggest this divide is also reflected in our time at work.

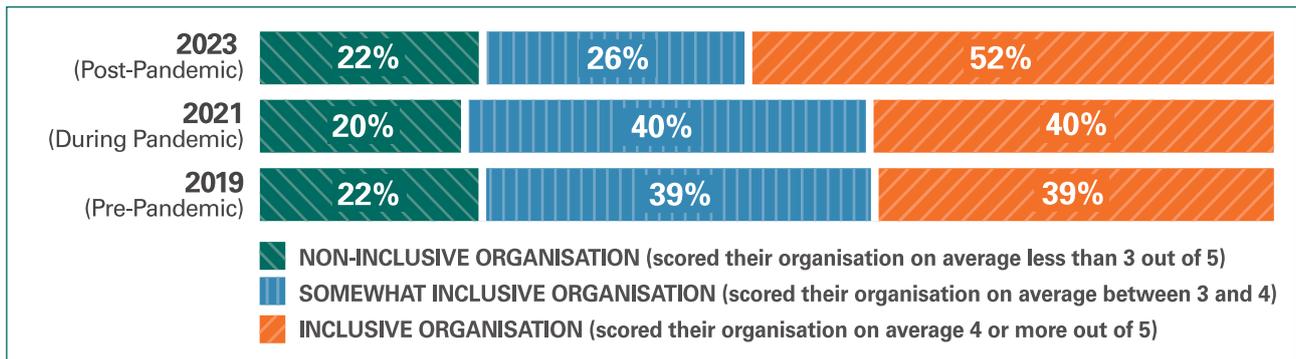
Non-inclusive teams have increased

While 46% of workers still felt their teams were inclusive in 2023, the percentage of workers reporting this has been steadily decreasing since 2019. In contrast, the proportion of workers perceiving their teams as non-inclusive has risen post-pandemic. Now, 19% of workers indicated their team is non-inclusive – an increase from 11% prior to the 2019 pandemic and 12% during the 2021 pandemic.



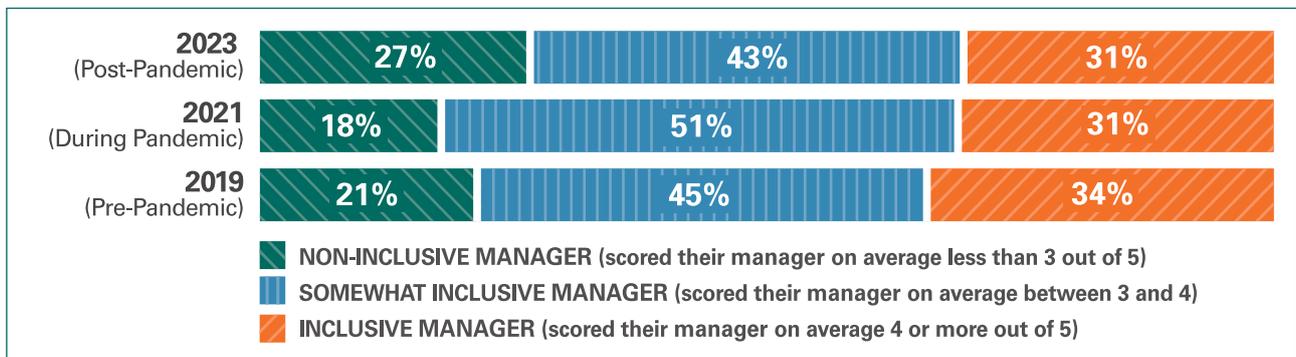
1 in 2 workers report their organisational climate is inclusive

The good news is more than 1 in 2 (52%) workers reported the organisational climateⁱ they work in is inclusive in 2023. However, 22% of workers continue to report their organisational climate is non-inclusive.



Organisations might be inclusive, but their managers are not

Just 31% of workers reported their manager is inclusive in 2023. Another 27% of workers reported their manager is non-inclusive, a concerning rise from 18% in 2021. With almost as many workers reporting their manager is non-inclusive as those reporting their manager is, it is clear Australian organisations have a critical need to develop the inclusive leadership capabilities of their managers.



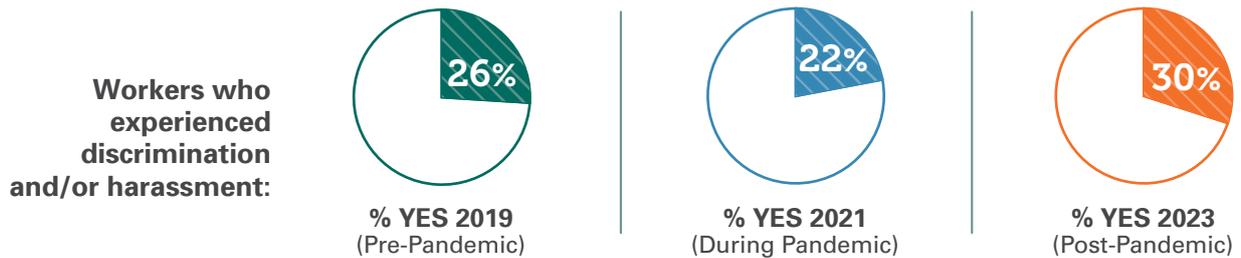
i. Please note: the 2023 Inclusion@Work Index survey included a change in the questions used to measure Inclusive Organisational Climate. This change included rephrasing one question from being reverse worded to positively worded. While a minimal change, it means it is not possible to meaningfully compare the 2023 results for Inclusive Organisational Climate with those in 2019 or 2021.



Nearly 1 in 3 workers reported experiencing discrimination and/or harassment at work in the past 12 months

Discrimination and harassment have increased post-pandemic

As non-inclusive teams and non-inclusive managers rise in Wave 4, so too have discrimination and harassment. Nearly 1 in 3 (30%) workers reported experiencing discrimination and/or harassment at work in the past 12 months. This is an 8% increase from 2021 (22%), and higher than the pre-pandemic figure of 26% in 2019.ⁱⁱ



Discrimination and harassment are highest for marginalised workers

Workers from marginalised backgrounds reported significantly higher levels of discrimination and/or harassment at work compared to workers from non-marginalised backgrounds.



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers reported the highest levels of exclusion, with 59% experiencing discrimination and/or harassment at work, compared to 22% of non-Indigenous workers



Workers with **disability** (42%) reported much higher levels of discrimination and/or harassment compared with workers without disability (23%)

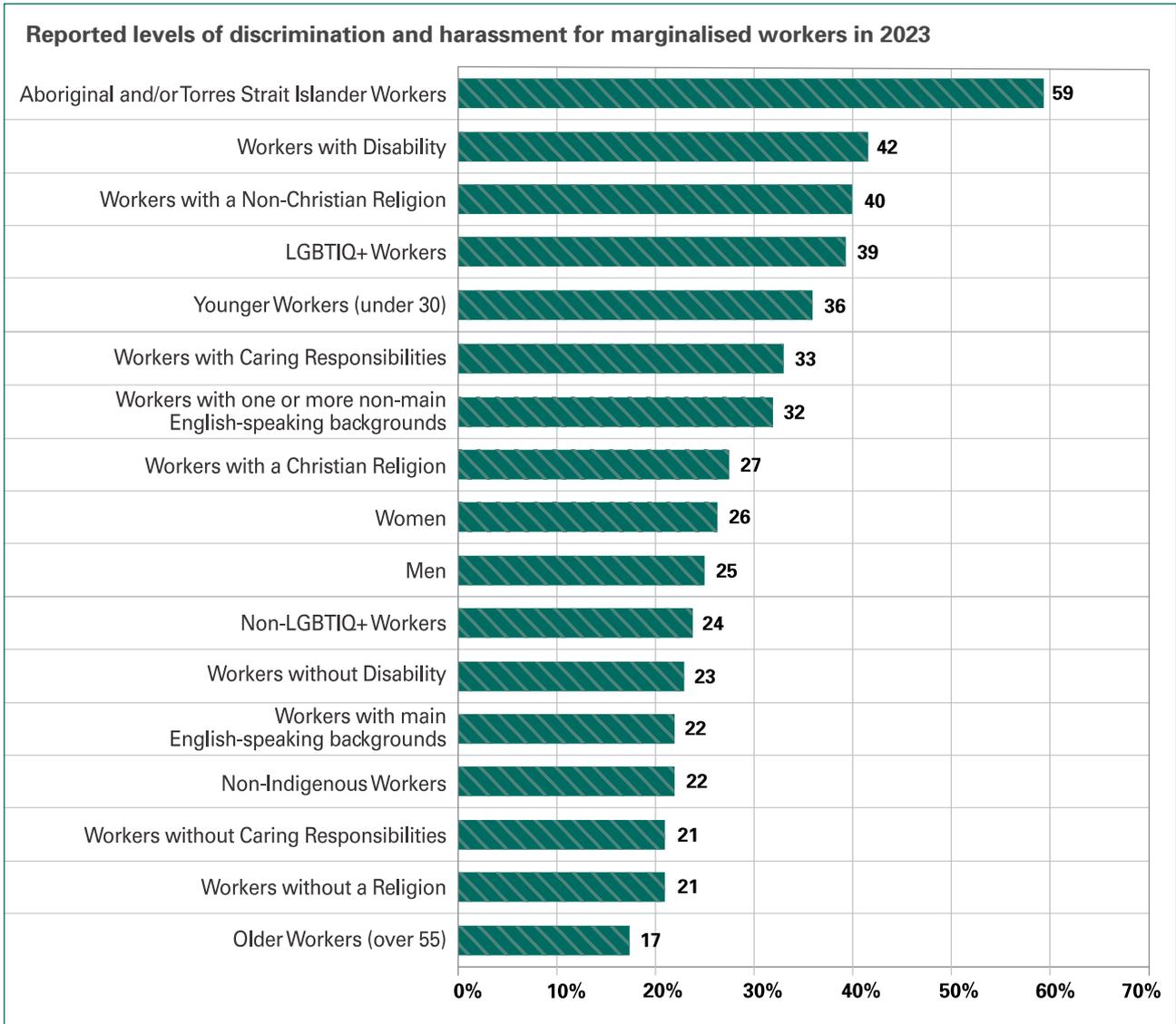


Workers from a **non-Christian religious affiliation**² (40%) reported high levels of discrimination and/or harassment compared with a Christian (27%) or no religious affiliation (21%)



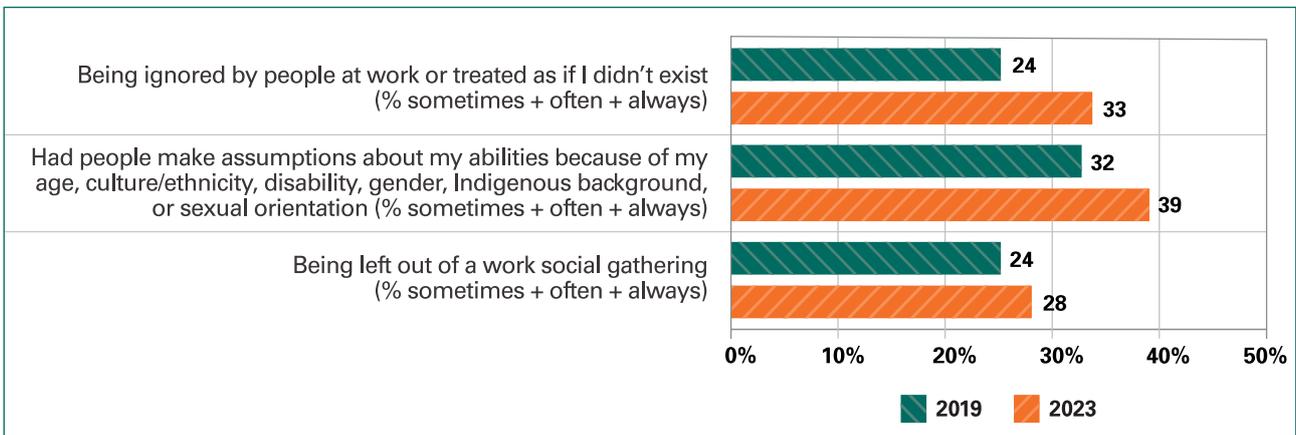
LGBTIQ+³ workers (37%) reported much higher levels of discrimination and/or harassment compared with non-LGBTIQ+ workers (24%).

ii. Experience with discrimination and harassment was asked differently in 2017. This means it is not possible to meaningfully compare the percentages of workers who experienced discrimination and/or harassment in 2017 with percentages in 2019, 2021 or 2023.



Everyday exclusion has also risen

Experiences of everyday exclusion have also increased post-pandemic. Workers reported greater instances of **being ignored at work** (33%, compared to 24% in 2019), **others making incorrect assumptions about their abilities** due to their background (39%, compared to 32% in 2019) and **being left out of work social gatherings** (28%, compared to 24% in 2019).





SUPPORT FOR D&I ACTION

Most workers continue to support their organisation taking action to create a diverse and inclusive workplace. But support remains highest from marginalised workers, opposition has doubled post-pandemic, and younger men are becoming less engaged with D&I.

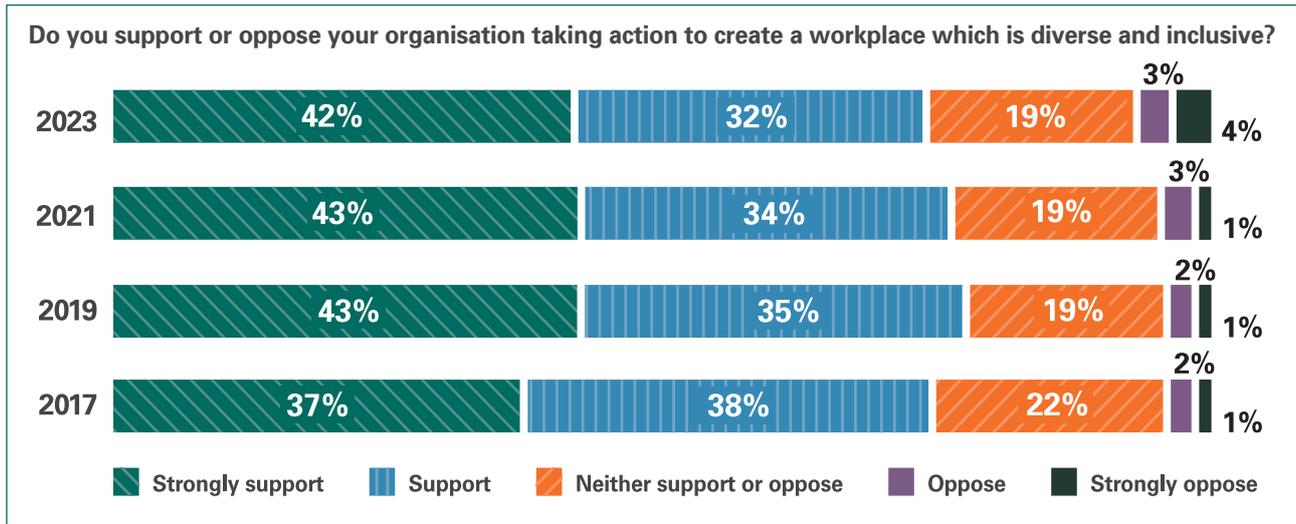
There's still strong support for D&I action, but opposition has doubled



3 out of 4 workers continued to strongly support and support their organisation taking action to become more diverse and inclusive in 2023. While still the majority, this figure has dropped since the 2019 Index.

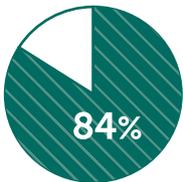


Reflecting growing polarisation in Australia,⁴ **opposition to D&I action in 2023 has doubled since 2019**. Though still the minority, 7% of workers now oppose and strongly oppose D&I action. This is the highest opposition reported, compared to 3% in both 2017 and 2019, and 4% in 2021.

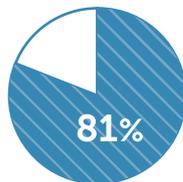


Marginalised workers show strongest support

The strongest support for workplace D&I continues to come from marginalised workers. This includes:



LGBTIQ+ workers
84% strongly support or support D&I action, compared to 77% of non-LGBTIQ+ workers



Women
81% strongly support or support D&I action, compared to 73% of men



Older workers (i.e. 55+ years)
79% strongly support or support D&I action, compared to 76% of younger workers (i.e. under 30).

There's been growth in some workers least supportive in the first Index

The biggest growth in support for workplace D&I has come from some workers who reported lower rates of support in our first Inclusion@Work Index.



Older workers (i.e. aged over 55) had the biggest increase, rising 8% from 71% strongly support and support in 2017 to 79% in 2023. This change makes older workers go from being the second least supportive in 2017 to now being one of the most supportive.



Workers without disability (5% increase), **workers with main-English speaking backgrounds only**⁵ (5% increase), and **men** (4% increase) have also shown noticeable growth since 2017.

Younger men's support for D&I is dropping

While overall men's support for workplace D&I has risen, younger men's (under 30) support continues to decline, dropping from 77% in 2019 to 69% in 2023.



To engage younger men with D&I, we need to shift misconceptions that D&I action is reverse discrimination that benefits women at the expense of men.⁶

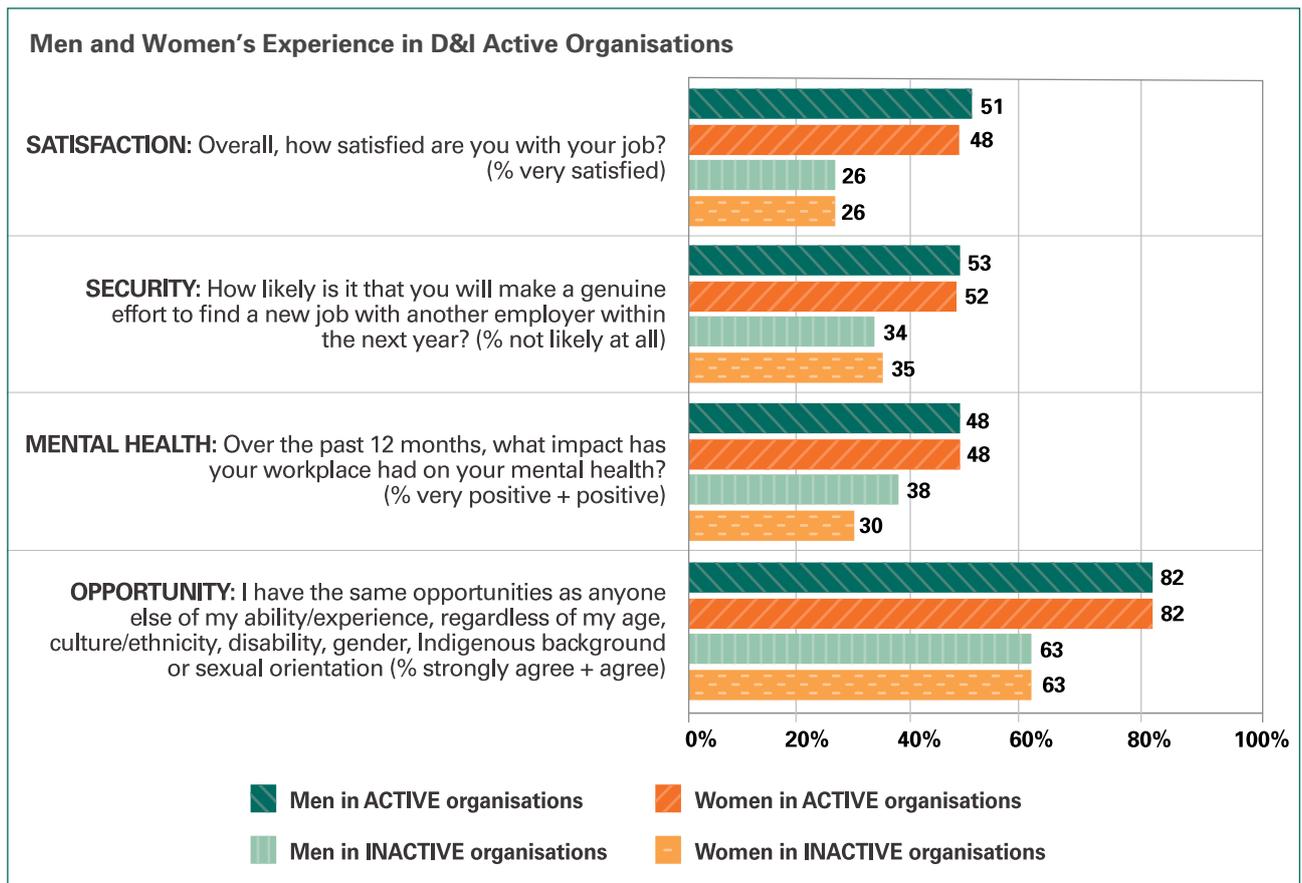
Our findings challenge this, showing both women *and* menⁱⁱⁱ working in organisations taking action to become diverse and inclusive experience increased wellbeing and opportunities at work.

WHAT IS A D&I ACTIVE ORGANISATION?

D&I ACTIVE organisations are those where respondents indicated their organisation is taking action to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

D&I INACTIVE organisations are those where the respondent indicated their organisation is not taking action or that they do not know.

We also found this to be the case for First Nations workers, workers with and without disability, workers with main English speaking backgrounds and workers with non-main English speaking backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ and non-LGBTIQ+ workers. Clearly, it's not just people from under-represented groups who are benefiting from organisational D&I efforts.



iii. This report presents a comparison between respondents identifying as men or women as the number of non-binary/gender diverse respondents (0.7%) in our sample was not large enough to meet statistical analysis requirements.



CONNECTION AND CONTRIBUTION

Feeling connected and able to contribute at work are two core components of Inclusion@Work.

Comparisons between 2019, 2021, and 2023 show that despite having more ways to reach team members than ever, workers report feeling less connected and able to contribute post-pandemic.



Workers feel less connected to their team post-pandemic

Sense of connection is lower post-pandemic

Reflecting research showing sense of belonging has dropped in the Australian community,⁷ Wave 4 shows that workers feel less connected to their team post-pandemic.

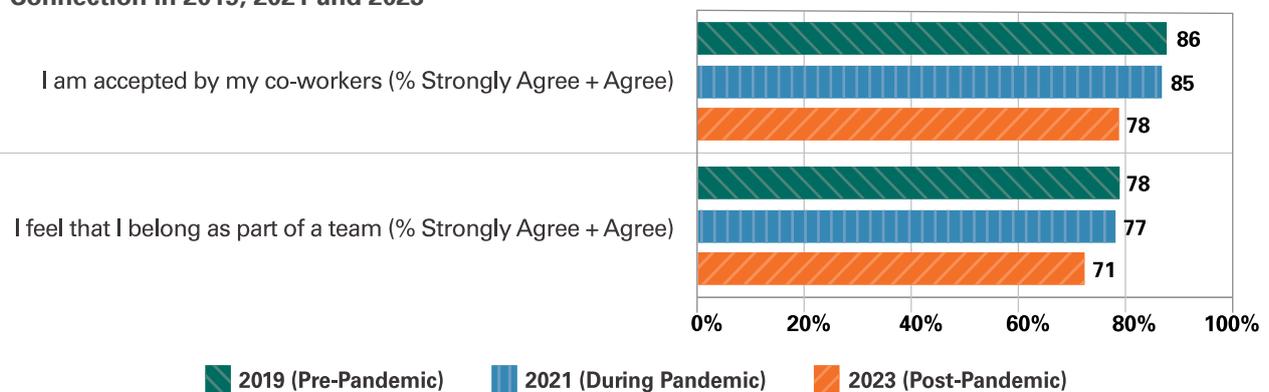


78% of workers stated that they feel **accepted by their coworkers**, a decrease from 85% during the pandemic in 2021, and 86% in 2019



71% reported they **feel they belong as part of a team**, a decrease from 77% in 2021, and 78% in 2019.

Connection in 2019, 2021 and 2023



CONNECTION AND CONTRIBUTION ARE IMPORTANT FOR INCLUSION@WORK

A workplace is inclusive when everyone, across multiple types of difference, feels a connectedness to co-workers, is accepted as an insider by others, and feels a sense of belonging.

Inclusion occurs when the diversity of perspectives members bring to their team are viewed as a valuable resource to shape strategy, work, and values for success.

Ability to contribute has also decreased

Despite significant increases in the use of communication and collaboration tools, less workers reported feeling they can contribute to their team post-pandemic.



64% of workers reported that in their team, **employees' ideas for improving how work is done are given serious consideration** – a drop from 73% in 2021, and 72% in 2019



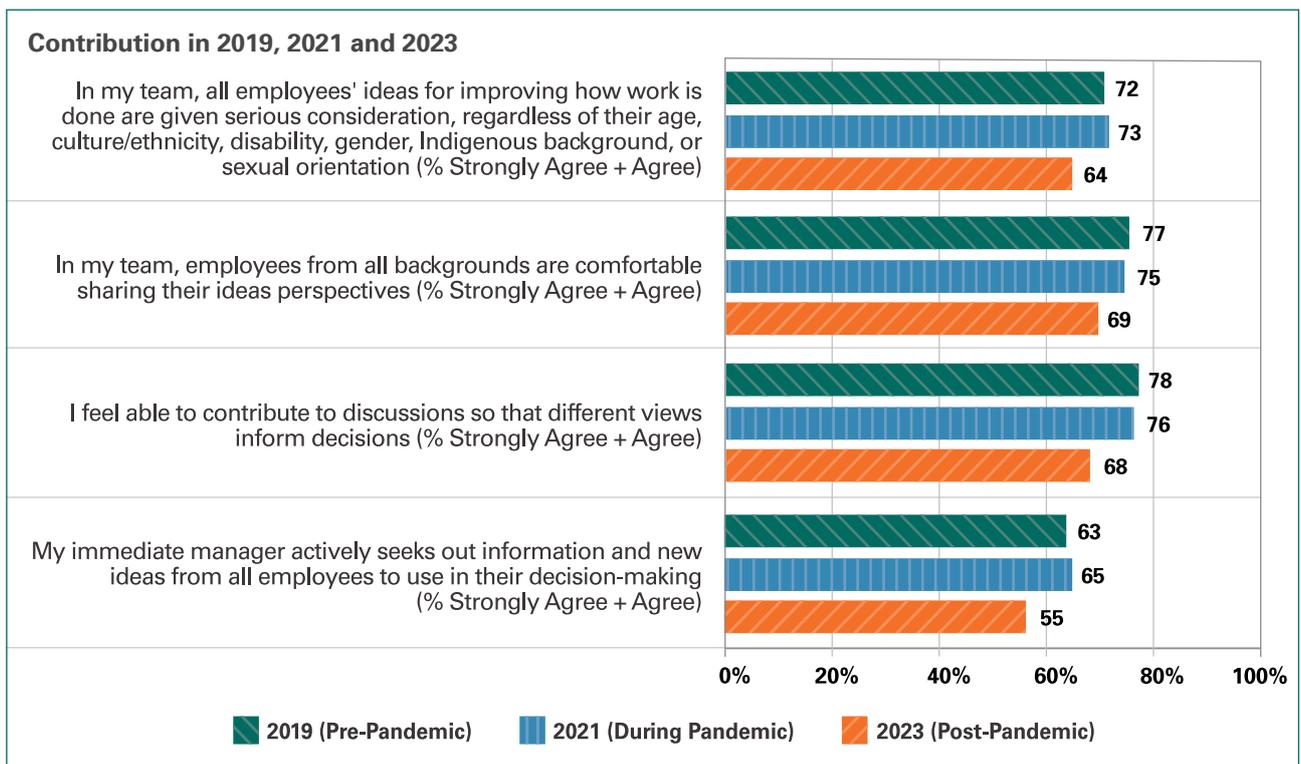
69% reported that in their team, **employees are comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives** – a drop from 75% in 2021, and 77% in 2019.



68% felt **able to contribute to discussions so that different views inform decisions** – a drop from 76% in 2021, and 78% in 2019.



55% of workers reported **their manager seeks out information and new ideas from all employees** – a drop from 65% in 2021, and 63% in 2019





INCLUSION@WORK FOR FIRST NATIONS WORKERS

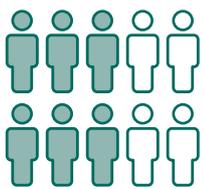
Despite growing support for First Nations rights in Australia since the first Index in 2017, First Nations workers' experience with exclusion and inclusion at work remains concerning.

First Nation workers continue to experience high levels of exclusion and less respect at work in 2023.



6 in 10 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers reported discrimination and/or harassment at work in Wave 4

Discrimination and harassment are highest for First Nations workers



6 in 10 (59%) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers reported discrimination and/or harassment at work in Wave 4. This was significantly higher than the 22% of non-Indigenous workers reporting the same.

Concerningly, this is also the highest level of discrimination and harassment reported by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers across all 4 Inclusion@Work Waves.

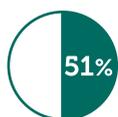
Workplace exclusion is high from sources inside and outside an organisation

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers were just as likely to experience discrimination and harassment at work from sources outside of their organisation as they were from sources internal.

Specifically, 21% experienced discrimination and/or harassment from customers, clients, or patients, 20% from colleagues in different teams, 17% from colleagues in their own own team, and 14% from suppliers. A further 13% experienced it from another manager, 12% from a senior leader, and 8% from their immediate manager.

First Nations workers also report highest everyday exclusion

Compared to non-Indigenous workers, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers were significantly more likely to:



be ignored at work: 1 in 2 (51%) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers reported they were sometimes, often or always ignored or treated as if they didn't exist at work, compared to 28% of non-Indigenous workers



have others make assumptions about their abilities: 1 in 2 (50%) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers reported people had made incorrect assumptions about their abilities because of their background, compared to 24% of non-Indigenous workers



be left out of work social gatherings: 1 in 2 (49%) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers reported they have been left out of work social gatherings, compared to 23% of non-Indigenous workers.



First Nations workers report less respect and connection at work

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers were also less likely than non-Indigenous workers to experience respect and connection at work, reporting:



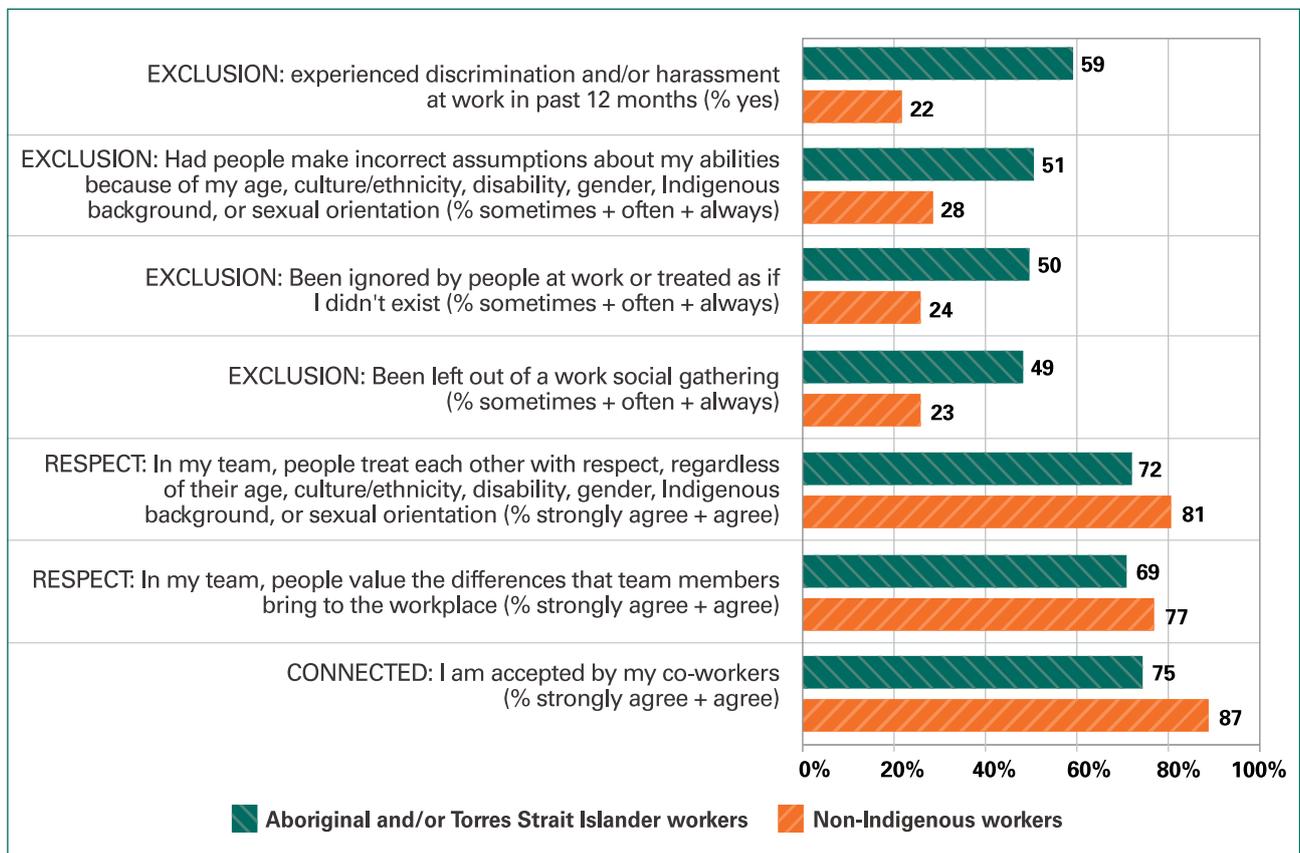
less respect in their teams: 72% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers agreed people in their team treat each other with respect, regardless of their background, compared to 81% of non-Indigenous workers



less valuing of differences in their teams: 69% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers agreed people in their team value the differences team members bring to the workplace, compared to 77% of non-Indigenous workers



less acceptance from coworkers: 75% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers agreed they are accepted by their co-workers, compared to 87% of non-Indigenous workers.



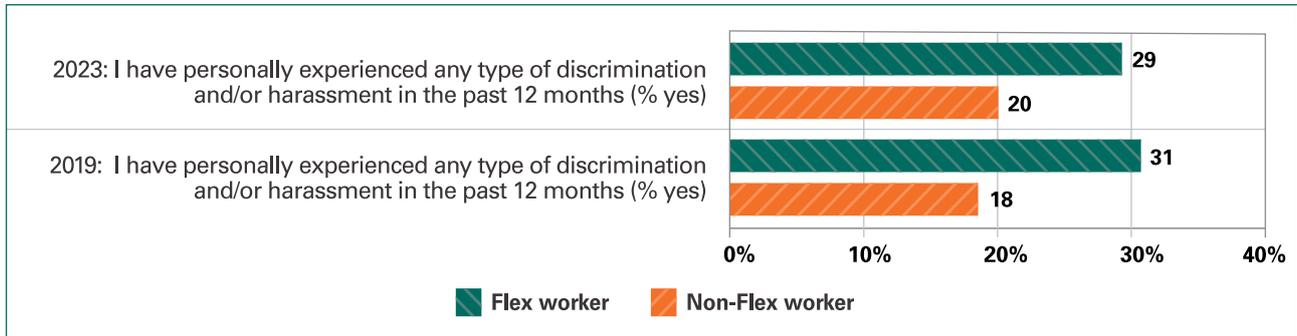


THE STATE OF FLEX

Despite hopes for post-lockdown improvements, the state of flex work remains largely unchanged post-pandemic, with ongoing challenges in uptake and stigma.

Flex workers experience the same exclusion post-pandemic

Over 1 in 4 (29%) flex workers reported experiencing discrimination and/or harassment at work in 2023, significantly higher than workers not accessing flexible options (20%). This remains relatively unchanged compared to the 31% of flex workers reporting experience of discrimination and/or harassment in 2019.



Caring and marginalisation are still “flexibility fault lines” in 2023

Use of flex was still predominately by **carers** in 2023, with 3 in 4 (74%) reporting using one or more flexible working options. This is significantly higher than the 58% of workers without caring responsibilities using flex.

Workers from marginalised backgrounds also reported high use of flex. This is particularly the case for **women** (72%), **workers with a non-Christian religion** (71%), **workers with disability** (71%), and **First Nations workers** (71%). These workers’ use of flex was higher compared to men (57%), workers without disability (63%), workers with a Christian religion or no religion, and non-Indigenous workers (all 64%).

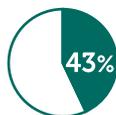
Use of flex remains gendered

Despite expectations that the pandemic would increase men’s uptake of flex permanently, men continued to use far less flexible work than women in 2023. With 57% of men using flex compared to 72% of women, a 15% gender flex gap persists post-pandemic.

Some flexible work options are more gendered than others, particularly flex in the form of:



reduced hours^{iv}: 38% of women accessed flex in the form of reduced hours, compared to 21% of men

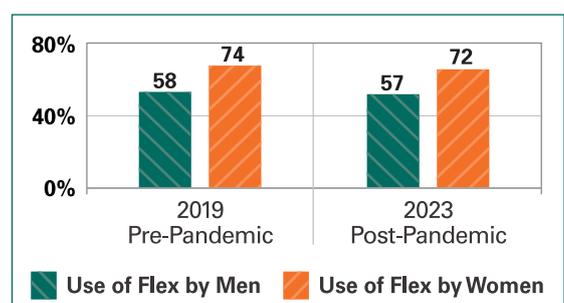


when they work^v: 43% of women accessed flex in the form of when they worked, compared to 35% of men.

These gendered differences and stigma on the type of flex accessed by men and women appear to be impacting experiences of employee discrimination and harassment.

Over 1 in 3 (37%) men who used flex in the form of reduced hours reported experiencing exclusion.

This is significantly more compared to men not using flex in the form of reduced hours (22%), women using the same (24%), or women not using reduced hours flex (28%).



iv. REDUCED hours = using part-time work, job share, purchased leave, leave at half-pay, leave in half-day increments, school term only work and part year annualised hours

v. WHEN you work = compressed working week, flexible work hours/shifts/start/breaks/finish times, time-in-lieu, and shift swapping.

Men continue to use far less flexible work than women in 2023.



We need to break the stigma on flex work

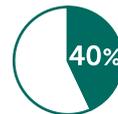
A common misconception about flexible work is that it harms team productivity. Our findings debunk this myth, showing there is no difference between the team performance of flex workers and non-flex workers when it comes to:



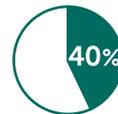
31% of flex workers and 30% of non-flex workers report their team is **innovative**



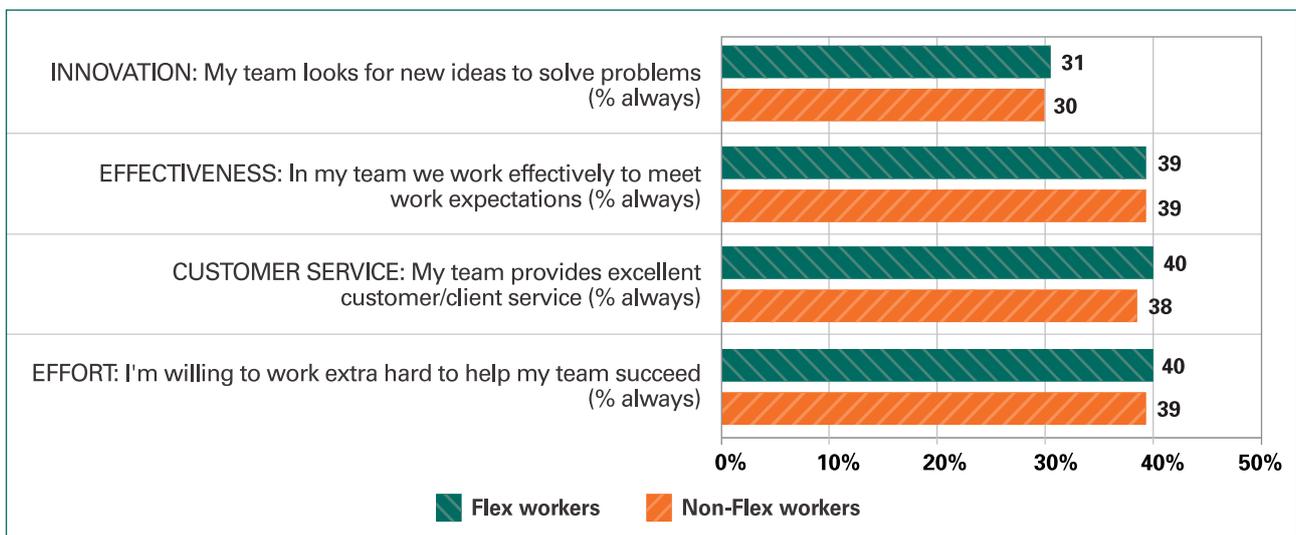
39% of both flex workers and non-flex workers report their team is **effective**



40% of flex workers and 38% of non-flex workers report their team provides **excellent customer service**



40% of flex workers and 39% of non-flex workers are **willing to work extra hard**



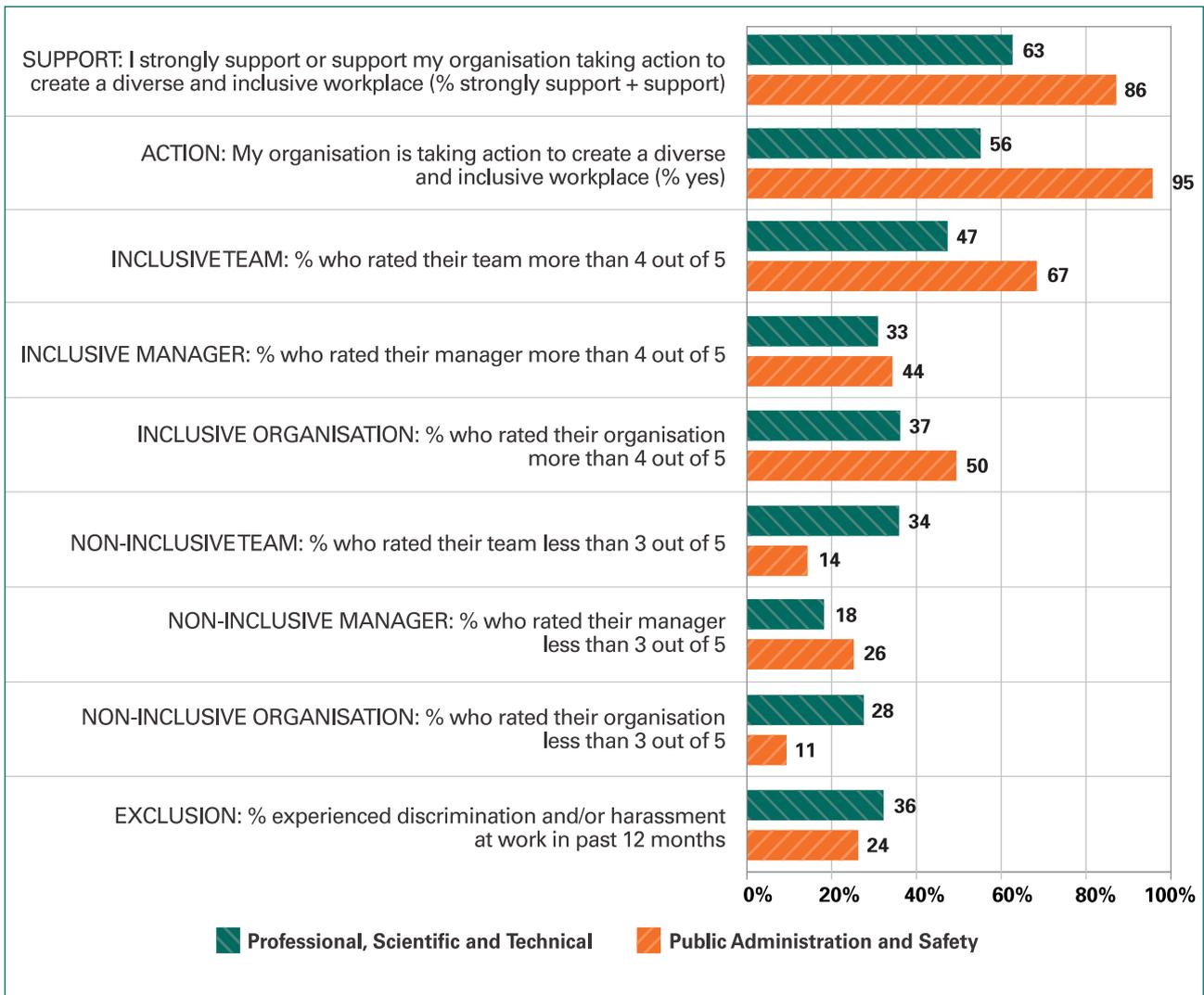
LEADING AND LAGGING INDUSTRY SECTORS



The **Public Administration and Safety industry** emerged as the **most inclusive** industry in 2023. Workers in this industry reported the highest level of combined organisation D&I activity and employee support for this and some of the highest percentages of employees working in an inclusive team, with an inclusive manager, and in an inclusive organisational climate.



The **Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services industry** emerged as the **least inclusive** industry in 2023. Workers in this industry reported some of the highest percentages of non-inclusive teams, non-inclusive managers and non-inclusive organisational climates, and the lowest proportion of organisational D&I activity and employee support for this. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services workers also reported the highest rates of experiencing discrimination and/or harassment at work out of all industries.



METHOD

Survey Development

The development of the Wave 4 Inclusion@Work Index survey occurred over the following key steps:

- In-depth review of industry and academic research in 2017 to investigate how to define and measure workplace inclusion.
- Development of a draft survey of 70 questions with questions focusing on measuring team inclusion, team and individual outcomes, and diversity-related demographics.
- Pilot of draft survey in a large organisation and subsequent statistical analysis of the pilot sample data set to select the final 50 survey questions on the basis of their ability to generate findings that were academically rigorous, of practical use to industry/organisations, and covered key inclusion-related themes (i.e. respected, connected, contributing, progressing) and key demographics (i.e. socio-demographics, job and organisational demographics).
- Administration of 2017 survey by Polity Research to a nationally representative sample of 3,000 Australian workers (through a research-only survey panel).
- Review of the 2017 survey in 2019 to refine for Wave 2, with consultation involving the expert panel and DCA members that had participated in the Inclusive Employer Index in 2017. Consultations focused on testing how helpful and appropriate each of the 2017–2018 survey areas were for measuring inclusion, as well as which key demographic areas the survey should include.
- Administration of 2019 survey by Polity Research to a nationally representative sample of 3,000 Australian workers (through a research-only survey panel).
- Review of the 2019 survey in 2021 to refine for Wave 3. To help track results against the prior 2 indexes, changes to the 2021–2022 survey were minimal, involving the removal of 4 survey questions where prior results had demonstrated limitations in the ability to capture meaningful data.
- Administration of the 2021 survey by Polity Research in May to a nationally representative sample of 3,000 Australian workers (through a research-only survey panel).

- Review of the 2021 survey in 2023 to once again refine for Wave 4. Changes to the 2021–2022 survey were minimal, involving the removal of 2 survey questions where prior results had demonstrated limitations in the ability to capture meaningful data. Two additional questions were added: a question on source of discrimination and harassment, and a question on the impact of work on mental health.
- Administration of the 2023 survey by Polity Research in May to a nationally representative sample of 3,000 Australian workers (through a research-only survey panel).

Analysis and Weighting

- Weighting of the survey data occurred to ensure the achieved respondent profile aligned with Australian Bureau of Statistics demographic indicators. These include Aboriginality, age, cultural background, disability status, gender, degree qualification, gender identity, and location (state and urban/regional splits).
- Analyses conducted on the overall sample (e.g., percentage of Australian workers in inclusive, somewhat inclusive and non-inclusive teams) were run on the weighted sample to ensure these findings were representative of the Australian workforce.
- Crosstab analyses were run on the unweighted sample to compare the inclusion and exclusion experiences of different demographic groups. These ensured the survey could benefit from the oversampling of key demographic groups including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers, while avoiding the loss of statistical power that can accompany weighting. The crosstab outputs did not appear to differ substantially from their weighted counterparts.
- Use of SPSS software to run a series of crosstabs (contingency tables) to identify possible differences in responses. For each contingency table, a chi-squared statistic was calculated to determine whether there was an association between the 2 variables at the 95% confidence level. For contingency tables considered statistically significant, adjusted standardised residuals greater (in absolute size) than +/- 1.96 were examined to determine what was driving the association.

For more information on the Inclusion@Work Index Wave 4 method, please refer to the full version of this report.

ENDNOTES

1. Edelman, *Edelman's 2023 Trust Barometer*, Edelman, 2023.
J. O'Donnell, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2023.
2. Refers to those who identified as having a religious affiliation that was not a Christian denomination (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism). Non-Christian religious background does not include those who indicated they have no religious affiliation.
3. We use the acronym LGBTIQ+ - lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans / gender diverse, intersex variation, and queer - the '+' recognises that LGBTIQ doesn't describe a range of other terms that people identify with.
4. Edelman, *Edelman's 2023 Trust Barometer*.
5. Refers to those who identified as having a religious affiliation that was not a Christian denomination (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism). Non-Christian religious background does not include those who indicated they have no religious affiliation.
6. The Dream Collective, *Allyship and Gender Equality: Measuring the Perceptions of Men in the Workplace and the Motivators and Barriers to Gender Equality and Diversity & Inclusion Training Initiatives*, The Dream Collective, 2021.
7. J. O'Donnell, *Mapping Social Cohesion*.



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