



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

Fewer moves, bigger changes

Occupation mobility and learning across life stages

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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, present and emerging.

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Introduction

This insights report provides an overview of occupation mobility patterns across life stages, and what these patterns mean for adult learning in Australia. This report leverages the architecture of Jobs and Skills Australia's Data on Occupation Mobility (DOM) dataset. It also builds on DOM by adding key demographic variables – age, gender and geography – for the first time.

The headline finding is that fewer Australians are changing occupations than in the past, but those who do are making more substantial moves.

The growing prevalence of transitions to higher-skilled occupations and different fields of work highlights the rising importance of upskilling and reskilling, including in the context of structural changes in the labour market. At the same time, the increasing share of workers remaining in the same occupation underscores the continuing importance of cumulative capability development, even where major occupational transitions do not occur.

How DOM-Career Pathways was constructed

JSA's core DOM dataset is constructed from administrative data on individuals' occupations derived from their Income Tax Returns. DOM-Career Pathways extends on this dataset by linking this data with demographic information within the Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), enabling analysis of patterns of occupation mobility for different cohorts at different points of their working lives. DOM-Career Pathways covers a 13-year period from the 2011–12 financial year to the 2023–24 financial year.

Adding demographic information while ensuring a high volume of transitions cleared suppression thresholds for PLIDA outputs requires a different approach to DOM, which captures the specific 6-digit occupation held in origin and destination years. For this purpose, DOM-Career Pathways employs 23 occupation groupings that bring multiple occupation titles together into broader categories based on the relevant field of work.

Detailed mapping of occupation groupings to occupation titles in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) has been published on the JSA website alongside this paper. As an example, Table 1 provides this mapping for one of the 23 occupation groupings: *Accounting, Banking and Financial Services*.

Table 1. Occupation unit groups comprised within the *Accounting, Banking and Financial Services* occupation grouping

Accounting, Banking and Financial Services occupation grouping	
1322 Finance Managers	5511 Accounting Clerks
2211 Accountants	5512 Bookkeepers
2212 Auditors, Company Secretaries and Corporate Treasurers	5513 Payroll Clerks
2221 Financial Brokers	5521 Bank Workers
2222 Financial Dealers	5522 Credit and Loans Officers
2223 Financial Investment Advisers and Managers	5523 Insurance, Money Market and Statistical Clerks

Note: Occupation codes and titles relate to ANZSCO 2013 v1.3.

Alongside data aggregated at this level, we retained a binary yes/no flag to enable analysis of the frequency of occupation changes at the detailed 6-digit level by demographic groups without capturing the specific occupations involved.

Due to the trade-off between additional demographic dimensions and less detailed occupation information:

- DOM-Career Pathways is best suited for use cases where occupation mobility dynamics by age group, gender or geography are of particular interest.
- DOM is best suited when understanding occupation transitions at the most detailed level of occupation is the priority.

Caveats

Caution should be used when analysing and interpreting DOM-Career Pathways data.

- Occupation data in DOM-Career Pathways are self-reported in individual tax returns and may contain reporting errors, inconsistencies or missing information.
- Around 5% of the total volume of occupation-to-occupation transitions were suppressed due to cell counts below 10. DOM-Career Pathways provides evidence of common occupation transitions by age, gender and geographic variables. It does not capture every single transition. This limitation is most relevant when analysing smaller population groups and rare combinations.

Potential areas for future work

DOM-Career Pathways represents only one possible extension of Jobs and Skills Australia's core DOM dataset. For example, future work could explore different or additional demographic groups. It could also involve linking disaggregated occupation mobility data with other labour force information such as income.

Disaggregated data on occupation mobility is not only of interest from a lifelong learning lens. It could also be used to help address other important research questions relating to the labour market and skills system. For example,

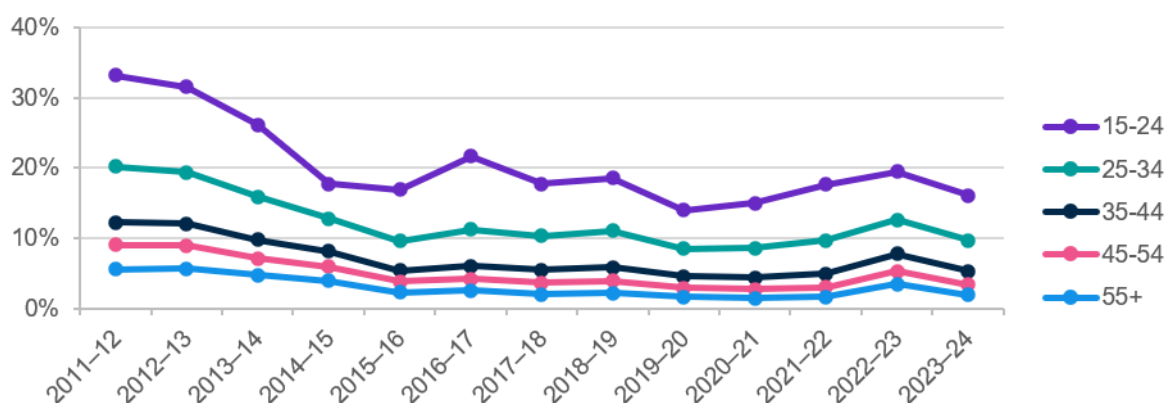
- whether occupation mobility patterns are reinforcing or helping to break down occupational gender segregation?
- how are patterns of occupation mobility for different cohorts of workers shaped by structural or cyclical changes in the labour market?

National level findings

Across all age groups, people are changing occupations less often

Across all age groups, people are changing occupations less often than before, though this decline has stabilised since 2015–16 (Figure 1). Lower rates of occupation mobility likely reduce demand for learning associated with career change and increase the importance of learning aimed at maintaining, updating and deepening skills for one's current occupation.

Figure 1. Share of individuals changing occupation by age group, 2011–12 to 2023–24



Note: This chart measures occupation mobility at the detailed (6-digit) occupation level.

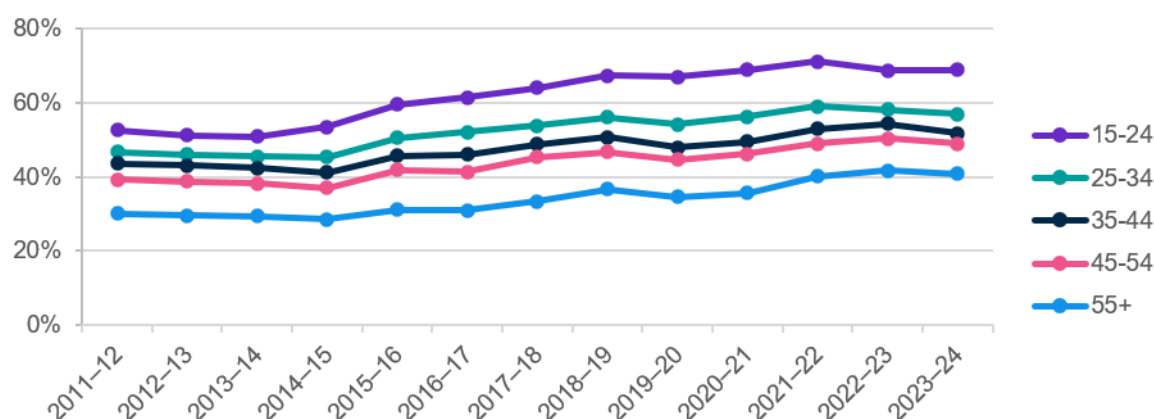
Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

When people do change occupations, they are making bigger changes

We examined the extent to which occupational transitions are becoming more, or less, substantial in two ways.

First, we explored whether occupational transitions involved a change in field of work, measured through movement between occupation groupings. For example, this could include moving from the *Manufacturing* to the *Transport and Logistics* occupation grouping. Since the mid-2010s, the share of occupational transitions involving a move into a different field of work has increased across all age groups (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Proportion of occupation transitions involving a different field of work by age group, 2011–12 to 2023–24



Note: Excludes data where occupation mapping could not be determined (approximately 5% of the data).

Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

This trend is driven by an increase in transitions between fields of work (up 35% since 2014–15) and a decline in occupation transitions within the same field (down 24%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Index chart of the number of occupation transitions across and within occupation groupings (2014–15 = 100)



Note: 2014-15 selected as the base year as this is when the trend towards a higher share of occupation transitions involving a change in field of work commenced.

Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

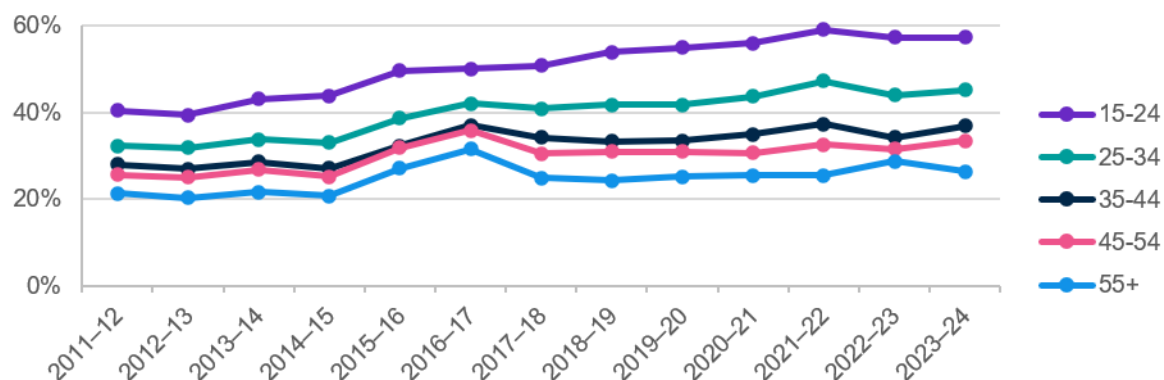
As more workers move into new fields of work, the need to acquire new skills and knowledge is likely to increase, stimulating demand for formal, non-formal and informal learning. For example:

- The nearly 2,000 people who transitioned from *Construction, Architecture and Design* to *Executive and General Management* in 2023–24 likely needed to develop new or deeper leadership and management capabilities to complement their existing skill sets.
- The nearly 3,000 people who transitioned from *Manufacturing* to *Health and Community Services* occupations in 2023–24 likely needed to reskill to acquire skills and knowledge for work in this growing area of the labour market.

Second, we examined whether occupational transitions involved a change in skill level. Across all age groups, a growing share of occupational transitions are into higher-skilled occupations (Figure 4). This likely reflects the growing importance of higher-skilled

occupations in the Australian labour market and underscores the role of skill development in supporting occupation mobility throughout working lives.

Figure 4. Proportion of occupation transitions involving an increased skill level, 2011–12 to 2023–24

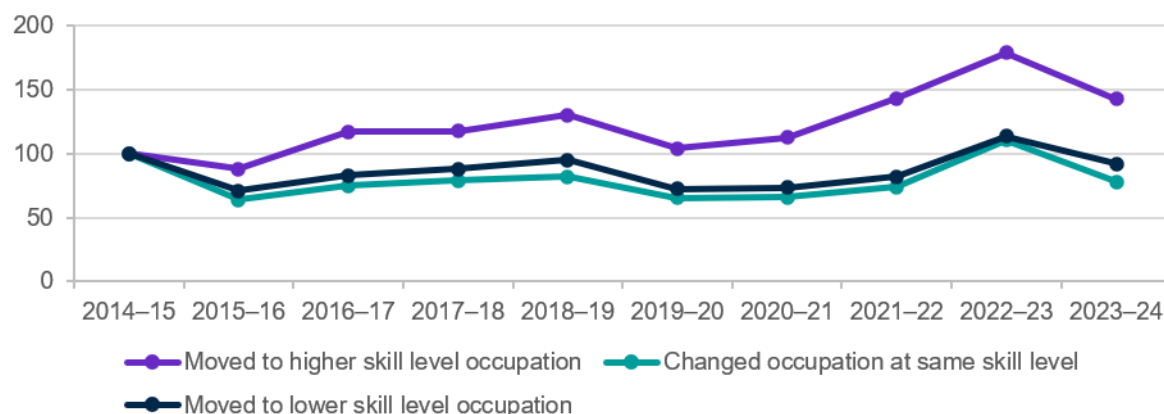


Note: Excludes data where occupation mapping could not be determined (approximately 7% of the data). Increased skill level measured with reference to ANZSCO Skill Levels 1 to 5, with Skill Level 1 occupations being the highest skill level.

Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

As with transitions between fields of work, this trend reflects two opposing movements since the mid-2010s. Transitions to higher-skilled occupations have increased by 42% since 2014–15, while transitions to occupations at the same or lower skill level have fallen by 22% and 8% respectively (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Index chart of the number of occupation transitions by skill level change (2014–15 = 100)



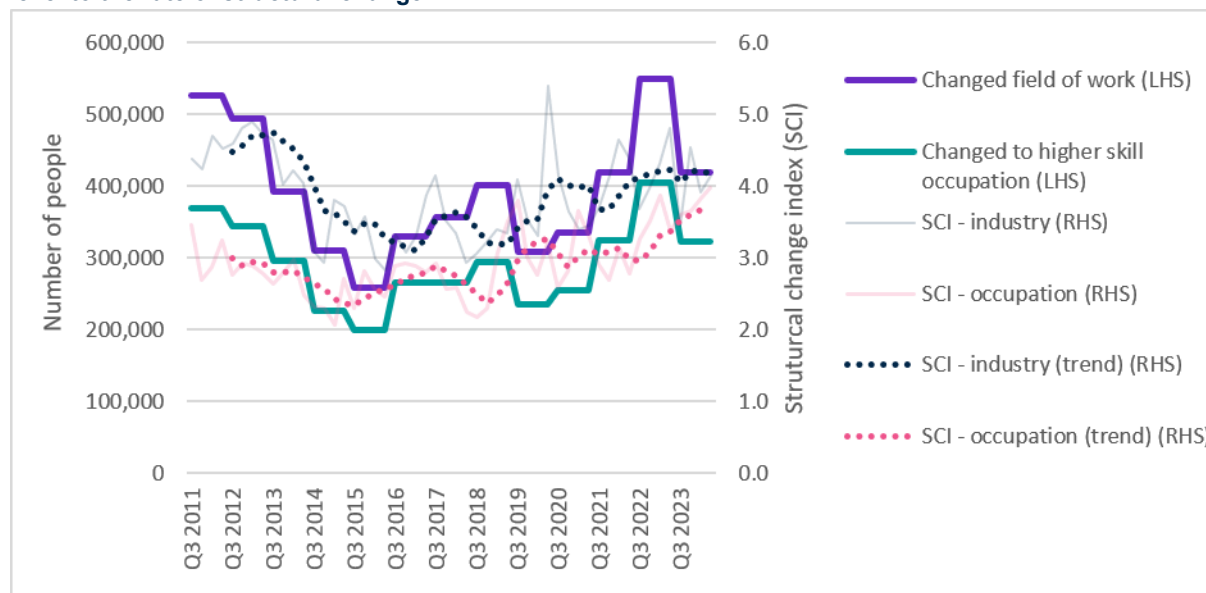
Note: 2014-15 selected as the base year as this is when the trend towards a higher share of occupation transitions involving a skill level change commenced.

Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

Across both measures (occupation groupings and skill level), substantial transitions account for a growing share of occupation mobility. This is consistent with Productivity Commission research showing that moves across major occupation groups and industry divisions comprise an increasing share of occupational and industry mobility.¹ Importantly, this Productivity Commission research relied on a different data source – the Participation, Job Search and Mobility (PJSMB) survey – which is not subject to the same caveats as relying on occupation data in individual tax returns. That both data sources and approaches indicate similar occupation mobility patterns provides reassurance that the trend toward more substantial transitions is simply a reflection of data or methodological limitations.

However, increasing transitions between fields of work and into higher-skilled occupations in absolute terms is not inevitable. Over the medium term, these transitions have tended to rise and fall alongside the pace of structural change in the labour market (Box 1). As shown in Figure 6, they were less common between 2014 and 2019, when structural change was relatively subdued, and more common before and after this period when structural change was occurring at a faster pace.

Figure 6. Time series comparing the number of transitions involving a new field of work or higher skill level to the rate of structural change



Note: Dashed trendlines are based on a 5-period moving average.

Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data; ABS Labour Force, Australia, Detailed (Tables EQ06 and EQ07a).

Box 1. Calculating levels of structural change by industry and occupation

A common method of measuring the extent of structural change over time is through the Structural Change Index, which provides a single value capturing the extent of changes in industry and occupation shares of total employment over time.² Where changes in shares are more significant, the index registers a higher value.

For example, a Structural Change Index value of 5 means that 5% of the workforce is in a different industry division (1-digit industry level) at the end of the relevant five-year period compared to where they would be if there was no change in the industry shares of total employment.

Analysis by occupation groupings

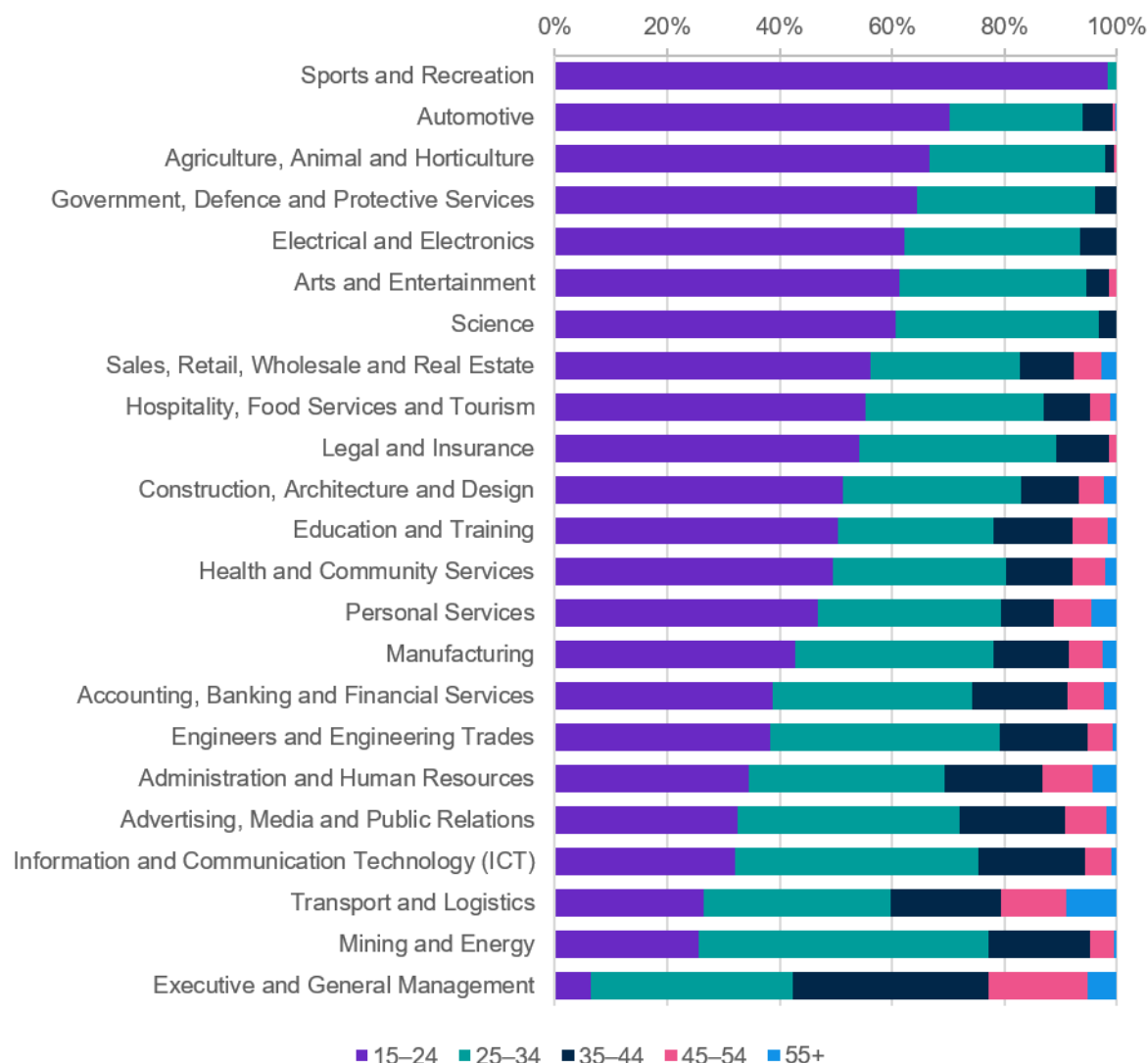
Mobility patterns vary significantly by occupation grouping and age

Figure 7 shows the age profile of workers entering each occupation grouping from other occupation groupings. Occupation groupings near the top of Figure 7, characterised by high shares of entrants aged 15–24, include Automotive, Electrical and Electronics, and Government, Defence and Protective Services. Entry into these occupations often occurs through structured education-to-work pathways, such as apprenticeships, traineeships and graduate programs, which are predominantly used by younger people.

For these occupations, adult learning is likely to focus on cumulative capability development and targeted upskilling, rather than reskilling pathways for workers entering the occupation for the first time later in life.

By contrast, occupation groups such as Transport and Logistics attract a relatively high share of entrants later in their working lives. In these cases, reskilling and transition pathways for older adults are likely to play a more prominent role.

Figure 7. Inflow of workers into each occupation grouping from other occupation groupings by age range, 2023–24



Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

DOM-Career Pathways can also be used to show how outflow patterns vary by age. Using transitions out of *Construction, Architecture and Design* as an example, transitions into *Transport and Logistics*; *Electrical and Electronics*; and *Executive and General Management* become more prominent for older age groups (Table 2).

For mid-career and later-career workers in *Construction, Architecture and Design*, these occupation groupings are likely to provide more relevant insights into potential career pathways than occupation mobility data that does not account for age, which tends to highlight moves into *Sales, Retail, Wholesale and Real Estate*.

Table 2. Proportion of transitions out of *Construction, Architecture and Design* and into select other occupation groupings, 2011–12 to 2023–24

Destination occupation grouping	All ages	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55 or over
Sales, Retail, Wholesale and Real Estate	13%	20%	10%	7%	6%	4%
Hospitality, Food Services and Tourism	5%	9%	4%	1%	0%	0%
Manufacturing	15%	15%	14%	16%	18%	13%
Transport and Logistics	16%	10%	13%	20%	30%	40%
Electrical and Electronics	6%	4%	6%	7%	8%	14%
Executive and General Management	6%	1%	7%	12%	11%	10%

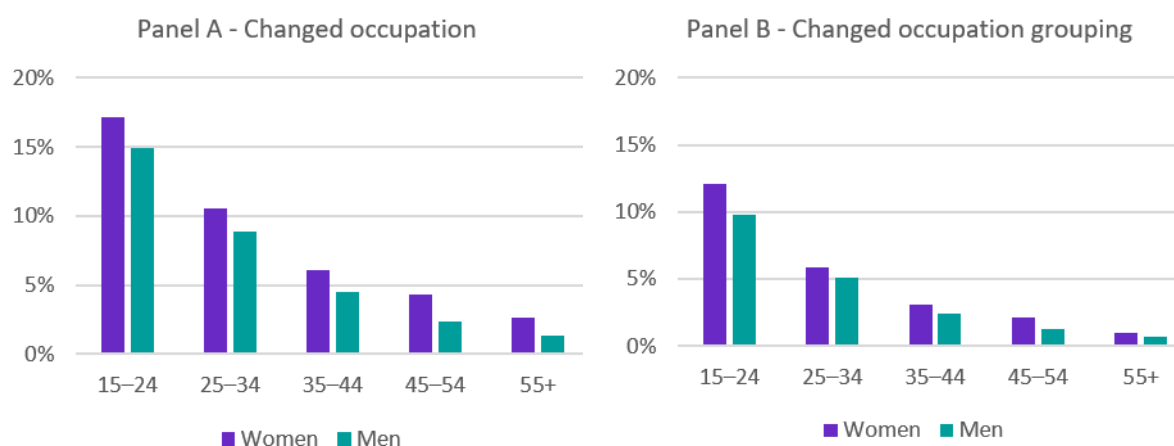
Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

Analysis by gender

More women change occupations and occupation groupings than men across all age groups

Occupation mobility is more common among women than men, encompassing both mobility at the detailed 6-digit occupation level as well as across occupation groupings (i.e. across fields of work) (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Proportion of individuals changing occupation (Panel A) and occupation grouping (Panel B) by age group and gender, 2023–24



Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

Relevant literature suggests this difference likely reflects the interaction of multiple factors, including occupational segregation and career interruptions arising from the unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities.

For example, horizontal occupational segregation may contribute to gender differences in occupation mobility through:

- higher rates of turnover in female-dominated occupations, with retention challenges in large occupations such as Aged and Disabled Carers and Hairdressers disproportionately affecting women³
- above-average rates of attrition among women working in male-dominated occupations, potentially reflecting barriers associated with occupational, industry or workplace cultures.⁴

Vertical occupational segregation may also influence patterns of occupation mobility. Where women have fewer opportunities to progress to leadership positions, secure promotions or achieve higher earnings within an occupation or occupational grouping, changing occupations may represent a more viable pathway for career advancement.

The unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities may also shape mobility by:

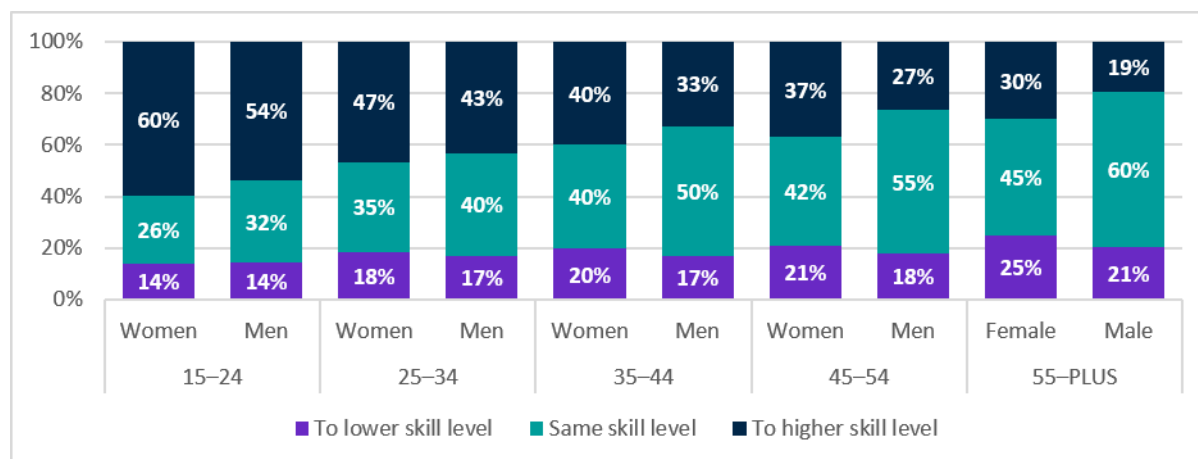
- reducing access to promotion and development opportunities where uninterrupted full-time work histories are favoured
- increasing the importance of work-life considerations, including flexibility and part-time employment, when making career decisions.⁵ For example, the Productivity Commission has found that movements from part-time to full-time and vice versa are associated with higher rates of occupation and industry change.⁶

By contrast, men are less likely to experience extended interruptions to labour market participation arising from unpaid care. This may increase the returns to accumulating occupation-specific skills and experience, strengthening incentives to remain within a particular occupation or career pathway.

Occupation mobility is more likely to involve a change in skill level for women than men

Women who change occupations are more likely than men to move to a role with a different skill level. This includes both upward and downward skill-level transitions, a pattern that holds across all age groups (Figure 9). Combined with the evidence that women are also more likely to move between occupation groupings, these findings lend further support to research showing that gender differences in mobility are most pronounced across more distant labour market boundaries, such as industries, fields of work and skill levels, rather than through job changes within the same occupation.⁷

Figure 9. Skill change direction of occupation moves by age and gender, 2023–24



Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

Analysis by geography

DOM-Career Pathways provides for analysis by jurisdiction and remoteness, though caution should be exercised for smaller segments of the population

The inclusion of geographic dimensions in DOM-Career Pathways allows for analysis of occupation mobility by state or territory and remoteness. However, care should be taken when making comparisons across these variables to avoid conflating impacts of suppression rules with genuine differences in labour market dynamics. For example, given their relative population sizes, a transition made by the same proportion of Victorians and Tasmanians may be retained for the former but suppressed for the latter. This means that DOM-Career Pathways is likely to underestimate levels of occupation mobility among smaller segments of the population.

An alternative to using percentages in such circumstances is to focus on the relative ranking of different transitions. For example, Table 3 outlines the top 5 occupation groupings that individuals have entered from another grouping after the age of 25 by remoteness. It shows that the prominence of occupation groupings such as *Mining and Energy*; *Construction, Architecture and Design*; *Transport and Logistics*; and *Automotive* as a transition option is elevated in regional and remote areas compared to major cities.

Table 3. Top 5 occupation groupings entered from other occupation groupings by adults aged 25 and over by remoteness, 2011–12 to 2023–24

Major cities of Australia	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote
Administration and Human Resources	Administration and Human Resources	Construction, Architecture and Design	Mining and Energy
Sales, Retail, Wholesale and Real Estate	Health and Community Services	Administration and Human Resources	Construction, Architecture and Design
Executive and General Management	Construction, Architecture and Design	Sales, Retail, Wholesale and Real Estate	Administration and Human Resources
Health and Community Services	Sales, Retail, Wholesale and Real Estate	Health and Community Services	Electrical and Electronics
Construction, Architecture and Design	Transport and Logistics	Transport and Logistics	Transport and Logistics, and Automotive

Note: *Transport and Logistics* and *Automotive* were equal fifth for occupation groupings entered by adults living in remote Australia.

Source: Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2011–12 to 2023–24, Income Tax Return (ITR) data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

Conclusion

The headline finding of this paper that fewer Australians are changing occupations than in the past, but those who do are making more substantial moves has important implications for adult learning:

- As a greater share of occupation mobility involves transitions to higher-skilled occupations and different fields of work, upskilling and reskilling are becoming increasingly important.
- At the same time, the increasing share of workers remaining in the same occupation underscores the continuing importance of cumulative capability development, even where major occupational transitions do not occur.

Occupation mobility dynamics are relevant across multiple areas of labour market policy and research. DOM-Career Pathways expands the tools available for unpacking these dynamics, leveraging large administrative datasets to enable analysis by key demographic variables (i.e. age, gender and geography).

This report demonstrates a range of potential use cases for DOM-Career Pathways at the national level and for different segments of the population, with an emphasis on implications for adult learning. The full DOM-Career Pathways dataset has been published alongside this paper to make the data available to other researchers and decision-makers with an interest in occupation mobility.

Note on PLIDA data

The results of these studies are based, in part, on data supplied to the ABS under the Taxation Administration Act 1953, A New Tax System (Australian Business Number) Act 1999, Australian Border Force Act 2015, Social Security (Administration) Act 1999, A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999, Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 and/or the Student Assistance Act 1973. Such data may only be used for the purpose of administering the Census and Statistics Act 1905 or performance of functions of the ABS as set out in section 6 of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975.

No individual information collected under the Census and Statistics Act 1905 is provided back to custodians for administrative or regulatory purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the data for statistical purposes and is not related to the ability of the data to support the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Business Register, Department of Social Services and/or Department of Home Affairs' core operational requirements.

Legislative requirements to ensure privacy and secrecy of these data have been followed. For access to PLIDA and/or BLADE data under Section 16A of the ABS Act 1975 or enabled by section 15 of the Census and Statistics (Information Release and Access) Determination 2018, source data are de-identified and so data about specific individuals has not been viewed in conducting this analysis. In accordance with the Census and Statistics Act 1905, results have been treated where necessary to ensure that they are not likely to enable identification of a particular person or organisation.

References

¹ Productivity Commission (2026), [*Talent in transit: Occupation and industry mobility in Australia*](#), accessed 8 September 2026.

² Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (2023). [*Understanding regional data: Industry*](#), accessed 17 March 2026.

³ Jobs and Skills Australia (2026), [*Occupation Shortage List*](#), accessed 3 August 2026; Jobs and Skills Australia (2026), [*Gender Segregation Intensity Scale Occupational Dashboard*](#), accessed 3 August 2026.

⁴ Torre M & Jacobs JA (2021), 'The gender mobility paradox: Gender segregation and women's mobility across gender-type boundaries, 1970-2018', *Gender and Society*, 35(6): 853-883; Jobs and Skills Australia (2025), [*New perspectives on old problems: Gendered jobs work and pay*](#), accessed 30 July 2026.

⁵ Women's Economic Outcomes Senior Officials Working Group (2024), [*Workforce gender segregation in Australia: A technical paper prepared by the interjurisdictional Women's Economic Outcomes Senior Officials Working Group of the Council on Federal Financial Relations*](#), accessed 30 July 2026;

⁶ Productivity Commission (2026), [*Talent in transit: Occupation and industry mobility in Australia*](#), accessed 8 September 2026.

⁷ Duan J, Kim S & Zhong-Xing S (2023), 'Gender and cross-boundary mobility preferences: the moderating effects of organisational and occupational contexts', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 62(1).