



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy

FOR A SAFER, MORE PROSPEROUS INDO-PACIFIC AND WORLD

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Government acknowledges Australia's First Nations peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises and respects their continuing connections to lands, waters and communities.

The government pays respect to Elders past and present, to emerging leaders, and to all First Nations peoples, and recognises the continuation of diverse cultural, spiritual and educational practices.

The government thanks all First Nations peoples who have generously shared their knowledge and expertise to inform *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy*.

This publication may contain images or references to First Nations Australians who are deceased. The Australian Government does not wish to cause distress to any First Nations community members.

Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy
ISBN 978-1-74322-629-2 (Online)

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The document should be attributed as:
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2025).
Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy,
Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

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Published February 2025

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Cover images credit:

Clockwise from top left: Australia Awards, CBM, Geraldine Grace Hoggang/Oxfam Philippines, DFAT, CBM

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Foreword by the Minister for Foreign Affairs



Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Gender equality is central to our interests. It's not just a 'women's issue', nor is it something we pursue simply as a matter of fairness or justice — though gender equality is of course both fair and just.

It's about accelerating progress for everyone — because we know that greater political and economic participation by women makes societies wealthier and more peaceful. Any country that wants to develop fully must encourage the full participation of all its people.

In 1995, the international community adopted the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* — a bold plan to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Thirty years later, much work remains.

More than 380 million women and girls worldwide are living in extreme poverty. Around 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal economic opportunities.

Sexual and gender-based violence is rife, with an estimated one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Last year alone, United Nations-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence surged by 50 per cent — almost a third of these cases involved girls.

In countries like Iran and Afghanistan, repressive authorities grossly deprive women and girls of their human rights — depleting their nations' souls and prospects. When the Taliban effectively imprisoned half their society's population, they immediately halved their country's potential.

Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy outlines how Australia is driving gender equality in our international engagement.

We are deepening partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, supporting women's health, rights, safety, economic participation, and leadership. We are delivering humanitarian and climate action that is gender responsive, and increasing investment in sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response in the Pacific. We are ensuring that these initiatives reflect the perspectives and priorities of women and girls from across our region.

Australia is also advocating globally for progress on gender equality while defending hard-won gains. We remain committed to the Women, Peace and Security agenda and will continue championing gender equality through international cooperation.

Australia is always better off if our region and world is more prosperous and more secure. So as we advance our interests in the world, policies that contribute to gender equality and to women and girls' empowerment are not simply an appendix to the rest of our foreign policy.

This Strategy reaffirms the centrality of Australia's commitment to gender equality. With our partners, we can build a safer, more prosperous world where everyone has equal opportunities, rights and freedoms and can thrive free of violence, conflict, and discrimination.

Because gender equality benefits everyone.

Foreword by the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy recognises that gender equality is central to DFAT's work – from foreign affairs and trade to security, development and humanitarian assistance.

The Strategy is the product of extensive consultation with more than 600 stakeholders – including partner governments, civil society, women's rights organisations, multilateral agencies, private sector leaders and state security agencies – across Australia and the world. Stakeholders consistently emphasised the need to focus on women's health, rights and safety, women's leadership and economic equality while urging us to scale up our efforts.

We also heard the importance of addressing different needs – this Strategy responds to those insights by prioritising inclusive, locally led approaches that deliver tangible impacts.

By ensuring gender equality is a foundational objective across DFAT's work, we are better able to support safer and more prosperous communities globally and in our region. This in turn benefits all Australians, their security and prosperity. This Strategy builds on Australia's strong track record as a leader on gender equality and reaffirms our commitment to measurable results, genuine partnerships, and structural reforms that address the root causes of gender inequality for lasting change.

This Strategy calls upon us all – DFAT staff, our partners and our stakeholders – to implement this collective vision. Together, we can advance gender equality across the globe, building a safer, more prosperous world for everyone.



Jan Adams AO PSM

Secretary
Department of Foreign
Affairs and Trade



Credit: Balance of Power

Executive summary

Gender equality benefits everyone. It is a necessary foundation for peace, prosperity and sustainability.¹ It drives economic growth, enhances social cohesion and increases the wellbeing of all members of society.² *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy* outlines how DFAT will use all tools of foreign policy to drive gender equality, including through our bilateral and regional programs and relationships, our multilateral diplomacy, trade, development and humanitarian assistance. It guides how we will leverage our existing expertise, partnerships, and resources and highlights the importance of working collaboratively with partner governments, civil society, and with the international community.

The Strategy focuses on five priorities:

1. work to end sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and protect and advance women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)
2. pursue gender responsive peace and security efforts
3. deliver gender equitable climate action and humanitarian assistance
4. promote women's economic equality and inclusive trade
5. support locally led approaches to women's leadership.

Through these priorities, Australia will expand existing efforts that have been substantial and effective, and launch new initiatives that drive tangible outcomes for women and girls. We will:

- increase investment in SGBV prevention and response services in the Indo-Pacific and in crisis and conflict settings
- strengthen partnerships with Indo-Pacific women's rights organisations, institutions and movements, including increasing support to amplify locally driven solutions, including in humanitarian contexts
- advance approaches to the green energy transition and climate adaptation that ensure all people benefit, including enabling women's leadership of emergency preparedness and response efforts
- implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and identify new opportunities to address contemporary challenges like climate change, cybersecurity, space, nuclear and critical technology
- work with global partners to mainstream economic equality in trade agreements and policies.

This Strategy reinforces Australia's longstanding role as a champion of and trusted partner for gender equality. By focusing on outcomes and fostering genuine partnerships, we will build a safer, more stable and prosperous world for everyone.

This Strategy reinforces Australia's longstanding role as a champion and trusted partner for gender equality.



Credit: Palladium

Strategic overview

Strategic Overview



GOAL

Advance gender equality for a safer, more prosperous Indo-Pacific and world

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Gender equality is a human right

Gender equality benefits everyone

Gender inequality affects people in different ways

Gender equality is integrated into all areas of Australia's foreign policy

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Work to end sexual and gender-based violence and advance and protect women's sexual and reproductive health and rights

Pursue gender responsive peace and security efforts

Deliver gender equitable climate action and humanitarian assistance

Promote women's economic equality and inclusive trade

Support locally led approaches to women's leadership

OUR APPROACH

Supporting local leadership and decision-making

Focusing on outcomes

Setting high standards and bolstering safeguarding mechanisms

Twin-track efforts

Evidence-based approaches



Gizo Market, Solomon Islands. Credit: DFAT

Chapter 1

Global picture

Gender equality benefits everyone. It is a stronger predictor of peace than a nation's wealth or political system.³ It unlocks economic productivity, reduces poverty, deepens social cohesion, and enhances wellbeing and prosperity for current and future generations.⁴ If women participated in the economy on equal terms with men, it could add up to US\$28 trillion to the international economy.⁵

Despite this potential, no country is on track to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. Women and girls remain disproportionately affected by poverty, insecurity, and systemic inequality.⁶ At the current rate of progress, achieving global gender parity in economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment will take more than 130 years.⁷ The increasing impacts of climate change, conflict and displacement are further exacerbating gender inequalities. We cannot fully realise Australia's aspirations for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific without gender equality.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is pervasive, affecting one in three women, with women from minority backgrounds at even greater risk.⁸ Additionally, limited access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services results in harmful practices and increased health risks for women and children. Each year, more than 22,000 women die globally due to complications from unsafe abortions.⁹

Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles worldwide. In 2024, women led only 29 countries and held just 27 per cent of parliamentary seats globally.¹⁰ Even when women achieve leadership positions, many face violence and discrimination that hinders their participation in public life.¹¹

Economic barriers further entrench gender inequality. Legal restrictions prevent women from fully participating in the labour market in 178 countries. As a result, women's labour force participation lags far behind men's, with women-owned businesses representing only 15 to 20 per cent of global enterprises.¹² Around one billion women remain excluded from formal financial services.¹³ Combined with attitudes that prioritise men's paid employment and expectations that women undertake most unpaid household care work, these barriers mean that just 61 per cent of women participate in the labour force compared with 91 per cent of men. This exclusion reduces development potential for individuals and countries.

At the current rate of progress, achieving gender parity in economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment will take more than 130 years.

Box 1

What is gender equality?

Gender equality means equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all people. It is part of international human rights law and enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'.¹⁴ Gender equality enables everyone to live safely, with dignity and respect, and to fulfil their potential. As outlined in Australia's national whole of government strategy, Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality, gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing the power imbalances, rigid attitudes and stereotypes that affect people over their lifetime. This means challenging stereotypes that limit how people behave, are perceived and are treated at work, at school, in relationships in their homes, online and by their communities.

Australia is committed to advancing the international norms and standards that protect the rights of all people. These include the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), the Women, Peace and Security agenda^(a), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences.

However, these global commitments are under threat. In countries like Iran and Afghanistan, repressive authorities grossly deprive women and girls of their human rights. Elsewhere, well-funded and coordinated efforts are pushing back on global gains on human rights, gender equality and women's social, political and economic advancement.¹⁵ These movements often rely on disinformation and misinformation to fuel fear, discrimination and violence against women, and evidence suggests links to broader anti-democratic and authoritarian agendas.

(a) The Women, Peace and Security agenda – adopted by the United Nations Security Council through resolution 1325 (2000) and nine subsequent resolutions – recognises the disproportionate impact that conflict has on women and girls, and calls for the full and equal participation and leadership of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict.

Box 2

Gender equality – a shared priority with the Indo-Pacific

Gender equality is a shared commitment of Australia and our Indo-Pacific partners. It is reflected in key regional frameworks, including: the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security, the Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration¹⁶ and the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030. All ASEAN Member States and 11 out of 12 Pacific Island UN Members are party to CEDAW, reinforcing their commitment to global gender equality norms.

Australia's role

We use all tools of statecraft to advance gender equality for a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The Australian Government is committed to advancing gender equality both at home and internationally. We use all tools of statecraft to advance gender equality for a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Domestically, Australia's efforts are guided by Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality, released in 2024, which envisions a nation where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender. Under Working for Women, Australia is prioritising ending gender-based violence, valuing and sharing paid and unpaid work, advancing women's economic security and equality, improving equity in health services and closing leadership and representation gaps.

Australia has a longstanding tradition as a champion of gender equality on the global stage. Australia played a formative role in establishing the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1946 and was instrumental in the inclusion of human rights without distinction as to sex in both the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁷

Australia's first Global Ambassador for Women and Girls was appointed in 2011. Australia released its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in 2012 and our International Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy in 2016. Australia's current Ambassador for Gender Equality was appointed in 2022.

Box 3

Driving gender equality through Australia's international development, humanitarian and climate action, and in advancing disability equity and rights

The Australian Government is committed to advancing gender equality through levers of foreign policy.

Through our International Development Policy, launched in 2023, we have reinstated a target of 80 percent of all development investments to address gender equality effectively, and established a new requirement for investments of \$3 million and above to include gender equality objectives.

In our Humanitarian Policy, launched in 2024, we have committed to prioritising and promoting gender equality across all our humanitarian action and response efforts. Our International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, launched in 2024, supports equity and diversity for all people with disability and works to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender.

While steady progress has been made, significant challenges remain. *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy* reinforces and builds on Australia's commitment to advancing gender equality at home, in our region, and globally.



Credit: Australian Volunteers Program/Harjono Djoyobisono

Chapter 2

Gender equality benefits everyone

Goal

Advance gender equality for a safer, more prosperous Indo-Pacific and world

Guiding principles

The implementation of this Strategy is guided by four principles:

1. Gender equality is a human right

Human rights belong to everyone. Our work is grounded in international norms and standards, including equality of rights, respect for human dignity, non-discrimination, tolerance, and accountability.

2. Gender equality benefits everyone

While women and girls are most often affected by the power imbalances that underpin gender inequality, harmful gender attitudes and stereotypes constrain everyone, limiting choices and opportunities. As we implement this Strategy, we will work to ensure that everyone can benefit from the expanded opportunities, increased safety and economic benefits that gender equality can bring.

As we implement this Strategy, we will work to ensure that everyone can benefit from the expanded opportunities, increased safety and economic benefits that gender equality could bring.

3. Gender inequality affects people in different ways

Gender inequality presents differently depending on factors such as ethnicity, disability, age, religion, location and sexuality. Recognising these experiences allows for better responses to the unique needs of individuals at different stages of their lives and helps us recognise and address inequities, particularly for people with disability. As we implement this Strategy, we will continue to consider and respond to the diverse needs of different people through our international engagement and address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

4. Gender equality is integrated into all areas of Australia's foreign policy

Through our partnerships, advocacy and actions, gender equality is integrated into all areas of Australia's foreign policy, including bilateral, regional and multilateral diplomacy, trade, development and humanitarian assistance. Australia is recognised for advancing gender equality across our work, strengthening our role as a global actor and regional partner.

Box 4

Intersecting forms of discrimination

Globally, more women than men have disability – an estimated 19 per cent of women compared to 12 per cent of men.¹⁸ Women living in poverty are even more likely to have disability.¹⁹ Every minute, more than 30 women are seriously injured or acquire disability during childbirth. Violence against women can also result in disability.²⁰ Women with disability experience compounded marginalisation, and face greater barriers to education, employment and health care than both men with disability and women without disability. In addition to gender-based discrimination, they also face discrimination based on their disability.

In many parts of the world, LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities face discrimination and exclusion, and experience unjust criminalisation and other forms of punishment, violence, limited access to adequate health services and poor development outcomes. Australia is committed to advocating for and supporting the rights of LGBTQIA+ people and to partnering with LGBTQIA+ civil society organisations.



Lusiana Buli (Lusi) is a woman with physical disability and is an active member of her community from Rewa Province in Fiji. Lusi's community has been identified as being vulnerable to climate change and she advocates for the full and meaningful inclusion of people with disability in preparing for climate change and disasters. Credit: CBM

Box 5

Fostering cooperation between First Nations Australian and Pacific women on conservation

First Nations Australians have had shared culture and kinship connections in our region for tens of thousands of years and were Australia's first traders and diplomats, exchanging goods and ideas with our closest neighbours. DFAT supports initiatives that foster cooperation between First Nations Australians and regional partners. These initiatives are based on unique experiences and knowledge in order to address shared challenges. For example, the Australian Volunteers Program, in partnership with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Solomon Islands, WWF Australia and the Indigenous Women's Ranger Environmental Network, has supported First Nations Australian women working in conservation to share their knowledge and experience with rangers and communities in Solomon Islands. During the project, the First Nations volunteers visited three communities in Solomon Islands' Western Province, and shared their diverse experiences of conservation and caring for Country. The aim was to strengthen locally led conversation in the Pacific, and for First Nations Australian and Pacific Island women working in conversation to identify common challenges and opportunities to support one another.



First Nations Australian volunteer and Bundjalung Traditional Owner Cindy-Lou Togo, discussing marine use zones with rangers from the Pusiju community in Solomon Islands as part of the Indigenous Conservation Knowledge Exchange 2023. Cindy-Lou leads a team of women rangers at the Giringun Aboriginal Corporation in far north Queensland. Credit: Alice Tamang



Debora Namkoi participates in a health planning workshop with WaterAid staff, Wewak, Papua New Guinea. Credit: Australian Volunteers Program/ Harjono Djoyobisono

Chapter 3

Strategic priorities

Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy focuses on five strategic priorities to advance gender equality for all globally. All five priorities are connected – access to health services and increased safety are critical to women's economic advancement, women are more vulnerable to violence during conflict and humanitarian disasters, our responses and engagements in all contexts have the biggest impact where they are locally designed and led by women and include women in decision-making and leadership.

Priority 1: Work to end sexual and gender-based violence and advance and protect women's sexual and reproductive health and rights

To realise gender equality and the benefits it brings to all, women and girls must be safe from SGBV and be free to make informed decisions about their own bodies.

SGBV includes family and non-partner violence, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, harassment, and child and forced marriage. It can be deadly. SGBV undermines individuals' rights and social and economic development, with the global economic cost of SGBV estimated at US\$1.5 trillion annually.²¹

The right to comprehensive sexual and reproductive services, information and education is fundamental to gender equality. They support women and girls to make decisions about their own bodies and futures and can increase protection against sexual violence and abuse. Sexual and reproductive health services provide access to contraception, detection and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and support women's overall health. The consequences of inadequate access to SRHR services can be devastating.

The rights of women and girls to be safe and in control of their own bodies are under threat. This is reflective of a deeper pushback on women's human rights. This pushback is putting women and girls at risk. It not only limits women and girls' access to critical health, education and services; it can also reduce support for victim/survivors of sexual violence, contributing to stigma and trauma.

Australia advocates to protect and advance women's rights through our international engagements at all levels. Australia is committed to growing our investment to work towards ending SGBV and support justice for victim/survivors (Case study 1). We are increasing our investment in SRHR and health services (Case study 2), including working to eliminate diseases that affect women and girls, such as cervical cancer. We are also working with men and young people across our region to address harmful stereotypes and attitudes that perpetuate SGBV and limit the uptake of SRHR services.

Australia advocates to protect and advance women's rights through our international engagements at all levels.

Actions underway:

- investing in SGBV response services that put the needs of people experiencing violence first, including in crisis and conflict settings
- funding leading SRHR agencies at the global level, as well as service providers across the Indo-Pacific
- advocating for universal SRHR, including family planning, comprehensive sexuality education and access to safe and legal abortion, at the multilateral, regional and bilateral levels
- working with international partners to hold countries to account for violating international laws that protect the human rights of women and girls, including through Magnitsky sanctions and international legal efforts, where appropriate
- partnering with Pacific countries to eliminate cervical cancer through improving education and outreach, vaccine accessibility, cervical cancer screening and treatment.

Future directions:

- expanding Pacific SGBV crisis centres through a new Pacific Women Lead initiative
- increasing investment in SGBV primary prevention, including across social protection, economic equality, and education initiatives
- strengthening SRHR (including services) and integrating SGBV prevention and response in humanitarian assistance.

Case study 1

Southeast Asia Gender-Based Violence Prevention Platform

In Southeast Asia, 33 per cent of partnered women over the age of 15 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once.²² Australia's flagship Southeast Asia Gender-Based Violence Prevention Platform addresses this by supporting evidence-based approaches to prevent SGBV. The initiative brings together governments, civil society, and regional and international organisations to develop transformative programs and policies aligned with the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Case study 2

Towards Universal SRHR in the Indo-Pacific

Through the \$57 million Towards Universal SRHR in the Indo-Pacific (TUSIP) program, Australia is expanding access to comprehensive SRHR services, information and education, including family planning, testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and safe abortion (where legal). The program addresses harmful practices such as child and forced marriage and female genital cutting/mutilation, both of which remain prevalent across the Indo-Pacific. This enables all people, particularly women and girls, to make informed decisions about their health and lives.



Case study 3

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Credit: UNFPA

Engaging men and boys to change harmful gender norms in Cox's Bazar

Forcibly displaced and stateless people are at greater risk of SGBV. In partnership with Australia, Oxfam has worked with men and adolescent boys on preventing and mitigating violence against women and girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, to overcome perceptions that SGBV is a 'personal matter'. Male participants in the program agreed that while violence against women and girls remains, it is less accepted in their communities. One participant reflected that, 'If I behave badly towards my wife, my brother-in-law may think it is acceptable to beat my sister. Similarly, my son-in-law may be violent with my daughter. Where does all this violence get us? We must stop violence against women in our homes for a peaceful community.'

Case study 4

Holding the Taliban to account for mistreatment of women and girls

In Afghanistan, the Taliban has demonstrated a pervasive disregard for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls. Through a campaign of sustained and systematic oppression, the Taliban have denied girls their right to education and attempted to erase women from public life. In 2024, Australia joined with Germany, Canada and the Netherlands to take unprecedented action to hold Afghanistan to account under international law for the Taliban's treatment of women and girls. This action was brought against Afghanistan for violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Afghanistan is a party.

Priority 2: Pursue gender responsive peace and security efforts

Countries with greater gender inequality are more likely to experience armed conflict.²³ The impacts of conflict on women and girls are worsening. In 2023, 15 per cent of the world's women lived within 50 kilometres of active conflict,²⁴ and the number of women who died from conflict doubled, as did cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).²⁵ Conflict and crises exacerbate other gendered threats that affect women and men differently, including human trafficking and torture.²⁶ Girls are disproportionately vulnerable in conflicts – one-third of all cases of CRSV reported in 2023 were perpetrated against girls.

Women's leadership is critical for preventing conflict and crises and for responding to emergencies. Women's participation and leadership in conflict prevention and peace processes improves outcomes before, during and after conflict, leading to longer-lasting peace that benefits everyone.²⁷ Australia is committed to supporting women's participation and leadership in these processes, addressing the gendered causes and impacts of conflict and violence. Our actions are guided by Australia's second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (WPS) (2021-2031), and include advocacy, diplomacy and leadership in multilateral, regional and bilateral settings.

Other contemporary threats are intersecting with and diminishing progress under the WPS agenda. The risks and frequencies of conflict, displacement and disaster are intensifying. Blurred lines between cyberspace and the physical world present new threats of misinformation, deception, manipulation, online radicalisation and SGBV. Gender bias in digital technologies and a lack of data protection can impair human safety and security. Australia will address these contemporary challenges through multilateral engagement and partnerships, and support more women to participate in these traditionally male-dominated spaces (Case study 6).

Actions underway:

- positioning Australia as a global WPS leader through partnerships including the WPS Focal Points Network, the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the WPS-Humanitarian Action Compact
- advocating for WPS implementation across the United Nations and with regional bodies, and promoting regional-led initiatives such as ASEAN implementation of the Regional Plan of Action on WPS
- supporting women peace mediator networks in Southeast Asia and the Pacific to increase women's leadership in conflict prevention
- working with partner countries to strengthen legislative frameworks to prevent gendered crimes, including human trafficking, slavery, exploitation and forced marriage
- supporting the representation of women in nuclear security,

Australia is committed to supporting women's participation and leadership in these processes, addressing the gendered causes and impacts of conflict and violence.

including through contributions to training and fellowships for women in the Indo-Pacific and as co-founder of the Group of Friends for Women in Nuclear Security

- sponsoring training and participation of women from developing countries in discussions at the UN on international peace and security issues related to responsible state behaviour in cyberspace.

Future directions:

- increasing the promotion of women's leadership in conflict prevention, resolution and peace processes in the Indo-Pacific, including in the context of climate change
- identifying new opportunities to address contemporary challenges like climate change, cybersecurity, space, nuclear and critical technology through the WPS agenda
- increasing Australia's advocacy and leadership to eliminate the use of SGBV in all contexts, including conflict and war.

Case study 5

The Women, Peace and Security agenda

The WPS agenda offers a framework for achieving gender equality in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Australia's whole-of-government WPS approach reflects our commitment to achieving gender equality by working collaboratively with multilateral, civil society and regional partners and the broader global community to embed WPS across our foreign policy, defence, development, humanitarian and security work. Our second National Action Plan 2021-2031 guides coordinated action that places women's meaningful participation at the centre of efforts to protect and promote women's and girls' human rights, prevent and resolve conflict, and establish enduring peace. In 2025, DFAT will commission an interim independent review to make recommendations on how to enhance Australia's efforts under the National Action Plan.



Case study 6

Women in International Security and Cyberspace Fellowship

On average, just 27 per cent of speakers in peace and security debates are women.²⁸ The Women in International Security and Cyberspace Fellowship, co-funded by Australia, has increased women's participation in UN peace and security discussions, including women from more than 40 countries who have built multilateral negotiation and cyber policy skills. As a result, in December 2023, the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Cyber was the first UN peace and security forum to achieve gender parity, with 55 per cent of interventions made by women speakers.



Women in Cyber Fellows in the UN General Assembly. Credit: Pelayo Alvarez, United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Priority 3: Deliver gender equitable climate action and humanitarian assistance

The Indo-Pacific is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, with Pacific Island leaders identifying it as the single greatest threat to their people.²⁹ Gender inequality can worsen during crises and disasters, and their impacts are not gender-neutral. Climate-related crises disproportionately affect women, girls and gender-diverse individuals, making existing inequalities worse.³⁰ When disasters strike, women are less likely to survive.³¹

Evidence demonstrates that gender equality and climate action are mutually reinforcing, which is why Australia requires our development investments to address both issues. More women in national parliaments leads to more ambitious climate change policies and lower emissions, bringing benefits for whole societies.³² When women are involved in disaster planning, response and recovery, the needs of different groups are more likely to be met. In addition, preventing SGBV can enable women environmental defenders to safely advance ambitious climate action.³³

In Australia's Humanitarian Policy: Making a difference for people in crisis, we committed to focusing on those most at risk, and to promoting gender equality across our humanitarian action and response efforts. We recognise that when diverse people are equally engaged in decision-making, humanitarian planning, preparedness, response and recovery are more effective and the needs of different groups are more likely to be met.

We will continue working with partners in the Indo-Pacific to improve climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and supporting women and girls to represent their countries in international climate forums. Our development and humanitarian investments will create opportunities for both women and men to benefit from the green energy transition and lead emergency preparedness and response efforts.

Actions underway:

- embedding gender equality targets and objectives in all climate, disaster risk reduction, environment, and biodiversity investments, to deliver programs that actively address gender inequalities whenever possible, especially within multiyear humanitarian responses
- building our capability and specialist knowledge to integrate gender equality into our humanitarian deployments, helping us meet our aims of doing no harm and leaving no one behind
- supporting women's rights organisations and institutions to strengthen women's leadership, participation and influence in climate and humanitarian action
- providing crisis-affected communities with lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services and supplies, such as hygiene and dignity kits, to meet the needs of women and girls in the Indo-Pacific

Evidence demonstrates that gender equality and climate action are mutually reinforcing, which is why Australia requires our development investments to address both issues.

- promoting the need to address the intersection of gender equality and climate change impacts in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, including by implementing the UNFCCC Enhanced Lima Work Programme and Gender Action Plan.

Future directions:

- increasing funding for women's rights and refugee-led organisations to enhance crisis response and support for survivors of conflict-related SGBV
- integrating gender equality into green economy agreements and other climate policy frameworks
- increasing investment in women's participation in emerging low-carbon economies, with a focus on creating equal economic opportunities for women in green energy transitions.



Case study 7

Ellen Tamata, Disability Inclusion Officer at ActionAid Vanuatu, supports a woman with a disability to register for assistance following the earthquake. Credit: ActionAid Vanuatu

The Women I Tok Tok Tugeta Sunshine Network

Based in Vanuatu, the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta Sunshine (WITTT Sunshine) Network is designed by and for women with disability. It enables women with disability to lead climate resilience activities, disaster risk reduction planning and humanitarian responses. Since its inception in 2018, the network has grown to over 1,000 women with disability who have responded to a range of disasters including COVID-19, tropical cyclones and flooding. Following the December 2024 Vanuatu earthquake, WITTT Sunshine members were at the forefront of the emergency response, distributing food relief, dignity kits and water to affected households of people with disability. Member Ellen Tamata explains that 'Women with disabilities know what they want; people without disabilities will not understand our challenges. So, when we are trained, we will have a voice and we will speak up for ourselves in whatever situation we face, and during a disaster we will be prepared.'

Priority 4: Promote women's economic equality and inclusive trade

Women's economic equality is essential for overall economic growth and social cohesion, and for women's empowerment.³⁴ However, women face barriers to economic participation, including discriminatory labour laws and trade practices, limited access to financial services, and unsafe working conditions. Unpaid care responsibilities typically fall on women and girls, excluding an estimated 708 million women from the labour force.³⁵

Social protection – such as cash transfers, insurance and in-kind support – is critical for women's economic equality. Social protection systems and programs can improve girls' educational learning outcomes, reduce SGBV, recognise the economic value of unpaid caring responsibilities, and make women less vulnerable.

Australia is committed to advancing inclusive trade to ensure trade benefits flow to all people. Through Free Trade Agreements Australia cooperates with partner governments to advance women's economic equality by seeking to include non-discrimination provisions, addressing barriers faced by women in trade, and encouraging the collection and use of gender trade data.

Australia is working with global partners to promote and mainstream gender and economic equality in trade agreements and policies, supporting women-led businesses, and driving reforms for workplace equality and financial inclusion. We will increase investment in women-led businesses (Case study 8) and work with partner governments to strengthen the gender responsiveness of social protection systems.

Actions underway:

- embedding gender equality in multilateral aid for trade programming
- strengthening cooperation at the World Trade Organization and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to mainstream consideration of gender responsive trade policies, building on our efforts to promote exchanges of information and good practices
- supporting reform for workplace gender equality, financial inclusion, and decent work for women workers in the Indo-Pacific, in partnership with the private sector and government institutions
- partnering with national governments to strengthen the gender, age and disability responsiveness of social protection services, and increase social protection coverage for women and girls.

Future directions:

- pursuing gender equality provisions in all future free trade agreements and policies
- expanding digital trade rules and standards through negotiations, advocacy and capacity building to grow digital trade and generate benefits for women in emerging markets

Australia is committed to advancing inclusive trade to ensure trade benefits flow to all people.

(b) The La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth (2019-2030) encourages action by APEC members to achieve gender equality and the economic empowerment of women and girls.

- support implementation of commitments to advance gender equality in trade, in the G20 and in APEC, including APEC's La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth (2019–2030)^(b)
- strengthening women's business networks and participation in trade missions.

Case study 8

Investing in women

Australia's Development Finance Review, published in 2023, highlighted that Australia is recognised as a global leader in development finance that leverages public and private investment to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Australia's first \$15.4 million investment through our flagship Investing in Women program catalysed over \$290 million in co-financing for women entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia. We support 2X Global, the Women's Livelihood Bonds and the Orange Bond Initiative which focuses on gender and climate. In 2023, the Australian Government launched Australian Development Investments, a \$250 million impact investment fund, to greatly expand our capacity to mobilise private sector investment to expand small and medium enterprises in the Indo-Pacific region to drive climate and gender outcomes.

Women's rights organisations and movements are the most effective drivers of lasting change for gender equality

Priority 5: Support locally led approaches to women's leadership

Women remain largely excluded from decisions that impact their lives, despite occupying unofficial leadership roles in their communities. But whole societies benefit when women are in decision-making positions. When more women are in parliament, policies better reflect the priorities of all people.³⁶ Women's business leadership improves financial performance.³⁷ Women's leadership is critical for preventing crises and responding to emergencies.

Women's rights organisations and movements are the most effective drivers of lasting change for gender equality.³⁸ They are part of the communities that they represent and are best placed to drive locally led action. Australia will remain a reliable funder of local women's rights organisations and movements, reflecting good practice in locally led development. We support women's leadership in public and private sectors (Case study 9) and in regional and multilateral forums, including in sectors where women are underrepresented.

Actions underway:

- supporting locally led approaches to strengthen women's leadership across partner governments, the private sector and in multilateral forums
- funding education and professional development for women leaders in the Indo-Pacific
- amplifying the voices of women's rights organisations in regional and global forums, including the UN.

Future directions:

- increasing support for women's rights organisations, institutions and movements, including in humanitarian contexts
- expanding investment in scholarships, leadership programs and grants for emerging women leaders
- addressing the challenges of shrinking civic space for gender equality champions through Australia's Civil Society Partnerships Fund.

Case study 9

Pacific Women Lead

Pacific Women Lead is a locally led portfolio of programs supporting women and girls in all their diversity to be safe and to equitably share in resources, opportunities, and decision-making. In Tonga's 2023 local government elections, the Pacific Women Lead Balance of Power program supported FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga, a local women's rights organisation, to campaign for women's election. Twenty-five women ran for election, more than ever before. Milise Vaiangina, one of the women candidates who was inspired by the campaign to run, said: 'I realised that I, too, could make a difference by seeking out opportunities to lead and serve.' While Milise was not elected, her experience changed how she sees herself: 'I now identify as a woman leader in my community, and I can attest to the fact that the influence of powerful and inspiring women can be life changing', she said.



Milise Vaiangina. Credit: Balance of Power



Female students of Aruligo SDA Community School receive their human papillomavirus vaccines. Credit: DFAT

Chapter 4

Our approach



International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy consultations in Suva, Fiji. Credit: DFAT

Australia's efforts to advance and protect gender equality will be guided by a commitment to partnership, respect, listening and learning. Gender equality will be incorporated into all aspects of Australia's foreign, trade, security and development policy. Our approach will be underpinned by five key concepts.

1. Supporting local leadership and decision-making

Locally led approaches informed by local knowledge and networks achieve better outcomes. Efforts to promote gender equality are most effective when driven by local actors. Australia will listen to, learn from, and be guided by our partners. Australia will support civil society engagement and representation in multilateral spaces and agreements. Our development approach will support locally led approaches that align with shared values. This includes working with governments, the private sector, and civil society – particularly women's rights organisations and movements – to deliver sustainable, community-led solutions.

Australia will listen to, learn from, and be guided by our partners.

2. Focusing on outcomes

All activities, policies and programs influence gender equality. Gender responsive and transformative efforts deliver meaningful and lasting change, including structural reforms that address the drivers of gender inequality. Australia's engagement in multilateral, foreign policy and security spaces will be informed by our understanding of what works to advance gender equality. Australia's requirement that development and humanitarian investments of \$3 million or more have gender equality objectives ensures that investments are designed to be gender responsive and transformative so that everyone benefits.

3. Setting high standards and bolstering safeguarding mechanisms

We will set higher standards for DFAT staff and our implementing partners and bolster our safeguarding mechanisms to ensure we do no harm.

Efforts to achieve gender equality can face resistance, resulting in risks such as SGBV, exploitation, abuse, and harassment. We will use gender analysis across our research, policies and programs to avoid unintended negative consequences. We set high standards for DFAT staff and our implementing partners and will bolster our safeguarding mechanisms to ensure we do no harm. We will maintain a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. We will ensure that robust, accessible reporting and accountability mechanisms are in place and that emphasis is given to victim/survivor-centred approaches when harm occurs.

4. Twin-track efforts

Australia will continue its long-term twin-track approach by supporting both targeted and mainstream approaches to gender equality. Targeted approaches specifically tackle gender inequalities, and mainstream approaches consider gender equality in all policies, programs, agreements and activities. A combination of these approaches is critical to achieving the vision set out in this Strategy, ensuring gender equality is both a standalone priority and a cross-cutting issue.

5. Evidence-based approaches

High-quality gender data and analysis enables us to understand the problems we seek to address, the contexts we operate in and what works to achieve gender equality. Evidence ensures initiatives are effective, targeted to where they can have the most impact, and 'do no harm'. Australia will invest in robust gender analysis, data collection and research to inform our policies, programs, agreements and foreign policy, security and multilateral agreements. We will listen to the voices of people with lived experience, evaluate our programs to assess effectiveness and learn from experience



Credit: PRISMA/Satu Bumi Jaya

Chapter 5

Performance, accountability and transparency

We will remain accountable to Australians and our partners by improving transparency and ensuring comprehensive reporting on gender equality.

Australia is committed to strong performance, accountability and transparency in advancing gender equality. The implementation of this Strategy will be supported by DFAT's skilled staff, long-term funding and established institutional frameworks.

We will remain accountable to Australians and our partners by improving transparency and ensuring comprehensive reporting on gender equality. Reporting on this Strategy's development and humanitarian components will align with the International Development Policy. Progress against our target that 80 per cent of development investments effectively address gender equality will be assessed annually through DFAT's Investment Performance Reporting rounds. Additionally, we will report on overall Official Development Assistance (ODA) performance and gender equality expenditure through the following mechanisms:

- Performance of Australian Development Cooperation report
- ODA Budget summary
- ODA Statistical summary
- our transparency portal, AusDevPortal

At the regional and country levels, our Development Partnership Plans are informed by gender equality, disability and social inclusion analyses. These plans include gender equality objectives, outcomes and indicators to monitor progress. We will report on these through mid-cycle reviews.

We will contribute to progress reporting on:

- Australia's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
- periodic reports to CEDAW and Universal Periodic Reviews, and
- voluntary reports to international frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As part of our focus on evidence-based approaches, Australia will also conduct strategic thematic evaluations of gender equality initiatives to deepen our understanding of effective approaches. These evaluations will inform future policies and programs, ensuring continuous improvement.

Box 6

Improving our performance on gender equality

We are delivering on our gender equality commitments. These commitments have driven a proactive approach to improving attention to gender equality across our international development program. In 2023-24, we achieved full compliance with our requirement that 100 per cent of development investments include gender equality objectives. Furthermore, we are close to our target of 80 per cent of development investments effectively addressing gender equality. As part of this effort we are strengthening staff capabilities, increasing engagement with implementing partners, investing more in gender equality technical expertise and providing new guidance to DFAT staff and partners, such as *Outcomes at the Nexus: A handbook for developing inclusive program outcomes that address the intersection of gender equality and climate change*.³⁹



DFAT is committed to reflecting the diversity of Australia's communities within its workforce and fostering safe and inclusive workplaces. With a unique role and responsibility in managing Australia's whole-of-government overseas network spanning 120 embassies, consulates, high commissions, and representative offices, DFAT strives to ensure equitable access to opportunities for all employees.

Our Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Strategy: Embracing Diversity for Global Influence outlines how we build workplaces where staff feel valued and respected. Initiatives such as the Workplace Gender Equality Network and our Women in Leadership Champion play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality within DFAT.

Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy aligns our values with practical actions to advance gender equality globally. By working in genuine partnership, supporting local leadership and embedding gender equality across all aspects of our engagement, we will deliver tangible results. We will champion these principles in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, driving change that uplifts entire communities. With our partners, Australia will continue to work towards a safer, more prosperous world in which everyone has equal opportunities, rights and freedoms and can thrive free of violence, conflict and discrimination.

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