

Australian Federal Budget 2024-25

Feminist foreign policy analysis

26 May 2024

Lead authors: Alice Ridge, IWDA; Anat Cassuto; Thilina Madiwala.
Contributing authors: Sue Harris Rimmer, Griffith University.

Originally published as part of *Gender Lens on the 2024 Budget* for the National Foundation of Australian Women

Key Portfolio Issues

- Australia will spend \$4.96b on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in FY2024-25, a modest increase of \$193.1m on the previous year.
- Despite identifying gender equality as a foreign policy priority and holding important commitments to mainstream gender in the development program, the fact remains there is no new money for dedicated gender equality programs in this budget.
- Neither is there new funding for the Government’s commitment to a First Nations approach to foreign policy. This pre-election commitment has been supported by the appointment of the inaugural Ambassador for First Nations People and an Office for First Nations International Engagement, with a forthcoming strategy. But budget measures to build on these activities across foreign policy are lacking.
- As Julia Gillard said, “budgets are about choices, and you show what you value through the choices you make.” By spending 11 times as much on Defence as it spends on international development cooperation, this budget demonstrates that the Australian Government values militarisation – prioritising state security over human security, which exacerbates insecurity for women. By spending 18 times as much on the fuel tax credit subsidy as it allocates to regional climate finance, the Australian Government is actively undermining global efforts to mitigate climate change and our own, and our neighbours’ ability to adapt.
- In a world of poly-crisis and a growing global anti-rights movement, the forthcoming International Gender Strategy must commit to significant increases in spending on gender equality, human rights, and First Nations rights in order to hold the line against backlash and advance human rights for all.

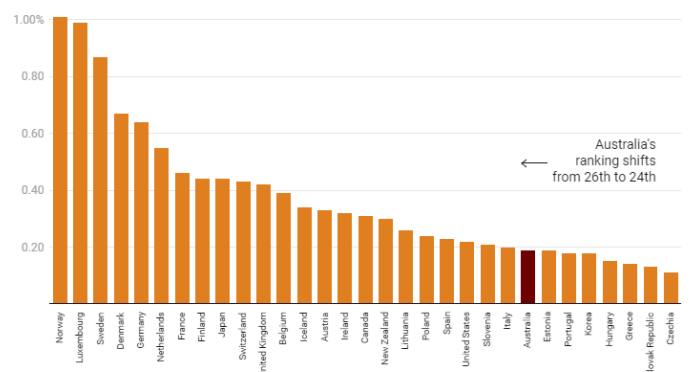
Budget Measures

1. International development

Overall Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

Australia will spend \$4.96b on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in FY2024-25, up \$193.1m or 4 per cent on the previous year, or slightly above the rate of inflation. This equates to just 0.19 per cent of Australia’s Gross National Income (GNI), far below the globally agreed target of 0.7 per cent, and the ALP’s own target of 0.5 per cent. Despite being the 13th largest economy in the world, and the 9th largest economy in the OECD, Australia ranks 26 out of 31 OECD DAC donors for ODA to GNI. A limitation of this ranking is that some donors count onshore refugee costs in the first 12 months of resettlement towards ODA; however, even when these costs are removed, Australia only gains two places – ranking 24th out of 31 countries.

Figure 2: ODA adjusted for in-donor refugee costs as percentage of GNI for DAC countries, 2023



Source: [Hill & Liu](#), 2024

Core funding for Gender, Disability and LGBTIQ+ Rights

[Australia's International Development Policy](#) emphasises gender equality as a central priority, alongside disability inclusion and climate change. However this budget includes only a marginal increase of \$1.1m to the central disability fund, bringing it to \$14.0m per year (short of sector calls for it to be raised to at least \$20m).

	FY23-24 (\$m)	FY24-25 (\$m)
Gender Equality Fund	65.0	65.0
Central Disability Fund	12.9	14.0
Inclusion and Equality Fund	3.5	3.5
Other central GEDSI funds	19.8	19.8
Total	101.2	102.3

Source: [DFAT](#) 2024

This new funding will go to a pilot program to screen school-aged children and provide glasses, hearing aids and mobility aids. There is no increase to the Gender Equality Fund (the confirmation of \$20m over 5 years for the new Southeast Asia Gender-based Violence Prevention Platform comes from existing funds), or the LGBTIQ+ Inclusion and Equality Fund).

Climate finance

Genuine climate action requires Australia to reduce our contribution to climate change, and to support other countries to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts. On the latter, Australia has committed to delivering \$3b in climate finance between 2020-2025. This budget includes welcome measures towards this commitment, including:

- \$50m in new and additional ODA over two years to re-join the UNFCCC Green Climate Fund (following the previous government's decision to pull out in 2018);
- \$100m over three years to the Pacific Resilience Facility (\$40m in this FY2024-25, of which \$15m is new and additional ODA)
- \$19m additional for an overall contribution of \$38m to extend the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project - a land reclamation and coastal rehabilitation project that form part of the quintupling of Australia's ODA to Tuvalu (to a total of \$86.7m in ODA from all sources) under the *Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union*, a bilateral treaty signed in 2023 which focuses on climate response and resettlement ([DFAT](#), 2023).

However, when compared with budget provisions of \$54b over five years for fuel tax credits – a scheme which the OECD qualifies as a “fossil fuel subsidy” calling for its elimination - and a further \$32.6m over four years for carbon capture and storage - a practice that climate scientists consider a costly and ineffective distraction

([ACF](#), 2024; [Climate Council](#), 2023) - Australia's climate financing approach is woefully inadequate.

As UN Women notes, “the climate crisis is not ‘gender neutral.’” Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate change - their livelihoods, often in agriculture, are more vulnerable, and they are more at-risk during climate disasters. The climate crisis “amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety” ([UN Women](#), 2022).

With just the fuel tax credit alone, Australia is spending 18 times more on exacerbating the climate crisis than it is on building the region's capacity to face it. Australia's fair share has been calculated at \$4b per year ([Oxfam, ActionAid et al](#), 2022) - a commitment of this size with a focus on gender transformative climate solutions should be the benchmark for Australia's contribution to the new global climate finance goal to be determined at COP29 in November.

Gaza and other humanitarian crises

Funding for humanitarian crises in Australia's international development budget is made up from a range of sources. DFAT has two flexible funds which can be drawn on for emergency and protracted crises to support local and international humanitarian response efforts. Despite the increasing frequency and severity of humanitarian crises globally, as well as the increasing cost of living which also affects supplies and logistics, there is no increase in this budget to the Humanitarian Emergencies Fund (which has stagnated at \$150m per year since 2018), and only a small increase of \$11.1m to funding for protracted crises (to a total of \$156.2m per year).

The humanitarian needs in Gaza as a result of Israel's indiscriminate deployment of military force and active efforts to block humanitarian aid are and will continue to be catastrophic. The gendered dimensions of the crisis are significant, including inadequate access to sexual health and reproductive rights services, leading to a [300% increase in miscarriages](#), and women undergoing [caesarean sections without anaesthetic](#). Women also face increased exposure to risks such as gender-based violence through displacement, and are targets for conflict related sexual violence. There are also gendered dimensions to reporting that portrays only women and children as innocent victims of the conflict, which can feed the perception that Palestinian men are legitimate targets, risking the lives of Palestinian men and boys ([IWDA](#), 2024).

Australia's core contribution to the UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA) is maintained at \$20m in FY2024-25, after being doubled in last year's budget from the previous \$10m annual allocation (with an additional \$6m granted to UNRWA during FY23-24). This brought the [total combined funding](#) provided to UNWRA and other agencies for Gaza response to \$52.6m in FY23-24. At a minimum, funding to Gaza [should be increased](#) to \$100m in FY2024-25 to contribute Australia's share towards the vast needs in response and rebuilding.

Funding for civil society

A vibrant and healthy civil society is both protective of state overreach and maintenance of democratic norms, which are themselves protective of human security and human rights. A gender-responsive approach would put greater funding directly into civil society, particularly constituency-led groups who are at the forefront of pushback on attempts to curtail rights.

Funding for the Australian NGO Cooperation program remains flat at \$143m per year, despite findings of the [2022 Independent Evaluation](#) which found that ANCP was critical in extending the geographic reach of the aid program, reaching the most marginalised populations, and leveraging community support for the aid program. The evaluation also recommended moving to a 3-4 year funding cycle, which has not been implemented, and more clearly articulating the strategic value of civil society to the Australian development program.

Disappointingly, no funding has yet been allocated to the Civil Society Partnership Fund which was announced in the new International Development Policy a year ago, as design of the fund is still ongoing. Additional analysis on localisation in the international development program is discussed below.

A barrier to increasing direct funding to civil society is the loss of DFAT development expertise over the past decade. The budget includes a significant focus on rebuilding capability across the public service, emphasising the intention to reduce reliance on external consultants. The papers report that the equivalent of 60 roles in DFAT will be converted from external labour to APS staff ([Budget paper 4](#), pp 171), but does not address the increased outsourcing of DFAT's program management to managing contractors. While there is a role for managing contractors in the aid program, it is important to minimise layers between bureaucrats and local civil society who are an important source of information and intelligence. Rebuilding DFAT's development capability should be a priority as part of broader reinvestment in the APS

Loans and concessional finance

A significant part of the aid budget, \$900m from 2024-45 to 2027-28, is directed at grants and concessional lending for the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP). These projects are presented as "climate resilient infrastructure and support the transition to net zero". Reporting with net zero targets specific to infrastructure projects would help ensure these goals are met. In addition, \$140m has been allocated to the Partnerships for Infrastructure (P4I) program in Southeast Asia, a program consisting of technical support to attract quality infrastructure finance. P4I has made important commitments to increase procurement from Indigenous-owned businesses ([P4I](#), 2022). While investing in infrastructure is an important part of climate mitigation, and DFAT is demonstrating good practice in making social inclusion a core part of these investments, the practice of concessional lending needs to be framed within a broader economic framework. Concessional loans are loans that offer more favourable

terms (such as lower interests and deferred repayments) than the borrower could obtain in the market. They still need to be paid back, and can be defaulted ([Finance](#), no date). Many Pacific nations are already experiencing high levels of public debt - a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example Fiji's public debt in 2023 was 83 per cent of its GDP, 59.7 per cent for Palau and 43.7 per cent for Tonga ([World Bank](#), 2024). Large portions of these debts are often owned by international financial institutions to which Australia contributes, such as the World Bank.

Activists across the world have called out the neo-colonial wealth extracting practices of these institutions (lower-income countries have paid US\$2.2 trillion in interest alone since 1970) ([Debt Justice](#), 2023) and the gendered impacts of austerity measures tied to loans ([FEMNET](#), 2023). Advocating for and funding debt relief within international financial institutions could allow for Pacific nations to fund their own infrastructure projects and strengthen their fiscal resilience in the long-term, particularly as the effects of climate change worsen.

2. Diplomacy and Trade

Funding for diplomacy and trade is primarily reported in the budget via staffing and infrastructure investment. This year's budget includes \$206.5m over four years (and \$6.9m per year after that) to "enhance and expand" Australia's diplomatic missions in the Pacific, as part of a \$228m package over four years to upgrade diplomatic properties and communications systems around the globe. ([Budget Paper 2](#), pp 103; [Wong](#), 2024).

In addition to the Pacific focus, the budget details measures to increase diplomatic and trade relations with Southeast Asia totalling \$505.9m over five years, including \$33.1m over five years from 2023–24 to establish an ASEAN-Australia Centre in Canberra; \$12.9m over three years to support new scholarships and fellowships under the Aus4ASEAN program; as well as measures to support Australian start-up businesses to expand to Southeast Asia and improve visa access ([Budget Paper 2](#), 2024; pp 106-7).

The budget also includes funds for the establishment of a new \$2.0b *Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility* on the National Interest Account of Export Finance Australia, to increase Australia's trade and investment in Southeast Asia. ([Budget Paper 2](#), 2024; pp 107). There is also \$29.5m in new funding for initiatives "to support Australian businesses and to boost Australia's trade, tourism, and investment opportunities," however none of the new initiatives detailed in the budget are described as having a focus on women- or Indigenous-owned businesses.

This stands in contrast to DFAT's annual report for 2022-23, which indicates a priority on expanding trade opportunities for Indigenous-owned businesses, including roundtable events "to build awareness of challenges and opportunities for First Nations businesses." ([DFAT](#), 2024). DFAT's growing focus on integrating more First Nations-led businesses into its global trade agenda is welcome, and should be expanded with a similar focus

on businesses owned by women, gender diverse people and people with disabilities. Alongside these efforts, a concerted approach by DFAT to advocate for changes to the global trading system so as to reduce the vulnerabilities it creates for marginalized groups would enhance overall effectiveness.

Significantly, the budget includes \$26.4m over four years from 2024–25 (and \$6.6m per year ongoing) to strengthen monitoring and enforcement of Australia's sanctions regime ([Budget Paper 2](#), pp 105). This is a welcome initiative, as targeted sanctions against individuals and entities (as opposed to broad-based sanctions which often impact marginalised communities most harshly) are an important lever for advancing gender equality and human rights through international pressure ([Ridge et al](#), 2019). Australia should expand the use of sanctions tied to conflict related sexual violence and other violations of gender-based rights ([as the UK has done](#)), and ensure that sanctions are applied consistently to countries which violate rights.

3. Security

Defence spending will reach a record level of \$55.69b in FY2024-25 – 11 times higher than ODA. This budget includes an additional \$5.7b in spending over and above the planned increase already set out in the forward estimates – alone this is greater than the annual ODA budget – with the Government committing to spend \$100b per year to Defence by 2033-34.

Spending on nuclear submarines - a core initiative under the AUKUS partnership - will more than quintuple from \$475m in FY23-24 to an estimated \$2.8b in FY2024-25. Defence will ultimately spend \$12b over the forward estimates on submarines, including what are effectively 'aid' payments to the UK and US to increase their domestic production capacity. ([Australian Defence Magazine, 2024](#))

The portfolio will also receive an injection of funding for staffing capability with the establishment of the Australian Submarine Agency, including 900 associated new roles, as well as cyber security initiatives ([Budget paper 4](#), pp14-15). By contrast, DFAT's staffing is slated to increase by approximately a third the amount– just 324 roles in 2024-25 to increase capability for Australia's development, diplomacy and trade. ([Budget paper 4](#), pp176). These differences in investment demonstrate the Government's continued prioritisation of Defence capability over strengthening the capability of other areas of international engagement.

The emphasis on militarisation over human security contradicts the Government's commitment to gender equality, climate change and human rights as stated in its [International Gender Equality Strategy](#). Militarisation centres on hegemonic and heterosexualised masculinities which can exacerbate unequal power relations and lead to violence and discrimination against gender identities that do not conform to militarised masculinities (Enloe, 2004 & 2014, Eichler, 2014). This can also manifest in the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. As gender inequality is rooted in unequal power relations, spending 11 times more on defence

than international development demonstrates a lack of political will to truly implement Australia's commitment to gender equality and human security, and may be undermine credibility with global allies.

The stark increase in the defence budget also poses questions regarding Australia's Women, Peace and Security commitments. Feminist peace researchers have shown links with increased militarisation and violence against women (Enloe, 2004) while identifying a continuum of violence from conflict related sexual violence during war to domestic violence during peacetime (Cockburn, 2004 & 2012). Australia's second [National Action Plan 2021-2031 on Women, Peace and Security](#) which sets out a whole-of-government strategy, identifies reducing sexual and gender-based violence as one of its four outcomes. Record levels of spending on defence compared to international development - including women, peace and security efforts in the Indo-Pacific region – undermine Australia's efforts to reduce sexual and gender-based violence in the long-term.

The significant increase in the Australia's defence to GDP ratio of 2.4 per cent exceeds the NATO Heads of State and Governments' agreed rate ([NATO](#), 2024). This is noteworthy as Australia is not even a NATO member but instead one of the [NATO's Enhanced Opportunity Partners](#). Such investment in military readiness for direct violence by 2033-34 can overshadow the commitments Australia has made to address structural violence against Indigenous Peoples in Australia and the Pacific region through its First Nations approach to foreign policy. Lack of new funding to expand work on a First Nations approach to foreign policy, combined with an above the NATO agreed GDP allocation to defence, not only undermines Australia's support to mitigate the impacts of climate induced displacement for Pacific islanders and violence against First Nations peoples rooted in settler-colonialism, but can make the commitment appear as lip-service.

Militarism as a form of slow violence – dispersed across time and space – can result in insecurity of women in the region similar to the way environmental degradation does (George, 2014). As there is a history of women's activism – particularly in the Pacific – opposing global and home-grown militarism, Australia needs to rethink if prioritizing militarisation over international development cooperation in the Pacific will delegitimize its efforts for a feminist or First Nations approach to foreign policy.

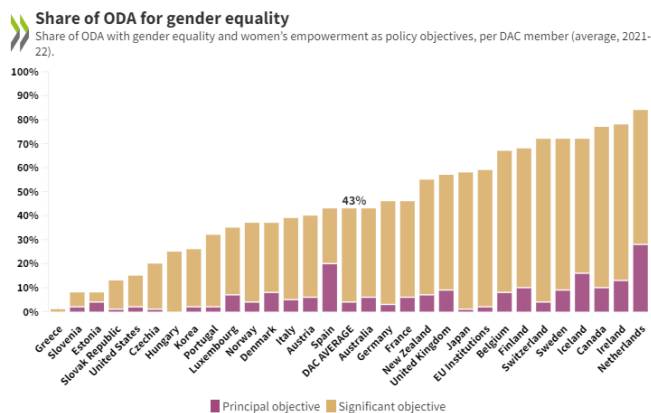
Finally, militarisation often shifts resources away from education and health that are important to women and girls, while impeding women's empowerment ([UN WOMEN](#), 2022). Access to comprehensive health care and quality education, will result in improved opportunities for women and girls, and LGBTQIA+ people. A demilitarisation and disarmament approach would enable reallocation of resources over time to gender equality and human security efforts, more aligned with Australia's commitment to gender equality and First Nations foreign policy.

Analysis of key performance measures

Gender equality

In addition to targeted spending, DFAT has a number of important commitments to enable mainstreaming of gender across the international development program. While the Gender Equality Fund is relatively small - at \$65m per year - is it only one part of the picture; in total DFAT spends approximately \$1.7b per year on programs that have gender equality as their principal or significant focus (DFAT 2024). This figure should rise in coming years, due to the commitment made in 2022 that all programs over \$3m to have a gender equality objective (aligned to the OECD DAC criteria. Performance reporting indicates that 85 per cent of new programs in 2022-23 had a gender objective, with the rest expected to establish one (DFAT 2024).

This is important, because Australia’s current performance on this measure is average for OECD donors (see chart below), indicating room to grow. However very little of this funding is delivered through women’s rights organisations, who directly received just 0.46 per cent Australia’s ODA in 2021-22 (average for 2021 and 2022 calendar years, calculated from OECD DAC data). While this is an area for improvement across many OECD donors, Australia can and should do more ensure that funding for gender equality is delivered through the most effective partners.



Source: Creditor Reporting System, OECD-DAC statistics
Note: Poland and Lithuania are not included as coverage was below 50%

Source: [OECD](#), 2023

DFAT also measures the effectiveness of its programs in achieving gender equality outcomes, with a target that 80 per cent will be assessed as effective. However in 2022-23 only 75 per cent of programs met this threshold - in fact DFAT has only once met the 80 per cent target in nearly 10 years (Ridge, 2024). While this indicates that DFAT’s Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Branch is holding programs to a robust standard of effectiveness, it is also indicative that the branch is under resourced, curtailing in-house capacity to support other areas of the Department and implementing agencies to consolidate learning and improve performance over time.

Similarly, spending on disability rights and equity happens across different areas of the aid program, totalling \$115m in 2022-23. There is no target for spending or performance on disability rights, but this data

is reported annually. In 2022-23, just 50 per cent of programs over \$3m performed satisfactorily on disability equity, down from 56 per cent the previous year. DFAT reports that “areas requiring improvement include ensuring meaningful participation by people with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities in all stages of programming, greater consideration of intersectionality and inclusion of diverse people with disabilities.” (DFAT 2024)

Localisation

DFAT has recently begun tracking indicators related to the use of “local actors in design, delivery and evaluation”, in line with its commitment to localisation. In 2022-23, the proportion of local personnel employed by managing contractors (the private organisations to whom DFAT outsources much of its program management) increased by 15 per cent. Managing contractors passed 20 per cent of their funding on to local organisations or suppliers. Reporting systems for NGO-delivered programs are still under development, but available information shows that 36 per cent of humanitarian funding to NGOs was passed on to local actors.

A feminist or First Nations foreign policy approach would require a greater focus on decolonisation - i.e.: changing the power systems that underpin Australia’s approach to all areas of development - rather than merely local delivery.

Recommendations

- Set Official Development Assistance (ODA) on a strategic and reliable trajectory for growth with the view to reaching 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI by 2029-30.
- Increase the Gender Equality Fund by \$35m per year to \$100m in FY2024-25, and set it on a trajectory to reach \$200m per year over the forward estimates.
- Increase the central disability allocation to \$20m in FY2024-25 and ongoing.
- Increase the Inclusion and Equality Fund by \$11.5m per year to a total of \$15m per year.
- Re-establish Australia’s ambition in climate justice internationally, allocating funding in next year’s budget to meet the existing commitment of \$3b in the period to 2025, and committing at least \$4b in new and additional climate finance annually from 2025 to meet our fair share.
- Dedicate \$100m in FY2024-25 to contribute Australia’s share towards the vast humanitarian needs in Gaza.
- Commit at least 5 per cent of ODA to be delivered through women’s rights organisations (CRS Sector Code 15170), prioritising core, flexible and multi-year funding mechanisms.
- Allocation \$80m per year to the new Civil Society Partnerships Fund to support core funding of local, constituency-led civil society organisations and safeguard civic space.
- The International Gender Strategy must embed and define feminist approach to advancing gender equality which is human-rights based, informed by intersectional feminist analysis and grounded in First Nations values and worldviews.

Additional references

Cockburn, C. (2004). *The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace*. In *Sites of Violence* (1st ed., p. 24). University of California Press.

Eichler, M. (2014). Militarized Masculinities in International Relations. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 21(1), 81–93.

Enloe, C. H. (2004). *The Curious Feminist: searching for women in a new age of empire*. University of California Press.

Enloe, C. H. (2014). *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: making feminist sense of international politics* (Second edition, completely revised and updated). University of California Press.

George, N. (2014). Promoting Women, Peace and Security in the Pacific Islands. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(3), 314–332.