

GENDER EQUALITY AS A NATIONAL AND ECONOMIC SECURITY IMPERATIVE

**Inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign
Affairs, Defence and Trade**

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Introduction

IWDA exists to defend and advance the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people. Within the ecosystem of women's rights organisations, we are both for and of feminist movements. As an Australia-based organisation, we work for feminist movements by resourcing diverse women's rights and aligned organisations, primarily in Asia and the Pacific, with the money, skills and access they need to achieve their priorities. We are also part of feminist movements, making our own contributions through knowledge creation, advocacy and movement strengthening, to advance our vision of gender equality for all.

IWDA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative. The evidence of this premise is extensive, and for this reason this submission aims to catalogue a wealth of data and practical examples for the Committee's consideration.

As an organisation which has been working to advance gender equality and women's rights for 40 years, we experience the current global context as one of violent backlash and regression.

Authoritarian and far-right political forces are gaining power across many parts of the world, targeting human rights, sowing seeds of division and polarisation, closing civic space, and targeting gender equality and social justice as both a means to power and an end unto itself. The rights and bodily autonomy of women and gender diverse people are under attack, and this attack represents a canary in the coalmine for broader efforts to undermine human rights, democracy and freedom – all of which are fundamental to the national and economic security of Australia and the region.

Australia's national security relies on adherence to a set of common and inviolable rules that protect sovereign decision-making and action regardless of size or standing. This is clearly outlined by the Government in the 2025 Snapshot *Australia in the World*: "Australia is better off in a world guided by rules that are agreed between nations...These rules are the way we level the playing field for nations of all sizes...[and] how we ensure that the world is not governed by might or size alone..."¹

Common rules establish and uphold the trading system we rely on for economic prosperity, as well as security. This international rules-based order protects the sovereign decision-making we require in a context where we hold economic and security partnerships with different nations who themselves may disagree or be in competition. The upholding of a rules-based system, through constructive and modern multilateralism is therefore, a foundational strategic interest, both of national and economic security, for Australia.

At present, the greatest threats to the rules-based, multilateral system are the rising authoritarian and illiberal regimes who view these rules not as critical guardrails of our common interests as a family of nations but rather as impediments to the unfettered application of their power for their singular interests. The ongoing Russian campaign to illegally annex parts of the Ukraine are one such example, while the United States' recent activity in Venezuela provides another.

¹ DFAT, *Australia in the World - 2025 Snapshot*.

Gender equality and women's political activity are innately threatening to autocratic and illiberal regimes and leaders, **because gender equality is more significant than wealth, democratic or religious status in predicting peaceful and flourishing societies.**² Put simply: autocrats fear women.

Htun and Weldon's ground-breaking 2012 research across 70 countries over 40 years, indicated that the **strength of a country's autonomous feminist movement was the most predictive factor of progressive gender policies** – more so than a nation's wealth, political ideology or the number of women in parliament.³ Chenoweth and Marks have noted the relationship between women's involvement in mass movements as predictive factors of a movement's success, and its ability to turn successes into democratic gains, stating that “[w]omen's political activism has clearly expanded and fortified democracy—a fact that autocrats and illiberal democrats intuitively understand” and therefore seek to control, curtail or reverse.⁴ Local women's rights organisations and movements understand the nuances of gender norms in their own context, and **provide a bulwark against the argument that gender equality is an imported, Western concept.**

Critically, these **authoritarian and illiberal regimes are in a symbiotic relationship with anti-rights and anti-gender actors and ideologies**—presenting two sides to the same coin that are both self-reinforcing and mutually beneficial.⁵ Whether they are working together in coordination, or simply operating concurrently, autocratic and illiberal regimes benefit from, and are strengthened by, the presence and success of anti-rights and anti-gender actors who build social momentum for derogatory, discriminatory and oppressive gender ideologies and policy influence toward outcomes that subdue, control or punish people on the basis of their gender or sexual identity. At the same time, anti-rights and anti-gender activists benefit from autocratic and illiberal regimes who are more amenable to these interests and which open space and access for the actors, and their agendas, to be brought into the mainstream.

The pursuit of these ideologies in tandem has been accelerating due to the nature of our hyper-connected online world characterized by rapid and high-volume transmission of ideas across borders. This environment is already being super-charged by the **ungoverned use of artificial intelligence tools and an information ecosystem rife with mis- and dis-information.** The *manosphere* – an umbrella term for a loose network of content creators and online communities which promote regressive ideas of masculinity and misogynistic attitudes under the guise of empowerment for men - has blossomed under these conditions, creating harmful new avenues for peddling misogyny and shifting social norms around gender equality.⁶ Research from the Universities of Queensland and Melbourne indicate that “misogynistic beliefs were a significant predictor of most forms of violence extremism...[and] if authorities recognised anti-feminist beliefs as a separate form of violent extremism, it would represent the most prevalent form of violent extremism in Australia today.”⁷

Given that the pursuit of a rules-based order is a foundational interest for Australia's national and economic security, offering a credible and enticing alternative to those who seek to undermine ordered multilateralism is a high-value strategy for securing Australia's national and economic interests. That makes the defence and pursuit of gender equality, embedded in a human rights and democratic framework, one of Australia's highest national priorities.

² Hudson et al., *Sex and World Peace*.

³ Htun and Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005.”

⁴ Chenoweth and Marks, “Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women.”

⁵ Chenoweth and Marks, “Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women.”

⁶ IWDA, *Factsheet 3: The Manosphere*.

⁷ “Radical Anti-Feminism a Prevalent Form of Violent Extremism”; Merger et al., *Misogyny, Racism and Violent Extremism in Australia*.

Summary of Recommendations

To advance gender equality as a national and economic security priority, the Australian Government should:

Recommendation 1: Work with likeminded states, including those who adopt feminist foreign policy approaches, to pursue human security and strengthen a modern multilateralism as core priorities of Australia's national and economic security.

Recommendation 2: Continue to pursue global governance reform priorities to uphold and democratise the rules-based order.

Recommendation 3: Maintain and grow Australia's investments in the collection, analysis and use of gender data, including in individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty and inequality, and resource multinational coalitions to ensure inclusive, sustainable development.

Recommendation 4: Support engagement of women's rights organisations in national and regional dialogues on measurement priorities, towards strengthening evidence on fundamental social, economic, ecological and climate needs to support the contextualisation of vulnerability and marginality and inform responsive action.

Recommendation 5: Publish a response to the final report of the Beyond GDP High Level Panel, outlining Australia's intended actions, domestically and multilaterally, to strengthen the comprehensiveness and accuracy of economic metrics.

Recommendation 6: Include individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty and inequality as a supported companion metric of economic and social progress, to improve insight into the relationship between overall economic activity and people's lived realities, and the influence of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, race and migratory status on opportunities and outcomes.

Recommendation 7: Fund initiatives to support women's political leadership and participation, including through temporary special measures coupled with efforts to shift the gendered norms and perceptions that provide barriers to women's leadership.

Recommendation 8: Ensure that its investments in social protection, in Australia and through its development cooperation, are accompanied by investments in data and evidence about individual circumstances, to support responsive, efficient systems that connect to lived realities, contribute to equity and inclusion, and people's perceptions of fairness.

Recommendation 9: Expand funding and support to WROs to hold governments accountable for implementation of commitments to gender equality and human rights, including through national level advocacy and engagement in regional and global treaty bodies.

Recommendation 10: Invest in data that can be disaggregated by gender, age, disability, other individual characteristics and intersections of these, to support analysis of how these factors shape opportunities and outcomes, and the ways in which human rights commitments and treaties are being realised in practice.

Recommendation 11: Fund constituency-led research to better understand anti-rights activities in Australia and in the Asia and Pacific regions to support early awareness of national security threats.

Recommendation 12: Fund collaboration across women's rights, feminist, SRHR and LGBTQIA+ organisations to counter anti-rights movements, including coordination of tracking, sharing strategies to counter opposition and disinformation, and alliances to safeguard women's and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Recommendation 13: Provide regular mechanisms for civil society coalitions to brief government officials and coordinate on national security impacts posed by anti-rights activities.

Recommendation 14: Adopt a target of at least 75% emissions reduction by 2030, consistent with 1.5°C commitments, and legislate a coal and gas phase-out, including ending fossil fuel subsidies and redirecting investments to climate finance, renewable energy, care infrastructure, and resilient public services.

Recommendation 15: Commit Australia's fair share of climate finance to resource feminist climate action, by:

- establishing a dedicated Gender and Climate Fund of at least AUD 300 million within Australia's aid program to resource feminist-led climate action, prioritising locally-led solutions;
- tripling grant-based climate finance to \$11 billion over 2025-2030, in line with the tripling of the global climate finance goal; and
- committing an additional \$300m in dedicated loss and damage support, reflecting Australia's fair share based on its economic capacity, high per-capita emissions, and regional responsibility to climate-vulnerable nations.

Recommendation 16: Fund domestic and international civil society organisations creating alternative narratives of modern masculinity, and (re)-allocate domestic and international funding for community spaces such as youth groups, local sports clubs, unions and community centres to provide real world alternatives to online communities for marginalised people.

Recommendation 17: Work with local, feminist civil society to develop and fund programs on digital literacy and gendered disinformation.

Recommendation 18: Introduce a positive-duty for social media platforms to address gendered-violence and vilification.

Recommendation 19: Establish dedicated funding streams within ODA for community-based WPS initiatives, with simplified access for smaller organisations, as part of broader efforts to provide core, flexible and long-term funding to WROs and grassroots women's networks.

Recommendation 20: Ensure that diverse women leaders from conflict-affected communities and marginalised groups have a formal seat in peace negotiations, security sector dialogues, and policy forums, including through quotas and mentoring programs.

Recommendation 21: Create mechanisms to link community peacebuilding to national policy, including by funding consultations between government officials and women peacebuilders at the community level.

Recommendation 22: Develop and fund protection and response programs for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders facing intimidation or violence, especially in contexts with anti-rights backlash or political instability, including rapid support (financial, legal, psychosocial) to local WPS actors under threat, recognising their role in sustaining peace and democracy.

Recommendation 23: Adapt monitoring and evaluation frameworks to capture community-level peace and security outcomes (eg: early conflict prevention, social cohesion, trust-building) generated by women's initiatives, and including this reporting in national security assessments.

Recommendation 24: Attach dedicated, transparent, and multi-year funding to the implementation of its Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2021–2031), establishing clear budget

lines, public expenditure tracking, and regular reporting on WPS investments across defence, diplomacy, development, and humanitarian portfolios.

Recommendation 25: Leverage Australia's leadership within regional and multilateral forums - including ASEAN-led mechanisms, the Pacific Islands Forum, APEC and the Quad - to position WPS and gender equality as integral to regional security and economic resilience.

Recommendation 26: Support women peacebuilders from across Asia and the Pacific to engage directly in regional and international policymaking, including sponsoring regional convenings, supporting participation in multilateral negotiations, seconding gender advisers to peace and security missions, and ensuring that women, including young and Indigenous women are represented in security, humanitarian, and diplomatic forums.

Recommendation 27: Strengthen accountability mechanisms for WPS implementation by improving data collection, outcome monitoring and public reporting, and ensure independent civil society input into monitoring and review processes.

Recommendation 28: Embed Indigenous justice as a core pillar of its domestic WPS commitments, recognising the ongoing impacts of colonisation, state-sanctioned violence and structural exclusion on First Nations women, girls and gender-diverse peoples, and supporting Indigenous-led activities across all areas of WPS and in line with the rights articulated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Recommendation 29: Align domestic and international WPS practice to strengthen Australia's credibility, and reinforce the connection between inclusive governance, democratic resilience, and national security.

Recommendation 30: Commit at least 20% of ODA to initiatives with gender equality as the principal objective and ensure robust review and moderation of progress towards this and existing targets.

Recommendation 31: Commit at least 5% of ODA to be delivered through women's rights organisations (CRS Sector Code 15170), prioritising core, flexible and multi-year funding mechanisms.

Recommendation 32: Double the Gender Equality Fund to at least \$130 million per year, and increase the Inclusion and Equality Fund to \$15 million per year, in order to resource the priorities of the IGES.

Recommendation 33: Double the staffing footprint of gender technical expertise within DFAT (including the GEDSI Branch, technical roles across country and thematic desks, and local advisors at Post) to support the priorities of IGES and consolidate performance on gender equality indicators.

Recommendation 34: Enable these priorities by setting ODA on a strategic and reliable trajectory for growth with the view to reaching 0.7% ODA/GNI by 2029-30.

Recommendation 35: Rebalance Australia's approach to risk and compliance including by improving staff capability to apply risk policies in a proportionate and flexible way, and by explicitly recognising that under-investment in local WROs and feminist movements, who are the most effective partners on gender equality, is a critical risk in itself.

Recommendation 36: Invest in the capacity of DFAT to actively manage tailored partnership arrangements and recognize the role of values-aligned intermediaries in supporting local organisations to receive funding where that is their preference.

Recommendation 37: Operationalise the Civil Society Partnerships Fund, which should be managed directly by DFAT, and adopt tailored partnership arrangements including values-aligned intermediaries to balance the need for an arms-length model with the strategic benefit of information sharing.

Recommendation 38: Release the LGBTQIA+ rights strategy and prioritise its implementation in tandem with the IGES.

Recommendation 39: Take a systemic power analysis approach to Australia's efforts to advance gender equality.

Recommendation 40: Targeted sanctions for CSRV and other violations of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Recommendation 41: Continue to cooperate with likemindeds in UN negotiations and other multilateral fora to advance gender equality, women's and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Recommendation 42: Hold briefings with feminist civil society before and after key meetings of blocs and friend groups to inform Australia's engagement, and report back on challenges and achievements.

Recommendation 43: Fund civil society organisations to conduct monitoring of anti-rights actors and provide regular intelligence briefings with DFAT and security agencies on their findings, as well as coordinating around tactics to counter these movements.

Recommendation 44: Provide funding and other support for feminist civil society in Australia and the region to participate in, and influence, UN and other multilateral fora.

Recommendation 45: Ensure government-to-government relationships are complemented by the voices of diverse civil society, including women's rights and feminist organisations, LGBTIQ+ organisations and Organisations of People with Disability (OPDs).

Recommendation 46: Pursue reform priorities in multilateral and regional forums to democratise the rules-based order.

Recommendation 47: Undertake economic analysis of trade agreements which is informed by colonial histories to avoid further perpetuating economic disparity between countries.

Recommendation 48: Expand funding for technical expertise in gender, disability and social inclusion across all areas of DFAT and Posts to support power-based intersectional analysis and implementation.

Recommendation 49: Require in-house training on the history of gender and diplomacy and gender-responsive statecraft and practices.

Recommendation 50: Apply existing or complementary gender equality targets to all areas of DFAT's work including diplomacy, trade and security policy, and include gender equality actions in the annual performance agreements of all Band 1-3 (including Heads of Mission) staff at Post.

1. Evidence of the economic and national security benefits of realising gender equality for every person

Inquiry TORs:

1. The economic security and national security benefits of realising gender equality for every person, and how the integration of gender equality across foreign policy supports this objective;
2. Evidence and data that demonstrates the links between gender equality and economic growth and prosperity, including in food security and labour markets

The benefits of realising gender equality for all are plentiful, and firmly in the interests of both Australia and the region. Gender equality is more significant than wealth, democratic or religious status in predicting peaceful and flourishing societies,⁸ a fact that has been repeatedly emphasised by Foreign Minister Wong and forms the basis of Australia’s International Gender Equality Strategy.⁹

This section addresses two definitional / methodological questions – grounding ‘security’ in human security, and grounding ‘evidence’ in lived experience – before providing evidence and data towards the benefits of gender equality for all.

Human security is the basis for national security

In pursuing national security, it is important to consider the contested definitions and understandings of the concept, including those that ultimately undermine the everyday security of women and all people in our region.

Traditional foreign policy approaches emphasise military might as the basis of security, arguing that a nation is only secure when it is armed more strongly than its nearest rival.¹⁰ But this is a false notion, leading to an ever-proliferating arms race under the looming threat of mutually assured destruction.

Not only is the reliance on military might an existential threat, but it is also an everyday threat to the safety and security of people in Australia’s region, especially women. As Foreign Minister Wong has identified, the Indo-Pacific region is currently experiencing a build-up of military infrastructure, with great powers using the region as a stage for their competition, with little regard for the safety and sovereignty of the

⁸ Hudson et al., *Sex and World Peace*.

⁹ Senator the Hon Penny Wong, “National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly”; DFAT, *Australia’s International Gender Equality Strategy*.

¹⁰ Jayakumar, “Who Will Bell the Cat? Building Feminist Foreign Policy Routes to Facilitate Nuclear Disarmament.”

people.¹¹ Australia has also pursued increasing investment in militarisation, via the AUKUS partnership and increases in defence spending – currently 12 times greater than Official Development Assistance (ODA), and projected to increase to 19:1 if Australia meets its target of increasing defence spending to 3 per cent of GDP by 2030 – a bigger difference than during the cold war period.¹²

As a middle power, a world where security is primarily pursued through military might will never be in Australia's interests. Instead, feminist foreign policy approaches posit that national security should be viewed *on a continuum with* human security, rather than as a hierarchy where one is more important than the other.¹³ This allows us to see that threats to state security can come not only from external forces, but also from inside. When human security deteriorates, or is not experienced equally by everyone – including on the basis of gender – national security is compromised. At the global level, a feminist understanding of the international rules-based order also requires critical consideration to understand who sets and enforces the rules, who benefits, and whose interests are being upheld. Minister Wong's stated objective to campaign for a permanent seat for Africa on the Security Council is a strong example of this, and should be replicated across all areas of Australia's engagement in multilateral fora.

This understanding of security is consistent with the Pacific definition outlined in the *Boe Declaration*, which affirms a “concept of security which addresses the wide range of security issues in the region, both traditional and non-traditional, with an increasing emphasis on Human Security, including humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people.”¹⁴

Gender equality is foundational to this human-centred understanding of security. In a region where women face participation and benefit gaps across economic and political domains, as well as threats to their health and safety, achieving human security for all requires dedicated efforts to drive gender equality for all people. This is most starkly illustrated by the real and everyday threat of gender-based violence which is experienced by 1 in 3 women worldwide. A country cannot be considered ‘secure’ when women are not safe in their homes.¹⁵

This means that Australia's interest in a peaceful and flourishing region cannot be met without consideration of the gendered implications of trade, defence, diplomacy and international cooperation. Ensuring human security and gender equality for all people and working to uphold a rules-based order where security is not dependent on military might, must therefore be central priorities of Australia's foreign policy.¹⁶

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Work with likeminded states, including those who adopt feminist foreign policy approaches, to pursue human security and strengthen a modern multilateralism as core priorities of Australia's national and economic security.

¹¹ Penny Wong, “National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly”; Jayakumar, “Who Will Bell the Cat? Building Feminist Foreign Policy Routes to Facilitate Nuclear Disarmament”; Agius et al., “Challenges for Feminist Informed Foreign Policy: Militarisation and Australia's Engagements via AUKUS and NATO.”

¹² Agius et al., “Challenges for Feminist Informed Foreign Policy: Militarisation and Australia's Engagements via AUKUS and NATO”; Hill, “The Defence-Development Divide: From Gap to Chasm.”

¹³ IWDA, “What Is Feminist Foreign Policy and Why Is It the Right Move for Australia?”; IWDA, *A Feminist Foreign Policy for Australia: IWDA Position Paper*.

¹⁴ Pacific Islands Forum, “Boe Declaration on Regional Security.”

¹⁵ Asia Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D), *What Does It Look like for Australia to Be an Effective Partner for a Secure and Peaceful Pacific*.

¹⁶ IWDA, *Feminist Foreign Policy: An Overview (November 2022 Update)* (Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition, 2022).

Recommendation 2: Continue to pursue global governance reform priorities to uphold and democratise the rules-based order.

Evidence and data must reflect lived experience to build trust in institutions

At a moment where algorithm-driven social media feeds and AI generated content directly challenge ideas of truth and trust, and many people get their information from self-reinforcing social media where mis- and disinformation is rife, trust in data has never been more important, or precarious. If official data doesn't depict the circumstances and lived experience of the people, it can erode trust in the institutions that produce it and the idea of a shared narrative of truth, feeding a wider questioning of legitimacy.

From this perspective, household-level measures of poverty and inequality and population-level measures of economic progress are approaches that mask, by design, individual differences in circumstances and opportunities.¹⁷ Such approaches are more than limited; they are problematic, making it more difficult for governments to be and be perceived as connected and effective. Transparent, defensible data and evidence that reflect lived realities are a foundation for people feeling 'seen' and for governments and institutions being able to respond to people's circumstances. They are part of the critical social infrastructure of democracy, representing social, economic, political and security assets, and contributing to social cohesion, institutional legitimacy, and democratic governance.

Australia has been at the forefront of investing in the development and strengthening of data and evidence about individual's experiences of poverty and inequality, to inform responsive policies, programs and resourcing. Australian support for individual-level gender-sensitive measurement of poverty and inequality through the Equality Insights measure and survey has ensured the availability of a measurement option that improves accuracy and insight. Where surveys have been conducted, the data have strengthened the visibility of individual lives, particularly the circumstances of women over 50 who are not surveyed by the Demographic and Health Survey and the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey. This has benefits for governments, civil society and the private sector, providing foundations for sound decision-making connected to people's lives that can help sustain trust and truth. Replacing some household-level surveys with individual-level surveys would provide a way to improve coverage and insights while recognising resource and capacity constraints.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3: Maintain and grow Australia's investments in the collection, analysis and use of gender data, including in individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty and inequality, and resource multinational coalitions to ensure inclusive, sustainable development.

Recommendation 4: Support engagement of women's rights organisations in national and regional dialogues on measurement priorities, towards strengthening evidence on fundamental social, economic, ecological and climate needs to support the contextualisation of vulnerability and marginality and inform responsive action.¹⁸

¹⁷ Kanbur, *Intra-Household Inequality and Overall Inequality*.
[Http://Publications.Dyson.Cornell.Edu/Research/Researchpdf/Wp/2016/Cornell-Dyson-Wp1611.Pdf](http://Publications.Dyson.Cornell.Edu/Research/Researchpdf/Wp/2016/Cornell-Dyson-Wp1611.Pdf).

¹⁸ Women's Major Group - SIDS, *Deep Water, Daring for Shore: SIDS Feminist Challenges and Priorities in Implementing a SIDS4 Roadmap*. Statement of the Women's Major Group - SIDS.

Evidence and data on the benefits of realising gender equality for every person, both for Australia and our region

Gender equality contributes to greater economic strength and wellbeing

Through an economic security lens, achieving gender equality would bring significant economic benefits to Australia. The Australian Government's *Working for Women* strategy outlines how gender inequality constrains women's workforce participation due to structural barriers including unpaid care burdens, inflexible work arrangement, gendered discrimination, and unsafe workplaces.¹⁹ Australia has a gap of 8 percentage points between men and women's participation in the formal labour force, with women overrepresented in part time work and facing an average pay gap of 21.1 per cent - making just 79 cents to every dollar a man makes.²⁰ Women make up only 37 per cent of university STEM enrolments and only 15 per cent of all people working in STEM jobs.²¹ Ensuring gender-inclusive access to future industries strengthens Australia's ability to compete globally, respond to technological change, and build a resilient, future-ready workforce.

This matters, because gender inequality carries a measurable economic cost. When women and gender-diverse people are excluded from economic participation, leadership, and high-value industries, Australia forfeits productivity gains and GDP growth. Traditional growth metrics such as GDP, fail to account for unpaid care and domestic work that is largely performed by women, as well as non-monetary factors like wellbeing, social cohesion, and long-term resilience all areas where gender inequality is most pronounced.²²

The unequal burden of unpaid care is also an economic constraint in our region. On average across the Asia Pacific region, women spend up to 11 hours a day on paid and unpaid care work – more than 4 times more than men. 80 percent of the unpaid care work in the region is done by women, directly affecting labour force participation, working conditions and financial circumstances.²³ UNESCAP has emphasised the importance of making the invisible contributions of care visible, and the need for comprehensive data collection and analysis on unpaid care work by gender, age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, to craft effective policies.²⁴ Expanding individual-level, gender-sensitive data on poverty and inequality using Equality Insights would contribute to understanding the implications of unpaid care on other aspects life, as the measure assesses both paid and unpaid work as part of 15 dimensions of measurement.²⁵

There has been long-standing concern about the fundamental limitations and bias of GDP and standard metrics such as the System of National Accounts due the exclusion of unpaid care and household labour, subsistence production, and environmental costs.²⁶ Agenda 2030 translated the concern for more comprehensive measurement of economic value into a shared global commitment to 'developing broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product'²⁷. The work of the High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, appointed by the UN Secretary General in 2025, is a key opportunity to both

¹⁹ Commonwealth of Australia and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*.

²⁰ Workplace Gender Equality Agency and Commonwealth of Australia, *WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2024-25*.

²¹ Department of Industry, Science and Resources and Commonwealth of Australia, *The State of STEM Gender Equity in 2024*.

²² Cook and Kabeer, "From Economic Growth to a Wellbeing Economy: Notes for a Feminist Foreign Policy."

²³ IWDA, *Care in Crisis: Understanding the Value of Paid and Unpaid Care in Response to COVID-19*.

²⁴ Tata et al., "Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: The Silent Backbone of Asia and the Pacific."

²⁵ This summary provides an overview of the measure and methodology and links to the most recent data collection in Solomon Islands and Tonga: IWDA, *Introducing Equality Insights*.

²⁶ See, for example: Waring, *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*.

²⁷ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1*.

improve GDP as a metric and develop a broader framework for assessing progress that integrates²⁸ well-being, equity and inclusion, and sustainability.²⁹ This includes attention to 'disparities in income, wealth, health, education, environmental quality and other dimensions' and 'horizontal inequalities by gender, ethnicity and race and migratory status, as well as inequalities across and within nations.' It also considers 'well-being over the life-cycle' and 'the extent to which members of society fail to achieve minimum thresholds and the degree to which deprivations are correlated within certain socioeconomic groups.' Australia is uniquely placed to lead the translation of this work into concrete action given its sustained support for the development of an individual-level, gender-sensitive measure of multidimensional poverty and inequality, which is vital to understanding the extent to which economic progress is translating into improved lives, and for whom.³⁰ The foresight to invest in this world-first work positions Australia to provide a solution that could enable rapid expansion of data and evidence that covers the life-course³¹, can be disaggregated by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, race, migratory status, other individual characteristics of interest, and intersectional disparities. Such data can reveal horizontal inequalities, including within households, a key site of gender inequality that is systematically hidden by household-level data.

'Beyond GDP' metrics that consider current wellbeing, equitable wellbeing, and sustainable wellbeing³² are well-aligned with wellbeing-based budgeting and "measuring what matters,"³³ and better reflect the true drivers of economic security. The High-level Expert Group will present its final report to the UN General Assembly at its 80th Session later in 2026. Use of 'beyond GDP' metrics that take account of horizontal inequalities and well-being will more clearly reflect the importance of gender equality for economic security, with improvements in gender equality being reflected in improved outcomes on such metrics.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 5: Publish a response to the final report of the Beyond GDP High Level Panel, outlining Australia's intended actions, domestically and multilaterally, to strengthen the comprehensiveness and accuracy of economic metrics.

Recommendation 6: Include individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty and inequality as a supported companion metric of economic and social progress, to improve insight into the relationship between overall economic activity and people's lived realities, and the influence of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, race and migratory status on opportunities and outcomes.

²⁸ High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, *High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP: Interim Progress Report*.

²⁹ High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, *High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP: Interim Progress Report*, p.3.

³⁰ It also matters for accuracy: ignoring inequalities within households, by measuring poverty and inequality at the household level, understates overall inequality by around one-third, and over-estimate the extent to which GDP growth translates into poverty reduction. Kanbur, *Intra-Household Inequality and Overall Inequality*. [Http://Publications.Dyson.Cornell.Edu/Research/Researchpdf/Wp/2016/Cornell-Dyson-Wp1611.Pdf](http://Publications.Dyson.Cornell.Edu/Research/Researchpdf/Wp/2016/Cornell-Dyson-Wp1611.Pdf).

³¹ Multitopic surveys in wide use in our region and globally, such as the Demographic and Health Survey and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, focus on women of reproductive age, so do not provide data about women over 50. This is a significant - and avoidable - limitation on the evidence available about older women in our region, at a time that populations are ageing, with implications for understanding the implications of intersecting inequalities, health and social protection needs, and contributions to economic and social value through unpaid care. See, for example: World Economic Forum, *Why Do so Many Older Women Become Invisible?*; UN Women, *Older Women: Inequality at the Intersection of Age and Gender*.

³² UN Statistical Commission, *Beyond GDP: Measuring Progress – Dialogue with Experts from the Secretary-General's High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP*.

³³ Treasury and Commonwealth of Australia, *Measuring What Matters Framework*.

Gender equality leads to stronger democratic governance and participation

Gender representation in political institutions shapes the quality, inclusiveness, and legitimacy of decision-making. While Australia has recently reached gender parity at the federal level, this achievement is recent and uneven across parties, and has yet to be achieved in six of eight state and territory parliaments.³⁴ The presence of sexual harassment at the heart of democratic institutions signals broader governance weaknesses and erodes Australia's credibility as a safe, fair, and accountable society.³⁵ Addressing workplace safety is therefore central to workforce participation, institutional integrity, and democratic legitimacy. An independent review, commissioned by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), found that one-third (33 per cent) of people in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces (CPWs) had experienced sexual harassment there.³⁶

Increasing women's political representation at the global level and across the Indo Pacific would also have significant benefits for democratic governance. Women's representation at all levels of governance is low. Just 27 per cent of all national parliamentarians worldwide are women,³⁷ falling to 6 per cent at the head of government level. In the Pacific, women's representation is even lower with just 8 per cent of seats held by women.³⁸ At present, Tuvalu has no women in Parliament, Vanuatu has one, and Papua New Guinea three.³⁹ Women's experiences in parliament also pose a challenge; in a survey covering parliaments in 33 Asia-Pacific countries, 76 per cent of women parliamentarians reported experiencing psychological violence in the form of sexist remarks, harassment and intimidation in the context of their role, and 60 per cent had been the target of hate speech, disinformation, image-based abuse or doxing online.⁴⁰

Women parliamentarians also face barriers in relation to perceptions about women's leadership. IWDA-supported research in Fiji and Solomon Islands between 2014 and 2019 on public perceptions of women as leaders found widespread support for the idea that women and men have equal rights and in-principle support that there should be more women in political leadership. However many people hold biases that contradict these beliefs, for example, believing that men are better suited to political leadership than women.⁴¹ In this context, effective support for women's leadership requires an approach that addresses both the material and practical barriers to women's leadership and tackles norms and perceptions that hinder women's participation at all levels of decision-making. Tools such as Temporary Special Measures can also be effective to ensure women's representation and shift perceptions about gender roles.⁴²

In the private sector, gender inequality in corporate governance limits strategic oversight, risk management, and long-term decision-making. Boards and executive leadership that lack gender diversity are less equipped to navigate economic uncertainty and complex social risks⁴³. The proportion of women CEOs in Australia remains at 22 per cent, and Board chairs at 21 per cent, despite women making up 53 per cent of graduates and 43 per cent of managerial roles.⁴³ Across the Asia-Pacific region, women's

³⁴ Williams and Beauregard, "Which Australian States and Territories Perform Best on Gender Representation in Parliament? We Crunched the Numbers."

³⁵ Hitch, "Review Finds 1 in 3 Staff in Federal Parliament Experience Sexual Harassment."

³⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Time for Respect: Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*.

³⁷ Interparliamentary Union, *Global and Regional Averages of Women in National Parliaments*, as at 1 April 2024.

³⁸ Interparliamentary Union, *Global and Regional Averages of Women in National Parliaments*, as at 1 April 2024.

³⁹ Interparliamentary Union, *Global and Regional Averages of Women in National Parliaments*, as at 1 April 2024.

⁴⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliaments in the Asia-Pacific Region*.

⁴¹ Mulder et al., *Public Perceptions of Women as Political Leaders: A Multi-Country Study* Stella Mulder, Dr Tracy McDiarmid and Lisa Vettori in Collaboration with IWDA Perceptions Management Group and WAVE Partner Research Teams A MULTI-COUNTRY STUDY.

⁴² Pacific Islands Forum, *PACIFIC LEADERS GENDER EQUALITY DECLARATION* 30 August 2012, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

⁴³ Workplace Gender Equality Agency and Commonwealth of Australia, *WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2024-25*.

participation in the formal labour force is declining, with estimates around 43.6 per cent in 2023, below the global average.⁴⁴

Looking beyond representation, it is also important to understand that systemic limitations to evidence of horizontal inequalities are a governance risk in themselves. As discussed earlier, if policy makers cannot see lived realities in data, it is more difficult to shape responsive action and resourcing that connects to people's lives. 'Sustained distance between understandings of policy makers and lived experience can erode citizen confidence in governments—with implications for legitimacy and social cohesion.'⁴⁵

Seeing people's circumstances is vital if governments are to develop social protection systems and investments that meet people where they are. This matters, for inclusion and access, quality (particularly effectiveness and efficiency), and perceived legitimacy (social protection is a key way that people experience the care and engagement of government). Development of social protection systems that are responsive to differences in people's circumstances and the factors that shape them (e.g., gender, age, disability, ethnicity) and holistic – integrating social, economic, and environmental considerations – requires robust, holistic evidence integrating these considerations.⁴⁶ 'Accurately and comprehensively identifying who requires access to social protection is a foundation for inclusion and coverage. This requires measurement systems that can accurately and comprehensively identify people in need of social protection.'⁴⁷

Recommendations

Recommendation 7: Fund initiatives to support women's political leadership and participation, including through temporary special measures coupled with efforts to shift the gendered norms and perceptions that provide barriers to women's leadership.

Recommendation 8: Ensure that its investments in social protection, in Australia and through its development cooperation, are accompanied by investments in data and evidence about individual circumstances, to support responsive, efficient systems that connect to lived realities, contribute to equity and inclusion, and people's perceptions of fairness.

Gender equality is central to the achievement of human rights for all

Looking at international human rights frameworks and other international agreements, it is clear that gender equality is central to the achievement of rights for all, but that progress remains off track. No country is on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality, with progress on indicators moving at an insufficient pace to be achieved by 2030. 73 countries have stagnated in their progress to remove legal discrimination in employment and economic inclusion, and 39 have regressed in terms of women's representation in national parliament.⁴⁸ 1 in 3 women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, primarily by an intimate partner, which is a fundamental violation of human rights and indicator of structural gender inequality.⁴⁹ This is exacerbated by conflict and displacement, with up to 70 per cent of women experiencing gender-based violence in these settings.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ DFAT and Commonwealth of Australia, *Investing in Women: Smart Economics*.

⁴⁵ Crawford and Pradela, *Building from the Foundations: Improving Data to Inform Future-Fit Social Protection*.

⁴⁶ Crawford and Pradela, *Building from the Foundations: Improving Data to Inform Future-Fit Social Protection*. p.3

⁴⁷ Crawford and Pradela, *Building from the Foundations: Improving Data to Inform Future-Fit Social Protection*. p.5

⁴⁸ Azcona et al., *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025*. pp 28

⁴⁹ UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women*.

⁵⁰ UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women*.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, agreed in 1995, covers 12 critical areas of action towards gender equality, with a priority theme assessed by the Commission on the Status of Women annually, and progress at national, regional and global levels tracked every 5 years. The most recent of these reviews – Beijing +30 – found that progress had been made towards gender equality across Asia and the Pacific, with several countries having “eradicated or substantially reduced extreme poverty and expanded access to social protection and affordable health care, as well as other public services which benefit all, including women and girls,” and that women and girls’ leadership in environmental and climate action has “driven transformative change towards the green and blue economies.”⁵¹ However, gaps in gendered poverty, limited coverage of sexual and reproductive health services or fulfillment of these rights, and particularly challenges in employment for women driven by social norms around unpaid care, education and gender roles. Violence against women remains unacceptably high, presenting a violation of human rights and barrier to the achievement of all other objectives. 60 per cent of Governments in the region also identified the climate crisis as a barrier to effective implementation of the BPfA.⁵²

The importance of local women’s rights organisations’ work in implementing global frameworks on gender equality and human rights cannot be overstated. According to data from 70 countries over 40 years, the strength of feminist movements was the most predictive factor in whether or not a country enacted comprehensive policies to combat violence against women.⁵³ The Feminist Mobilisation Index (FMI), which measures the existence, strength, and autonomy of feminist movements over time, confirms that movements have been critical for advances in gender justice, articulating women’s perspectives, changing public opinion, bringing issues into public and policy agendas and resisting efforts to roll back previous gains.⁵⁴ ‘Mobilisation in movements is distinct from but related to mobilisation in organisations, elective office, and on-line activity’.⁵⁵ It is critical that Australia continue and expand its funding and support to the work of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements. Their work on the ground, through to national level advocacy and engagement in regional and global treaty bodies is critical to hold governments accountable for commitments to, and progress on, gender equality and human rights.

The role of data and political will is also critical here. Where progress on SDG5 has been made, “evidence shows that the most transformative outcomes for gender equality and women’s empowerment occur when robust gender data are not only generated but actively used, backed by strong political will, institutional commitment and strategic partnerships.”⁵⁶

A specific priority is addressing the invisibilising of particular groups in mainstream data frameworks and methods. Gender inequality remains systematically invisible in mainstream¹⁸ economic, security, and policy data frameworks. What is not measured is not prioritised leading to distorted policy design and incomplete risk assessments¹⁹. Resourcing measurement and data that hides evidence of horizontal inequalities is a waste of resources and contributes to policy ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Women over 50 are a particular concern. ‘Despite recognition that “gendered labour market and life course patterns lie at the roots of women’s disadvantage in old age,”⁵⁷ the exclusion of women 50 years plus from surveys such as the DHS and MICS that are in general use ‘means the circumstances of this cohort,

⁵¹ ESCAP, *Charting New Paths for Gender Equality and Empowerment : Asia-Pacific Regional Report on Beijing+30 Review*.

⁵² ESCAP, *Charting New Paths for Gender Equality and Empowerment : Asia-Pacific Regional Report on Beijing+30 Review*.

⁵³ Htun and Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005.”

⁵⁴ Forester et al., “New Dimensions of Global Feminist Influence: Tracking Feminist Mobilization Worldwide, 1975–2015.”

⁵⁵ Weldon, “Presentation of the Feminist Mobilization Index.”

⁵⁶ Azcona et al., *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025*. Pp 29

⁵⁷ Staab, *Protecting Women’s Income Security in Old Age: Toward Gender-Responsive Pension Systems*.

which has experienced the cumulative impact of gender inequality, are not influencing related poverty estimates.⁵⁸

Reliance on surveys that exclude some groups or assess the circumstances of households rather than individuals limits the visibility of differences where they exist.

When the implementation of human rights and other international framework fail to address gendered harms, it reinforces inequality and weakens trust in institutions, with downstream effects on social cohesion and national stability.

Recommendations

Recommendation 9: Expand funding and support to WROs to hold governments accountable for implementation of commitments to gender equality and human rights, including through national level advocacy and engagement in regional and global treaty bodies

Recommendation 10: Invest in data that can be disaggregated by gender, age, disability, other individual characteristics and intersections of these, to support analysis of how these factors shape opportunities and outcomes, and the ways in which human rights commitments and treaties are being realised in practice.

⁵⁸ Crawford, *Gender and Poverty as a Feminist Foreign Policy Priority: Opportunities to Accelerate Action*.

2. The international and national security implications of undermining gender equality

Inquiry TORs:

3. The international and national security implications of undermining gender equality, including in the context of humanitarian crises and climate change

Research by Plan International Australia has found that 17 per cent of people over the age of 16 surveyed believe “gender equality is no longer an issue and change for equality for women has gone too far.”⁵⁹ The Universities of Queensland and Melbourne have found that “nearly 20 per cent of Australian men believe feminism should be violently resisted.”⁶⁰ The rise of anti-feminist violence reflects a growing backlash against gender equality with direct implications for social cohesion and democratic stability.⁶¹ This has to be considered in light of the fact that in 2025 researchers from Destroy the Joint’s Counting Dead Women project documented 52 known deaths due to violence against women in Australia – on average, one every week.⁶²

These figures point to a sustained and growing backlash against gender equality and women’s rights, which is being facilitated by authoritarian and anti-rights actors, who seek to undermine gender equality and national security as a strategy to consolidate their own power and wealth.⁶³

This section provides examples and evidence of the international and national security implications of efforts to undermine gender equality through an exploration of the strategies utilised by state and non-state actors across various domains, and the potential to counter them through investment in civil society, women’s rights organisations and feminist movements.

⁵⁹ Plan International Australia, *Gender Compass*.

⁶⁰ Merger et al., *Misogyny, Racism and Violent Extremism in Australia*.

⁶¹ Nicholas et al., “Antifeminist, Manosphere and Right-Wing Extremist Sentiment among Men Who Use Domestic and Family Violence: Masculinism, Misinformation, and the Justificatory Logics of Violence.”

⁶² Destroy the Joint, *Counting Dead Women Project: 2025*.

⁶³ Justice for Prosperity, *Unveiling Subversive Power: New Report Sheds Light on Anti-Rights Actors in the Asia-Pacific Region*.

Table 1: Security implications of efforts to undermine gender inequality

Description	Examples of how its manifesting	
<p><u>Authoritarian attacks on gender equality undermine security within and between nations.</u></p> <p>Governments are including gender equality-related rationales for taking unilateral military action that undermines the sovereignty of other states, contrary to – and in a concerted effort to undermine – multilateral norms and international law.</p>	<p>Justifications for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on the basis that Ukraine has come to represent the European / Western approach to gender norms and LGBTQIA+ rights, and must be reintegrated into ‘traditional’ Russian values. This extends to the use of sexual violence against Ukrainians in service of ethno-nationalist aims.</p>	<p>The “strong man” military personas of leaders such as Putin and Trump represent a hypermasculine, authoritarian approach, which is linked to efforts at enforcing a patriarchal, heteronormative hierarchy domestically, and (re)imposing a “might is right” hierarchy globally.</p>
<p><u>Authoritarian and anti-rights actors are undermining multilateralism, women’s rights and gender equality.</u></p> <p>Conservative Member States are blocking progress and pushing for regression on previously agreed language, primarily around women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and SRHR. They are also engaging in alliances with non-state actors to undermine rights, including religious fundamentalist groups with links to powerful right-wing leaders, such as the Political Network on Values.</p>	<p>In January 2026 the Trump Administration issued Executive Orders withdrawing US funding and participation from 66 UN agencies and expanding the Global Gag Rule again to strip US funds from any organisation promoting “gender ideology” or diversity, equity and inclusion (in addition to SRHR). These decisions will strip millions, or even billions, of dollars out of already weakened multilateral agencies and decimate funding for women’s rights.</p>	<p>Tactics to weaken faith in the ability of multilateral processes to reach outcomes, such as flooding negotiations with repeated objections, or re-litigating processes that have already been agreed to create an impression of broad disagreement and impasse, as displayed by Russia in Gender Action Plan negotiations at COP30.</p>
	<p>Alliances of state and non-state actors are undermining multilateralism and targeting advances in gender equality and women’s rights by co-opting human rights language and establishing parallel frameworks that undermine gender equality and women’s and LGBTQIA+ peoples’ rights (such as “the Geneva Consensus” which is an anti-abortion statement or “Declaration on Women’s Sex Based Rights” which is an anti-trans statement.) These frameworks attack bodily autonomy and attempt to enforce rigid, binary gender norms and deny the empowerment of women and LGBTQIA+ people.</p>	<p>Member States forcing votes in decision making fora that use a consensus-based approach, after demanding (and receiving) concessions on language related to gender equality and SRHR. Eg: conservative Member States blocking the adoption of a declaration at the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) in 2025 due to the inclusion of (previously agreed) language on SRHR and comprehensive sexuality education.</p>
<p><u>Attacks on gender equality, democracy and human rights in Australia and the Indo-Pacific are undermining regional security.</u></p> <p>Authoritarian and far-right governments are cracking down on space for civil society as a way to increase authoritarian power, with a particular focus on women and LGBTQ+ organisations and movements. These same groups are also pushing anti-rights legislation at the national level with a focus on women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights and SRHR.</p>	<p>Anti-rights groups in Asia and the Pacific pose a threat to regional and national security by undermining long-standing democratic principles, and are being instrumentalised as part of geopolitical influence and interference.</p>	<p>Anti-rights influence is also visible in Australia. For example, the Queensland Government’s ban on gender-affirming care to new patients under the age of 18 pending the outcome of an ideologically-motivated inquiry, despite court orders to reinstate care, and evidence of its safety and benefits to trans youth. Supported and enabled by anti-trans groups that use tactics such as mis- and dis-information about gender affirming care, targeting and vilifying trans people, and weaponising women’s safety concerns against trans rights.</p>

	<p>Positioning gender equality, women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ rights as Western constructs, in contradiction to the work of local women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights organisations that are advancing these issues in culturally relevant and responsive ways.</p>	<p>Climate change is exacerbating the gendered economic and security risks for women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people. These groups face greater risks due to unequal access to power, resources, and decision-making. Extreme events dramatically increase women’s unpaid care work and lead to spikes in gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and sexual exploitation during displacement.</p>
<p>Online radicalisation and the <i>manosphere</i> are undermining gender equality and threatening national security.</p> <p>Online spaces that excuse and celebrate violent masculinity, misogyny and backlash against gender equality – known as the <i>manosphere</i> – are radicalising men in Australia and the region, and driving on- and offline violence against women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people, creating new security threats and exacerbating existing ones.</p> <p>Manosphere networks and far-right online spaces overlap and are mutually reinforcing, with both driven by a sense of aggrieved entitlement, a desire for tradition and order and to reinstate traditional hierarchies, distrust of government institutions and expertise, and a concern around the curtailment of individual liberty.</p>	<p>ASIO have identified that online radicalisation is a significant threat to Australia’s national security, stating that “intolerance based on race, gender and identity, and the extreme political views that intolerance inspires, is on the rise across the western world in particular”.</p> <p>At the extreme end, online spaces have been directly tied to real world mass violence – for example in the case of mass murderer and self-described ‘incel’ Elliot Roger. At the same time, the <i>manosphere</i> is influencing everyday attitudes about masculinity and driving gendered violence on- and offline.</p> <p>The <i>manosphere</i> is a key entry point into the alt-right, and algorithms are supercharging radicalisation. YouTube’s algorithm took a ‘blank’ account (created as a 19-year-old male) just over an hour to start recommending <i>manosphere</i> content, and by day 4 was recommending pro-Nazi content.</p> <p>Social media companies consistently prioritise profit over safety and have resisted regulation to target technology-facilitated abuse, which will be further exacerbated by AI. In just 11 days, X’s AI chatbot Grok was used to generate an estimated 3 million sexualised images, including 23,000 which appeared to depict children – amounting to sexualised images of children being created by Grok every 41 seconds at the request of its users.</p>	<p>The <i>manosphere</i> is changing boys’ attitudes and behaviour towards girls, making them unsafe. 1 in 4 Australian girls feel unsafe because of the behaviours of their peers who have been influenced by the <i>manosphere</i>, and about 1 in 5 have experienced physical or sexual abuse.</p> <p>Women and marginalised communities experiencing online violence report missing work opportunities and decreased productivity, leading to broader economic costs.</p> <p>Gendered disinformation can provide an early-warning system for broader attacks on rights and democratic norms, along with attacks on women journalists and public figures. These coordinated disinformation campaigns are now an established feature of domestic politics in Southeast Asia, and the decline in independent media in the Pacific is creating a significant vulnerability to disinformation.</p> <p>Gender is strategically used by State and other anti-rights actors as an entry point to normalise broader attacks on liberal democracy, human rights, and multilateral institutions, because gender triggers a strong emotional response, can be easily linked to fears about social change, and allows disinformation to feel more personal, moral and relatable rather than just ideological.</p>

Authoritarian attacks on gender equality undermine security within and between nations

The Observatory on the Universality of Rights has described gender and sexuality as “the bread and butter of fundamentalist and fascist agendas,”⁶⁴ with the patriarchal family as the basic unit of the authoritarian state. The liberation of women from patriarchal rule through bodily autonomy, economic empowerment and political participation is therefore seen as a direct threat by authoritarian and populist rulers, who target women, trans and LGBTQIA+ peoples first and hardest in their effort to clamp down on civil society.⁶⁵ By attacking sexual and reproductive health and rights, they aim to limit women’s freedom to choose their own paths in life, consigning them to the reproductive sphere in service of nationalist and ethno-purist aims.⁶⁶

For example, **Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has been justified by the Kremlin on the basis that Ukraine has come to represent the European – or Western – approach to gender norms** and women’s and LGBTQIA+ people’s rights, and must be reintegrated into ‘traditional’ Russian values via hypermasculine violence and rhetoric.⁶⁷ Sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war, through sexual assault of Ukrainian women for the expressed purpose of producing “Russian” offspring and castration of Ukrainian men to prevent them from reproducing.⁶⁸ Putin’s self-styled image of a **hypermasculine “strong man” leader** is deeply tied to his authoritarian approach and the subjugation of women’s and LGBTQIA+ people’s rights within Russia. By attacking the rights, and indeed, the very existence, of LGBTQIA+ people – especially trans and gender diverse people who challenge the classification of people into rigid, binary categories – authoritarian leaders aim to uphold the hierarchical power structure of gender inequality for all people.⁶⁹

So it is no coincidence that authoritarian and anti-rights actors target women, trans and LGBTQIA+ people and organisations, seeking to violently control their power and freedom. While at first glance a patriarchal hierarchy may seem to benefit men – based on their relative power in the areas of life deemed most important by society at large, including money, power and status – men are also subjugated in this system, by way of disconnection from the relationships and emotional expression that are central to a flourishing human existence. Additionally, men who do not uphold traditional or hegemonic masculinities are also oppressed under patriarchal structures, and may find themselves targeted by the same forces who seek to control women.⁷⁰

These efforts on the part of authoritarian and anti-rights actors are part of an intentional strategy to establish a false ‘security’ through dominance and control. In the international arena, they seek to concentrate power amongst a few countries that wield both internal oppression and external aggression to consolidate and expand their power. For a country such as Australia, a global system predicated on this order can never be in our interests.

⁶⁴ Shameem, *Rights at Risk: Time for Action. Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report.*

⁶⁵ Khan et al., *Facing the Backlash: What Is Fuelling Anti-Feminist and Anti-Democratic Forces?*

⁶⁶ Thomson, “Gender and Nationalism.”

⁶⁷ Kratochvíl and O’Sullivan, “A War like No Other: Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine as a War on Gender Order.”; Feminist Anti-War Resistance, *Manifesto of Feminist Anti-War Resistance.*

⁶⁸ Borger, “Russia Is Guilty of Inciting Genocide in Ukraine, Expert Report Concludes.”

⁶⁹ IWDA, *IWDA Position Paper on Trans Rights, Recognition and Self Determination.*

⁷⁰ IWDA, *IWDA Position Paper on Trans Rights, Recognition and Self Determination.*

Authoritarian and anti-rights actors are undermining multilateralism, women's rights and gender equality

Authoritarianism always aims to weaken multilateralism because multilateralism seeks to equalise power differentials, whereas authoritarianism is constructed in hierarchies, envisioning and seeking a world order where the strongest set the terms.

Creating impasses, quagmires and a sense of futility about what can be achieved through multilateralism is one key strategy. The **Trump Administration's defunding and disengagement from over 66 UN Agencies**⁷¹ is one of the clearest demonstrations of this effort in recent times, but the path was clearly established in the first month of the Administration, when Trump pulled funding from USAID and re-established an expanded Mexico City Policy (colloquially known as the Global Gag Rule, as it stopped USAID-funded health programs from speaking about abortion). Just this month, the Global Gag Rule has been expanded once again to apply to all areas of USAID funding, and aiming to strip funding from UN agencies and international organisations advancing gender equality in any way.⁷² The targeting of gender equality and women's rights focused agencies through the Global Gag Rule is just the foreground of a broader withdrawal and attack on the legitimacy of the multilateral system.

The timing of this latest withdrawal from multilateralism – within a week of undertaking unilateral action against the President of Venezuela, violating both the principles of a rules-based order and the established processes of the UN Security Council – further underscores that these actions are part of a coordinated effort by the Trump Administration to undermine the rules-based order and reassert the doctrine of “might is right”. There is no need to read between the lines to reach this conclusion, the Administration has said it explicitly:

“...we live in a world in which you can talk all you want about international niceties and everything else, but we live in a world, in the real world... that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power. These are the iron laws of the world that have existed since the beginning of time.

...The United States is using its military to secure our interests unapologetically in our hemisphere. We're a superpower. And under President Trump, we are going to conduct ourselves as a superpower.”

- Stephen Miller, White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy, interview on CNN, 5/1/26⁷³

However, there are many other subtler tactics being deployed by authoritarian and anti-rights groups to undermine the effectiveness of multilateralism, with processes centred on gender hit first and hardest. One such tactic is to **flood multilateral negotiations with repeated objections** based on high-level principles, in an effort to stretch out negotiation timeframes and create an impression of broad disagreement and impasse, when in fact most Member States are in agreement. A clear example of this is **Russia's engagement in the Gender Action Plan negotiations at COP30** in November 2025, where they repeatedly raised the same broad objections to gender equality concepts and language at each point of a line-by-line negotiation, despite assurances from the facilitators that their concerns had been noted, aiming to run down the clock on discussions and delay progress.⁷⁴

Another tactic to undermine the strength of multilateralism is the repeated **attempts to force voting on key multilateral decisions** in forums which usually adopt their agreements by consensus. Consensus based

⁷¹ Trump, *Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties That Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States*.

⁷² IPPF, *US Government Expands Global Gag Rule in a Major Escalation of Regressive Foreign Policy*.

⁷³ CNN Newsroom, *The Lead with Jake Tapper: Trump Presses Greenland Acquisition, Democrats and Republicans Opposed His Move (Transcript)*.

⁷⁴ Climate Action Network International, “Fossil of the Day – Russia; Colossal Fossil of COP30 – Saudi Arabia & EU; Ray of the COP – Colombia; Special Mention – COP30 Workers.”

agreement-making has been a key pillar of multilateralism, and provides a picture of the status of global agreement on an issue, as well as a platform for civil society to hold all Member States accountable to their commitments. A pattern has emerged in recent years of anti-rights Member States and their allies calling for votes on agreements which take a strong position on women's rights issues, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights. While countries have typically gone on to allow documents to be adopted, in 2025, they successfully prevented the Commission on Population and Development from adopting an Outcome Document, signalling a new level of boldness.⁷⁵

A new tactic which emerged in the COP30 Gender Action Plan negotiations in late 2025 was the **request for inclusion of a footnote on the term "gender"** by Paraguay and Argentina, noting their own definitions were limited to the "female and male sexes". Subsequent requests for similar footnotes were quickly made by Iran, the Holy See, Russia, Malaysia and Indonesia, and the request to footnote the term "gender" began to spread to other streams of the UNFCCC negotiations. While in this instance facilitators and the UNFCCC Presidency were able to secure agreement to remove the footnotes, the incident represents a new tactic in a broader effort to undermine the consensus-based nature of multilateralism, and erode trust in the process and outcomes of such agreements. While there is a broader discussion to be had about the role of consensus-based decision making in the context of UN reform, the intensity of efforts to undermine it – and the preoccupation with women's rights in their effort – represent a key tactic to weaken faith in multilateral processes.

New tactics to undermine multilateralism also manifest in the **co-option of human rights language and creation of parallel frameworks** expounding anti-rights agendas, which are intended to weaken the multilateral system and create confusion about the global basis of human rights. For example, the "Geneva Consensus" is an anti-abortion, anti-SRHR and pro-male-headed-nuclear family declarative text developed under the first Trump Administration by then head of the US Department of Health and Human Services, Valerie Huber, an anti-SRHR activist with no public health training.⁷⁶ Its name is explicitly chosen to mimic existing multilateral agreements to create the impression of legitimacy, and its promotion through US foreign policy is an explicit goal of Project 2025, with 40 Member States signing on to date.⁷⁷ Its impact goes beyond the normative sphere; after 2020, Huber's organisation, the Institute for Women's Health, developed a national health policy framework based on the principles of the Geneva Consensus, which has so far been piloted by Guatemala and Uganda, facilitating the roll-out of abstinence-only, anti-choice education programs in public education systems, and the strengthening of already harsh laws against abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights.⁷⁸

The **co-option of women's rights language to advance anti-trans agendas** has become a common feature of anti-rights movements, as illustrated by another parallel framework, the "Declaration on Women's Sex Based Rights." This declaration opposes the rights of transgender people or any discussion of gender identity.⁷⁹ Denial of self-identity on the basis of gender is an attack on the bodily autonomy of trans people, and it follows the same playbook as attacks on the bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive rights of women. Ultimately these are attempts to **enforce rigid, binary gender norms and deny the empowerment of women and LGBTQIA+ people**, another common tactic of authoritarian leaders (see for example, Russia's demonisation of LGBTQIA+ rights and Trump's Executive Order equating gender with biological sex).⁸⁰

⁷⁵ United Nations, "Concluding Session, Commission on Population and Development Fails to Adopt Text on Ensuring Healthy Lives, Promoting Well-Being for All."

⁷⁶ The Institute for Women's Health, *The Geneva Consensus Declaration*; Ipas, *PROTEGO: Operationalizing the Geneva Consensus Declaration*.

⁷⁷ Ipas, *The Geneva Consensus Declaration in Action: Why Advocates and Policymakers Should Be Concerned, and What Can Be Done*; The Institute for Women's Health, *The Geneva Consensus Declaration*.

⁷⁸ Ipas, *PROTEGO: Operationalizing the Geneva Consensus Declaration*.

⁷⁹ Women's Declaration International, *Declaration on Women's Sex-Based Rights: Full Text*.

⁸⁰ Trump, *DEFENDING WOMEN FROM GENDER IDEOLOGY EXTREMISM AND RESTORING BIOLOGICAL TRUTH TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT*.

Attacks on gender equality, democracy and human rights in Australia and the Indo-Pacific are undermining regional security

These trends are also operating at the regional and national level. There is relatively little research on Asia (especially south-east Asia) and the Pacific compared to other regions, however the 2024 report from IPPF and Justice for Prosperity, *Unveiling Subversive Power: Shedding light on anti-rights actors in the Asia-Pacific region*, provides key insights into the activities of anti-rights actors in this part of the world. Just as anti-rights and authoritarian actors target gender equality, and the rights of women and LGBTQIA+ people globally, the report demonstrates how these issues have become flashpoints for attacks on rights in our region.

The report emphasises that the activities of anti-rights in Asia and the Pacific “pose a threat to regional and national security” by undermining long-standing democratic principles, and are being “instrumentalised as part of geopolitical influence and interference.” It highlights the reliance on local and religious institutions to frame gender equality as “foreign”, as well as the ways in which they are exposing civil society organisations to targeted attacks and systemic suppression.⁸¹

It recommends a range of strategies to track, mitigate and counter the impact of these actors, including tracking tactics across multilateral and national spaces, working across government and with civil society to share intelligence and coordinate efforts to counter anti-rights movements, and funding the work of civil society at all levels – including through cooperation across sectors – to provide counter narratives and combat disinformation.⁸²

Critically, more research is needed to better understand and counter the activities of anti-rights actors in the region, as well as their impact in Australia.

Case Study: Locally-led approaches to gender-based violence and national security – insights from IWDA partners in Solomon Islands

Women’s Rights Organisations in Solomon Islands are leading advocacy for gender-responsive and inclusive approaches to security that place women’s safety and wellbeing at the centre.

In Pacific Islands contexts, peace and security means more than the absence of war. The intensifying impacts of climate change, 21st century digital and cyber security threats, unsustainable resource extraction, and ongoing colonial legacies undermine community connection to place, and perpetuate existing and emerging contexts of gender-based violence.

In Solomon Islands, approximately 64 per cent of women and girls experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime. Gender-based violence (GBV) organisations on the frontline of responding to this crisis are witnessing changing patterns of violence, with increasing reports of emotional and psychological abuse, and technology-facilitated abuse. Climate change is also front-of-mind for GBV responders, who are observing both the ways climate-induced disasters and displacement aggravate household and community stressors that trigger violence against women and girls, and how the impacts of climate disasters are cutting off access to life-saving services for survivors of violence across the country. These effects are heightened for women and girls with disabilities, and those living in rural and remote areas.

Recognising the linkages between GBV and security, service providers such as Christian Care Centre and Family Support Centre have actively participated in recent processes to develop the second Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plan (WPS NAP) for Solomon Islands. The first WPS NAP focussed on reconciliation and sustaining peace following the period of internal conflict from the late 1990s through the

⁸¹ Justice for Prosperity, *Unveiling Subversive Power: New Report Sheds Light on Anti-Rights Actors in the Asia-Pacific Region*.

⁸² Justice for Prosperity, *Unveiling Subversive Power: New Report Sheds Light on Anti-Rights Actors in the Asia-Pacific Region*.

early 2000s. With relative peace now achieved at the national level, women’s rights activists are advocating for the revised NAP to shift attention to GBV, especially domestic and family violence, which threatens peace and stability at the household and community levels, as well as climate change and digital security – issues with markedly gendered implications. This is a critical moment for elevating women’s safety as a national security issue, recognising the widespread ramifications of GBV for economic development and resilience.

Locally-led approaches such as these also highlight the importance of supporting local WROs to advance gender equality in their own contexts. This is critical both to ensure efforts are appropriate and responsive to local priorities, and as a strategy to counter claims that gender equality is a Western construct.

Active threats to gender equality, human rights and democracy are also evident in Australia. In the past year, we have witnessed the State Government-ordered **cessation of gender-affirming care to new patients under the age of 18 in QLD**, based on the premise of an administration error at a Cairns clinic that affected just 2 patients.⁸³ The QLD Government’s inquiry was reportedly to determine the safety of care provided to gender-diverse youth, a claim that is undermined by the fact that an independent review of the Queensland Children’s Gender Service conducted just one year earlier recommended expansion of the state’s services, finding they were “safe and evidence based.”⁸⁴ The inquiry panel includes no trans people or any members with clinical expertise in gender-affirming care, and advocacy groups have criticised the methodology for failing to explore the benefits of gender-affirming care to trans children.⁸⁵ In October the ban on care, enacted while the inquiry was underway, was found to be unlawful by the QLD Supreme Court; despite this, the QLD Government reinstated the ban within 6 hours of the finding.⁸⁶

This inquiry, and other attempts at undermining trans rights in Australia, come in the context of increasing activity by anti-rights groups that hold connections to international anti-trans groups. **Common tactics of these groups include spreading mis- and dis-information** about the potential risks of puberty blockers (medication to delay puberty in the case of early onset in young children, which has been in common use since the 1970s), **targeting and vilifying transgender people**,⁸⁷ and **weaponizing women’s safety concerns**.

Recommendations

Recommendation 11: Fund constituency-led research to better understand anti-rights activities in Australia and in the Asia and Pacific regions to support early awareness of national security threats

Recommendation 12: Fund collaboration across women’s rights, feminist, SRHR and LGBTQIA+ organisations to counter anti-rights movements, including coordination of tracking, sharing strategies to counter opposition and disinformation, and alliances to safeguard women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights

Recommendation 13: Provide regular mechanisms for civil society coalitions to brief government officials and coordinate on national security impacts posed by anti-rights activities

⁸³ Kerwick, *Queensland Trans Health Review Fact Sheet*.

⁸⁴ Kerwick, *Queensland Trans Health Review Fact Sheet*.

⁸⁵ Kerwick, *Queensland Trans Health Review Fact Sheet*.

⁸⁶ Equality Australia et al., *Queensland Gender Affirming Care Update*.

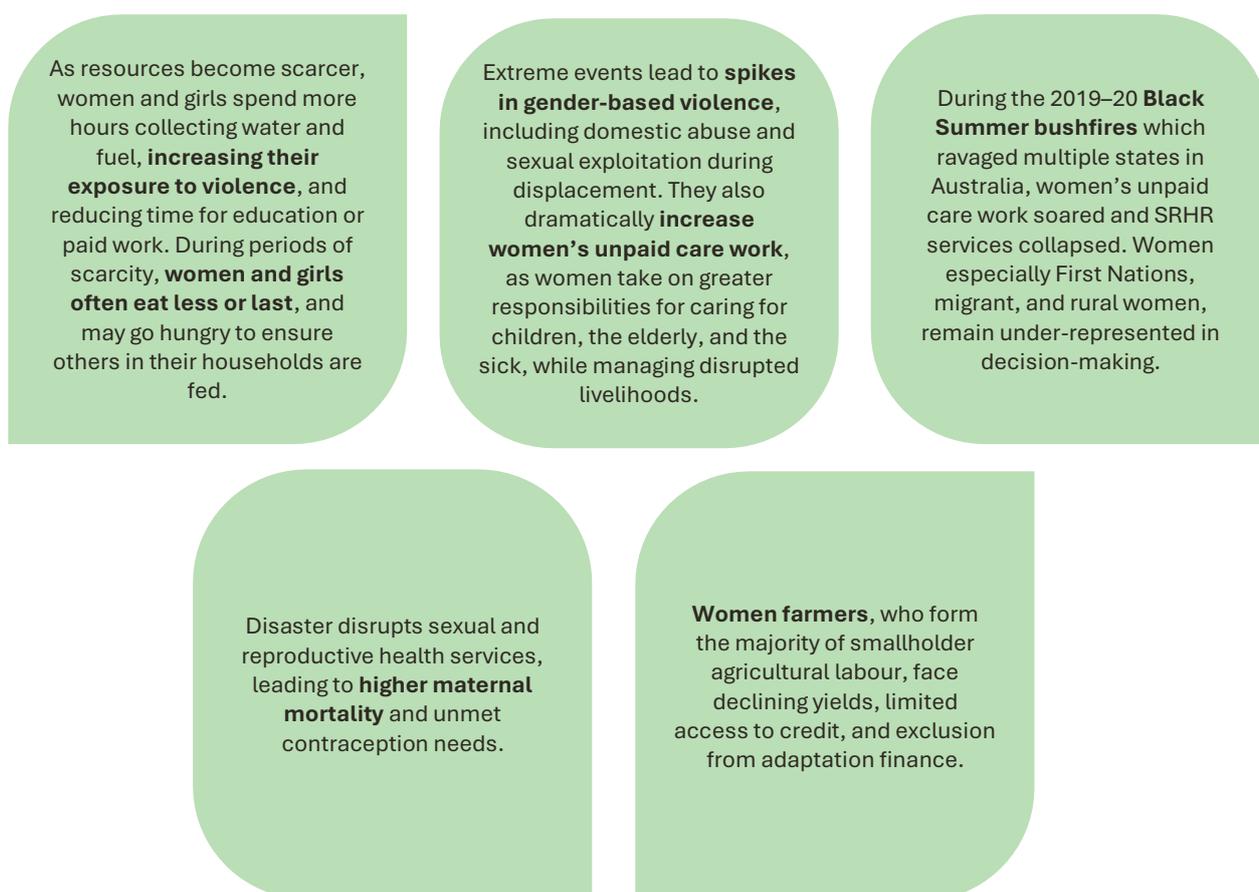
⁸⁷ Equality Australia, “Court Ruling That Anti-Trans Campaigner Unlawfully Vilified Two Trans Women Is Welcomed by Equality Australia.”

Climate change is exacerbating gendered insecurity

Countries across the Pacific Islands and parts of Asia are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, facing the most severe and immediate consequences. People in the Asia-Pacific region are five times more likely to experience a natural disaster than those elsewhere, with over 2 million lives lost since 1970.⁸⁸

Women and gender-diverse people face increasing economic and security risks due to the impacts of climate change. Unequal access to power, resources, and decision-making means they carry the heaviest burdens of both the immediate and long-term consequences of climate-related disasters.⁸⁹ These risks are further compounded by intersecting forms of marginalization which shape how people experience and respond to the impacts of climate change.⁹⁰

The gendered economic and security risks of climate change – key evidence from IWDA’s Policy Paper on Feminist Climate Justice⁹¹



As the world continues to face the effects of the climate crisis, the gendered security impacts will only increase. As one of the world’s highest per-capita emitters⁹² and a major fossil fuel exporter,⁹³ Australia must take decisive action to reduce emissions and phase out fossil fuels to ensure our future economic prosperity and national security, as well as that of our region. Meeting our fair share of climate finance, including through

⁸⁸ Global Campus of Human Rights, *Climate-Related Emergencies on the Rise in Asia and the Pacific: Are We Prepared?*

⁸⁹ Women’s Environmental Leadership Australia (WELA), *Gender, Climate and Environmental Justice in Australia*.

⁹⁰ IWDA, *Policy Paper on Feminist Climate Justice*.

⁹¹ IWDA, *Policy Paper on Feminist Climate Justice*.

⁹² Moreton, *Australia Has Highest Per-Capita CO₂ Emissions from Coal in G20, Analysis Finds*.

⁹³ Climate Analytics, *Dug Up in Australia, Burned Around the World: Exporting Fossil Fuels Undermines Climate Targets*.

new, dedicated funding to gender and climate initiatives delivered by women’s rights organisations will be critical to navigate and mitigate the gendered security implications of climate change.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 14: Adopt a target of at least 75% emissions reduction by 2030, consistent with 1.5°C commitments, and legislate a coal and gas phase-out, ⁹⁴including ending fossil fuel subsidies and redirecting investments to climate finance, renewable energy, care infrastructure, and resilient public services.

Recommendation 15: Commit Australia’s fair share of climate finance to resource feminist climate action, by

- establishing a dedicated Gender and Climate Fund of at least AUD 300 million within Australia’s aid program to resource feminist-led climate action, prioritising locally-led solutions;
- tripling grant-based climate finance to \$11 billion over 2025-2030, in line with the tripling of the global climate finance goal; and
- committing an additional \$300m in dedicated loss and damage support, reflecting Australia’s fair share based on its economic capacity, high per-capita emissions, and regional responsibility to climate-vulnerable nations.

Online radicalisation and the *manosphere* are undermining gender equality and threatening national security

In his first Annual Threat Assessment speech as ASIO Director General, Mike Burgess identified that “Intolerance based on race, gender and identity, and the extreme political views that intolerance inspires, is on the rise across the western world in particular”, and that online radicalisation was a significant threat to national security, a theme which has remained in every subsequent Annual Threat Assessment since.⁹⁵

Online platforms have radically reshaped public discourse and power dynamics, and created spaces where women and LGBTQIA+ people face violent backlash. The *manosphere* is an umbrella term for a loose network of content creators and online communities targeted at men, which promote rigid, regressive ideals of masculinity, misogynistic and anti-feminist ideals under the guise of self-help/empowerment for men.⁹⁶ These misogynistic peer cultures have real-life impacts for women, girls and gender-diverse people’s security on- and offline. At the extreme end, these online spaces have been directly tied to real world mass violence – for example in the case of mass murderer Elliot Rodger, a self-described ‘incel’ who engaged heavily in the *manosphere* and published a 137-page manifesto detailing his grievances and hatred of women before murdering 6 people and injuring 14 others.⁹⁷ At the same time, the *manosphere* is influencing everyday attitudes about masculinity, and driving on- and offline violence against women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people, creating and exacerbating security threats.

The impact of the *manosphere* on men and boys – Excerpt from IWDA’s 16 Days of Activism Campaign Fact Sheet#3: The *Manosphere*⁹⁸

Despite claiming to support self-improvement, the *manosphere* has been shown to have negative impacts on men’s health and wellbeing:

⁹⁴ Martin, “Australia Urged to Adopt 75% Emissions Reduction Target by 2035 If It Is to Reach Net Zero.”

⁹⁵ Burgess, *Director-General’s Annual Threat Assessment*.

⁹⁶ IWDA, *Factsheet 3: The Manosphere*.

⁹⁷ *Elliot Rodger: How Misogynist Killer Became “Incel Hero.”*

⁹⁸ IWDA, *Factsheet 3: The Manosphere*.

- Men who actively engage with masculinity influencers report higher levels of worthlessness and nervousness and are less likely to prioritise their mental health.
- Men who abide by the restrictive gender attitudes promoted by the manosphere are more likely to engage in harmful behaviour like risk-taking and substance abuse and are more prone to depression and suicidal thoughts.

Unsurprisingly, the mainstreaming and normalisation of these misogynistic ideas and narratives are also changing the way young men and boys view social change and progress towards gender equality:

- Younger men today are more likely to hold regressive ideas about gender roles than older men.
- In the US, nearly 60% of men aged 24 to 30 say men have it harder than women in the US today and 47% disagree that “feminism has made America a better place.
- In Australia, 75% of young men who engaged with masculinity influencers believe women have it easier and 69% believe women use feminism to keep men down.

The **unique characteristics of online spaces** – including anonymity, the ability to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, and algorithms that direct people to more extreme content while rewarding shock-value and outrage over nuance – have turned them into places where violence against women can be perpetrated. The anonymity and distance from the act and subject these platforms offer can embolden users to express views or act in ways they might not offline, resulting in potentially more extreme, hostile and coordinated violence.⁹⁹ At the same time, the creation of online spaces that reinforce peer cultures that excuse and celebrate violent masculinity, misogyny and backlash against gender equality is **fuelling broader shifts in mainstream discourse around these topics offline.**¹⁰⁰

While there is limited research into the impacts of these networks on women, girls and gender-diverse people, the evidence we do have tells us that **the spread of these ideas is changing how safe Australian girls feel at school.** 1 in 4 Australian girls reported that they felt unsafe because of the behaviours of boys influenced by the manosphere, with 22 per cent experiencing physical abuse and 21 per cent experiencing sexual abuse.¹⁰¹ Almost a fifth (19 per cent) of children and young people who had seen manosphere-type content online thought ‘hurting someone physically is okay if you say sorry after hurting them’ compared with just 4 per cent of those not exposed.¹⁰²

There are also **economic costs to online gender-based violence**, as women and marginalised communities experiencing violence report missing work opportunities and decreased productivity.¹⁰³

The manosphere is a key entry point into the alt-right. Social media platforms and online forums as one of the key spaces used by Men’s Rights Activists and manosphere influencers to spread anti-feminist, misogynistic ideals and fuel broader backlash against gender equality. These spaces are being increasingly used to recruit and radicalise young men and boys, network with others across the globe, test and refine their messaging for broader appeal and mobilise in mass numbers against individuals, groups or particular issues.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Wachs and Wright, “Associations between Bystanders and Perpetrators of Online Hate: The Moderating Role of Toxic Online Disinhibition.”

¹⁰⁰ Holm, *The Power and Politics of the Manosphere*.

¹⁰¹ Tomorrow Woman, *Unmasking Influence: How the Manosphere Affects Young Women*.

¹⁰² Women’s Aid, *Influencers and Attitudes: How Will the next Generation Understand Domestic Abuse?*

¹⁰³ Bundtzen, *Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended Measures for Platforms to Assess and Mitigate Online Gender-Based Violence*.

¹⁰⁴ Agius et al., *Mapping Right-Wing Extremism in Victoria: Applying a Gender Lens to Develop Prevention and Deradicalisation Approaches*; Schmitz and Kazyak, “Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men’s Rights Activist Websites.”

The same algorithms that are pushing manosphere content are also promoting far-right views onto young men and boys. Tik Tok and YouTube Shorts accounts, set up by researchers with male profiles and which sought out typically male – but not harmful – interests, were fed negative, anti-feminist manosphere content within 23-26 minutes, much of it anti-trans.¹⁰⁵ Research looking into YouTube’s algorithmic recommendations showed that it took ‘blank’ accounts (created as a 19-year-old male) just over an hour of engaging with content recommended by the website (not sought out by the user) for the algorithm to start recommending manosphere content. By day 2 of active use, the top recommendations on the homepage included “Men Going Their Own Way” content, and by day 4, the top home page recommendations included videos glorifying Hitler and other neo-Nazi content. YouTube shorts showed more extreme videos within relatively brief timeframes with no difference between the content being recommended to under- and over-18s.¹⁰⁶ Other research into YouTube’s algorithm has shown that the age of the account holder did not have an effect on the types of videos recommended, with child accounts also being recommended inappropriate content that sexualised women alongside right-wing news content and videos designed to promote ‘culture war’ topics such as anti-trans rhetoric.¹⁰⁷

IWDA’s 16 Days of Activism Campaign in late 2025 focused on the manosphere, and collected stories of the impact it is having on everyday people¹⁰⁸

“It feels threatening, like the impending doom of an act not yet committed, but openly discussed.”

“There is effectively a toxic uninvited guest in my home manipulating my son.”

“It's like seeing all the insults that I've ever received as a woman all in one.”

“The manosphere has co-opted a lot of spaces I used to enjoy and appropriated it for its own purposes.”

“I've seen the nicest people turn into someone I don't even recognise anymore.”

“The manosphere led my nephew into Neo Nazi views and caused the breakdown of a close relationship with my son.”

¹⁰⁵ Baker et al., *Recommending Toxicity: The Role of Algorithmic Recommender Functions on YouTube Shorts and TikTok in Promoting Male Supremacist Influencers.*

¹⁰⁶ Thomas and Balint, *Algorithms as a Weapon against Women: How Youtube Lures Boys and Young Men into the “Manosphere.”*

¹⁰⁷ Cooper, *Investigation 2 “Male Lifestyle Guru” Personas.*

¹⁰⁸ IWDA, *16 Days of Activism*; IWDA, “We asked how the manosphere impacted you. Here’s what you told us.”

Investing in civil society organisations that offer alternative narratives for men and boys who may be susceptible to these drivers, thereby reducing the risk of radicalisation by giving them an alternative story to help explain their situation and feelings, is an important **strategy to counter radicalisation**, along with investment in community and third-spaces.¹⁰⁹

Social media companies **consistently prioritise profit over safety** as fear and outrage generate greater engagement, and therefore, revenue. Companies have also been resistant to regulation aimed at curbing technology-facilitated abuse, which will be further exacerbated by Artificial Intelligence. Left unregulated, these tools have the capacity to enable image-based abuse on a massive scale, as exemplified by features added to X’s AI chatbot Grok. Launched on 29 December 2025, the image-generating feature allowed users to edit images posted to the platform with simple prompts. Within the span of 11 days, the tool was used to generate an estimated 3 million sexualised images. Of these, 23,000 appeared to depict children – amounting to sexualised images of children being created by Grok every 41 seconds at the request of its users.¹¹⁰ In responding to public outcry, X initially chose to only limit the feature’s use to paid subscribers before eventually geo-blocking its ability to edit photos of real people in explicit ways in countries with laws against this. As of 15 January 2026, it is estimate that 29 per cent of sexualised images of children identified by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate were still publicly accessible.¹¹¹ Recent research by The Guardian has also identified “at least 150 Telegram channels – large encrypted group chats popular for their secure communication – that ... offer “nudified” photos or videos for a fee: users can upload a photo of any woman, and AI will produce a video of that woman performing sexual acts.”¹¹²

Research has also shown a strong overlap between anti-feminist, manosphere type networks and right-wing online spaces, with anti-feminist and far-right sentiments being mutually reinforcing. Both sentiments are driven by a sense of aggrieved entitlement, a desire for tradition and order, the desire to take back control and return to either a different order or to abolish the current one and instigate a new system, a significant distrust of mainstream government and politics as well as institutions and expertise, and a concern around the curtailment of individual liberty.¹¹³

These impacts have significant implications for security at the national, regional and global level. **There is broader evidence to suggest that movements have inspired acts of violent extremism and been central to the rise of populist far-right movements.**¹¹⁴ While online gender-based violence occurs on a continuum, research indicates that “misogynistic behaviour that starts in the online space may lead to the perpetration of offline violence – both in private and public spheres”, and that addressing these views while they are nascent can be an effective strategy for de-escalation.¹¹⁵

Gendered disinformation can provide an early-warning system for broader attacks on women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights, as well as the undermining of democratic norms and institutions, along with attacks on women journalists and public figures.¹¹⁶ Coordinated disinformation campaigns are now an established feature of domestic politics in Southeast Asia, and the decline in independent media in the Pacific is creating

¹⁰⁹ Copland, *The Male Complaint*; Haslop et al., “Mainstreaming the Manosphere’s Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the Andrew Tate Effect.”

¹¹⁰ Center for Countering Digital Hate, *Grok Floods X with Sexualized Images of Women and Children*.

¹¹¹ Center for Countering Digital Hate, *Grok Floods X with Sexualized Images of Women and Children*.

¹¹² Bharadia and Down, “Millions Creating Deepfake Nudes on Telegram as AI Tools Drive Global Wave of Digital Abuse.”

¹¹³ Agius et al., *Mapping Right-Wing Extremism in Victoria: Applying a Gender Lens to Develop Prevention and Deradicalisation Approaches*.

¹¹⁴ Dignam and Rohlinger, “Misogynistic Men Online: How the Red Pill Helped Elect Trump.”

¹¹⁵ Bundtzen, *Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended Measures for Platforms to Assess and Mitigate Online Gender-Based Violence*.

¹¹⁶ Bundtzen, *Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended Measures for Platforms to Assess and Mitigate Online Gender-Based Violence*.

a significant vulnerability to disinformation; based on the current trajectory, there will be no independent media left in the Pacific within a decade.¹¹⁷

These vulnerabilities are being weaponised, including by state actors, with research demonstrating how **Russian state-linked media strategically uses anti-gender narratives to spread illiberal, authoritarian, and anti-democratic propaganda.**¹¹⁸ Gender is deliberately used by these actors as an entry point to normalise broader attacks on liberal democracy, human rights, and multilateral institutions, because it triggers a strong emotional response, can be easily linked to fears about social change, and allows disinformation to feel more personal, moral and relatable rather than just ideological.¹¹⁹ **Attacks on women journalists and other public figures** are another key mechanism for undermining democracy through gendered violence, with increasing evidence of this activity being undertaken by politicians and officials.¹²⁰

Recommendations:

Recommendation 16: Fund domestic and international civil society organisations creating alternative narratives of modern masculinity, and (re)-allocate domestic and international funding for community spaces such as youth groups, local sports clubs, unions and community centres to provide real world alternatives to online communities for marginalised people.

Recommendation 17: Work with local, feminist civil society to develop and fund programs on digital literacy and gendered disinformation.¹²¹

Recommendation 18: Introduce a positive-duty for social media platforms to address gendered-violence and vilification.¹²²

Investing in civil society as a strategy to counter authoritarianism

While the strategies to counter the various security implications outlined are complex and multifaceted, investing in civil society – especially feminist, women’s rights and LGBTIQ+ movements – is a critical underpinning intervention to ensure national and economic security, both for Australia and the region.

The exact amount of funding flowing to anti-rights actors is hard to measure, but it is clear that it dwarfs funding to women’s rights organisations and movements. One calculation, based on funding to anti-rights groups registered in the US alone, found that they received USD 6.2 billion over the decade to 2020 – more than the ODA going to women’s rights movements globally over the same period.¹²³ A report from the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights uncovered USD 1.18 billion in funding between 2019-2023 for actors involved in anti-gender activities in Europe, with at least US 171 million traced back to public funding.¹²⁴ The use of public and ODA funds by anti-rights groups is deeply concerning. For example, an investigation of the funding sources of conservative religious organisations in Uganda that supported anti-LGBTQIA+ laws – including the death penalty – found that they had received funding between USD 40-75 million from donors who held commitments to feminist foreign policies and LGBTQIA+ rights, with

¹¹⁷ Asia Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D), *What Does It Look like for Australia to Use All Tools of Statecraft in the Information Environment*.

¹¹⁸ Stolze, “Russian Disinformation Hijacking Gender Cleavages: Anti-Gender Frames on RT as a Gateway for Illiberal Propaganda.”

¹¹⁹ Stolze, “Russian Disinformation Hijacking Gender Cleavages: Anti-Gender Frames on RT as a Gateway for Illiberal Propaganda.”

¹²⁰ Bundtzen, *Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended Measures for Platforms to Assess and Mitigate Online Gender-Based Violence*.

¹²¹ Haslop et al., “Mainstreaming the Manosphere’s Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the Andrew Tate Effect.”

¹²² Respect Victoria, *Summarising the Evidence: Online Harassment and Abuse Against Women*.

¹²³ Global Philanthropy Project, *A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement*.

¹²⁴ European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, *New Report Exposes Funding to Anti-Rights Initiatives in Europe Rise to US\$1.18 Billion*.

some funding even coded as support for “gender equality.”¹²⁵ While many of the implicated donors responded by clarifying that the funding in question was not for anti-LGBTQIA+ activities, but unrelated programming,¹²⁶ the funds nonetheless strengthened these organisation’s operations and legitimacy, and raise questions about the due diligence conducted by donors.



By contrast, women’s rights and feminist organisations face dire funding shortages. According to the most recent available data, in 2023, total funding from OECD DAC donors to women’s rights organisations globally was USD 229.4 million, representing just 0.22 per cent of total ODA.¹²⁷ Just slightly more funding was allocated to the priority of ending violence against women – 0.27 per cent of global ODA in the same year.¹²⁸ The bulk of funding to WROs is driven by a handful of donors, particularly those holding commitments to feminist foreign policy. However, several of these countries have now walked back their feminist foreign policies – including the Netherlands, Sweden, and to some extent Germany) – including cuts to gender-focused ODA and women’s rights organisation funding, which are not reflected in the figure below.

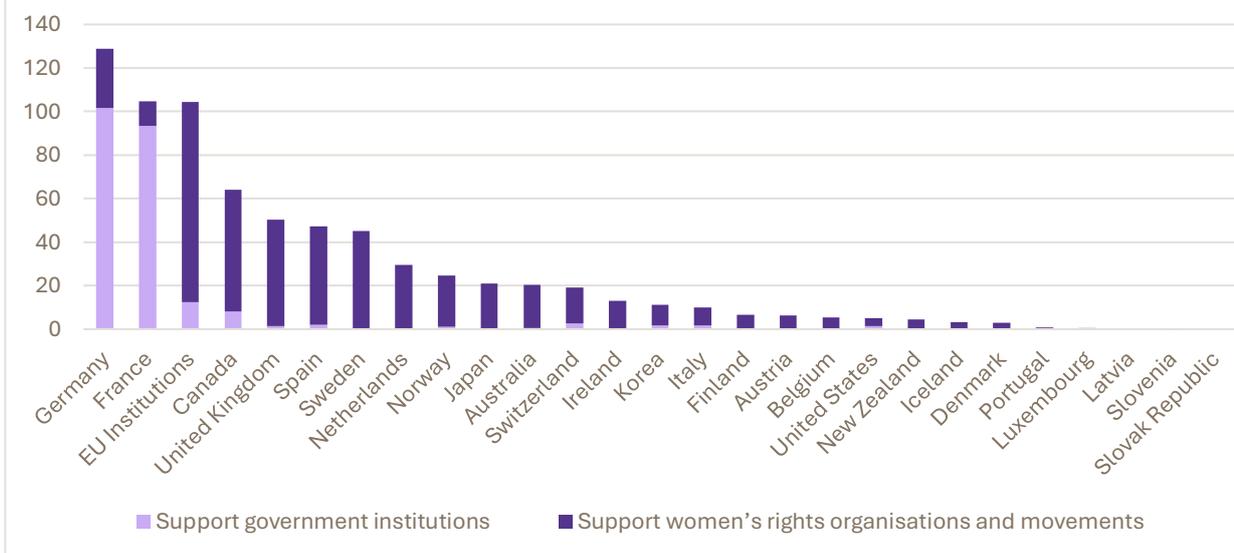
¹²⁵ Provost, *Progressive Cash for the Anti-LGBTQI Backlash? How Aid Donors and ‘Feminist’ Governments Have Funded Backers of Uganda’s Deadly Anti-Homosexuality Bill*.

¹²⁶ The Institute for Journalism and Social Change, *Progressive Cash for the Anti-LGBTQI Backlash? How Aid Donors and ‘Feminist’ Governments Have Funded Backers of Uganda’s Deadly Anti-Homosexuality Bill: Donor/Development Partners’ Responses to Our Findings*.

¹²⁷ OECD, *Development Finance for Gender Equality*.

¹²⁸ OECD, *Development Finance for Gender Equality*.

ODA to support the effectiveness and sustainability of women’s rights organisations and movements, and government institutions (2023, USDm)



Source: OECD, *Development Finance for Gender Equality*. 2024

Funding women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights organisations and feminist movements allows them to do the critical work of holding the line on gender equality and women’s rights, and ensures that they are resourced to gather and share the kind of intelligence that is critical to Australia’s national security. Empowering local WROs to decide how to go about their work for gender equality is also critical to ensure approaches are fit for purpose and counter perceptions of outside influence. The most transformative outcomes are achieved when women’s rights organisations are provided with core, flexible, long-term funding – when they are funded to *be*, not merely to *do*.¹²⁹ Raising both the quantity and quality of funding to WROs is critical to delivering DFAT’s goals on gender equality.

The complexity of geopolitical times and fluidity in the politics of existing groupings and their margins and boundaries, underline the importance of diverse networks and mechanisms for accessing grounded real-time intelligence from constituencies, and concrete evidence to challenge coordinated misinformation, or if not to counter, to at least to anchor principled, intentional advocacy and action in data and evidence that is sound. Meso-level networks and relationships, with civil society and at technical and working levels bureaucrats are vital to complement intergovernmental relationships in contexts of politicisation and disruption.

(See final section for detailed recommendations on funding to women’s rights organisations)

¹²⁹ Miller and Jones, *Toward A Feminist Funding Ecosystem*; Office of Development Effectiveness, *Learning from Australian Aid Operational Effectiveness*. p 32-34.

3. Advancing gender equality and national security through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Inquiry TORs:

4. The role of locally-led leadership and decision-making in advancing gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda
5. The Women, Peace and Security agenda internationally and Australia's role in promoting and implementing it

Locally-led Women's Leadership: A Cornerstone for Peace and Security

Across conflict-affected communities, women's locally-led initiatives have proven vital in preventing violence and sustaining peace. Evidence from around the world shows that countries with greater gender equality are more likely to resolve disputes without violence and less likely to resort to force, whereas large gender gaps correlate with higher risks of conflict.¹³⁰ In the Indo-Pacific, women have long been frontline peacebuilders. During the Bougainville civil conflict, matrilineal leaders brokered ceasefires and mediated tribal disputes, while in the Solomon Islands, women's church networks created safe spaces for dialogue and reconciliation during periods of unrest.¹³¹ These grassroots efforts helped minimize, and even end, armed violence in such contexts.¹³² Despite operating far from formal negotiating tables, local women's organisations and community leaders build trust, maintain social cohesion, and address grievances before they escalate, thereby directly contributing to stability. Research confirms that including women at all stages of peace processes bolsters local trust in political processes and yields more durable peace agreements.¹³³ In short, locally-led women's leadership is not auxiliary to the WPS Agenda – it is its foundation, translating high-level commitments into tangible conflict prevention and community resilience.

Underfunding and Exclusion: Barriers to Local Leadership

Despite this evidence, local women leaders and organisations remain under-resourced and often excluded from decision-making. Global funding for women's rights organisations (WROs) is strikingly inadequate: less than 1 per cent of gender-focused aid reaches these frontline groups, and only 0.13 per cent of all official development assistance supports them directly. This chronic underinvestment means that women's community networks operate on shoestring budgets, limiting their ability to participate in and shape peace and security initiatives. The Australian civil society coalition on WPS warns that without core, flexible, long-term funding, WPS commitments will remain largely rhetorical. Indeed, IWDA's experience as a regional intermediary illustrates the challenge – while IWDA strives to provide flexible support to partners across Asia and the Pacific, it is itself constrained by short-term project-based funding cycles. Such funding gaps are compounded by exclusionary practices. After conflicts, women peacebuilders are too often siloed into

¹³⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, *Women's Participation in Peace Processes*.

¹³¹ Hunter, "A Pacific Reflection on Women, Peace and Security."

¹³² Masta et al., *Women, Peace and Security in the Pacific Region (WPS027)*.

¹³³ Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, *Where Are the Women: Advancing Women's Leadership in Politics and Peacebuilding*.

“women’s issues” (e.g. gender-based violence services) and marginalised from broader peace negotiations and governance where key security decisions are made.¹³⁴ Traditional and state institutions, frequently dominated by male leadership, may overlook the informal but crucial roles of women who are keeping families fed, mending community divides, and countering extremist narratives on the ground.¹³⁵ Furthermore, external interventions in the region have sometimes sidelined local priorities – external agenda-setting without local ownership undermines the effectiveness of WPS programs. In sum, a combination of meagre funding and limited voice in formal arenas curtails the transformative potential of locally-led WPS efforts.

Feminist, Locally-Led Responses Bolster Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience

Empowering local women leaders is not only the right thing to do – it also yields concrete security dividends. Women-led civil society movements help build strong institutions, accountability, and trust, even in environments where democracy is under threat.¹³⁶ In Asia and the Pacific, many women’s organisations simultaneously advance gender equality and defend democratic freedoms at the grassroots level. For example, in Myanmar, women activists and networks have been at the forefront of the pro-democracy resistance since the 2021 coup. Despite brutal repression by an authoritarian regime, women continue to lead movements for justice and change, using underground networks and cross-border collaboration to keep the vision of inclusive democracy alive.¹³⁷ Their locally driven, feminist response – from documenting human rights abuses to delivering humanitarian aid in conflict zones – has helped maintain social cohesion and community hope amid chaos. Crucially, these efforts also counter the influence of anti-rights and anti-gender forces. Around the world, and as outlined in earlier sections of this submission, authoritarian actors frequently weaponize “gender ideology” and attack women’s rights to fracture societies and roll back democracy.^{138 139} The Indo-Pacific is not immune to this trend, as fundamentalist and ultra-nationalist groups in various countries have targeted women’s rights defenders and LGBTQIA+ communities to stoke division. Locally-led women’s organisations provide a bulwark against this erosion of rights: they promote inclusive values, bridge social divides, and model accountable leadership, fostering resilience in democratic institutions. Pacific women leaders, for instance, combine Indigenous knowledge with rights-based advocacy to address emerging security threats – from climate-induced displacement to online hate – thereby reinforcing community resilience to both crises and corrosive ideologies.¹⁴⁰ By centring human security and equality, feminist local leadership strengthens the social fabric that underpins national security. As Australia’s Foreign Minister has noted, we need credible, evidence-based examples of how gender equality contributes to security and stability – and the evidence is clear that when local women are resourced and included, communities are safer, more cohesive, and more resistant to conflict and authoritarianism.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 19: Establish dedicated funding streams within ODA for community-based WPS initiatives, with simplified access for smaller organisations, as part of broader efforts to provide core, flexible and long-term funding to WROs and grassroots women’s networks.

¹³⁴ Masta et al., *Women, Peace and Security in the Pacific Region (WPS027)*.

¹³⁵ Hunter, “A Pacific Reflection on Women, Peace and Security.”

¹³⁶ Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, *Where Are the Women: Advancing Women’s Leadership in Politics and Peacebuilding*.

¹³⁷ International Civil Society Action Network, *From Crisis to Action: Strengthening Women’s Leadership in Myanmar. ICAN Peacework*.

¹³⁸ UC Berkeley Research, “Gender Issues” Are Being Used as Cover to Erode Democracy.

¹³⁹ Brechenmacher, *Why Gender Is Central to the Antidemocratic Playbook: Unpacking the Linkages in the United States and Beyond*.

¹⁴⁰ Hunter, “A Pacific Reflection on Women, Peace and Security.”

Recommendation 20: Ensure that diverse women leaders from conflict-affected communities and marginalised groups have a formal seat in peace negotiations, security sector dialogues, and policy forums, including through quotas and mentoring programs.

Recommendation 21: Create mechanisms to *link community peacebuilding to national policy*, including by funding consultations between government officials and women peacebuilders at the community level.

Recommendation 22: Develop and fund permanent protection and resettlement programs for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders facing intimidation or violence, especially in contexts with anti-rights backlash or political instability, including rapid support (financial, legal, psychosocial) from diplomatic missions to local WPS actors under threat, recognising their role in sustaining peace and democracy.

Recommendation 23: Adapt monitoring and evaluation frameworks to capture community-level peace and security outcomes (eg. early conflict prevention, social cohesion, trust-building) generated by women’s initiatives, and including this reporting in national security assessments.

Global State of the WPS Agenda: Normative Success, Implementation Gaps

Internationally, the Women, Peace and Security agenda is both widely endorsed and persistently under-implemented. Twenty-five years after UNSC Resolution 1325, over 110 countries have adopted National Action Plans and virtually every multilateral security forum acknowledges the importance of women’s participation and protection.¹⁴¹ However, this near-universal policy recognition has not fully translated into transformative change on the ground. Armed conflicts and humanitarian crises are in fact increasing, with devastating impacts on women and girls – from the use of gender-based violence as a weapon of war to the rollback of women’s rights under extremist regimes. The core challenge is a failure to move from rhetoric to implementation. Too often, WPS commitments “evaporate” within bureaucracies, remaining confined to paper while militarized approaches continue to dominate security responses. A key symptom of this gap is the lack of dedicated resourcing: UN assessments and civil society analyses find that many WPS National Action Plans are launched without budgets or clear accountability mechanisms, rendering them toothless. For example, Australia’s own Second National Action Plan on WPS (2021–2031) was introduced with no earmarked funding, relying on already-stretched departmental resources. The Australian WPS Coalition’s 2025 shadow report pointedly characterises this as “mainstreaming without money,” noting that ambitious goals cannot be met when no new resources are attached. Internationally, only a small fraction of security expenditures or development aid is directed toward gender-inclusive peacebuilding, and just 0.22 per cent of global aid reaches feminist organisations directly.¹⁴² This disconnect between high-level WPS pledges and tangible support on the ground is a global phenomenon that undermines the credibility of the agenda. It also provides fodder to sceptics, who might question the WPS agenda’s value when gender equality gains remain fragile (as starkly seen in Afghanistan’s collapse and Myanmar’s coup). Thus, the international WPS agenda stands at a crossroads: its normative framework is in place, but real progress now depends on political will, resources, and accountability to implement those norms in practice.

Australia’s Role and Commitments: From Aspiration to Action

As a member of the UN Security Council when Resolution 1325 was adopted and a regional leader, Australia has an important role in advancing WPS internationally. Australia’s policy architecture is generally supportive – Australia is now implementing its second National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS and regularly affirms WPS principles in international fora. Notably, Australia has championed language on women’s leadership and

¹⁴¹ Caso, “The Australian Civil Society Coalition Evaluates the Women, Peace and Security at 25.”

¹⁴² OECD, *Development Finance for Gender Equality*.

gender equality in joint statements of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), explicitly framing gender equality as integral to Indo-Pacific stability and prosperity. This diplomacy positions Australia as a proponent of the WPS agenda. In practice, Australia has funded various initiatives (often through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT) to promote women's participation in peace processes, support regional civil society networks, and train peacekeepers on gender issues. However, stakeholders report that Australia's approach, while well-intentioned, has room to grow bolder and more consistent. Financing remains a critical weakness. The lack of a dedicated budget for the WPS NAP until now has led to fragmented implementation at home, and this mirrors a broader hesitancy to commit sizable resources for WPS abroad. The Australian WPS Coalition in 2025 warned that without earmarked funds and transparent tracking, it is difficult to hold agencies accountable for results. In line with the commitment to WPS established in the International Gender Equality Strategy, Australia's contributions could be strengthened by moving from project-based support to institutionalized, long-term investments in gender equality and peace.

Australia also has an opportunity to lead by example in the Indo-Pacific region. It can leverage its position in regional institutions (ASEAN Regional Forum, Pacific Islands Forum, the Quad, APEC, etc.) to integrate WPS principles into regional security and development agendas. This means consistently advocating that issues such as women's political inclusion, protection from gender-based violence, and support for women's civil society be treated as core security and economic issues, not side concerns. Encouragingly, we see steps in this direction: for instance, the Pacific Islands Forum's 2050 Strategy now references gender-responsive approaches, partly due to persistent advocacy by Australia and Pacific feminists. But Australia's role should go beyond words. In practice, Australia should act **as a** partner and amplifier of local voices – supporting Asia-Pacific women peacebuilders to engage directly in policymaking. This includes sponsoring regional convenings, seconding gender advisers to multilateral missions, and using diplomatic channels to ensure women from our region (including young and Indigenous women) are at the table in international discussions. By elevating these voices, Australia helps fulfill WPS commitments in spirit, not just letter.

Finally, Australia must also get its own house in order by meaningfully implementing its Women, Peace and Security commitments at home. This means going beyond traditional metrics such as increasing the share of women in the military and police, training diplomats on gender analysis, and ensuring refugee and aid policies address women's needs. It also requires centring Indigenous justice as an integral part of WPS implementation: recognising and responding to the ongoing impacts of colonisation, state-sanctioned violence and structural exclusion that disproportionately affect First Nations women, girls and gender-diverse peoples. This means supporting Indigenous-led peacebuilding and decision-making, and aligning WPS action with the rights affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including participation, self-determination and protection from violence. This is consistent with the understanding of national security as a continuum with human security established in section 1, where a state cannot be considered secure when human security is not shared by those living within the state. Embedding Indigenous perspectives and justice within domestic WPS policy will deepen Australia's domestic resilience, reduce structural insecurity, and strengthen its legitimacy in advocating for gender equality and peaceful conflict resolution internationally.¹⁴³

Recommendations:

Recommendation 24: Attach dedicated, transparent, and multi-year funding to the implementation of its Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2021–2031), establishing clear budget lines, public expenditure tracking, and regular reporting on WPS investments across defence, diplomacy, development, and humanitarian portfolios.

¹⁴³ Creamer, *Centring First Nations Perspectives in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Australia: Recommendations for Action*.

Recommendation 25: Leverage Australia’s leadership within regional and multilateral forums - including ASEAN-led mechanisms, the Pacific Islands Forum, APEC and the Quad - to position WPS and gender equality as integral to regional security and economic resilience.

Recommendation 26: Support women peacebuilders from across Asia and the Pacific to engage directly in regional and international policymaking, including sponsoring regional convenings, supporting participation in multilateral negotiations, seconding gender advisers to peace and security missions, and ensuring that women, including young and Indigenous women are represented in security, humanitarian, and diplomatic forums.

Recommendation 27: Strengthen accountability mechanisms for WPS implementation by improving data collection, outcome monitoring and public reporting, and ensure independent civil society input into monitoring and review processes.

Recommendation 28: Embed Indigenous justice as a core pillar of its domestic WPS commitments, recognising the ongoing impacts of colonisation, state-sanctioned violence and structural exclusion on First Nations women, girls and gender-diverse peoples, and supporting Indigenous-led activities across all areas of WPS and in line with the rights articulated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Recommendation 29: Align domestic and international WPS practice to strengthen Australia’s credibility, and reinforce the connection between inclusive governance, democratic resilience, and national security.

4. Advancing gender equality through all levers of foreign, defence and security policy

Inquiry TORs:

6. The Australian Government's efforts to advance gender equality and the human rights of women and girls across all aspects of foreign policy, defence and national security

Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy commits to using all tools of foreign policy to drive progress on gender equality for all.

While there are areas of significant strength across DFAT's work when it comes to implementing gender equality objectives, fully realising the intention of the Strategy will require a lift in political will, prioritisation and investment.

"To fully realise its policy ambitions, Australia must now match its greater strategic clarity with strengthened investment. Delivering this will require sustained political leadership, institutional capability and targeted resourcing that can meet interconnected regional and global challenges."

- OECD DAC Peer Review of Australia's Development Program, 2026

Australia's support for gender equality and women's rights through development funding

The objective of Australia's international development program is "to advance an Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable, and prosperous ... while also supporting Australia's national interests and the interests we share with our region." To achieve this, it identifies that "we must tackle the unequal power systems and structures that stifle economic growth and human development."¹⁴⁴ As this submission has laid out, there is overwhelming evidence that gender inequality is one such structure.

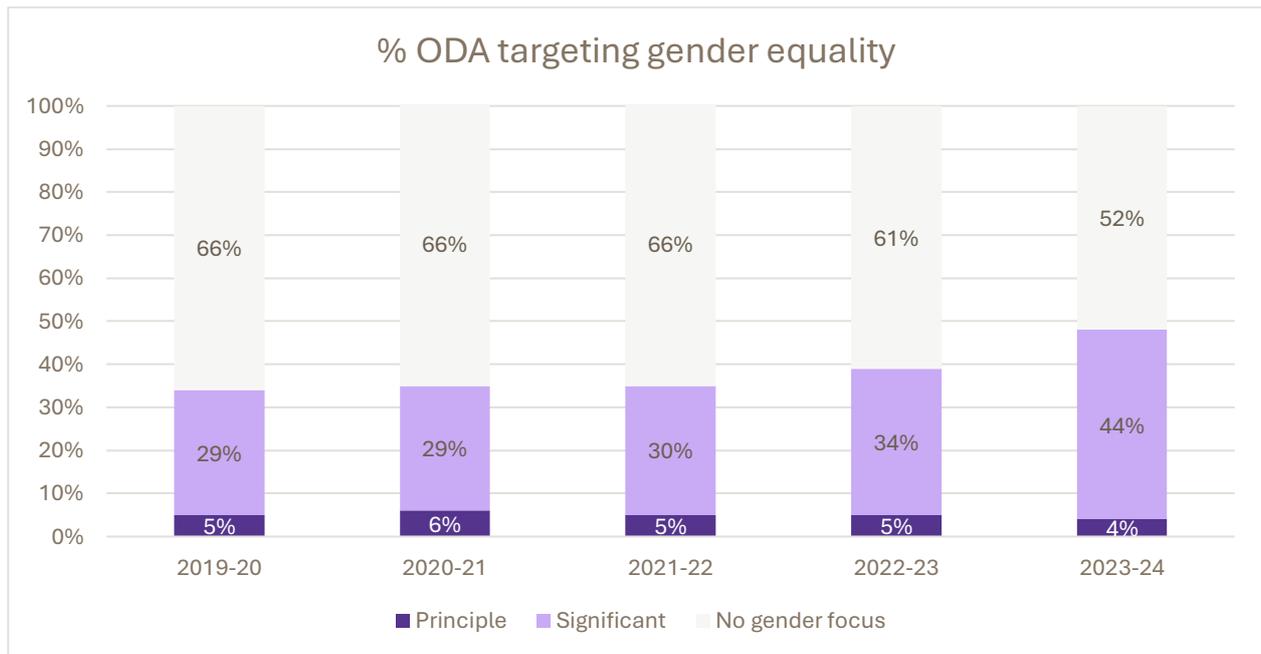
DFAT has a number of important commitments to enable mainstreaming of gender across the international development cooperation program. For over 10 years, DFAT has held a target that 80 per cent of programs must perform effectively against gender equality criteria, measured against 6 criteria in the Aid Quality Check.¹⁴⁵ This target has only been met once, with figures hovering between 75-79 per cent in other years, indicating both that DFAT's Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Branch is holding programs to a robust standard of effectiveness in the Aid Quality Check process, and that strengthened practice is required to consistently meet or exceed the target.¹⁴⁶ To better support other areas of the Department and implementing agencies to consolidate learning and improve performance on this metric over time, DFAT should invest more resourcing and in-house capacity in the GEDSI Branch.

¹⁴⁴ DFAT, *Australia's International Development Policy*.

¹⁴⁵ Ridge, "Didn't Meet the Gender Target... Good News for Transparency or Bad News for Gender?"

¹⁴⁶ Ridge, "Didn't Meet the Gender Target... Good News for Transparency or Bad News for Gender?"

In 2022, DFAT introduced an additional commitment that all programs over \$3m must have a gender equality objective (aligned to the OECD DAC criteria). In the past 3.5 years, this mandate has driven an increase in the amount of ODA targeting gender equality, rising to \$2.3 billion per year, or 48 per cent of programs which had gender as a “principal” or “significant” focus¹⁴⁷ in 2023-24, with the “significant” category driving this increase.¹⁴⁸ In some ways this commitment is more ambitious than comparable commitments from other OECD DAC countries such as France and Canada, which have set targets of 75 per cent and 90 per cent respectively, rather than requiring *all* programs of a certain size to advance gender equality.¹⁴⁹ However, it has yet to – and is not necessarily going to – lead to an increase in programs with gender equality as their *principal* focus, which has languished at around 5 per cent of Australia’s ODA.



Source: Calculated from [DFAT annual performance reporting](#) and [OECD Database](#)

To achieve the objectives of DFAT’s International Gender Equality Strategy, and in line with the TORs of this inquiry which highlight the centrality of gender equality to national and economic security, providing increased funding to activities with gender equality as their principal objective must be a priority for the Australian Government. A target of 20 per cent of ODA would drive progress towards this end.

Additionally, very little of Australia’s development funding – even of funding which is focused on achieving gender equality – is delivered through women’s rights organisations. In 2023–24, Australia provided \$49.5 million to “women’s rights organisations, partner governments, international organisations and the private sector” (the combination of women’s rights actors specified by the OECD DAC coding system). This is equal to around 1 per cent of Australia’s ODA, or 2 per cent of Australia’s gender equality spending.¹⁵⁰ This is despite the fact that research consistently finds WROs to be the most effective actors at advancing gender equality.¹⁵¹ This evidence suggests that a target for 5 per cent of ODA to be delivered through WROs would meaningfully

¹⁴⁷ These categories measure different, but related, aspects of programming. *Significant* refers to programs where gender equality is considered within, but not the sole focus of the activity. *Principal* refers to programs where gender equality is the main aim of the activity. Both are required to deliver inclusive and equitable development and achieve gender equality.

¹⁴⁸ DFAT, *Performance of Australian Development Cooperation Report 2023-24*.

¹⁴⁹ Government of Canada, *Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy*; France Diplomatie, *Feminist Diplomacy*.

¹⁵⁰ DFAT, *Performance of Australian Development Cooperation Report 2023-24*.

¹⁵¹ Htun and Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005.”

drive progress on gender equality. In doing so, Australia should priorities core, flexible and multiyear funding towards the established priorities of WROs and feminist movements.¹⁵²

There are established funds administered by DFAT through which it would be appropriate to channel some of this new and additional gender equality spending. The Gender Equality Fund, established in 2015 and administered by the GEDSI Branch, is a critical mechanism for advancing the priorities of the International Gender Equality Strategy, but has not been increased under the current Government.¹⁵³

There is immense need created by the USAID cuts and expansion of the Mexico City Policy as well as significant reductions in funding for women’s rights organisations and from previously reliable donors like the Government of the Netherlands. These cuts have also decimated the multilateral system, with key UN Agencies on gender equality, UN Women and UNFPA, currently being considered for merger as a cost-saving mechanism due to the impact of US funding withdrawals, which are projected to worsen under the latest expansion of the GGR.¹⁵⁴

Significant gender equality donors (non-US) who have announced sweeping cuts to ODA (figures in USD):¹⁵⁵



Coupled with the stated priorities of the IGES, meeting these challenges will require a vast increase in spending; IWDA recommends a first step of doubling the Fund to \$130m per year. The newer Equality and Inclusion Fund, which supports LGBTQIA+ organisations and movements should also be increased to \$15m per year to support the critical work of frontline actors holding the line on women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights and bodily autonomy. The 2025 OCED DAC Peer Review notes that “Australia’s global leadership on GEDSI highlights its capacity to drive change while underscoring the value of sustained in-house technical expertise on key policy priorities.”¹⁵⁶ Expanding this in-house capacity in line with an increased budget would ensure continued effectiveness of gender equality work.

Ultimately, actioning these priorities without succumbing to an approach of reduced spending elsewhere will require Australia to increase overall ODA. Australia’s Defence spending is currently 12 times greater than ODA, projected to increase to a ratio of 19:1 by 2030.¹⁵⁷ The OECD DAC peer review notes that an increase to ODA would also “minimise pressure to reduce global spending to support regional needs and better align with

¹⁵² See for example: Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, *Pacific Feminist Forum*; State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Women Deliver 2023: Oceanic Pacific Regional Outcomes Statement*. DIVA for Equality, *17 URGENT DEMANDS OF PACIFIC FEMINISTS DEFENDING THE PLANET*.

¹⁵³ DFAT, *Australia’s International Support for Gender Equality*.

¹⁵⁴ IPPF, *US Government Expands Global Gag Rule in a Major Escalation of Regressive Foreign Policy*.

¹⁵⁵ IWDA, *Australian Federal Budget 2025 IWDA Analysis*.

¹⁵⁶ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. pp 10

¹⁵⁷ Hill, “The Defence-Development Divide: From Gap to Chasm.”

Australia's values," better enabling the Government's stated priority to be a 'partner of choice' to the region.¹⁵⁸ Australia should set ODA on a strategic and reliable trajectory for growth, with the view to reaching 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI by 2029-30.

Recommendations

Recommendation 30: Commit at least 20% of ODA to initiatives with gender equality as the principal objective and ensure robust review and moderation of progress towards this and existing targets.

Recommendation 31: Commit at least 5% of ODA to be delivered through women's rights organisations (CRS Sector Code 15170), prioritising core, flexible and multi-year funding mechanisms.

Recommendation 32: Double the Gender Equality Fund to at least \$130 million per year, and increase the Inclusion and Equality Fund to \$15 million per year, in order to resource the priorities of the IGES.

Recommendation 33: Double the staffing footprint of gender technical expertise within DFAT (including the GEDSI Branch, technical roles across country and thematic desks, and local advisors at Post) to support the priorities of IGES and consolidate performance on gender equality indicators.

Recommendation 34: Enable these priorities by setting ODA on a strategic and reliable trajectory for growth with the view to reaching 0.7% ODA/GNI by 2029-30.

Investing in and supporting civil society partnerships as a critical source of intelligence for the Australian government on gender equality and women's rights

As this submission has established, backlash towards gender equality and women's rights is a canary in the coalmine for authoritarianism and anti-democratic shifts, which pose national and economic security implications for Australia. Gender equality-focused civil society encompasses a broad ecosystem of actors including local women's rights and grassroots organisations, national and regional NGOs, feminist funds, feminist INGOs and think tanks, as well as feminist and women's rights movements. There are a range of different roles that these actors play, as service providers, activists and organisers, advocates, movement builders, intermediary funders, knowledge producers and communicators. Across these roles, women's rights actors provide different kinds of insight into the backlash to gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people and can offer a valuable source of intelligence to the Australian Government, whether directly, or through partnerships with values aligned intermediaries. However, DFAT is not maximising this source of intelligence, in part because it has introduced additional layers to the management of development partnerships.

Managing Contractors – private sector providers of development program management services – delivered 25 per cent of Australia's ODA based on most recent figures, an increase from 16 per cent over the preceding decade.¹⁵⁹ 90 per cent of these companies are registered in Australia (although many are ultimately foreign owned), and while DFAT has begun reporting on the breakdown of local staff and procurement, these metrics fail to address the power structures at play.¹⁶⁰ This reliance on the private sector has been solidified by a steady drain of in-house development expertise over the past decade. While recent budgets have made some effort to reduce the reliance of the Australian public service on external *consultants*,¹⁶¹ equivalent effort has

¹⁵⁸ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. pp 23

¹⁵⁹ Stambolie and Hill, "2025 Australian Aid Procurement Update."

¹⁶⁰ Stambolie and Hill, "2025 Australian Aid Procurement Update."

¹⁶¹ Ridge et al., *Gender Lens on the Budget 2024: Foreign Policy*.

not been made to address the increased outsourcing of DFAT’s program management to managing contractors.

While there is some role for managing contractors in the aid program, it is important to minimise layers between bureaucrats and civil society in order to maximise learning and enable information and intelligence sharing. IWDA has seen from its own experience the value of being both deeply connected to global civil society networks, and being a knowledgeable technical actor with relationships to partner governments and UN technical agencies, which brings value to, and forms the basis of, relationships with competent, non-political, public minded actors. As established in earlier sections of this submission, these meso-level networks and relationships between civil society and technical-level bureaucrats are a vital source of intelligence and cooperation for Australia, and reducing the reliance on outsourcing program management would increase DFAT’s access to these relationships.

Additionally, DFAT’s current approach to risk in terms of funding local actors requires rebalancing, if Australia is to fulfil the objectives of advancing gendered security. DFAT’s approach to localisation is outlined in the *DFAT guidance note on locally led development* which includes welcome commitment to partnerships based on shared values, mutual respect and trust, and acknowledges the importance of civil society organisations in “delivering services, reaching and advocating for vulnerable groups, demanding stronger governance and accountability, working on difficult or sensitive policy issues, and addressing multidisciplinary policy problems in partnership with government, the private sector and development partners,” especially in contexts of shrinking civil space.¹⁶² However, the guidance note fails to meaningfully engage with the need to reconceptualise risk in ways that would better enable locally-led development, stating:

“DFAT’s Risk Appetite Statement for the Australian International Development Program recognises that local partners are best placed to identify local challenges and propose feasible solutions to drive change in their communities. It acknowledges that shifting more ownership, decision making authority and implementation responsibilities to local partners may expose us to different implementation risks than experienced with other partners.”¹⁶³

The only approach proposed to achieving this outcome is to work with local partners to “strengthen their capacity to implement and meet policy requirements,” with no consideration given to the appropriateness or necessity of these requirements in all contexts. While minimum standards are important to ensure Australian Government-funded work does no harm and confidence in the integrity of development funding can be maintained, there is significantly more scope to tailor risk and compliance requirements and rebalance them away from an overwhelming focus on institutional- and fiduciary-focused risk. Doing so would enable Australia’s International Development to better address for the risks of not funding women’s rights and gender equality actors, as outlined in earlier sections of this submission, and enable it to fully benefit from the intelligence and insights provided by WROs. Use of values-aligned intermediaries would also grant greater independence to local actors, and guard against implications of Australian government interference in the sovereign domain of partner governments, or the accusation of Western values being imposed from the outside.

This argument is echoed in the OECD DAC Peer Review, which points to a “lack of adaptability in DFAT’s risk settings to accommodate a more diverse range of partners”, and the need to focus more on the DFAT-side by adjusting risk appetite and “tackline institutional disincentives to risk-taking”, (pp 10) rather than focusing primarily on the local partner-side of compliance, in order to reduce barriers to partnership with local organisations.¹⁶⁴ The DAC also recommends streamlining compliance processes for local partners through passporting approaches, similar to that afforded to Australian NGOs through ANCP Accreditation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² DFAT, *DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development*.

¹⁶³ DFAT, *DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development*.

¹⁶⁴ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. Pp 48-49

¹⁶⁵ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. pp 49

DFAT should also consider a nuanced approach to the use of intermediaries. DFAT should avoid assuming that local organisations will lack the systems and processes to receive funding directly while at the same time avoid imposing requirements for local organisations to receive funding directly regardless of their preference. Instead DFAT should engage with local partners on their preference - to receive funding directly, or through values-aligned intermediaries that can provide support on meeting compliance requirements, thereby freeing up their own staff to work on core business of advancing women's rights. This is the difference between localisation, which continues to operate the same system with different players, and decolonisation, which focuses on changing the system itself.¹⁶⁶

Similarly, DFAT's approach to measuring localisation should include a greater focus on local agency and shifting power, rather than using local participation and procurement as a proxy for 'localisation'.¹⁶⁷

Recommendations:

Recommendation 34: Rebalance Australia's approach to risk and compliance including by improving staff capability to apply risk policies in a proportionate and flexible way,¹⁶⁸ and by explicitly recognising that under-investment in local WROs and feminist movements, who are the most effective partners on gender equality, is a critical risk in itself.

Recommendation 35: Invest in the capacity of DFAT to actively manage tailored partnership arrangements and recognize the role of values-aligned intermediaries in supporting local organisations to receive funding where that is their preference.

Recommendation 36: Operationalise the Civil Society Partnerships Fund, which should be managed directly by DFAT, and adopt tailored partnership arrangements including values-aligned intermediaries to balance the need for an arms-length model with the strategic benefit of information sharing.

Prioritising gender equality, economic and national security through diplomacy

Diplomacy is a critical tool to advance gender equality and should be pursued as part of a holistic approach to using all tools of statecraft, for example, using bilateral relationships to better understand the priorities of individual counterparts in partner governments when it comes to gender equality in their context, elevating the priorities of local women's rights organisations and movements, and influencing regional and multilateral agreements to advance gender equality and human rights.

The OECD DAC Peer Review 2025 found many strengths in Australia's work in this regard, including that "Australia tactically leverages its influence, funding and partnerships to steer global attention towards GEDSI," including advocacy through the multilateral system, the appointment and work of the Ambassador for Gender Equality, and support for "inclusive trade."¹⁶⁹ However it notes that the delayed release of Australia's LGBTQIA+ strategy is a "missed opportunity";¹⁷⁰ prioritising the finalisation, release and implementation of this strategy will be critical to ensure a joined-up approach to advancing gender equality, women's and LGBTQIA+ people's rights as core priorities of Australia's national and economic security.

While care must be taken to avoid the perception or reality of a neo-colonial approach, this is not unique to the issue of gender equality. Australia has long championed the abolition of the death penalty, despite its popular approval in many contexts and the resistance of partner governments to external criticism of its use.

¹⁶⁶ Guttenbeil-Likiliki, *Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Va and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together* (IWDA, 2020).

¹⁶⁷ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. pp 45

¹⁶⁸ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. pp 11

¹⁶⁹ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. pp 56

¹⁷⁰ OECD DAC, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*. Pp 57

DFAT should learn and apply lessons from this experience to its work to advance gender equality, and treat it with the same level of political will that it has applied to anti-death penalty advocacy; after all, gender equality is also a matter of life and death for many women and people of marginalised genders.

It is also critical for Australia to adopt an understanding of gender equality that goes beyond equality for individual women, extending the analysis of gender-power relations at the individual level to the systemic, by grappling with the power structures that marginalise people on the basis of gender and other identity factors, patriarchy, colonialism, and exploitative capitalism.¹⁷¹ For example, a feminist approach to transforming systems of power for disability inclusion would focus on shifting attitudes and practices across cultural, legal and structural dimensions to create the pre-conditions for inclusion. A systemic power approach would also connect this strategy to Australia's First Nations Foreign Policy, for example, via the link between the ongoing impacts of colonialism on women and gender diverse people in Australia with the impact of colonialism on development outcomes for countries in our region.¹⁷²

Recommendations

Recommendation 38: Release the LGBTQIA+ rights strategy and prioritise its implementation in tandem with the IGES.

Recommendation 39: Take a systemic power analysis approach to Australia's efforts to advance gender equality.

Recommendation 40: Targeted sanctions for CSRV and other violations of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Cooperation across likeminded governments and civil society to advance gender equality

A critical approach that should continue to be prioritised by Australia is its partnerships with likeminded governments to advance gender equality and women's rights. Australia's partnership with Germany, Canada and the Netherlands to take action against the Taliban in the International Court of Justice is a critical example. As the first time that gender discrimination – or gender apartheid¹⁷³ – has formed the basis of an ICJ case, it holds the potential to set a precedent for future actions.¹⁷⁴ Australia should also strengthen the use of targeted sanctions against individuals and entities found to have violated women's and LGBTQIA+ rights, for example, pursuing sanctions on the basis of conflict related sexual violence and other violations of gender-based rights (as the UK has done).¹⁷⁵

Australia's active participation in negotiation blocs with likemindeds (eg: the Mountains group in CSW), as well as groupings in multilateral fora to signify support for gender equality, women's and LGBTQIA+ rights (eg: Nexus initiative on SRHR, Friends of Gender (UNFCCC), FFP+ group, Equal Rights Coalition) present another critical avenue for such cooperation and should continue to be prioritised and resourced by Australia. Conducting regular briefings with feminist civil society both in Australia and the region would strengthen the effectiveness of Australia's participation in these groups, allowing the two-way sharing of intelligence and information, as well as coordinating efforts to hold the line against backlash. Building on the recommendation in section 2, this should include funding for civil society organisations to conduct monitoring of anti-rights actors, and conduct intelligence briefings with DFAT and security agencies on their findings, as well as

¹⁷¹ IWDA, *Feminist Foreign Policy: An Overview (November 2022 Update)* (Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition, 2022).

¹⁷² Blackwell and Ballangarry, "Indigenous Foreign Policy: A New Way Forward?"

¹⁷³ Akbari and True, "Gender-Apartheid in Afghanistan: Foreign Policy Responses."

¹⁷⁴ Dziedzic, "Australia Set to Take Taliban to International Court of Justice for Gender Discrimination, Joining Canada, Germany and Netherlands."

¹⁷⁵ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Government of UK and Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon KCMG, *Press Release: UK Sanctions Perpetrators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*.

coordinating around tactics to counter these movements. It should also include funding and other technical support for feminist civil society actors in Australia and the region to attend and actively participate in – and shape the outcomes of – multilateral meetings, noting the significant geographic, financial and technical barriers to engagement.

This engagement with civil society in the region is critical to emphasise. The Australian Government’s primary relationships with partner countries and regional mechanisms naturally occur at the government-to-government level. However, engagement with civil society – including women’s rights and feminist organisations, LGBTIQ+ organisations and Organisations of People with Disability (OPDs) – is critical to ensure a diversity of views is informing Australia’s approach advancing gender equality. This is particularly important in contexts where women’s representation in government is low, to ensure that government-to-government dialogue is not missing critical perspectives.

As discussed in earlier sections of this submission, it is also important that Australia engages critically with the colonial legacies of the global rules-based order and the multilateral system and seeks opportunities to advance reform and democratisation. This includes using Australia’s power in the multilateral system to progress reform agendas that equalise power, such as the Foreign Minister’s commitment to pursuing UNSC reform with a permanent seat for Africa, which is a strong example of this approach which should be replicated across forums. At the bilateral level, this means ensuring that diplomacy and trade negotiations are premised on equal and respectful relationships, accounting for the historical and current power dynamics between Majority and Minority World actors.¹⁷⁶

Recommendations

Recommendation 41: Continue to cooperate with likemindeds in UN negotiations and other multilateral fora to advance gender equality, women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Recommendation 42: Hold briefings with feminist civil society before and after key meetings of blocs and friend groups to inform Australia’s engagement, and report back on challenges and achievements.

Recommendation 43: Fund civil society organisations to conduct monitoring of anti-rights actors and provide regular intelligence briefings with DFAT and security agencies on their findings, as well as coordinating around tactics to counter these movements.

Recommendation 44: Provide funding and other support for feminist civil society in Australia and the region to participate in, and influence, UN and other multilateral fora.

Recommendation 45: Ensure government-to-government relationships are complemented by the voices of diverse civil society, including women’s rights and feminist organisations, LGBTIQ+ organisations and Organisations of People with Disability (OPDs).

Recommendation 46: Pursue reform priorities in multilateral and regional forums to democratise the rules-based order.

Resourcing and technical expertise for gender equality across all levels of foreign policy

Adequately resourcing the advancement of gender equality in this way will require greater investment in dedicated technical expertise in Canberra and at Posts as well as an increase in capability across all roles including development, diplomacy, trade and security. Where gender technical expertise is grouped with disability and other forms of social inclusion via GEDSI (gender equality, disability and social inclusion)

¹⁷⁶ Guttenbeil-Likiliki, *Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Va and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together* (IWDA, 2020).

advisory roles, they must be sufficiently resourced to ensure adequate attention to all areas.¹⁷⁷ They must also go beyond a focus on mere inclusion to understanding and ultimately seeking to transform the underlying structures of power, which perpetuate inequality and marginalisation.¹⁷⁸ This capability should be embedded within DFAT to strengthen internal capability and ensure systemic application across all functions of statecraft.

Additionally, incentives must be aligned to ensure high level prioritisation of gender equality translates into meaningful action. This should include accountability hooks at all levels, from regular Ministerial affirmation of the importance of gender equality and feminist approaches, to establishing ownership and accountability for gender commitments at all APS levels and bands.¹⁷⁹

Recommendations

Recommendation 47: Undertake economic analysis of trade agreements which is informed by colonial histories to avoid further perpetuating economic disparity between countries.

Recommendation 48: Expand funding for technical expertise in gender, disability and social inclusion across all areas of DFAT and Posts to support power-based intersectional analysis and implementation.

Recommendation 49: Require in-house training on the history of gender and diplomacy and gender-responsive statecraft and practices.

Recommendation 50: Apply existing or complementary gender equality targets to all areas of DFAT's work including diplomacy, trade and security policy, and include gender equality actions in the annual performance agreements of all Band 1-3 (including Heads of Mission) staff at Post.

¹⁷⁷ ACFID, *Strengthening Australia's Efforts to Address Gender Inequality*.

¹⁷⁸ ACFID, *Strengthening Australia's Efforts to Address Gender Inequality*.

¹⁷⁹ Flint et al., *A Review of Reviews: Insights from Four Decades of Reviews into Australia's Development Program*.

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