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NGO WOMENS RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY CAUCUS – AUSTRALIA
A WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY NETWORK – WORKING TOGETHER FOR GENDER EQUALITY

NGO Beijing +30 Review 2024

Working Together for Equality Australia

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We acknowledge the depth of expertise, analysis, knowledge and input from those who drafted, reviewed and have given input to the Australian Report for Beijing +30.

We especially recognise and acknowledge that the work for this report was undertaken voluntarily often outside of work hours.

Disclaimer:

This document reflects views and perceptions of the Australian NGO Beijing + 30 Caucus and endorsing members. To clarify points and issues, a number of individuals with specific technical expertise were invited to review the document.

No funding was received by government agencies for this review. Those conducting the study and those participating in the drafting, compilation or information and review process undertook all resourcing.

Terminology:

Throughout this report '**Indigenous**', '**First Nations**' and '**Aboriginal**' are used interchangeably to refer to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander peoples. When referencing policy and research reports, we use the terminology used within the report. When referring to specific Aboriginal groups we use local, language names. In using these terms we acknowledge the diversity of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

Women and girls all in their diversities, includes transgender, gender diverse and non-binary communities.

Women and girls from marginalised communities, includes women in all their diversities from marginalised and historically criminalised communities such as indigenous, migrant and refugee women, religious minorities, LGBTIQ+ communities, women with disabilities, adolescent leaders, women from rural and remote areas, women living in poverty, and other communities and vulnerable groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of violence, oppression, and vulnerability.

Caveats:

The time frame included in this review - 2020 to 2025

Gender related policies and outcomes for the period 2020 to 2025 are divided into two distinct periods, marked by the change of Australian Government in May 2022 from a long-term conservative Coalition Government to a new Labor Government that committed to positioning gender equality as central in its change agenda.

As well as ongoing initiatives to stem the 'epidemic' of violence against women, in families and sexual harassment (including at work), a suite of coordinated transformative policies to address issues of fairness (including gender equality) are in progress at the time of this review but will require longer than the three-year electoral cycle (2022-2025) to come to meaningful fruition. This positions the transformative policies as vulnerable, dependent on the outcome of the next federal election due before May 2025. Further, these change policies are being introduced at a time marked by economic challenges including a rapidly transforming labour market, inflation, increasing cost of living pressures, wealth inequality, a housing crisis, an aging population, health, aged care and disability sectors under stress and increasing numbers of people requiring assistance.

On not speaking for others

Despite acknowledgement of the diversity of women, this review does not have the capacity to take full account for the position of the many diverse groups of category 'women and girls'. This significant limitation is acknowledged with regret and the following comment:

First Australians

When considering 'shared prosperity' it is important that comment be made here regarding the highly problematic positioning of Australia's First Nations' peoples as illustrated not only by the negative outcome of the 2023 'Voice' Referendum but the multitude of publications, policies, implementation plans & initiatives that continue not to redress the overall ongoing disparity in a meaningful way. As evidence, we refer to the Productivity Commission's 2024 *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap* final report that confirms 'that fundamental changes are required to deliver on the Agreement' and supports its four recommendations to government, viz: 'share power; recognise and support Indigenous Data Sovereignty; fundamentally rethink mainstream government systems and culture; and implement stronger accountability'.

To acknowledge the many gender-based issues that impact the every day lives, status (and prosperity) of First Australians, we draw attention to and offer unconditional support to the voices of First Nations women and girls in the following reports, their findings and the recommendations:-

- Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) *Women in Native Title: Native Title Report 2024*¹
- Klein E., Hunt J., et al. (2023), *Caring about Care*², and in particular
- *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future 2020 report*³ and subsequently,
 - the 2022 *Wiyi Yani U Thangani Implementation Framework*⁴ and
 - The 2023 inaugural *Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit Communique*⁵

¹ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2024). *Women in Native Title: Native Title Report 2024*. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/women-native-title>

² Klein E., Hunt J., Staines Z., Dinku Y., Brown C., Glynn-Braun K., Yap M. (2023). *Caring about Care* (Commissioned Report No. 7/2023), Centre for Indigenous Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra. <https://doi.org/10.25911/7S8N-8C87>

³ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2020). *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future, Report (2020)* <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/wiyi-yani-u-thangani>

⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2022/2021). *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Implementation Framework* <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/wiyi-yani-u-thangani-5>

⁵ *Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit Communique May 2023*. https://wiyiyaniuthangani.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/WYUT%20National%20Summit%20Communique%202023_0.pdf

Women with Disability

The high levels of disadvantage and the complexity of redressing that for and with people with disability are well recognised, as is the glacial pace of positive change that must involve co-design and the active participation of people with disability in decision making at all levels. The *National Disability Strategy 2021-2031* encapsulated a 'vision for a more inclusive and accessible Australian society where all people with disability can fulfil their potential as equal members of the community'.⁶ Within the broader categorisation of disability, gender equality and inclusion for women with disability remain problematic, with the many interrelated factors that impact their 'shared prosperity and decent work' requiring specific focus and more importantly, meaningful action. Key concerns here include not only the complexity of so many interrelated factors, but also the lack of reliable disaggregated data and evidence-based research and reports relating to 'women with disability' - again not a single grouping but women who come from a range of backgrounds, lifestyles, beliefs and communities. We cannot speak for women with disability in this section in any way that would do justice to their situation/s and/or demands, but draw attention to and support the Call to Action issued by Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) in their response to the 2024-25 Federal Budget that:

'expresses concern over the missed opportunity for targeted action to improve the lives of women with disabilities. While some positive steps have been taken, transformative change is still needed to address the systemic inequalities faced by women, girls, feminine-identifying, and non-binary people with disabilities'.⁷

WWDA have been a part of this review and we stand with them in sisterhood, and defer to their right of WWDA to strengthen and speak for their Australian constituents in BPfA +30 activities and other human rights processes.

⁶ For detail of the Strategy and supporting documents see: <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads/strategy>

⁷ Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (2024). *Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Responds to the 2024-25 Federal Budget*. Fri 17th May 2024. <https://wwda.org.au/2024/05/17/women-with-disabilities-australia-wwda-responds-to-2024-25-federal-budget/>

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Executive Summary

This monitoring and evaluation report is on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) and Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome (B+5) reports for Australia from 2020 to 2025. It covers 5 key areas of gender equality:

1. Shared Prosperity and decent work, Economic wellbeing, education and training and gender equality
2. Freedom from Violence
3. Participation, Accountability and Gender Responsive Institutions
4. Gender, Climate Change, Disasters and Environmental Management

Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

For each of these key areas future forward strategies to accelerate progress in each area has been suggested.

Each substantive section of this report is written as a separate, stand alone Issue Papers giving context to the issues and recommendations under discussion. In the compilation of the forward strategies all papers have been taken into consideration to formulate the key recommendations from this report.

This report recognises that the experiences of women in Australia's socio-cultural and economic spheres are diverse and influenced by intersecting factors such as age, race, ethnicity, gender identification, disability status, location and socioeconomic background. Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ women face intersecting challenges in achieving economic security, career advancement, safety and security and gender equality.

Women's experience of discrimination is far from uniform, rather they are shaped by overlapping identities such as age, race, class, disability and sexual orientation that intersect and exacerbate marginalisation.

This report highlights there is a critical need for a robust, intersectional approach that ensures a unified national vision for gender equality for Australian women in all our diversity, regardless of location or intersecting identities. This includes reliable disaggregated data collected and published as a matter of course across all areas to evidence and support an intersectional approach to gender equality is a baseline requirement for all policies and initiatives.

The use of data to track progress and hold governments accountable is a key component of Australia's approach to gender equality. Data highlights areas needing improvement, but a critical lens reveals that the collected data and metrics may not always capture the full spectrum of experiences for women facing multiple forms of discrimination. There is a pressing need for more nuanced, intersectional data collection and analysis to ensure that policies are truly effective in reducing gender disparities for all women.

Structural barriers to women's economic access, rights and independence persist across Australia, including barriers to shared prosperity, decent work, economic well being, education and training, work and gender equality. Women in all their diversities are more likely to face workplace discrimination, low wages, poor working conditions, fewer prospects for promotion and gender based violence. Unpaid work is an everyday feature of everyone's life, and it contributes to supporting the well-being of individuals, households and communities. Unfortunately, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work continues to impact women's economic participation and health and often remains invisible. Availability and affordability of childcare continue to be significant barriers to women's workforce participation. Poverty remains a critical issue. Women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment and low wages compared to their non-disabled counterparts.

Investment in education and skills development is essential to prepare women for the jobs of the future and is crucial as an investment for long term economic growth. Despite major focus by the Australian government on these areas and on STEM and VET courses, entrenched cultural barriers persist.

The significant rise in all forms of violence against women in all their diversity and significant developments in on-line and cyber violence which impacts women and girls across their whole life cycle. Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) against women and girls in all their diversity, gender-diverse people, remains rooted in political and economic structures and power imbalances. Reinforced by patriarchy, misogyny, ableism, heteronormativity, stereotypes and cultural notes that continue to justify violence in its multiple forms. Support services, such as shelters and legal assistance are often inaccessible and there is a lack of targeted programs that address the specific needs of women and girls from marginalised and vulnerable communities.

The nature and brutality of violence is ever changing, with new forms of violence erupting almost on a daily basis. On-line harassment and abuse is both targeted and patterns of perpetration and victimisation of online violence and harassment against women are strongly gendered. Violence issues are hidden, cloaked in social and cultural practices, where sometimes only the service sector can see the impacts of violence. Data on other forms of violence, such as child marriage, trafficking and modern slavery is less comprehensive and often based in police reports.

While progress in political leadership is notable, with women achieving record representation in Australian Parliament and gender-balanced cabinets. Key barriers remain in corporate leadership where Women remain underrepresented in key decision-making roles, holding only 35.1% of management positions and 18% of board chair roles in ASX300 companies. Setting gender equality targets and strengthening the regulatory framework will improve gender balance in leadership.

Despite the clear disproportionate impact of climate change on women in all their diversity, the significant leadership roles allocated to women and girls for developing solutions for climate action remain under-valued and under-recognized.

Climate change represents a universal crisis and Australia's climate policies largely fail to address the specific needs of women and girls, especially women with disabilities. Mobility, communications and restricted access to emergency services impact severely on vulnerable communities. Health impacts from environmental harm have a gendered impact and this is exacerbated by increasing food insecurity, especially in, but not limited to, rural and regional areas of Australia.

The work on Women Peace and Security is a long and ongoing discussion with progress in many areas. The outbreaks of conflict, militarisation and armed violence are increasing in this region, and the world is confronted by increasing levels of armed conflict, militarisation, and growing numbers of civilians forced to flee increasing violence; with women and marginalised groups bearing the brunt of conflicts and crises, including conflict-related sexual violence, poverty, forced displacement and hunger. Now is the time for Australia to take more critical action specifically for advocating for the WPS agenda, gender justice, international human rights and humanitarian law - globally, regionally and locally.

Data and accountability

The use of data to track progress and hold governments accountable is a key component of Australia's approach to gender equality. Data highlights areas needing improvement, but a critical lens reveals that the collected data and metrics may not always capture the full spectrum of experiences for women facing multiple forms of discrimination. **There is a pressing need for more nuanced, intersectional data collection and analysis to ensure that policies are truly effective in reducing gender disparities for all women.**

The way forward for gender equality requires sustained commitment, investment in equitable policy approaches, and collaboration across government, business, and civil society.

Summary of Recommendations

Data and Accountability

1. There is a pressing need for more nuanced, intersectional data collection and analysis to ensure that policies are truly effective in reducing gender disparities for all women.

Shared Prosperity & Decent work, Economic wellbeing, education and training and gender equality

1. Strengthen Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) implementation
2. Increase investment in the care economy is crucial to enable women's full economic participation and recognise the value of care work.
3. Continued efforts to transform workplace cultures, combat sexual harassment, and promote inclusive environments that support women's career advancement.
4. Address the gender gap in superannuation and ensuring economic security for women in retirement must be a key focus of future policies.
5. Strengthening mechanisms for monitoring progress and holding institutions accountable for gender equality commitments is essential
6. Develop strategies to engage men as allies in promoting gender equality in the workplace and in sharing domestic and care responsibilities is crucial. For Australia to achieve gender equality, the work must be seen as more than 'women's work'.

Freedom from Violence

1. Ensure a holistic sustained approach that tackles the structural drivers of GBV to achieve transformational change.
2. Establish a National Partnership Agreement between state and federal governments that clarifies responsibilities, provides an immediate increase in funding that is ongoing and sustainable for all FDSV services, especially rural, regional, and remote areas where demand is high. Special consideration should be given to specialist sexual assault services to

meet growing demand and diversify programs with schools and local organisations. Consult appropriately with civil society, especially communities experiencing multiple forms of oppression.

3. Establish a funded unified framework for early intervention
4. Invest in specialist FDSV services led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other community-led initiatives.
5. Develop and implement multi-agency risk assessment frameworks and information-sharing laws and regulations at the national level to provide a comprehensive, survivor-centred approach to addressing GBV.
6. Allocate funds to peak bodies at both national and state/territory levels to ensure effective advocacy and communication between frontline services and governments.
7. Elevate the *Domestic, Family, Sexual Violence Commission* to an independent statutory authority with greater powers to compel action.
8. Implement a National Workforce Strategy, including a robust First Nations workforce strategy and a bilingual workforce strategy, to ensure a well-supported and sustainable specialist FDSV sector nationwide.
9. Increase investment in social and affordable housing, prioritising these resources for individuals escaping violence, including women on temporary visas. Explore and expand programs such as *Safe at Home* programs, which have shown varying degrees of success.
10. Establish a dedicated and sustainable funding stream for community and women's legal services as part of the National Legal Assistance Partnership to support women affected by GBV, including those on temporary visas
11. For women on temporary visas, improve the migration system and eligibility so that all women who experienced FDSV and their dependents can access protections, services, justice and access to social security
12. Increase funding for community-led initiatives that target all forms of GBV. Responses and education need to be targeted to communities in recognition that multicultural work requires

specialised skills. Fundamental to this work is comprehensive national data using consistent variables to collect ethnicity data across major service systems.

13. Increase knowledge and practice around TFA. Focus on using technology for prevention, intervention, and response, while ensuring that principles of co-design and safety-by-design are embedded.

Participation, Accountability and Gender Responsive Institutions

1. Targeted initiatives to increase women's representation in leadership positions across all sectors should be prioritised.
2. We recommend the Federal Government encourage employers to set gender equality KPIs.
3. Political institutions must actively promote diversity and respectful conduct to ensure women in all their diversity are represented in government and national decision-making.
4. Enhance support for women in male-dominated and emerging industries
5. The 2020 Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report provides a comprehensive framework to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We commend the Australian Government's commitment to fund key recommendations, including a national summit for First Nations women and girls.
6. Gender-responsive institutions should ensure equitable access to services, resources, and opportunities to address the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities.

Gender, Climate Change, Disasters and Environmental Management

1. Build a consultative and robust Climate and Disaster National Adaptation Plan which reflects the lived experiences of those who experience food insecurity and disaster.
2. Develop and adopt a plan to implement relevant aspects of the Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 ⁸(Sendai GAP), 2024 within Australia
3. Encourage the effective protection and use of the knowledge and practices of indigenous women, ensuring these are respected and the intellectual property safeguarded.
4. Promote the participation of local communities, particularly women, in identifying their needs for physical, emotional and spiritual strength in the face of changing climate.
5. For Government to revise its approach to the NAP in three high-level aspects that relate to gender equality and women's engagement in climate change adaptation. These are:
 - a) Widen the scope of risks considered to go beyond physical hazards arising from climate change to include the socio-economic risks and disruptive impacts of climatic and environmental disasters. This understanding is needed to ensure that climate change adaptation measures do not exacerbate existing gender inequality and that they meet the needs of all people living in vulnerable situations;
 - b) Use the NAP as an opportunity to include clear objectives and mechanisms to further gender equality through women's leadership and the use of gender analysis, and to prevent falling back from achievements already made. Climate change adaptation needs to align with Australia's international obligations under CEDAW and other human rights conventions, as set out in CEDAW General recommendation No. 37 (2018), which requires policy coherence across sectors and policy pillars; and

⁸ <https://www.undrr.org/publication/gender-action-plan-support-implementation-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015>

- c) Move to a more unified national planning process on climate change adaptation across sectors, at different levels of government, across party lines and with businesses, industries and community leaders that ensures women are in leadership positions at all levels. This is proposed as the most effective way to achieve policy coherence on gender equality and climate change adaptation.

Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

1. Commit to strengthening WPS NAP impact and accountability. Publicly release the 2023 Progress Report as soon as possible as it is beginning to have an impact on the integrity of NAP approach, and the ability to learn, and plan for more effective future implementation. We need to ask the hard question: Is this plan making progress to meet its commitments to the 10 UNSC resolutions?
2. Review the broad conceptual approach and develop a clearer model which addresses the need to provide a stronger whole of government understanding of effectiveness; including by strengthening cross agency coordination and implementation; investing in learning from agencies and CSOs; prioritising the socialisation of the WPS agenda and Australia's NAP with the Australian public; strengthening the domestic-regional-global connections; and engaging with diverse civil society stakeholders to build trusted partnerships.
3. Review the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF) and assess whether the framework and indicators are fit for purpose; including reviewing the accessibility to data and links to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 - Gender equality and 16 - Peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Move the money' and prioritise WPS and gender equality, genuine participation by women, girls and marginalised groups. Address the contradictions in policy and 'move more money' to address climate change, social cohesion, diplomacy, and peacebuilding.

Gender Equality in Australia

In 1995 the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) affirmed the principles that would govern future actions and strategies for women. It firmly established an agenda for 'removing all obstacles to gender equality', to take 'all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women', 'to empower women' and 'promote and protect all human rights of women and girls'. Through this agenda States 'committed to implement the BPfA ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programmes.' States and the UN agreed to promote gender mainstreaming as a strategy to ensure that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programs at the national, regional, and international levels. The BPfA was built on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and is, along with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a major blueprint for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Thirty years on from the BPfA the world has changed and while there have been major steps of progress for women across the 12 Critical Areas of the BPfA, there remain major push backs and new forms of discrimination, inequality and violence.

The emergence of women's rights, in the rubric of human rights, development and self-determination has developed as a collective measure to the gendered character of the early Human Rights Conventions and to address the multiple harms experienced by women. The Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 and ratified in 1981, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) (1995), and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security (2000) have provided a much-needed umbrella of rights for women and girls across the world to use to advance their full access to Human Rights. The very need for these Conventions, Declarations and UN Resolutions and agreements reflects the gendered character of the International Bill of Rights and earlier human rights conventions, treaties, and security council resolutions where abuses against human rights were measured and defined on the harms that men experienced.

Gender frameworks in Australia

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) has served as a critical framework for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment globally. In Australia, governments, civil society organisations, and international bodies have made efforts to implement the BPfA's goals.

As a signatory to CEDAW as well as the complementary international frameworks (Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Australia's gender equality initiatives at federal and state levels should include the international benchmark responsibilities.

Legal and policy frameworks

Australia's federated system of government adds complexity to the advancement of gender equality, with both Commonwealth and state/territory governments playing crucial if differentiated roles depending on jurisdictional responsibilities. However, anti discrimination laws also operate at state and territory levels⁹, with federal laws over-ruling if there is a clash. This can result in a 'patchwork' of policies and outcomes across the nation, reflecting variations in laws, priorities and resources, thus both facilitating and/or hindering progress towards equality.

Australia has established a comprehensive federal legal and policy framework to promote gender equality in the workplace. Key legislation relevant to this section includes:

1. *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*: Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, and family responsibilities in various areas of public life, including employment.
2. *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*: Requires non-public sector employers with 100 or more employees to report annually on gender equality indicators.
3. *Fair Work Act 2009*: Provides for flexible working arrangements and protects employees from discrimination.

These laws form the backbone of Australia's commitment to gender equality in the workplace, providing legal recourse for discrimination and setting standards for equitable treatment¹⁰.

⁹ See: Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) *A quick guide to Australian discrimination laws*. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/GPGB_quick_guide_to_discrimination_laws_0.pdf

¹⁰ Other relevant federal legislation for this section includes the Racial Discrimination Act 1975; Age Discrimination Act 2004; Disability Discrimination Act 1992 & the Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

Shared Prosperity and Decent Work

Introduction

As a signatory to CEDAW as well as the complementary international frameworks (Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) (e.g. Area F: Women and the Economy) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (e.g. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) Australia's gender equality initiatives at federal and state levels must include the international benchmark responsibilities.

Framing 'Shared prosperity and decent work'

The descriptor for this section to the Australian CSO BPfA + 30 Review is that of 'Shared prosperity and decent work', implying a focus on the economy and economics.

In this context, Australia's economic landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for gender equality:

Labour Force Participation: Women's labour force participation has increased significantly over the past decades, reaching 62.4% in 2023, lagging behind men's participation rate of 71.2%.

Gender Pay Gap: As of 2023, the national gender pay gap stands at 13.3%, a slight improvement from previous years.

Occupational Segregation: Women remain overrepresented in industries (healthcare, education, and retail), which often offer lower pay and fewer advancement opportunities.

Leadership Representation: As of 2023, women hold 35.1% of board positions in ASX 200 companies.

Superannuation Gap: Women retire with significantly less superannuation than men, with the gap at retirement age around 42% in 2023.

This review shifts the traditional economic frame in line with the pressing need to accommodate changing approaches in economics that also offer increased potential for gender equality initiatives.

In 2015 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) developed a *Framework for Australian Social Statistics* with a focus on inter-related dimensions that demonstrated some of the problematics of measuring 'prosperity'¹¹. Economic wellbeing was just one aspect of that framework. In 2023 The Australian Government established the nation's first wellbeing framework – '*Measuring what matters*'¹² to track progress for 'overall life satisfaction' under key concepts of 'inclusion, fairness and equity'. Data are collected by measuring 50 indicators under the inter-related themes of 'healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous'¹³. Annual updates are provided, with a major report due every three years¹⁴.

¹¹Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2015) Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics, June 2015. 4160.0.55.001 <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4160.0.55.001~Jun%202015~Main%20Features~Developing%20Frameworks%20for%20Australian%20Social%20Statistics~5>

¹²Australian Government (2023), Measuring what matters. Australia's first wellbeing framework. July 2023, Commonwealth of Australia https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/measuring-what-matters-statement020230721_0.pdf

¹³Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2024). Measuring what matters. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters>

¹⁴See: Chalmers, J with Leigh, A (2024). Measuring what matters to deliver better outcomes. Media release 24th June 2024. <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/media-releases/measuring-what-matters-deliver-better-outcomes>

The approach to prosperous aligns both social and economic goals – '(a) society that has a dynamic, strong economy, invests in people's skills and education, and provides broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs' that is based on three dimensions (underpinned by 15 sub categories):

- Broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs
- Access to education, skills development and learning throughout life
- Dynamic economy that shares prosperity. ¹⁵

The implementation of this new framework, especially its endeavour to collapse silos that exist in more traditional economic measures, augers well for supporting and enhancing other current commitments and policies to gender equality. It provides a basis for this review.

The Australian context

Since the Beijing +25 Report, Australia has made notable strides in several key areas related to gender equality in the economic sphere. However persistent challenges remain. These multifaceted challenges require a sustained and comprehensive bipartisan approach to institutional transformation, legislative and policy changes, shifts in social norms, attitudes and behaviours along with restructuring of economic systems to ensure equality for women in education, work and life.

Dynamic economy that shares prosperity

Legislative advancements

Significant legislative progress includes:

Strengthening of Existing Laws and Instruments:

The Australian Government has strengthened existing legislation, such as the *Workplace Gender Equality Act*, to enhance reporting requirements and drive greater accountability in the private sector. Associated instruments include the *Workplace Gender Equality (Matters in relation to Gender Equality Indicators) Instrument 2023* and *Workplace Gender Equality (Gender Equality Standards) Instrument 2023* ¹⁶.

Domestic Violence Leave: The introduction of 10 days of paid family and domestic violence leave as a *National Employment Standards*¹⁷ marks a significant step in supporting women's economic security and recognising the impact of domestic violence on work life.

Gender analysis in budgeting : One of the most significant developments is the re-implementation of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) at federal level. This approach aims to integrate gender considerations into the budget process, ensuring that budgetary decisions benefit all genders equitably.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2024). 'Prosperous' <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters/measuring-what-matters-themes-and-indicators/prosperous>

¹⁶ For detail see: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/about/our-legislation>

¹⁷ See: National employment Standards: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/national-employment-standards>

Key achievements include:

Mandatory Gender Analysis: Federal departments are now required to conduct gender analysis for New Policy Proposals (NPPs) and Cabinet Submissions. This analysis must be proportional to the potential impact, value, and scope of the policy, ensuring that gender considerations are at the forefront of decision-making processes.

Guidance and Resources: The federal Office for Women has developed comprehensive resources to support the implementation of GRB. *Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment*¹⁸ provides detailed instructions on how to perform gender analysis and assessments, enhancing the capacity of public servants to integrate gender considerations into their work.

Community of Practice: The establishment of the APS Gender Analysis Community of Practice (CoP) has created a platform for public servants to share knowledge, best practices, and challenges in applying gender analysis. This initiative has fostered a culture of continuous learning and improvement in the application of GRB principles.

Women's Budget Statement (WBS)¹⁹: The re-introduction and enhancement of the Women's Budget Statement provides greater transparency and accountability in how the federal budget impacts women. This WBS outlines specific investments and policy measures aimed at advancing gender equality across various sectors.

Women's economic equality initiatives

From 2020, the Government has invested in targeted programs to enhance women's economic security, including the 2020 *Women's Economic Security Statement (WESS)* that extended the three pillars of the original 2018 Statement: workforce participation; earning potential; and economic independence²⁰.

In 2022 the incoming Labor Government established the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) to 'provide independent, ambitious and transformational advice to drive women's economic equality in Australia' to support the and achieve gender equality, as committed to in both the 2022 and 2023 Women's Budget Statements. The Taskforce identified five economic pillars where gendered economic inequality is prevalent and needing transformation: care, work, education and skills, tax and transfers, governments, advising that 'current data shows that inequality is prevalent and persistent, and it impacts a woman's public and private experiences across her entire lifetime' (pp12-14). Its 2023 Report *A 10-Year Plan To Unleash The Full Capacity And Contribution Of Women To The Australian Economy*²¹ declared that women's essential contributions are often undervalued and unpaid, perpetuating economic inequality', while also 'costing' the Australian economy an estimated value of AUD\$128 billion (p.7). The Taskforce made seven primary recommendations, each with immediate and medium- to long-term actions for implementation by Government, designed to drive a stronger economy and gender equality over the coming decade (See Att. A to this Chapter)

¹⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet (2024). *Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessments, January 2024. 2024-25 Budget*. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/including-gender-aps-guide-gender-analysis-and-gender-impact-assessment>

¹⁹ See: Budget 2024-25. Women's Budget Statement. <https://budget.gov.au/content/womens-statement/index.htm>

²⁰ As the WESS documents are no longer available, for detail see: <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A92002>

²¹ Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) (2023). *A 10-year Plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy*. WEET 23-33. Commonwealth of Australia 2023, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. ISBN 978-1-925365-32-0 (online)

<https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/womens-economic-equality-taskforce-final-report.pdf>

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2020) *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*. AHRC. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020>

Transforming Education Summit (2023) *National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education: Australia* https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/ed3002/National_Statement_of_Commitment_to_Transform_Education_-_Australia.pdf

For detail and reports see: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord>

For detail see: <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform>

Broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs

Women in Australia face significant hurdles in accessing and participating in decent work. Social and policy barriers continue to hinder women's access to secure employment and financial stability. This disparity is particularly evident among older women, where increasing economic insecurity has led to rising rates of homelessness.

Unpaid care work compounds these challenges. Despite efforts to address this, women and girls continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid care responsibilities. This disproportionate burden results in substantial losses of income and superannuation over women's lifecycles. That care work is neither measured nor counted in the GDP, along with the undervaluing of skills and labour in care work and the lack of status accorded feminised occupations all exacerbate its economic cost for women.

Advances

Workplace Gender Equality Initiatives

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) plays a pivotal role in driving progress, including refining reporting requirements, providing more comprehensive data on gender equality in Australian workplaces; incentivising employers through Equality citations citing employers for implementing best practices in promoting gender equality, driving cultural change across industries; introducing mandatory pay gap reporting for large employers has increased transparency and accountability, spurring action to address wage disparities.

Paid Parental Leave Enhancements

Significant improvements have been made to the Paid Parental Leave scheme including: offering greater flexibility in how parents can split their leave, promoting shared care responsibilities; including superannuation payments on government-funded Paid Parental Leave to address a key contributor to the gender gap in retirement savings; expanding paid parental leave, providing greater support for new parents.

Addressing Workplace Harassment

In 2020 the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner reported the results of a Government supported national Inquiry undertaken as a response to growing awareness of workplace harassment issues. The Commissioner noted that the current legal and regulatory system was 'simply no longer fit for purpose' and recommended a new model that improves the coordination, consistency and clarity between the anti-discrimination, employment and work health and safety legislative schemes' in the *Respect@Work* report.²² Many of the report's 55 recommendations have been or are being implemented.

These achievements demonstrate the benefits of a multi-faceted approach, addressing structural, policy, and cultural barriers to women's full and equal participation in the workforce and economy.

Key challenges to gender equality progress in 'broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs'

Despite the progress made, Australia continues to face significant challenges in achieving gender equality in the realm of shared prosperity and decent work.

²² Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2020) *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian Workplaces*. AHRC. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020>

Persistent gender pay gap

Male-dominated industries and economic sectors like construction and mining, show larger pay gaps, highlighting the need for sector-specific interventions.

The gap is attributed to various factors, including persistent discrimination, occupational segregation, undervaluation of female-dominated industries, and career interruptions due to caring responsibilities. An intersectional analysis reveals that these factors are often compounded for women facing multiple forms of marginalisation.

Underemployment and part-time work

Women's overrepresentation in part-time and casual work contributes to economic insecurity. Women make up the majority of part-time workers in Australia, due to caring responsibilities. This is particularly pronounced for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those with disabilities.

Many women in part-time roles desire more hours but are unable to secure them, leading to financial stress and reduced career progression, disproportionately affecting single mothers and women from CALD backgrounds.

Part-time and flexible work arrangements often come with "flexibility stigma," negatively impacting promotion opportunities and wage growth, particularly damaging for women already facing discrimination based on race, age, or disability.

Occupational segregation

That Australia has a highly segregated labour force, horizontally and vertically, is a well known and enduring issue. The concentration of women in certain industries and their underrepresentation in others remains a significant challenge.

Sectors such as healthcare, education, and social services, predominantly staffed by women, often offer lower pay and fewer advancement opportunities. This undervaluation of 'women's work' has roots in systemic gender bias.

Women remain underrepresented in high-paying industries such as technology, finance, and mining, more pronounced for women of colour and those from low-income backgrounds.

Despite improvements, women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership roles across most industries. The 'glass ceiling' effect is compounded for women facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

Intersectional disadvantages

Women facing multiple forms of discrimination experience compounded challenges:

Indigenous Women: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face significantly higher rates of unemployment and lower workforce participation, reflecting the ongoing impacts of colonialism and systemic racism.

Women with Disabilities: Face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, as well as significant barriers to workplace accommodation and advancement. The intersection of gender and disability discrimination often results in unique challenges that are not adequately addressed by current policies.

Migrant and Refugee Women: Often experience difficulties in having overseas qualifications recognised and face language and cultural barriers in the workplace. These challenges are exacerbated by racism and xenophobia.

LGBTQIA+ Women: May face discrimination and barriers to career advancement, particularly in conservative industries. The intersection of gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression can create complex experiences of marginalisation in the workplace.

Unpaid care work

The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work continues to impact women's economic participation:

Time Spent: Women spend significantly more time on unpaid care and domestic work compared to men, limiting their capacity for paid work and career advancement. This burden is often heavier for women from cultures with strong traditional gender roles.

Career Interruptions: Women are more likely to take career breaks or reduce work hours to care for children or elderly relatives, impacting their long-term earning potential and superannuation. These interruptions can have more severe consequences for women already facing economic disadvantage.

Lack of Recognition: The economic value of unpaid care work remains largely unrecognised in economic measurements and policy considerations. This invisibility particularly affects women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may have fewer resources to outsource care work.

Workplace harassment and discrimination

Despite legal protections, gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment remain significant issues:

Prevalence: A high proportion of women continue to experience sexual harassment in the workplace, with certain industries showing higher rates. Women of colour, LGBTQIA+ women, and women with disabilities often face intersecting forms of harassment.

Reporting Challenges: Many incidents go unreported due to fear of career repercussions or lack of faith in reporting processes. This underreporting is often more pronounced among women in precarious employment situations or those from marginalised communities.

Impact: Workplace harassment and discrimination can lead to reduced productivity, job satisfaction, and career progression for women. The psychological and economic impacts can be particularly severe for women who are already facing other forms of social or economic marginalisation.

Superannuation gap

The gap in retirement savings between men and women remains a critical issue:

Current State: Women retire with significantly less superannuation than men, with the gap at retirement age around 42% in 2023. This gap is even wider for women who have experienced career interruptions, worked in low-paid sectors, or faced multiple forms of discrimination.

Contributing Factors: Lower lifetime earnings, career interruptions, and higher rates of part-time work all contribute to this disparity. These factors are often exacerbated for women from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with caring responsibilities.

Long-term Consequences: This gap leads to increased risk of poverty and housing insecurity for women in retirement, particularly affecting single older women and those from marginalised communities.

Access to affordable childcare

The availability and affordability of childcare continue to be significant barriers to women's workforce participation:

Cost: High childcare costs can make it economically unviable for some women to return to work, particularly in full-time capacities. This issue disproportionately affects single mothers and low-income families.

Availability: Many areas face shortages of childcare places, particularly for children under two years old. There is the prevalence of 'child care deserts' particularly in rural Australia that drive intersecting barriers to women re-entering the workforce. These shortages often have a more severe impact on women in remote or disadvantaged communities.

Quality: Ensuring high-quality early childhood education while maintaining affordability remains a challenge. Access to high-quality care is often inequitable, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds having less access to well-resourced centres.

Digital gender divide

As the economy becomes increasingly digitalised, new challenges emerge:

Skills Gap: Women are underrepresented in digital and technology-related fields, which are becoming increasingly crucial across all sectors. This gap is often wider for older women, women in rural areas, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Access: Women in rural and remote areas, as well as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may face barriers in accessing digital technologies and skills development opportunities. This digital divide can exacerbate existing economic inequalities.

Women in STEM

Despite initiatives to promote gender equality in STEM, several challenges persist:

Gender Gap: Women represent only 22% of the professional, scientific, and technical services workforce, and they face a substantial gender pay gap of 22% in STEM professions. Women made up 28% of the total employed population but only 22% of STEM university-qualified managers, highlighting the underrepresentation and pay disparities women face in STEM fields.

Intersectional Disparities: Women, especially from marginalised communities, remain underrepresented in STEM (27% in 2021) and face a 23.5% gender pay gap. This disparity worsens for women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with disabilities.

Systemic Barriers: High attrition rates among women transitioning from education to workforce stem from workplace discrimination, inflexible working conditions, and inadequate support for work-life balance. These barriers are often compounded for women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Cultural and Educational Obstacles: Persistent stereotypes discourage women and girls, particularly from underrepresented groups, from pursuing STEM careers. Educational environments often lack inclusivity for diverse learning needs, perpetuating cycles of underrepresentation.

Need for Comprehensive Reform: Achieving gender equity in STEM requires systemic changes addressing intersecting forms of oppression, with policies ensuring accountability and responsiveness to diverse challenges. This includes addressing the cultural and structural barriers that disproportionately affect women from marginalised backgrounds.

Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has exacerbated many existing inequalities:

Job Losses: Women were disproportionately affected by job losses in sectors hit hard by lockdowns, such as retail and hospitality. This impact was particularly severe for women in casual or precarious employment, who are often from marginalised communities.

Increased Care Burden: Lockdowns and school closures led to an increased unpaid care burden, primarily shouldered by women. This burden was often heavier for single mothers, women from lower-income households, and those without access to support networks.

Remote Work Challenges: While remote work offered flexibility for some, it also blurred work-life boundaries and created new stressors, particularly for women managing work and care responsibilities. Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often faced additional challenges due to inadequate home office setups or limited access to technology.

These ongoing gaps and challenges underscore the complexity of achieving gender equality in the economic sphere. They highlight the need for continued efforts, innovative approaches, and a commitment to addressing both overt and subtle forms of discrimination and inequality. Crucially, they emphasise the importance of an intersectional approach that recognizes and addresses the unique challenges faced by women with diverse identities and experiences.

Access to education, skills development and learning throughout life

Transforming education and training in Australia.

The transformation of Australia's education and training systems is a high priority for the current Government, with a plethora of changes already in place and many significant reform inquiries still underway. This is especially so in the Higher Education (HE)/university sector through the Australian University Accord²³ and the 'skills' sector - vocational education and training (VET)²⁴. It includes initiatives to improve the synchronicity (or 'harmonisation') between the two sectors necessary for learning pathways, lifelong learning as well as learner/workers and the economy.

While 'equity' is a key discursive focus of education and training at all levels, there is no overarching agreement or statement of just what 'equity' is, nor agreement between all sectors from school education to VET and HE about who comprise 'equity groups'. Indeed, women are not considered as an equity cohort in HE institutions other than through STEM initiatives, despite lack of focus on intersectionality and discipline/professional occupation related gender disparities in enrolment and attainment. This, along with diminished expertise in gender equality (GE) and GE design and implementation not only in government departments, education and training institutions but also in industry and professional bodies does not auger well for gender equality.

Women's equal access to and participation in education and training and decent work remains a critical concern for Australian women. Despite strides in women's access to and achievements in education, success is neither universal nor does it necessarily translate to equal opportunities in the workforce. The challenges are both intersectional and systemic, with education & training patterns reflecting & reproducing Australia's highly gendered labour force.

Persistent disparities exist in the fields of study pursued by women despite decades of numerous initiatives to redress this segregation, the latest being a focus on attracting girls & women into STEM. This imbalance has far-reaching implications for women's career prospects and their under-representation in high-growth, high-paying sectors of the economy, including emergent industries and occupations.

Disrupting the persistent gendered narrative

Despite the lack of any in-depth overarching qualitative and quantitative research about the position of and issues for women and girls in all their diversity in education and training since the late 1990s, and based on selective data, the dominant narrative is that all is great for women and girls in this field in Australia. While there is much to celebrate, there are increasingly serious signs that all is not well for many, and on many fronts.

The Australia's National Review for the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024), states that 'Australia rates 4th highest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for level of tertiary education women'. However, a review of the OECD's Adult Education level for women shows that Australia is not in the top 17 countries in the indicator for 2022.

²³ For detail and reports see: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord>

²⁴ For detail see: <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform>

Adult education level Tertiary, women, % of 25-64 year-olds, 2022

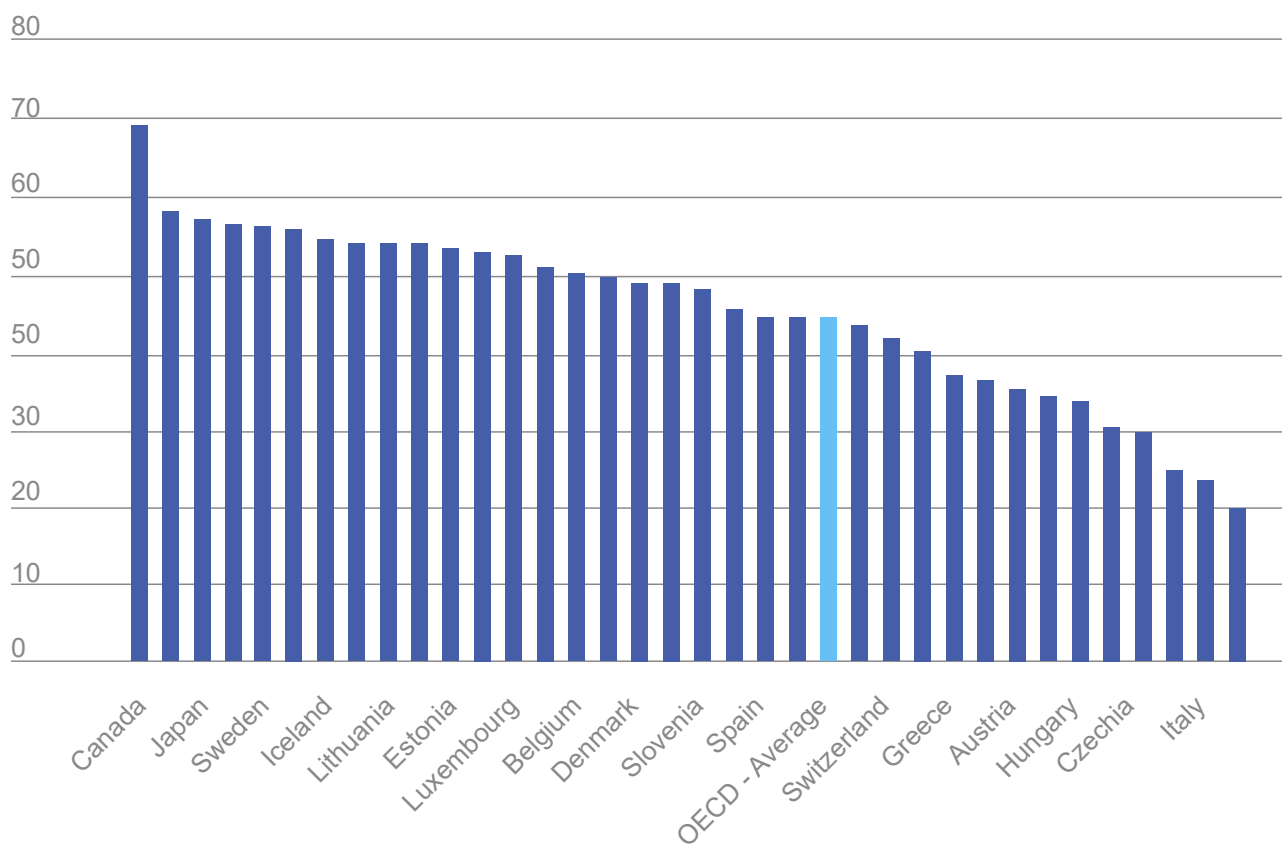


Figure 1 OECD Adult Education Level Tertiary, women % 25-64 year olds, 2022

Moreover, even though across all of Australia 16.4% of women are in education compared to 15.1% of males (ABS, all persons aged 15-74) when it comes to being fully engaged in work and/or study, 71.1% males are fully engaged compared to 51.2% of females showing the clear inequity between study and work – a key goal and outcome

Some of the entrenched and persistent inequity in the education and training system particularly in vocational education and training include:

Systemic inequities in the VET Sector:

The VET system in Australia has long been inequitable, particularly in how it serves women. Participation in VET is gendered, with disparities in the type of training (including funding), industry segments, and qualification levels that women pursue compared to men.

Women are more likely to be involved in lower-paying, more casualised jobs after VET training, which reflects broader gendered workforce issues.

Barriers to participation and completion:

Gendered experience: Women often leave VET courses for “personal reasons,” unlike men, who typically leave due to achieving the necessary skills or securing employment. This difference highlights the gendered nature of the VET experience and the additional challenges women face.

Cultural barriers: Entrenched cultural barriers in male-dominated trades, such as construction, contribute to the low participation and completion rates of women in these fields.

Workplace safety: Reports of workplace sexual harassment, particularly in male-dominated fields, act as a significant deterrent for women entering or completing VET programs. This issue is compounded for young women, those from migrant/refugee backgrounds, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Structural challenges:

Gender pay gap: The gender pay gap becomes more pronounced after the age of 30, with men earning more on average than women, even within the education and training sectors. This pay gap reinforces the economic disadvantages that women face throughout their careers.

Inadequate leadership and accountability: The current VET system lacks the leadership and accountability mechanisms necessary to drive gender equity. The absence of targeted equity strategies within the VET sector means that systemic issues remain unaddressed.

Lack of gender-sensitive policy and data collection:

Insufficient data on gendered barriers: There is a lack of comprehensive data collection that considers the intersectional barriers women face in the VET system. Improved data collection and reporting are needed to better understand and address these challenges.

Policy gaps: Current VET policies do not sufficiently address the gendered nature of learning experiences or the barriers to completion for women. Applying an equity lens to these policies is crucial for creating more inclusive and effective training environments.

Without addressing these systemic issues, women will continue to face significant barriers in accessing and completing VET programs, leading to persistent gender inequities in the workforce. The failure to implement these proposed changes will also hinder national productivity and economic growth.

Looking forward

Investing in education and skills development programs that prepare women for the jobs of the future is crucial for long-term economic equality. Suggestions include:

- Co design and implement over-arching national gender equality framework and policies specifically for education and training sectors.
- Implement gender-responsive career guidance in schools and universities to broaden girls' and young women's career aspirations and also, transform gendered barriers to boys and men participating in the care industries. This guidance should be culturally sensitive and inclusive of diverse career paths.
- Expand the definition of STEM to STEAM, to include humanities and the arts, necessary for critical thinking, creativity and innovation.
- Expand STE(A)M education initiatives for girls and women, addressing gender stereotypes and barriers in these fields including targeted programs for girls and women from under-represented groups in STEM.
- Ensure that design of policies, programs and initiatives for emergent and green industries and emergent occupations including AI and technological change are inclusive and gender sensitive in their entirety from their inception.
- Develop reskilling and upskilling programs targeted at women, particularly those returning to the workforce after career breaks.
- Rather than over emphasis on areas of skills shortage, program advice must centre on career advice tailored for the woman.
- In particular, reform the apprenticeship and traineeship model so that it does not disadvantage feminised occupations and those people who have care responsibilities -- in particular women.
- Programs should be flexible, affordable and accessible to women with diverse needs and backgrounds, with appropriate pedagogies.
- Ensure that all planning and reporting of Australia's education and training system is based on disaggregated data that not only describes participation by gender but also by location, by migrant background, disability and participation of First Nations people. This data must be used to inform policy decisions and target interventions where they are most needed.

Ongoing significant gaps and challenges: The peril of policy homogeneity

Unveiling the intersectional realities of women's lives

Intersectional feminist analysis reveals that women's experiences of discrimination are far from uniform; rather, they are shaped by overlapping identities such as age, race, class, disability, and sexual orientation that intersect and exacerbate marginalisation. The homogenisation of women in policy can inadvertently exacerbate existing inequalities, perpetuating disparities within the broader category of 'women' but also undermining the goals of gender equity policies.

The challenge lies in transforming the understanding of gender equity from a one-size-fits-all approach to a nuanced recognition of the diverse lived experiences of all women across the Commonwealth. To address these issues, Australia must adopt a more nuanced and intersectional approach to policy-making that includes:

- Collecting and analysing data that is disaggregated by multiple identity factors to better understand and address the specific needs of different groups of women
- Ensuring that diverse groups of women, particularly those from marginalised communities, are meaningfully involved in the policy-making process
- Implementing analytical frameworks that recognise and address how various forms of discrimination intersect and amplify disadvantage
- Providing comprehensive training to policymakers on intersectionality and its practical applications in policy development and implementation
- Developing targeted employment programs for Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and migrant women, addressing cultural, linguistic, and accessibility barriers. These programs should be co-designed with the communities they aim to serve.
- Implementing culturally appropriate mentoring and leadership programs to support career

advancement for women from diverse backgrounds. These programs should recognise and value diverse leadership styles and experiences.

- Ensuring all gender equality initiatives are designed and evaluated with an intersectional lens, considering how different aspects of identity intersect to shape women's economic experiences. This approach should be embedded in all stages of policy development and implementation.

What the future needs to progress gender equality in shared prosperity and decent work

Structural reforms:

More ambitious structural reforms are needed to address the root causes of gender inequality. These reforms should include:

Comprehensive equal pay legislation that goes beyond 'equal pay for equal work' to address the undervaluation of female-dominated industries. This legislation should include mechanisms to address intersectional pay disparities.

Mandated pay transparency measures across all sectors and company sizes to expose and address pay disparities. These measures should require reporting on intersectional pay gaps, not just gender-based gaps.

Reform of the superannuation system to address the gender gap in retirement savings, including paying superannuation on parental leave and introducing carer credits. These reforms should consider the cumulative disadvantage faced by women with intersecting marginalised identities.

Targeted initiatives to increase the value, status and recognition of work in feminised professions such as teaching, nursing, and aged care. These initiatives should address the racial and class dimensions of care work.

These reforms should be accompanied by robust enforcement mechanisms and regular reviews to ensure their effectiveness in driving systemic change, with a particular focus on their impact on women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Strengthening GRB implementation

While progress has been made in gender responsive budgeting, there is a need for more consistent and thorough implementation across all levels of government. This should comprise:

- Introducing federal legislation mandating GRB, similar to Victoria's pioneering approach, to ensure long-term commitment and consistency across political cycles. This legislation should explicitly require consideration of intersectional impacts.
- Developing more sophisticated tools and methodologies for gender impact assessment, including intersectional analysis. These tools should be designed in consultation with diverse women's groups and experts in intersectionality.
- Enhancing parliamentary engagement with GRB processes, potentially through a dedicated parliamentary committee on gender equality in budgeting. This committee should include representation from diverse women's groups.
- Building capacity across the public service through comprehensive training programs on gender analysis and GRB implementation. This training should include a strong focus on intersectionality and its practical application in policy-making.

Enhanced support for the care economy

Greater investment in the care economy is crucial to enable women's full economic participation and recognise the value of care work.

Key areas for Australia are:

- Implementing universal, high-quality, affordable childcare to support women's workforce participation. This system should be designed to be accessible and culturally appropriate for diverse communities, including Indigenous families, migrant families, and families with children with disabilities.
- Developing a comprehensive national strategy for the care economy, addressing workforce issues, quality of care, and the recognition of unpaid care work. This strategy should explicitly consider the intersectional nature of care work and the diverse needs of both care workers and care recipients.

- Introducing paid family and domestic violence leave as a universal workplace right. This policy should be implemented with an understanding of how domestic violence intersects with other forms of oppression and marginalisation.
- Enhancing support for elder care, including better conditions and pay for aged care workers, who are predominantly women. This should include targeted support for migrant care workers and addressing the specific needs of Indigenous elders and their carers.

Addressing workplace culture

Continued efforts are needed to transform workplace cultures, combat sexual harassment, and promote inclusive environments that support women's career advancement.

This requires Australia to:

- Implement all recommendations from the Respect@Work report, including the positive duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment. Implementation should consider the specific vulnerabilities of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.
- Develop industry-specific strategies to address gender-based discrimination and harassment, particularly in male-dominated sectors. These strategies should be developed in consultation with diverse groups of women working in these industries.
- Promote flexible work arrangements as a norm for all employees, regardless of gender or caring responsibilities. This promotion should be coupled with efforts to destigmatise flexible work and ensure it doesn't hinder career progression.
- Drive development and build capacity of leaders to be inclusive by targeting management development training in universities, education providers and corporate Australia. This training should include a strong focus on intersectionality and inclusive leadership practices.

Promoting women in leadership

- Targeted initiatives to increase women's representation in leadership positions across all sectors should be prioritised. These could include:
- Setting and enforcing quotas for women's representation on boards and in senior management positions, with specific targets for women facing compounding forms of discrimination. These quotas should be accompanied by support mechanisms to ensure women's success in these roles.
- Addressing the "broken rung" phenomenon by focusing on increasing women's representation in first-level management positions. This effort should include targeted support for women from underrepresented groups.
- Challenging gender stereotypes in leadership through media campaigns and education programs. These campaigns should feature diverse representations of women leaders, including women of color, women with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ women.

Economic security in retirement

Addressing the gender gap in superannuation and ensuring economic security for women in retirement must be a key focus of future policies.

Strategies must include:

- Removing the \$450 monthly threshold for superannuation guarantee contributions to benefit part-time and casual workers, who are predominantly women. This change should be accompanied by targeted financial literacy programs for women in precarious employment situations.
- Introducing a superannuation guarantee top-up for low-income earners, the majority of whom are women. This top-up should be designed to provide additional support for women facing intersecting forms of economic disadvantage.
- Implementing measures to address the impact of career breaks on women's superannuation, such as government contributions during periods

of unpaid care work. These measures should consider the cumulative impact of multiple career breaks on women from marginalised communities.

- Reviewing the age pension system to ensure it adequately supports women who reach retirement with low superannuation balances. This review should consider the specific needs of older women from diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous women and migrant women.

Monitoring and accountability

Strengthening mechanisms for monitoring progress and holding institutions accountable for gender equality commitments is essential. This needs to comprise:

- Developing a comprehensive national gender equality index to track progress across various domains of economic and social life. This index should include intersectional indicators to measure progress for diverse groups of women.
- Mandating regular, transparent reporting on key gender equality indicators by both public and private sector organisations. This reporting should include intersectional analysis and be made publicly available.
- Establishing an independent body to oversee and report on the implementation of gender equality commitments across government and industry. This body should include representation from diverse women's groups and have the power to make binding recommendations.
- Enhancing the role of civil society organisations in monitoring and evaluating progress on gender equality initiatives. This should include providing resources and support for grassroots women's organisations, particularly those representing marginalised communities.

Men's engagement

For Australia to achieve gender equality, the work must be seen as more than 'women's work'. Developing strategies to engage men as allies in promoting gender equality in the workplace and in sharing domestic and care responsibilities is crucial. This could include:

- Implementing workplace programs that encourage men to take parental leave and work flexibly to share care responsibilities. These programs should challenge traditional gender norms and promote a culture of shared responsibility.
- Developing education and awareness campaigns targeting men and boys on the importance of gender equality and shared domestic responsibilities. These campaigns should be culturally sensitive and address diverse masculinities.
- Promoting male champions of change in various industries to model equitable practices and challenge gender stereotypes. These champions should represent diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- Incorporating gender equality education into school curricula to shape attitudes from an early age. This education should include discussions on intersectionality and how gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression.

Concluding remarks

By addressing these areas comprehensively and with a long-term perspective, Australia can build on its progress and work towards a future where all women have equal opportunities for economic participation, security, and leadership. This vision of shared prosperity and decent work for all aligns with the principles of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, positioning Australia as a leader in gender equality on the global stage.

The path forward requires sustained commitment, investment in equitable policy approaches, and collaboration across government, business, and civil society. By tackling the structural barriers that have historically limited women's economic empowerment and embracing an intersectional approach that leaves no woman behind, Australia can create a more equitable and prosperous future for all its citizens.

Crucially, this journey towards gender equality must be guided by an unwavering commitment to intersectionality. It is not enough to make progress for some women while others continue to face compounded barriers and discrimination. Australia's efforts must explicitly recognise and address the diverse experiences of women across different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and ability backgrounds. Only by centering the voices and experiences of the most marginalised women can we hope to create policies and systems that truly work for all.

As we move forward, it is essential to continually challenge our assumptions, listen to diverse voices, and remain adaptable in our approaches. The landscape of gender equality is complex and ever-evolving, requiring ongoing reflection, research, and action. By maintaining a commitment to intersectional feminism and social justice, Australia can lead the way in creating a society where every woman, regardless of her background or circumstances, has the opportunity to thrive and contribute fully to the nation's prosperity.

Attachment A to Chapter 1

Recommendations: A 10-year plan for women's economic equality

Recommendation 1

The Australian Government must provide leadership and accountability for driving economic equality outcomes and embed gender equity into its decision making, budgeting and policy design, implementation and evaluation mechanisms.

Recommendation 2

The Australian Government must invest in policies and programs that recognise the economic importance and value of care work in Australia and help families to better share caring responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

The Australian Government must utilise its legislative, regulatory and spending powers to ensure all Australian workplaces create safe, secure, flexible and equitable work opportunities that support women's economic participation.

Recommendation 4

The Australian Government must provide women in Australia with lifelong, accessible, flexible and affordable education and skill building. They must also remove existing disincentives and inequities that perpetuate industry and occupational segregation and sustained pay and wealth gaps.

Recommendation 5

The Australian Government must undertake a long-term, targeted and deliberate investment program to ensure women are leading and building the economy in equal measure to men.

Recommendation 6

The Government must ensure that women have financial security across their lives and are increasingly building lifetime wealth and economic equality.

Recommendation 7

The Australian Government must invest in programs to address community attitudes and bias that prevent women's full economic participation across a lifetime.

Source:

Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) (2023). A 10-year Plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy. WEET 23-33. Commonwealth of Australia 2023, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. ISBN 978-1-925365-32-0 (online)

Attachment B to Chapter 1

Policy Alignment Table

Policy Area	BPFA / CSW Agreed Conclusions	SDG Goal/Target	CEDAW
Structural Reforms	Objective F.1, F.5	Goal 5, Targets 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 5.a, 5.c	Article 11
Intersectional Approach	Objective F.5, H.3	Goal 5, Target 1,	
Goal 10, Target 10.2	Article 14		
Strengthening GRB	Objective H.2, H.3	Goal 5, Targets 5.a, 5.c	Article 3
Care Economy Support	Objective F.5, F.6	Goal 5, Target 5.4	Article 11
Workplace Culture	Objective F.5, F.6	Goal 8, Target 8.5	Article 11
Women in Leadership	Objective G.1	Goal 5, Target 5.5	Article 7
Retirement Security	Objective A.1	Goal 1, Target 1.3	Article 11, 13
Skills and Education	Objective B.1 B.2, B.3, B.4, B.5, B.6, F.1, F.3, F.4, F.5, G.2, K.1, K.2, L.4	Goal 5, Targets 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 5b, 5c Goal 4, Targets 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 Goal 8, Targets 8.5, 8.6, 8.8, 8b Goal 13, Targets 13.2, 13.3	Article 3? Article 5? Article 10 Article 11
Monitoring and Accountability	Objective H.3	Goal 17, Target 17.18	Article 18
Men's Engagement	Objective F.6	Goal 5, Target 5.4	Article 5

This table demonstrates how the proposed policy areas align with key international frameworks, ensuring that Australia's efforts towards gender equality are in harmony with global commitments and best practices.

Freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation

Australian Context

In Australia, family/domestic/sexual violence (FDSV) encompasses a broad range of violence, such as violence committed by one or more perpetrators towards family members, elder abuse, and intimate partner violence (IPV). Data from the *Personal Safety Survey (PSS)* indicates that 1 in 4 women (23%) and 1 in 14 men (7.3%) have experienced such violence, highlighting a notable gender disparity.²⁵ The impact is particularly severe among marginalised groups with 1 in 3 migrant and refugee women²⁶ and 3 in 5 Aboriginal women²⁷ reporting experiences of IPV. Rising racial tensions occurred following the failed Constitutional recognition referendum. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are eight times more likely to be homicide victims and 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults.²⁸ The racial dimension is evident, with non-Indigenous men often perpetrating violence against First Nations women.²⁹

Sexual violence is widespread, affecting 22% of women and 6.1% of men.³⁰ Physical violence is also prevalent, with 31% of women and 42% of men affected.³¹

Women with disabilities (WWD) are particularly vulnerable to violence, with two in five reporting such experiences³². WWD are more likely to experience violence from multiple perpetrators, including carers and family members, and over longer periods of time³³.

LGBTIQ+ communities also face significant violence, with two in five individuals reporting abusive relationships. Women within these communities, including those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, plus are at higher risk of sexual violence. Approximately 13% report such experiences, compared to 2.4% of heterosexual women.³⁴

The severity of IPV is underscored by homicide statistics. On average, one woman is killed every nine days by a current or former partner. Despite a historical decline in these homicides, recent data shows an alarming rise. In the 2022-23 period, 34 women were victims of intimate partner homicide, a 28% increase from the previous year. This trend continued into 2023-2024, with 43 women killed, reflecting another 25% rise.³⁵

Data on other forms of violence, such as child marriage, trafficking, and modern slavery, is less comprehensive and often based on police reports. In 2022-23, the Australian Federal Police received around 340 reports of modern slavery, the highest number to date. With 90 reports in 2022-23, forced marriage was the most frequently reported form of modern slavery³⁶

²⁵ [Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/Personal-Safety-Australia-2021-22-financial-year)

²⁶ Segrave, M., Wickes, R. and Keel, C. (2021) Migrant and refugee women in Australia: The safety and security study

²⁷ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/changing-the-picture>

²⁸ [Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story, 2019, Australian Institute of Health & Welfare](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/sexual-violence/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-in-australia)

²⁹ [Missing and murdered First Nations women and children, The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee](https://www.senate.gov.au/committees/committee-on-legal-and-constitutional-affairs/references-committee)

³⁰ [Sexual violence - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/sexual-violence/sexual-violence)

³¹ [Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 financial year, Australian Bureau of Statistics](https://www.abs.gov.au/Personal-Safety-Australia-2021-22-financial-year)

³² Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health (2021) Nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability in Australia

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ [PrideinPreventionEvidenceGuide.pdf](https://www.prideinprevention.org.au/evidence-guide)

³⁵ [Homicide in Australia 2022-23, Australian Institute of Criminology](https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/homicide-in-australia-2022-23)

³⁶ [Modern slavery - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/modern-slavery/modern-slavery)

*InTouch*³⁷ assisted over 20,000 people and in 2023/24, 39% of family violence case management clients reported having experienced forced marriage. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), an estimated 53,000 women and girls born overseas now living in Australia have undergone female genital mutilation³⁸.

Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is a prevalent threat, affecting 50% of Australians. TFA includes harassment, grooming and other harmful behaviours facilitated through online and digital technology.³⁹

Males are predominantly the perpetrators of FDSV, harassment and coercive control. This gendered pattern is consistent across other forms of violence.^{40 41}

Progress

In 2022, the Australian Government released its second *10-year National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (NAP)*. This strategy aims to eliminate FDSV within a generation, focusing on prevention, early-intervention, response, and recovery. It emphasises enhancing national institutions, research, police and justice systems, and strengthening both specialist and mainstream services as a priority to effectively address violence.⁴² The implementation of this national framework is undertaken by the States/Territories.

A First Nations National Plan for Family Safety is scheduled for mid-2025.⁴³

Our Watch has developed the Primary Prevention (PP) evidence-base - *Change the Story* and continues to focus on changing social norms, structures and systems at the national level, including a strong focus on addressing the gendered-drivers of violence.⁴⁴ Strategies, including community-led PP initiatives are primarily led by State/Territories.⁴⁵ *The Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to End Gender-Based Violence* also highlighted the ongoing need for leveraging all prevention opportunities to stop the violence.⁴⁶

Survivor-centred approaches empower survivors and involving them in decision-making processes results in better policy and service-design.⁴⁷

Integrated approaches across health, legal, social services, and housing sectors are being implemented⁴⁸.

³⁷ *In Touch*, Specialist family violence service provider supporting migrant and refugee women and their communities to move on from experiences of family violence and thrive.

³⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare <https://www.aihw.gov.au › aihw-phe-230.pdf.aspxPDF>

³⁹ [Technology-facilitated abuse: National survey of Australian adults' experiences, ANROWS, July 2022](#)
[Second national survey on technology and domestic violence, WESNET, 2020, https://wesnet.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/11/Wesnet-2020-2nd-National-Survey-Report-72pp-A4-FINAL.pdf](#)

⁴⁰ [Perpetration of sexual violence in a community sample of adult Australians, AIC](#)

⁴¹ [Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? QUT](#)

⁴² [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, Australian Government](#)

⁴³ [Expert First Nations Steering Committee to advise on reducing rates of family violence and abuse, Media Release 24 January 2024](#) This plan is supported by a dedicated First Nations Secretariat and Steering Committee to ensure culturally appropriate strategies

⁴⁴ [Change the Story \(second edition\), Our Watch](#)

⁴⁵ [Ballarat community saturation model, Respect Victoria](#). For example, a pilot in Ballarat led by *Respect Victoria* and funded by the Victorian Government. This four-year program aims to test and influence future prevention initiatives

⁴⁶ [Unlocking the Prevention Potential, Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches](#)

⁴⁷ [Practice Guidance: A Victim/Survivor-Centred Approach to Responding to Violence, Our Watch & Universities Australia](#)

⁴⁸ There are various approaches to multisectoral/integrated response services being implemented in Australia including high risk assessment and management panels.

Multi-agency frameworks aim to enhance the coordination between various agencies involved in responding to FDSV, including police, social services, and legal entities. These frameworks help in managing high-risk cases and improving victim safety⁴⁹.

Research into masculine norms, such as the “Man Box” study, highlights that while many young men reject harmful norms, those who adhere to them are more likely to commit acts of violence. This will better inform future policy and programs.⁵⁰

Significant investment has been made in collecting prevalence data and community attitudes through the PSS⁵¹ and the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS).⁵² The 2021 NCAS has also provided data analysis regarding community attitudes for people born in countries where the main language is not English.⁵³ Research and evaluation are supported by the Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS), while *Our Watch* assists State and Territory governments in developing prevention strategies.

Strategies include coercive control laws, multi-agency risk assessment frameworks, and enhancing information-sharing laws aimed to better assess and manage risk.⁵⁴ *National Risk Assessment Principles* provide a conceptual framework.⁵⁵

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSVC) ⁵⁶ is part of government machinery reporting to Parliament.

Progress has been made in addressing workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The Australian Government has implemented recommendations from the *Respect@Work*⁵⁷ report, introducing new laws and regulations to enhance workplace safety.⁵⁸

Modern Slavery initiatives that encompass forced marriage, servitude, trafficking and other forms of exploitation, include pathways to access services and funding to undertake counselling and mediation. Australia now has an Anti-Slavery Commissioner⁵⁹, and many States are establishing Modern Slavery Commissioners.⁶⁰ Recognition of the multifaceted forms of GBV and how they present in diverse communities is increasing.

The Online Safety Act 2021 updates online-safety measures, providing the *eSafety Commissioner* with powers to address harmful content, including cyberbullying and image-based abuse.⁶¹ The Online Content Scheme regulates illegal and harmful online content.⁶² *The Safe Connections Program*⁶³ provides emergency phone and data connections to women/young people fleeing FDSV, along with additional support services to manage technological and online safety.⁶⁴

⁴⁹ States like Queensland and New South Wales are considering or have implemented laws targeting coercive control and multi-agency frameworks for managing domestic violence

⁵⁰ [The Man Box 2024 - Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia, Respect Victoria & Jesuit Social Services](#)

⁵¹ [Personal Safety Survey 21-22, ABS](#)

⁵² [Attitudes Matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey](#)

⁵³ [Quick Guide to the 2021 NCAS findings for people born in countries where the main language is not English, ANROWS](#)

⁵⁴ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/unlocking-the-prevention-potential-executive-summary>, Recommendation 13 comprehensive frameworks linked to information-sharing are present only in Victoria, with discussions about nationwide adoption.

⁵⁵ [National risk assessment principles for family and domestic violence, ANROWS](#)

These frameworks are in various states of maturity across the country, with Victoria’s Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) leading efforts to enhance coordination and risk management for family violence

⁵⁶ The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission was established in 2022.

⁵⁷ [Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report \(2020\), Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

⁵⁸ [Safe Work Australia](#)

⁵⁹ [Australia’s Anti-Slavery Commissioner | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

⁶⁰ [NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner](#)

⁶¹ [Online Safety Act 2021, eSafety Commissioner](#)

⁶² [Online Content Regulation, Australian Government](#)

⁶³ Safe Connections Program is a partnership between WESNET and Telstra, implemented by WESNET

⁶⁴ [Safe Connections Program, WESNET](#)

Significant gaps and persistent challenges

First Nations Women and Children

Violence against First Nations women in Australia persists amidst rising racial tensions following the failed constitutional recognition referendum. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face disproportionate rates of violence, being eight times more likely to be homicide victims and 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults.⁶⁵ The racial dimension is evident, with non-Indigenous men often perpetrating violence against First Nations women.⁶⁶

Recent reports, including the Senate Inquiry and Closing the Gap⁶⁷ progress report, reveal a lack of significant progress despite numerous recommendations. The intersectionality of gender, racial discrimination, and socioeconomic factors compounds the challenges faced by First Nations women, exacerbating their vulnerability to violence and creating barriers to seeking help.

Women with Disabilities

As evidenced in the final report of the Royal Commission into Violence, abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with Disabilities, women with disabilities experience higher rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and abuse compared to their non-disabled counterparts, yet they face significant barriers in accessing protection and justice. Support services, such as shelters and legal assistance, are often inaccessible, and there is a lack of targeted programmes that address the specific vulnerabilities of women with disabilities. Many women face difficulties in reporting abuse, as communication barriers, stigma and a lack of accessible reporting mechanisms prevent them from seeking help. This leaves them particularly vulnerable and trapped in cycles of violence without adequate recourse. Furthermore, there are gaps in accountability and enforcement when it comes to protecting women with disabilities from exploitation and abuse. Institutions, including care facilities and group homes, have been criticised for failing to provide safe environments, with numerous reports of neglect and mistreatment. Australia lacks sufficient oversight and stringent enforcement mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable in these settings. Additionally, gender-responsive services that should prioritise the safety of women with disabilities are often ill-equipped to handle the complex and intersecting issues of gender, disability and violence.

⁶⁵ [Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story, 2019](#) . Australian Institute of Health & Welfare

⁶⁶ [Missing and murdered First Nations women and children](#). The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

⁶⁷ [Closing the Gap - Commonwealth 2023 Annual Report and 2024 Implementation Plan](#), Australian Government

Inconsistent Approaches and Structural Challenges

There is a notable inconsistency in how FDSV services are provided across Australia and how specialist services are funded, and civil society is consulted. Despite national outrage and the declaration of a national emergency, many services are forced to turn people away due to insufficient resources.

Barriers to Effective Prevention and Support

Underreporting of violence, particularly for those suffering multiple forms of oppression, is widespread due to stigma, fear of repercussions. This leads to inaccurate prevalence estimates and hampers effective response strategies⁶⁸.

Mainstream systems, including specialist frontline services, are often inaccessible to marginalised groups such as First Nations women, migrant and refugee women⁶⁹, women with disabilities, and those from LGBTIQ+ communities⁷⁰.

Women and children fleeing violence often face homelessness due to the lack of available social and affordable housing. The current crisis accommodation system is backlogged, forcing survivors into temporary solutions that lack adequate support.⁷¹

There is a lack of thorough review and counting of suicides linked to FDSV, resulting in gaps in addressing the crisis.^{72 73}

Data Collection and Justice System Gaps

Much of the prevalence data collected is from the perspective of the victim/ survivor. Data from the PSS cannot show us how many people in Australia have used FDSV. This limits the way we report on violence and how it portrays the people who use violence.⁷⁴

Inconsistent data collection systems across States/ Territories affects the ability to measure response effectiveness and understand demand and capacity.

Police responses to GBV are inconsistent, with issues such as misidentification of primary aggressors, particularly affecting women from marginalised communities. Structural and systemic racism within police institutions exacerbates these problems⁷⁵.

Women in crisis are turned away from legal services, highlighting a gap in access to justice. *Women's Legal Services Australia* estimates that 52,000 women will be turned away in 2024 due to insufficient resources.⁷⁶

Despite recent reforms to family law, there remains concern that family law, visa, migration, and child protection systems continue to be among those most commonly creating barriers to accessing support and safety.⁷⁷

⁶⁸ <https://saaricollective.com.au/community/blog/unseen-barriers-for-diverse-women-reporting-family-violence/>

⁶⁹ <https://stories.uq.edu.au/research/2022/refugee-migrant-women-excluded-mainstream-dv-services/index.html>

⁷⁰ [Opening Doors: Ensuring LGBTIQ+ inclusive family, domestic and sexual violence services. latrobe.edu.au/arcshs](https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs)

⁷¹ [Homelessness and domestic and family violence: State of Response Report \(2024\), Homelessness Australia](https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/state-of-response-report-2024)

⁷² [Indigenous domestic and family violence, mental health and suicide, AIHW](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-domestic-and-family-violence)

⁷³ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/unlocking-prevention-potential/prevention-through-learning-and-data>

⁷⁴ [Family, domestic and sexual violence: Who uses violence, ABS](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/1301.0/feature-articles/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence)

⁷⁵ <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/12/17/1384272/the-continuing-problem-of-misidentification-for-family-violence-victim-survivors>

⁷⁶ [Federal Budget forces women's legal services to reduce legal assistance for women fleeing violence. Women's Legal Services Australia](https://www.womenslegalservices.org.au/federal-budget-forces-women-s-legal-services-to-reduce-legal-assistance-for-women-fleeing-violence)

⁷⁷ [Evaluation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children \(2010-2022\), KPMG](https://www.kpmg.com/au/issues/themes/articles/2022/evaluation-of-the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children)

Early Intervention and Primary Prevention

No unified framework for early intervention across Australia leads to fragmented and inconsistent practices.

Community-level primary prevention programs lack consistency in funding, which is necessary to demonstrate and achieve impact to support the work of Our Watch.

Responding to all forms of GBV

Coordination between the federal government and the states/territories targeting and resourcing strategies are required.

Backlash and Misguided Focus

There is an increasing trend to ignore the gendered nature of violence, with a shift towards individual psychology and non-causal factors such as alcohol misuse. This undermines the structural analysis necessary for effective intervention.

The cost of effective inaction based on the current evidence is high, both in economic terms and in lives affected.

Future Priorities for Accelerated Action

Focus on Transformational Change

Ensure a holistic sustained approach that tackles the structural drivers of GBV to achieve transformational change.

Urgent Investment in Adequate Funding

Establish a National Partnership Agreement between state and federal governments that clarifies responsibilities, provides an immediate increase in funding that is ongoing and sustainable for all FDSV services, especially rural, regional, and remote areas where demand is high.⁷⁸

Special consideration should be given to specialist sexual assault services to meet growing demand and diversify programs with schools and local organisations. Consult appropriately with civil society, especially communities experiencing multiple forms of oppression.⁷⁹

Establish a funded unified framework for early intervention⁸⁰

Support for First Nations Services and Community-Led Approaches

Invest in specialist FDSV services led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other community-led initiatives. This investment is crucial to support effective, culturally appropriate responses.⁸¹

Effective intervention necessitates culturally safe spaces, improved data collection methods, and the incorporation of First Nations women's leadership in developing and implementing solutions. The government must prioritise these community-led efforts for First Nations women and promote healing and resilience.

⁷⁸ [Funding the Frontline to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services](#)

⁷⁹ [Funding the Frontline to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services](#)

⁸⁰ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/unlocking-the-prevention-potential-executive-summary>, Recommendation 4

⁸¹ [Missing and murdered First Nations women and children, The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee](#)

Enhancing Multisectoral and Survivor-Centered Services

Develop and implement multi-agency risk assessment frameworks and information-sharing laws and regulations at the national level to provide a comprehensive, survivor-centered approach to addressing GBV.

Funding for Independent Advocacy and Communication

Allocate funds to peak bodies at both national and state/territory levels to ensure effective advocacy and communication between frontline services and governments.

Elevate the *Domestic, Family, Sexual Violence Commission* to an independent statutory authority with greater powers to compel action.^{82 83}

Strengthen the National Workforce Strategy (NWS)

Implement a NWS, including a robust First Nations workforce strategy and a bilingual workforce strategy, to ensure a well-supported and sustainable specialist FDSV sector nationwide. This strategy should address sector-specific needs, build skills and capabilities, improve remuneration, and support professional development and workforce wellbeing.⁸⁴

Address Housing and Social Infrastructure Needs

Increase investment in social and affordable housing, prioritising these resources for individuals escaping violence, including women on temporary visas. Explore and expand programs such as *Safe at Home* programs, which have shown varying degrees of success.

Improve Legal Frameworks and Access to Justice

Establish a dedicated and sustainable funding stream for community and women's legal services as part of the National Legal Assistance Partnership to support women affected by GBV, including those on temporary visas⁸⁵.

Reform the Migration System

For women on temporary visas, improve the migration system and eligibility so that all women who experienced FDSV and their dependents can access protections, services, justice and access to social security^{86 87}

⁸² [Unlocking the Prevention Potential. Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches](#)

The Domestic, Family, Sexual Violence Commission has involved survivor/advocates in systemic reforms, including the Lived Experience Advisory Council

⁸³ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/unlocking-the-prevention-potential-executive-summary>, Recommendation 19

⁸⁴ [Funding the Frontline to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services](#)

⁸⁵ [Funding the Frontline to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services](#)

⁸⁶ Including Medicare and Income Support Payments

⁸⁷ [Blueprint for Reform 2022, WESNET](#)

Expand responses to other forms of GBV

Increase funding for community-led initiatives that target all forms of GBV. Responses and education need to be targeted to communities in recognition that multicultural work requires specialised skills. Fundamental to this work is comprehensive national data using consistent variables to collect ethnicity data across major service systems. Linkages and targeted strategies across service systems such as Health, DFSV, Education and Migration are required.

Strengthen the response to Technology-Facilitated Abuse (TFA)

Increase knowledge and practice around TFA. Focus on using technology for prevention, intervention, and response, while ensuring that principles of co-design and safety-by-design are embedded. Develop strategies to hold perpetrators accountable through AI and surveillance and ensure an intersectional approach that empowers affected individuals and fosters social change.

Participation, Accountability and Gender Responsive Institutions

Australia's International Obligations towards women and girls

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – 1995
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – 1999
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women - 1993
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women

In 2023, Australia jumped 17 places in the WEF Global Gender Gap Report, mainly due to women's increased political participation and economic empowerment. Yet, Australian women still face deep-rooted barriers to equality. These barriers are even more significant for First Nations women, who experience compounded disadvantages and systemic obstacles.

Despite higher educational achievements, women are more likely than men to work part-time, below their capacity, and in unstable jobs. The persistent gender pay gap reflects not only unequal pay but also higher wages in male-dominated sectors compared to female-dominated ones.

The Federal Government, which made gender equality a priority in the 2022 Election, has made notable progress with the *Working for Women* strategy launched in 2024. However, Australia still trails behind peer nations in workforce participation rates, economic equality, and addressing gendered violence:

- **Gender-segregated workforce:** Australia has one of the world's most gender-segregated workforces.
- **Female part-time employment:** Australia's rate is 10% higher than the OECD average.
- **Care burden:** Women spend an average of 4 hours 31 minutes on unpaid work daily, compared to men's 3 hours 12 minutes.
- **Violence against women:** Projected to cost \$323.4 billion by 2045.
- **Gender pay gap:** Men earn higher average salaries in 95% of occupations, including heavily female-dominated sectors.

Expectations around unpaid work and the undervaluing of care industries perpetuate gender inequality. While individual work and care choices are shaped by this policy landscape, systemic change is needed to tackle the structural barriers to women's workforce participation and economic equity.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The Office for Women must be enabled to align its work with leading international practice as a centre of expertise on gender equality in government. This Office must be appropriately funded to expand its capacity to design and inform policy and to drive change in policy practice across the Australian Public Service (APS).

The Office for Women must be adequately resourced to have the right skills, expertise, and leadership, and be appropriately connected with the leadership of the broader APS to perform its functions with impact.

Machinery of Government

The Federal Government has maintained a strong focus on gender equality, particularly through women's leadership and the development of gender-responsive institutions. Key developments include:

- Women's Budget Statement: Reinstated to outline government commitments to women and girls.
- Gender Equality Report Card: Tracks Australia's progress towards gender equality goals.
- Key legislation:
- Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work Act 2022)
- National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022–2032)
- Amendments to the Fair Work Act 2009 (including 10 days' paid family and domestic violence leave)
- Women's Economic Equality: A 10-year plan (2023–2033)
- Sex Discrimination and Other Legislation Amendment (Safe Workplaces Act 2020)

Fair Work Commission Decisions

- The Fair Work Commission made significant rulings in predominantly female industries:
- Aged care sector: Implemented wage increases following the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- Disability and childcare sectors: Similar pay rises to address long-standing pay disparities in female-dominated workforces.

Notable Reports and Recommendations

- Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021): Called for better pay and working conditions, leading to reforms in aged care.
- Disability Royal Commission: Highlighted the need for improved pay and conditions in the disability sector.
- A comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to gender-responsive policy is essential for coherent, effective outcomes. Gender impact assessments must include an intersectional lens to address the needs of diverse women, including First Nations women, migrants and refugees, women with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and women in rural areas. In 2023, the Women's Budget Statement committed to embedding gender-responsive budgeting across policy and budget processes, aligning with OECD best practices.

Amendments to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency

The WGEA has made significant strides toward gender equity, but challenges persist:

Improvements:

1. **Mandatory Reporting:** Organisations with 100+ employees must submit Gender Equality Indicators, enhancing transparency and accountability.
2. **Leadership Accountability:** Gender Equality Action Plans encourage measurable targets for gender diversity at executive levels.
3. **Incentives and Recognition:** The Employer of Choice for Gender Equality citation promotes best practices.
4. **Support and Resources:** WGEA provides tools and guidance to foster gender equity.
5. **Public Disclosure:** Increased public reporting on gender data pressures organizations to improve.

Gaps:

1. **Leadership Disparities:** Women remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles.
2. **Pay Gaps:** Persistent gender pay disparities exist, including in leadership roles.
3. **Intersectionality:** The focus on gender often overlooks other intersecting factors like race and disability.
4. **Cultural Barriers:** Workplace cultures and unconscious bias continue to hinder women's leadership advancement.
5. **Work-Life Balance:** Flexible work options remain insufficient to support both men and women equally.

Recommendations to Fill the Gaps

1. **Strengthen Targets and Quotas:** Introduce more stringent targets for female representation on boards and executive teams.
2. **Enhance Pay Transparency:** Implement stronger measures for transparency on pay gaps.
3. **Support Intersectionality:** Develop policies that accommodate diverse women's needs and address intersecting forms of discrimination.
4. **Unconscious Bias Training:** Implement ongoing programs to tackle unconscious bias at all levels.
5. **Promote Flexible Work:** Make flexible work standard for all employees without penalizing career advancement.
6. **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly assess gender equity initiatives and adjust based on data.

By addressing these gaps and evolving practices based on evidence, Australia can further enhance gender equity in leadership and across all sectors.

Development of Gender Responsive Budgeting

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in Australia plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality through various actions that inform Commonwealth budgets:

Data and Research: WGEA provides comprehensive data on workplace gender equality, including pay gaps and workforce participation, helping inform equitable budget decisions.

1. **Policy Advocacy:** WGEA engages with stakeholders to advocate for policies and budgets that promote gender equity, particularly in employment opportunities and pay gap reduction.
2. **Gender Equality Indicators (GEIs):** Data from GEIs helps assess the effectiveness of government funding programs aimed at improving workforce gender equality.
3. **Promotion of Best Practices:** WGEA showcases successful gender-responsive policies through initiatives like the Employer of Choice for Gender Equality (EOCGE) citation, guiding budget allocations.
4. **Guidance and Resources:** The agency provides tools and frameworks to support gender-focused financial planning in both public and private sectors.
5. **Public Awareness and Education:** WGEA raises awareness of gender-responsive budgeting through reports and public outreach.

Impact on Commonwealth Budgets and Recommendations

To further promote gender equality in budgeting, the following initiatives are recommended:

- **Strengthen WGEA and Data Collection:** Expand gender-disaggregated data, including intersectional data, to improve transparency and address leadership and workforce disparities.
- **Gender Budgeting:** Implement pilot programs for needs-based gender budgeting, following the model of the 2022 Budget pilot program.
- **Government Procurement for Gender Equality:** Use procurement principles to drive compliance with gender equality standards, requiring large employers to support Gender Equality Indicators to win government contracts.
- **Paid Parental Leave (PPL):** While the Government's investment in PPL supports gender equality, further reforms, such as the 'use it or lose it' provision, are needed to encourage more equitable participation by men and women.

Economic Support for women into leadership

Progress in political leadership is notable, with women achieving record representation in Australian Parliament and gender-balanced cabinets. However, barriers remain in corporate leadership:

- **Corporate Leadership:** Women remain underrepresented in key decision-making roles, holding only 35.1% of management positions and 18% of board chair roles in ASX300 companies. Setting gender equality targets and strengthening the regulatory framework will improve gender balance in leadership.
- **Workplace Flexibility and Positive Duty Amendments:** Recent amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act mandate that employers take measures to eliminate discrimination. Strengthening WGEA's reporting framework will enhance accountability.

Addressing Gender Segregation in the Workforce

Australia's workforce remains highly gender-segregated, particularly in male-dominated industries like mining and construction. Feminized industries face poor pay and conditions. Initiatives are needed to reduce these disparities:

- **Encouraging Women in Male-Dominated Sectors:** Programs targeting women's participation in emerging industries, such as clean energy and AI, will support economic growth and address gender segregation.
- **Government Initiatives:** The Women's Economic Equality Taskforce recommends reskilling programs to support women in transitioning to higher-paid, male-dominated sectors.

Political and Corporate Leadership

Progress in political leadership is notable, with women achieving record representation in Australian Parliament and gender-balanced cabinets. However, barriers remain in corporate leadership:

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- **Workplace Flexibility and Positive Duty Amendments:** Recent amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act mandate that employers take measures to eliminate discrimination. Strengthening WGEA's reporting framework will enhance accountability.
- **Respect @Work:** The Federal Government has pledged to implement all Set the Standard Report recommendations, aiming to create safer workplaces for women. Addressing gender-based violence is crucial for economic equality. Violence against women hinders workforce participation and impacts economic security and well-being. We urge full implementation of Respect@Work recommendations to combat these issues.

Corporate leadership

Research shows gender-balanced leadership teams outperform peers, achieving higher profits, better talent retention, and stronger ESG outcomes. A study found a 10% increase in female top-tier managers led to a 6.6% increase in Australian ASX-listed companies' market value.

Women in the Workforce

The CEW Senior Executive Census reveals stalled progress in gender equality, with some areas regressing:

- 91% of CEOs are men, with only 25 women CEOs (down from 26 in 2023)
- 70% of executive leadership roles are held by men
- Only 27% of companies have gender-balanced executive leadership teams
- 82% of CEO pipeline roles are held by men

Positive Duty Amendments

Recent Sex Discrimination Act amendments require employers to eliminate discrimination. We propose outcome-based minimum performance standards in WGEA instruments to align with international best practices.

Gender-Balanced Targets

Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles. Companies achieving gender balance often set 40:40 or better targets. We recommend the Federal Government encourage employers to set gender equality KPIs.

WGEA data shows employers implementing gender equality policies achieve stronger outcomes. Enhancing reporting frameworks can encourage more employers to develop such strategies. Targets have proven successful, as seen in the increase of female directors in ASX200 from 19% to 33.7% (2015-2021).

Gender Equality in Segregated Industries

Australia's workforce remains highly gender-segregated, impacting equality across sectors. Men dominate management roles, while female-dominated industries often face job insecurity and lower pay. Gender segregation contributed 24% to the 2022 gender pay gap.

The Women's Economic Equality Taskforce recommends supporting women in male-dominated and emerging industries. Investing in reskilling programs could rebalance gender segregation and boost economic growth.

Educational Programs

- **STEM and Trades Initiatives:**
- **Women in STEM Decadal Plan (2020-2030):** Aims to increase women's participation in STEM fields
- **National Innovation and Science Agenda:** Encourages girls to pursue STEM careers
- **Trades Women Australia (TWA):** Supports women in traditionally male-dominated trades

Working for Women Strategy

Political institutions must promote diversity and respectful conduct to ensure women's representation in government and national decision-making.

Prioritise First Nations Communities

First Nations women face significant inequality due to intersecting forms of disadvantage. Despite long-standing initiatives, gaps in life expectancy, health, and incarceration rates persist. Achieving true inclusivity requires prioritizing First Nations women's involvement in decision-making processes that affect their communities, as recommended by the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report.

The 2020 Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report provides a comprehensive framework to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We commend the Australian Government's commitment to fund key recommendations, including a national summit for First Nations women and girls. We advocate for continued support of all seven report recommendations. The government is developing strategies to close the First Nations employment gap, and we support efforts to create meaningful, well-paid employment opportunities for First Nations women, with increased funding for Indigenous-run Employment Programs.

Prioritise Women with Disabilities

While some initiatives exist to promote inclusivity, women with disabilities remain underrepresented in political, community, and leadership roles. Structural barriers, including limited accessibility to platforms of influence, a lack of support systems, and widespread discrimination, continue to impede their full participation in civic and public life. The absence of targeted programs that encourage leadership opportunities for women with disabilities means their voices are often excluded from key decision-making processes, leading to policies and practices that fail to reflect their needs and experiences.

Accountability and the implementation of gender-responsive institutions also remain significant challenges. Many Australian institutions lack clear mechanisms for ensuring the inclusion of women with disabilities in both policy development and service delivery. While frameworks for gender equality exist, they often fail to incorporate disability as a critical intersection, resulting in a lack of accountability for meeting the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities. Gender-responsive institutions that should ensure equitable access to services, resources, and opportunities remain ill-equipped to address the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities.

Gender, Climate Change, Disasters and Environmental Management

Introduction

Climate change represents a universal crisis, impacting every region of our planet through extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and shifting weather patterns. It is leading to food, water and energy shortages, increasing the risk of pandemics, conflict and displacement, and disrupting trade. Hazards occur not only as single incidents, but simultaneously, with cascading effects. In the context of this global issue, Australia emerges as a crucial example where the dynamics of gender equality and climate change intersect markedly.

Natural hazards and climate change impact genders differently due to conscious and unconscious biases in societal expectations expressed in gender inequality and ingrained gender roles. Women continue to earn less than men, are more likely to take on child rearing and carer roles and less likely to work full time or to have adequate savings or superannuation in their older age, leaving them more vulnerable to the increasing costs of food, water, electricity, gas, petrol and other goods which come because of climate change. Incidents of intimate partner and sexual violence increase during heat waves, pandemics and traumatic climactic events.

Despite their increased vulnerability in disasters, Australia's climate policies largely fail to address the specific needs of women with disabilities, who often face mobility challenges, communication barriers, and restricted access to emergency services. Women with disabilities are more likely to experience health impacts from environmental harm, such as pollution, and face greater risks of displacement during climate-induced disasters yet they are excluded from key decision-making processes and their specific needs aren't included in Australia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

Despite the clear disproportionate impact of climate change on women in all their diversity, the significant leadership roles allocated to women and girls for developing solutions for climate action remain under-valued and under-recognised. This approach to policy development and service delivery limits the participation of women in shaping sustainable, resilient solutions that address their unique challenges. Climate change and disaster risk preparation and response demand initiatives that identify and address existing gendered differences to ensure that all women and girls, alongside men and boys have equal access to disaster risk resilience and climate change and environmental solutions.

A recent report by Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (WELA) points to areas in which women's leadership in Australia on climate issues is hampered by persistent structural inequalities in access to decision-making and finance and investment. It further highlights the disproportionate effect of climatic disasters on groups in the community who already have the least access to resources and influence. For women, this includes health impacts, vulnerability to losing shelter and food security, increased care burden both in formal employment and informally at home and in the community; and increased exposure to violence⁸⁸.

⁸⁸ <https://wela.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Full-report-Gender-Climate-and-Environmental-Justice-in-Australia-WELA.pdf>
WELA 2024

During crises such as those that are arising through climate-related stresses and disasters, research from the experience during COVID has shown that women are expected to – and do – fall back into traditional gender roles, meeting the expectations of men but leaving women with the sense that they have lost the gains they have made towards gender equality⁸⁹. (ANU GIWL 29 July 2024)

The **National Report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**⁹⁰ focuses on creating employment opportunities for women in the emerging green energy sector, acknowledging that traditionally women have been underrepresented in tech and construction employment. However, this focus on a single economic response fails to apply the human rights-focussed and holistic approach that the government promises in its reports to international bodies.

To achieve its goals of integrating gender and climate policies, the Australian government must fund research into the gendered nature of climate-related impacts, apply a gender lens to budgets and to funding and further fund and implement policies to shift the narrative about gender roles and the importance of a clean and caring economy. See other refs.

Background: BPfA commitments and other key international commitments by Australia

Since the BPfA was agreed, both our understanding of climate change science and the recorded impacts we now see have emerged strongly to the point where we now commonly refer to the “climate emergency”. While this aspect is new, the actions that need to be taken, as set out in the BPfA strategic objectives, continue to apply to broader environmental management as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation: women in leadership and decision-making; gender analysis and a gender equality perspective in policies and programmes, and stronger regional and international mechanisms to assess the impact of current policies on women.

The Beijing +25 Political Declaration⁹¹ (para 11(f)) spoke of climate change and natural disasters as among the new challenges that have emerged with regard to environmental management, recognizing that that these require “intensified efforts” to implement the BPfA including by:

“ Mainstreaming a gender perspective into environmental, climate change and disaster risk reduction policies, recognizing the disproportionate effect of climate change and natural disasters on women and girls, in particular those in vulnerable situations, strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change and natural disasters, and promoting women’s participation and leadership in decision-making on environmental and climate change issues;”

⁸⁹ <https://giwl.anu.edu.au/news/precarity-progress-how-traditional-gender-roles-can-undermine-equality-times-crisis> ANU GIWL 29 July 2024

⁹⁰ <https://www.asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Australia%27s%20National%20Review%20for%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20Platform%20for%20Action%20%282024%29.pdf>

⁹¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/CSW64-Declaration-EN-Fin-WEB.pdf> (para 11(f))

CEDAW and General Recommendation 37

Australia is a party to The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women⁹²(CEDAW), which is a binding treaty. Article 14 highlights the needs of rural women, which are critical in Australia, CEDAW applies in all its aspects to how governments mitigate, reduce and manage climate change, disasters and the environment. Australia's international obligations under CEDAW are enacted in the federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, and the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, and are also part of separate State and Territory legislation, including gender equality legislation. However, the CEDAW commitment to non-discrimination and equality applies across all areas of government including environmental management, climate change and disaster risk reduction and management.

The CEDAW treaty body, the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has provided specific guidance on how CEDAW applies across climate change, disasters and the environment. It developed General recommendation No.37 (2018) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate⁹³ after multiple global consultations. Furthermore, it gives specific guidance on how CEDAW applies across climate change, disasters and the environment. This closely links to six critical areas of the BPfA; the right to live free from gender-based violence against women and girls; the rights to education and to information; the rights to work and to social protection; right to health; right to an adequate standard of living; and the right to freedom of movement.

Of these areas, Gender Based Violence (GBV), has been highlighted in Australia and is overviewed in Chapter 3 of this report⁹⁴. There are specific gender dimensions in rural areas affected by disasters from bushfires and floods, and also in areas under water stress and drought where economic loss compounds existing fragilities and gender stereotypes. The right to health is deeply affected by GBV and is also a wider issue for rural women in Australia compounding with the psychosocial effects of repeated disasters, and the ongoing reduction of access to health services in rural areas.

The rights to work and to social protection are also critical in Australia, and we saw during the COVID-19 response that social protection measures were highly discriminatory against women and resulted in diminution of rights to an adequate standard of living due to that lack of social protection when women overall were suffering greater economic loss and hardship than men, as described in the section 2 of this report.

⁹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>
CEDAW

⁹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no37-2018-gender-related>

⁹⁴ <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/291/89/pdf/n1529189.pdf> Chapter 3

Other relevant international commitments for Australia, which include gender equality commitments in development, climate change and disasters, as well as gender action plans include:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)⁹⁵
- The three Rio Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification agreed at the Earth Summit in 1992 along with its detailed Agenda 21⁹⁶ and the gender action plans that each of them have developed:
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change⁹⁷ (UNFCCC) and the later 2015 Paris Agreement⁹⁸, as well as its Enhanced Lima Work Program on Gender and its Gender Action Plan⁹⁹.
- Convention on Biological Diversity¹⁰⁰ as well as its Gender Plan of Action¹⁰¹
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification¹⁰² and its Gender Action Plan¹⁰³
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030¹⁰⁴ (*Sendai Framework*) and its Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030¹⁰⁵ (Sendai GAP), 2024.

Key Australian legislation and regulatory frameworks include:

- The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and State and Territory legislation on the environment
- Disasters and emergency management are the primary responsibility of the States and territories under their legislation. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is the agency implementing federal responsibilities and acting as a national coordination mechanism.

⁹⁵ <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/29/1/89/pdf/n1529189.pdf>

⁹⁶ <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/agenda21>

⁹⁷ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>

⁹⁸ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

⁹⁹ <https://wrds.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/The%20Enhanced%20Lima%20Work%20Programme%20on%20Gender%20Decision%203CP25.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.cbd.int/convention>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-11-en.pdf>

¹⁰² <https://www.unccd.int/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/gender-action-plan>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.undrr.org/publication/gender-action-plan-support-implementation-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015>

Sustainable Development

Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹⁰⁶, especially its Sustainable Development Goal 5 to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, which builds upon the BPfA.

Environment and Climate Change - The Rio Conventions

The three Rio Conventions—on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification—derive directly from the 1992 Earth Summit that preceded the BPfA. Each instrument represents a way of contributing to the sustainable development goals of Agenda 21¹⁰⁷. The three conventions are intrinsically linked¹⁰⁸, operating in the same ecosystems and addressing interdependent issues.

Convention on Biological Diversity¹⁰⁹; and its Gender Plan of Action.¹¹⁰

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification¹¹¹; and its Gender Action Plan¹¹²
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change¹¹³ (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement¹¹⁴; and the Enhanced Lima Work Program on Gender and its Gender Action Plan¹¹⁵.

Disasters

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030¹¹⁶ (Sendai Framework)

The Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (Sendai GAP)¹¹⁷, 2024.

Other Australian key legislation and regulatory frameworks include:

Australia’s international obligations under CEDAW are enacted in the federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, and the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, and are also part of separate State and Territory legislation, including gender equality legislation.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and State and Territory legislation on the environment.

Disasters and emergency management are the primary responsibility of the States and territories under their legislation. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is the agency implementing federal responsibilities and acting as a national coordination mechanism.

¹⁰⁶ <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FRES%2F70%2F1&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

¹⁰⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/agenda21>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.cbd.int/cooperation/interlinkages.shtml>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.cbd.int/convention>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-11-en.pdf>

¹¹¹ <https://www.unccd.int/>

¹¹² <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/gender-action-plan>

¹¹³ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>

¹¹⁴ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

¹¹⁵ <https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/The%20Enhanced%20Lima%20Work%20Programme%20on%20Gender%20Decision%203CP25.pdf>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.undrr.org/publication/gender-action-plan-support-implementation-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015>

Critical sectors for gender justice in climate change

FOOD AND WATER SECURITY

In Australia, 36% of Australian households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity, and for First Nations people living in remote communities the estimate is 31% are food insecure. Foodbank estimates that over 3.7 million Australian households have experienced severe food insecurity in the last 12 months. Foodbank also estimates that a third of Australians (29%) experiencing food insecurity live in regional and remote areas.

In 2020 the House of Representatives Report on Food Pricing and Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities¹¹⁸ was published. It contained 16 recommendations. These recommendations if instigated would support food security, for not only for remote Indigenous communities but for all women living in remote and very remote areas in Australia. The recent flooding in northern Australia has once again demonstrated how vulnerable are our food chains in remote and very remote Australia are to natural hazards, disaster with major roads being cut and food and grocery trucks being unable to deliver needed supplies.

Recommendation 4 from the report asks for the Australian Government to encourage the establishment of more local distribution centres by wholesalers in major regional centres closer to remote communities. While recommendation 11 asks that the Food Security Working Group be maintained and tasked with:

- Identifying improvements to logistics of food & grocery supply into remote communities.
- Accessing the viability of warehousing greater volumes of food and groceries in more remote parts of the food chain.
- Identifying ways to improve the replenishment cycle of food and groceries to remote communities:
- Ensuring food supply during pandemics, natural disasters and seasonal change
- Identifying ways which major supermarkets chains can help play a role in driving down food prices and guaranteeing supply to remote communities

Many of the factors that facilitate food security at the household level for rural regional and remote women include the food system, including the price and availability of food, employment, housing, education and transport. The impact of food insecurity can have lifelong negative effects to health and physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development throughout the life course. Food security is particularly gendered as women tend to give their resources to the family, often surviving on lower than minima

Women are pivotal in ensuring the nutritional security of their households, though their contributions are often overlooked in policy and legal frameworks, limiting their potential in enhancing food security.

Gender inequalities and gender norms restrict women's access to resources and services, such as land, knowledge, and food, leading to poverty and food and nutrition insecurity. Vulnerable women, particularly in female-headed households, face limited access to nutrition information and resources, making them more susceptible to food shortages, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

¹¹⁸https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/02_Parliamentary_Business/24_Committees/243_Reps_Committees/Indigenous/Food_pricing/Report.pdf?la=en&hash=13F5E4BE6B2757223211A7C5E0353BDD9DCDBD14

Globally, the gender gap in food insecurity continued to rise in 2022, with 27.8 percent of women experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity, compared to 25.4 percent of men¹¹⁹ (FAO SOFI 2023). Malnutrition in mothers can initiate a deprivation cycle, impacting child mortality, disease, educational performance, and work productivity. Educational attainment in women significantly influences child survival rates. Empowering women and closing the gender gap in agriculture and food systems are crucial to eradicating hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, and achieving SDG 2: Zero Hunger by 2030.

Contributing factors towards food insecurity for rural, regional and remote women in Australia are lack of economic security, resulting from low incomes, increased/high living expenses, especially rent/mortgages, high cost of electricity, fuel and food, or changes in household living arrangement. These issues compound and severely impact on women in times of natural disaster, including drought, bushfire and flooding. Production and logistics is also being affected by natural disasters.

Climate Change poses a future risk to food security, especially in rural and remote communities through the increased instances of natural disasters, combined with the prolonged impact of reduced crop / livestock yields. Climate change and natural disasters, affects where and how much/many crops and cattle are produced, and it increases the number, length and severity of droughts, and the incidences of droughts, floods and cyclones that can wipe out production on a massive scale, creating unavailability of food.

WATER INSECURITY

Australia is the driest inhabited continent and climate change is creating a persistent issue of water insecurity affecting not only this relationship to food / cattle production, but to survival itself.

The Federal Government working with the State and Territory governments manages water. However, there are great inconsistencies. In some states, water is sold like a commodity separate to the land it flows through and past.

From 1996-2010 the Millenium Drought saw highly populated towns on tight water usage restrictions, with some towns running out of water entirely for example : Murrurundi and Guyra (NSW). Women on rural properties needed to truck water in for personal use and domestic and animal survival. Without access to adequate water, crops failed, and stock died. Australia has invested in water securitising measures like the Sydney desalination plant that now produces 15% of the city's drinking water, and in Perth 10% of treated wastewater is naturally filtered and available to be safely reused. In agriculture, irrigation water saving methods such as drip irrigation that reduces surface and flood irrigation have been widely adopted. However, this is not enough. While this may support urban context, the rural, regional and remote remain severely challenged. These communities must have a decision-making role in the ways of food and water security.

In some rural towns available water is not potable. These towns may be reliant on river, dam or bore water that is not suitable for drinking either permanently or during certain environmental conditions such as; floods, bushfires or during droughts, or for industrial reasons like contamination from gas extraction. In these towns, drinkable water is purchased. A major health issue with this strategy is that in some cases, buying a sugar-based drink can be cheaper than water. In Walgett, NSW four out of five residents had to rely on bought or donated bottled water in 2022¹²⁰.

Access to water is an essential resource for all of life. It is critical in the maintenance of human health and environmental health; climate change is challenging water security.

¹¹⁹<https://www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-food-security-and-nutrition/1/en>

¹²⁰<https://www.georgeinstitute.org/sites/default/files/Key-Findings-Food-Water-Security-Surveys-Walgett-2023.pdf>

OCEANS, FISHERIES, CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDER

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report¹²¹ has iterated what scholars have been saying for decades, that climate change adversely impacts human security (including personal, environmental, economic, health, food, communal, and political security) and is contributing to significant changes in human mobility, particularly through displacement and involuntary migration. The impacts of climate crises on people include serious harm to people's health, livelihoods, social networks, and cultural traditions. Changes in ecosystems, including rising salinity levels in soil, king tides, coral bleaching, tainted freshwater, and the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, are only a few of the challenges current and future humans face.

As in most crises, impacts and experiences vary by individual characteristics and intersecting circumstances, such as age, ethnicity, socio-economic class, geographical location, disability, and gender.

We know that women are not generally major political or local decision-makers in the fisheries sector; thus, they are unable to contribute or influence any resource allocation in the fisheries sectors. Given the importance of the fisheries sector to the social and cultural fabric of rural, coastal and island communities, and the role that the fisheries sector plays in local food security stabilisation, climate change implications are a significant risk to this sector. Gender Inequality of Climate Change and Disaster Risk in the Fisheries Sector¹²², (eEngender March 2022)

It is important in fisheries management to make sure that created policies are mindful of everyone's needs and challenges, ensuring that we're benefiting from knowledge from all genders. Not involving women in the fisheries management sector has proven to have ecological and social repercussions.

Women's Health, GBV and Climate Change

Climate change, recognised by the WHO as "the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century," presents profound public health challenges¹²³ ("WHO calls for urgent action to protect health from climate change" 2015). Women in Australia face unique and multifaceted challenges related to climate change, impacting their physical, mental, and reproductive health, with heightened risks for vulnerable populations, including First Nations women.

A critical concern is the heightened risk of gender-based violence, exacerbated by socio-economic pressures from climate-related disasters. First Nations women, already disproportionately affected by family violence, are particularly at risk. Addressing this requires strengthened, culturally sensitive support systems offering trauma-informed care.

Climate change also exacerbates adverse maternal outcomes, particularly in remote and underserved regions. Heat waves, floods and storms, for example, are linked with reduced birth weights and increased risks of preterm delivery and pregnancy complications. Evidence also suggests that women experience a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder compared to men following climate disasters. For pregnant women, this stress can lead to significant adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes. Ensuring access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services is critical in mitigating these risks. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure, including expanding telehealth services, is essential for timely prenatal, postnatal, and reproductive care amid increasing climate shocks.

With one in five women and almost half of all single mothers in Australia living in households with limited economic resources, economic insecurity driven by climate-related events further exacerbates existing financial inequalities. Gender-sensitive economic policies that promote job security and equitable access to resources are vital in alleviating these inequalities.

¹²¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

¹²² https://caribbean.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Gender%20Climate%20Change%2008%20Fisheries_F.pdf

¹²³ <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-10-2015-who-calls-for-urgent-action-to-protect-health-from-climate-change-sign-the-call>

Climate Change mitigation

Protecting Australian women from the worst effects of climate change means reducing carbon emissions as rapidly as possible, an outcome that benefits all Australians and the natural world. Current Australian policy focuses on reducing domestic emissions. This allows Australians to benefit financially from exporting fossil fuels which demonstrably cause existential harm to other communities, especially our Pacific island neighbours.

The Australian Government Report focusses in the climate area on the energy transition, an approach that prioritises support of industry and business, with the assumption that once we have the economic issues dealt with, everything else will fall into place. Recent research from of Australia reMADE¹²⁴ and others¹²⁵ reveals this approach to be too narrow. Government policies must equally promote and support strategies to build caring, resilient and prepared communities, work primarily carried out by women which tends to be underpaid and undervalued. Policies that respond to this highlight work-life balance, freeing up time to connect in community and develop skills for future disasters.

The European Court of Human Rights found that the human rights to private and family life of a group of older women had been breached by the Swiss government's failure to meet its GHG emission reduction targets (Schweiz and Ors v. Switzerland¹²⁶).

In Australia, we do not have broader recall through an institution such as an European Court of Human Rights, so we rely on State based Human Rights Acts. It was such an act that was relied on to stop the development of a coal mine in 2022 (Waratah Coal Pty Ltd v Youth Verdict Ltd & Ors¹²⁷). The Judge found that the mine would contribute to climate change, thus limiting a number of protected Human Rights of the young people bringing the case¹²⁸ (The Conversation, November 25, 2022).

However, in 2022 the Australian Federal Court, while recognising the disastrous effects of a warming climate on future generations and the planet, did not recognise a government duty of care to protect them, as such a duty would not align with current understandings of the law of tort¹²⁹ (Minister for the Environment v Sharma, 2022). A Government-led Senate Committee subsequently has relied on lack of drafting clarity and vagueness of definition in recommending that a Bill to create such a duty of care should not be passed¹³⁰ (The Senate, Environment and Communications Legislation Committee report, June 2024). The argument has also been made that the government's policies to reduce emissions and regulate fossil fuel developments are sufficient to protect young people's human rights. Sponsors of the Bill continue to press strongly for its passage¹³¹ (Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023).

¹²⁴<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ae6de517c932736b15f2cc7/t/653f96db2a38224453a2582c/1698666208770/Care+through+disaster+REPORT.pdf>

¹²⁵<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ae6de517c932736b15f2cc7/t/653f96db2a38224453a2582c/1698666208770/Care+through+disaster+REPORT.pdf>

¹²⁶ <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press#%7B%22itemid%22:%7B%22003-7919428-11026177%22%7D>

¹²⁷ <https://www.sciqld.org.au/caselaw/137575>

¹²⁸ <https://theconversation.com/this-case-has-made-legal-history-young-australians-just-won-a-human-rights-case-against-an-enormous-coal-mine-195350>

¹²⁹ <https://www.judgments.fedcourt.gov.au/judgments/Judgments/fca/full/2022/2022fcafc0035/summary/2022fcafc0035-summary>

¹³⁰ [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000215/toc_pdf/ClimateChangeAmendment\(DutyofCareandIntergenerationalClimateEquity\)Bill2023.pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000215/toc_pdf/ClimateChangeAmendment(DutyofCareandIntergenerationalClimateEquity)Bill2023.pdf)

¹³¹ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=s1385

Climate Change Adaptation Policy

The Australian Government is currently developing a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) to supersede the National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021–25. The National Climate Risk Assessment: First Pass Assessment Report¹³² and the National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper¹³³ set out an approach that aims to address only “physical risks” from climate change and not social or economic risks. If this approach is continued, the NAP will not have the capacity to address the gender dimensions of climate change outlined above, or other issues of the social inequality of risk and differences in access to benefits from the emerging green economy. These issues were highlighted in a submission on the NAP by the Women’s Climate Congress¹³⁴ (WCC Submission on Climate Adaptation in Australia - National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper, April 2024).

Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

Disaster Risk Reduction

For prevention, reduction and recovery, the importance of engaging with women’s organisations and women in communities cannot be overstated. Women play a central role in reducing risk and managing for disasters at both household and community level, and their expertise is needed to contribute to better preparedness as well as to ensure gender-based issues are properly considered. These issues are captured in the global Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (Sendai GAP), 2024¹³⁵ and this can serve as a guide for implementation of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, response and recovery in Australia.

Disaster Response & Recovery

[This is an excerpt from paper prepared by the National Women’s Alliances – March 2020 and was provided to the Prime Ministers Bushfire Recovery Roundtable on 17 March 2020]

According to a 2020 report of the National Women’s Alliances, “Disaster Recovery, Planning and Management for Women, their Families, and their Communities in all their Diversity”¹³⁶ which was provided to the Prime Ministers Bushfire Recovery Roundtable on 17 March 2020:

¹³²<https://www.dceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-climate-risk-assessment-first-pass-assessment-report-2024.pdf>

¹³³<https://storage.googleapis.com/files-au-climate/climate-au/p/prj2bf366cf9d0b4cc962561/page/National%20Adaptation%20Plan%20Issues%20Paper%20March%202024.pdf>

¹³⁴<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627727cf3788080302602679/t/67201a16de3503163f437c4c/1730157080165/>

¹³⁵<https://www.undrr.org/publication/gender-action-plan-support-implementation-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015>

¹³⁶<https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/NWA-Joint-Position-Paper-Disaster-Recovery-Planning-and-Management-for-Women-20200330.pdf>

'Disasters have a gendered face. In Australia, the need to cope with disasters in Australia has been shown to reinforce traditional gender roles within families and communities, with women contributing to unpaid community support work, caring for children and family, while forgoing or relinquishing employment opportunities which are crucial for gender equality and women's longer-term economic security. Evidence shows this pattern has recurred in the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, and the 2011 floods in Queensland and Victoria. Further, Australian research has shown that rates of domestic and family increase in post-disaster settings.'

Failure to respond to the different experiences and priorities for women will risk increasing gender inequality in the longer-term. At the same time, there is also evidence to show that disaster recovery is an opportunity for change, and for promoting gender equality as communities and lives are rebuilt. All disaster preparation, management, response and recovery efforts need to include a gender analysis at all levels, within both government and non-government organisations.

Recommendations: opportunities for action by Australian governments

Oceans, fisheries, climate change and gender

Prioritise the collection and use of standardised sex-disaggregated data and data on gender issues related to the fisheries sector, and across groups and sectors.

Advocate for insurance schemes to be gendered and supported and marketed through sectoral cooperatives and networks.

Climate Change mitigation

In light of the many higher risks for women from climate change (in Australia and internationally) we urge Australian governments to increase their climate ambition, including:

- a) Ensure women have a greater role in leadership and decision-making in national and state advisory and decision-making roles on emissions reduction;
- b) Increase investment in renewable energy while ensuring gender equality in sharing the opportunities and economic benefits of the energy transition.
- c) Government to move quickly to revise its approach to the NAP in three high-level aspects that relate to gender equality and women's engagement in climate change adaptation.
- d) Encourage the effective protection and use of the knowledge and practices of indigenous women, ensuring these are respected and the intellectual property safeguarded.
- e) Promote and enable participation of local communities, particularly women, in identifying their needs for physical, emotional and spiritual strength in the face of changing climate.
- f) Introduce a Human Rights Act to protect women's rights in the face of increased stresses from climate change.

Climate change adaptation policy

We urge the Federal Government to revise its approach to national adaptation planning the Climate Change National Adaption Plan in three key high-level aspects that relate to gender equality and women's engagement in climate change adaptation. These are:

- a) Widen the scope of risks considered to go beyond physical hazards arising from climate change to include the socio-economic risks and disruptive impacts of climatic and environmental disasters. This understanding is needed to ensure that climate change adaptation measures do not exacerbate existing gender inequality and that they meet the needs of all people living in vulnerable situations;
- b) Use the NAP as an opportunity to include clear objectives and mechanisms to further gender equality through women's leadership and the use of gender analysis, and to prevent falling back from achievements already made. Climate change adaptation needs to align with Australia's international obligations under CEDAW and other human rights conventions, as set out in CEDAW General recommendation No. 37 (2018), which requires policy coherence across sectors and policy pillars; and
- c) Move to a more unified national planning process on climate change adaptation across sectors, at different levels of government, across party lines and with businesses, industries and community leaders that ensures women are in leadership positions at all levels. This is proposed as the most effective way to achieve policy coherence on gender equality and climate change adaptation.

We also urge Australian governments to:

- a) Encourage the effective protection and use of the knowledge and practices of Indigenous women, ensuring these are respected and the intellectual property safeguarded.
- b) Promote the participation of local communities, particularly women, in identifying their needs for physical, emotional and spiritual strength in the face of changing climate.
- c) Introduce human rights legislation and/or amendments to protect women's rights in the face of increased stresses from climate change; and
- d) Look to the forthcoming revised Gender Action Plan under the UNFCCC¹³⁷ that will be approved by the COP in November 2024 for further guidance on gender-responsive climate action in Australia.

Disaster Risk Management

We urge Australian governments to develop and adopt a plan to implement relevant aspects of the Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030¹³⁸ (Sendai GAP), 2024 within Australia. Reference should be made to the submission on recovery planning recommendations Australian implementation of Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (Sendai GAP), 2024.

¹³⁷ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>

¹³⁸ <https://www.undrr.org/publication/gender-action-plan-support-implementation-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015>

Peace and Security

Introduction

In his 2023 Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Report, UN Secretary General Guterres made it explicitly clear that:

around the globe there were nearly 200 armed conflicts and situations of organised violence, increasing authoritarianism and misogyny; alongside the growing climate crisis, the largest global food crisis and ongoing impacts of COVID-19;

- women were increasingly at risk in conflicts with 614 million women and girls in conflict areas (2022), 50% more than in 2017; with 117.2 million people estimated to be forcibly displaced and stateless by 2023;
- women were disproportionately impacted by armed conflict during conflict, repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post conflict reconstruction; and
- women remained absent from peace processes signing or witnessing fewer than 1%; and making up only 16% of peace negotiators; and
- urged the international community that “*today we are on a knife’s edge*” and that there could be “*no more stalling*”¹³⁹.

Yet, on the eve of the UN Security Council (SC) Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and the 24th anniversary of the WPS UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on 31 October 2024, and the world is confronted by increasing levels of armed conflict, militarisation, and growing numbers of civilians forced to flee increasing violence; with women and marginalised groups bearing the brunt of conflicts and crises, including conflict-related sexual violence, poverty, forced displacement and hunger. Conflicts continue with devastating impacts for civilians in Sudan, Somalia, Ukraine, Haiti, Columbia, the Sahel, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, Afghanistan and beyond, along with the escalating crisis in the Middle East.

In this context, there could not be a more critical time for taking urgent action on Peace and Security - specifically for advocating for the WPS agenda, gender justice, international human rights and humanitarian law - globally, regionally and locally. *The WPS agenda’s vision of peace and equality has never been so important - or so under threat*¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁹ UN Secretary General. *Women, Peace and Security Report. S/2023/725. 28 Sept 2023.*

¹⁴⁰ NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. *2024 Open Letter to Permanent Representatives to the United Nations October 2024.* <http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/>

Global Frameworks

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) called on world leaders to recognise that “*Peace is inextricably linked with equality between men and women and development*”¹⁴¹ and for action to be taken to address dangers to society of armed conflict. In 2024, in contrast, total global military expenditure reached \$2443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8% from 2022; and the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009.¹⁴² In 1995, armed conflict referred more often to conventional weapons. In 2024, armed conflict ranges across many aspects - missiles, use of hybrid warfare, cyber, artificial intelligence, threats of nuclear attack, and rape as tactics of armed conflict.

1995 also laid the foundations for the first UNSCR on Women Peace and Security (WPS), UNSCR 1325, adopted in October 2000. This was the first resolution to link women to the peace and security agenda and to acknowledge that armed conflicts impact women and girls differently from men and boys, and to acknowledge the need for women’s active and effective participation in peacemaking, including peace processes and peacebuilding. UNSCR 1325 was also distinguished by the skilful diplomacy and advocacy efforts of civil society organisations (CSOs) (almost all women), who comprehensively laid the groundwork for UNSCR 1325¹⁴³.

UNSCR 1325 consists of *four pillars*: 1) role of women in conflict prevention; 2) women’s participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding; 3) protection of women’s rights during and after conflict; and 4) women’s specific needs during repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction. Since 2000, the UNSC has adopted 9 additional resolutions on WPS that detail action to promote women’s participation at all levels and stages of peace, security and peace processes; and address sexual violence in conflict. The WPS agenda continues to have close engagement with civil society across the globe, including for a growing call to action by the UNSC and nation states to deliver on almost 25 years of promises.

¹⁴¹ Beijing Platform for Action Critical Area E, Women and Armed Conflict, Paragraph 131. 1995. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf

¹⁴² SIPRI. Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity. 22 April 2024. www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/global-military-spending-surges-amid-war-rising-tensions-and-insecurity

¹⁴³ Cockburn Cynthia. *From Where We Stand: War, Women’s Activism and Feminist Analysis*. 1997. P.141.

Australian Context

Advocacy by Australian CSOs¹⁴⁴ also helped lay the foundations for Australia's implementation of UNSCR 1325 into the 1st WPS National Action Plan (NAP) (2012-2018), which was largely activities and outputs focused¹⁴⁵. Under the 1st NAP the Government released 3 Progress Reports (2014, 2016 and 2018).¹⁴⁶

Australia's 2nd WPS NAP (2021-2031)¹⁴⁷ was released after a gap of almost 2 years and covers a ten year period. It identifies four key outcomes:

- supporting women's meaningful participation and needs in peace processes;
- reducing sexual and gender-based violence;
- supporting resilience, crisis, and security, law and justice efforts to meet the needs and rights of all women and girls; and
- demonstrating leadership and accountability for WPS.

The NAP is implemented by the following departments and agencies: Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT); Australian Defence Force (ADF); Home Affairs; Australian Federal Police (AFP); and the Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC); with whole of government implementation of the NAP coordinated by DFAT.

Key elements of the 2nd WPS NAP include:

- a high level plan with broad concepts and outcomes, and potential to be flexible and responsive to changing global and domestic contexts over 10 years
- independent agency/ department implementation plans, with activities to be funded through existing budget and programs¹⁴⁸.
- focus on 'meaningful' women's participation; with key principles of: "do no harm" approach; gender mainstreaming; human rights based; recognising and responding to diverse experiences – which could potentially mean an intersectional lens, with recognition of LGBTQI and other 'diversity'
- acknowledgment of climate change, human security, humanitarian crises and forced displacement – to support resilience, crisis response and security responses that are gender responsive; which for our Asia-Pacific region is critical given the challenges of climate change, disasters, potential conflicts, forced displacement and humanitarian responses; and
- accountability under the 2nd NAP is framed in terms of the release of 3 Government Progress Reports (2023, 2025, 2028) and an Independent Interim Review (covering FY 2021-2025).

¹⁴⁴ Initial foundations date back to 2004 when Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Australia received funding from the Office of Women to develop an Australian website promoting UNSCR 1325; with follow up consultations in 2008-09. *Strengthening the Engagement of Australian Civil Society in Australia's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Sixth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security.* 2019. p. 24. wpscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/sixth-report.pdf

¹⁴⁵ Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018. www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/international-forums/australian-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security-2012-2018

¹⁴⁶ The 2018 Progress Report was tabled in parliament on 31 July 2018 and covered the period 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2017. www.pmc.gov.au/resources/2018-progress-report-australian-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security-2012-2018

¹⁴⁷ Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2021-2031.pdf

¹⁴⁸ Implementation Plans can be found at wpscoalition.org/wps-agenda/.

Implementation and Recommendations

As always the real understanding of effectiveness and accountability is in the implementation of the NAP, and while there is potential with this plan, unfortunately there is little public information to be able to meaningfully analyse progress towards the 4 NAP outcomes.

Accountability: While there is an Implementation and Reporting Timeline and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF) Annex, **the 2023 Progress Report has yet to be made public.**

- **It should be noted that the last time Government publicly provided a Progress Report on the WPS NAP was on 31 July 2018 (which covered the period 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2017 in relation to the 1st WPS NAP).**
- As of October 2024 published data on the WPS NAP can be found in the OFW Report¹⁴⁹ and in summaries provided by agency representatives as part of the WPS Government-Civil Society Dialogue in November 2023¹⁵⁰. OFW highlights the work from: ADF on the Gender, Peace and Security Mandate and training; DFAT's work supporting work on sexual and gender based crimes at the International Criminal Court; AFP's work on trafficking and modern slavery including forced marriage.
- The questions remain though - how can we understand what progress is being made across this whole of government plan in the last 3 years; how does Government make decisions to respond effectively in terms of WPS, to the major geopolitical changes, conflicts and humanitarian crises; and how do they learn from what they've implemented?
- Fundamentally, how does government explain it is demonstrating leadership and accountability for WPS (Outcome 4)?

¹⁴⁹ Australian Government. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Office for Women, National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. 2024. p. 37-39. www.asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Australia%27s%20National%20Review%20for%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20Platform%20for%20Action%20%282024%29.pdf

¹⁵⁰ Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security. Women, Peace and Security Government-Civil Society Dialogue. 2023. wpscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Civil-Society-Government-Dialogue-Report_fWEB1.pdf

Recommendations

Commit to strengthening WPS NAP impact and accountability. Publicly release the 2023 Progress Report as soon as possible as it is beginning to have an impact on the integrity of NAP approach, and the ability to learn, and plan for more effective future implementation. We need to ask the hard question: Is this plan making progress to meet its commitments to the 10 UNSC resolutions?

Concept to practice:

A broad framework and concepts may mean flexibility. But it might also mean that without targets and timelines, with each implementing agency responsible for its own plan, there are divergent assumptions, understandings of concepts and practice, and lack of clarity as to how to get to an overall picture of where the NAP is headed. Particularly as some of the Implementation Plans are close to expiring (or already have). At an institutional level this puts the WPS NAP at risk; for example to changes in government, Ministers, leadership, staff, possibly leading to shifting political priorities and directions, across government.

Review the broad conceptual approach and develop a clearer model which addresses the need to provide a stronger whole of government understanding of effectiveness; including by strengthening cross agency coordination and implementation; investing in learning from agencies and CSOs; prioritising the socialisation of the WPS agenda and Australia's NAP with the Australian public; strengthening the domestic-regional-global connections; and engaging with diverse civil society stakeholders to build trusted partnerships.¹⁵¹

Monitoring and Evaluation:

There are a number of fundamental questions about the **MEF** and indicators which need to be addressed. Where is the baseline and what is progress being measured against? Are the links between MEF indicators relevant to measuring progress against the NAP? For example, in Outcome 2: Reduce sexual and gender-based violence, the indicators in the MEF do not measure shifts in harmful gender norms, and are too high level to show a shift, with better measures being changes in attitudes, monitoring changing intentions and people's perceptions of gender norms.

¹⁵¹ Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security. Women, Peace and Security Government-Civil Society Dialogue. 2023. wpscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Civil-Society-Government-Dialogue-Report_fWEB1.pdf

Recommendations

Review the MEF and assess whether the framework and indicators are fit for purpose; including reviewing the accessibility to data and links to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 - Gender equality and 16 - Peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Resources and policy coherence:

Without dedicated resources and dedicated WPS budgets there are risks to sustainable implementation, and trade-offs around making gender mainstreaming the focus, and losing WPS along the way. This is an eternal problem and a risk to the effective implementation of the WPS agenda, let alone building partnerships to undertake the work. WPS works to bring women to peace processes, build strategies for conflict prevention; and reduce sexual and gender based violence. At the same time policies around arms manufacturing, increasing securitisation and militarisation sit in sharp contrast with a peace agenda which takes human security and human rights as its core concepts and practice.

'Move the money' and prioritise WPS and gender equality, genuine participation by women, girls and marginalised groups. Address the contradictions in policy and 'move more money' to address climate change, social cohesion, diplomacy, and peacebuilding.

Civil Society:

The 2nd WPS NAP identifies strengthening partnerships with Australian civil society “across two key functions – advice and accountability.” The Australian Civil Society Coalition conducted a series of civil society Listening Circles and Roundtables to understand

What do peace and security mean to diverse women in Australia?¹⁵² Five priorities emerged from the consultations, which were to:

- *Enable all Australians to achieve peace, security and their inalienable rights*
- *Reposition Australia as a global and regional peacemaker rather than a strategic partner*
- *Rebalance priorities and restructure departments and processes to enable Australia to become a world leader in global diplomacy, peacebuilding and mediation*
- *Respect and recognise the agency of diverse women, girls and gender diverse people and enable those most impacted to lead*
- *Position Australia at the forefront of global efforts to address climate change and insecurity*

These **priorities and recommendations for action** encapsulate the diversity of perspectives around the WPS agenda, specifically around:

- *meanings and understandings of “human security”, lived experiences, peace, and the role of Australia in the world;*
- *the links between local and global experiences of insecurity, crisis and conflict;*
- *intersectional and intergenerational understandings of insecurity based on and grounded in personal lived experiences; and*
- *the importance for local responses to insecurity to be resourced, and to support the agency and leadership of those most impacted by insecurity.*

And these priorities remind us that 30 years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the first UNSCR 1325 (2000), set a path for the women, peace and security agenda; which diverse women across Australia and so many women’s rights and human rights defenders around the globe are still advocating for - for gender justice, human rights and international humanitarian law.

As the UN Secretary General said in 2023

‘No more stalling’. It’s time to step up and deliver on the promises made over the last 30 years to bring peace and equality to our world.

¹⁵² Conducted during October 2022 to March 2023. Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security. *What do peace and security mean to diverse women in Australia? Roundtable summary and recommendations for action.* 2023. wpscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Roundtable-Report-Final.pdf

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACMC	Australian Civil Military Centre
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANU	Australian National University
APS	Australian Public Service
ASX	Australian Securities Exchange
B+5	Beijing Platform For Action + 5 year Monitoring and Evaluation process
BPfA	Beijing Platform For Action
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEW	Chief Executive Women (NGO)
CoP	Community of Practice
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFSVC	The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission
EPBC	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
ESG	Environmental Social and Governance
FDSV	Family Domestic Sexual Violence
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIWL	Gender Institute for Women's Leadership (academic institution)
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HE	Higher Education
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LGBTIQA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning, asexual and more. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
MEF	Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
NAP	National Action Plan
NAP	in Climate change context - National Adaption Plan
NCAS	National Community Attitudes towards violence Survey
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme (Independent Statutory Agency)
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales

NWS	National Workforce Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFW	Office for Women
PP	Primary Prevention
PSS	Personal Safety Survey
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TFA	Technology Facilitated Abuse
TWA	Trades Women Australia
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC	United National Security Council
UNSCR	United National Security Council Resolution
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBS	Women's Budget Statement
WEES	Women's Economic Security Statements
WEET	Women's Economic Taskforce
WEF	World Economic Forum
WELA	Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (NGO)
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WWD	Women with Disabilities
WWDA	Women With Disabilities Australia (NGO)



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