



## **Women in International Security – Australia Incorporated**

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign  
Affairs, Defence and Trade

Inquiry into Equality as a National Security and Economic  
Security Imperative

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## 1. About WIIS-A

Women in International Security–Australia, Inc. (WIIS-A) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Standing Committee’s inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative. This inquiry comes at a critical moment, as Australia and its partners confront increasingly complex security challenges alongside a global resurgence of regressive gender norms that risk narrowing participation in security decision-making precisely when broader expertise and inclusive leadership are most needed.

WIIS-A is an independent Australian-based registered charity dedicated to advancing gender equity, diversity, and inclusion in international security policy, practice, and scholarship. Incorporated in Victoria and registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, WIIS-A exists to pursue two core charitable purposes: advancing education in peace and security, and promoting reconciliation, mutual respect, and tolerance within Australia’s national security community. These purposes are pursued through leadership development, professional education, research engagement, and public dialogue, with a particular emphasis on elevating diverse and under-represented voices in security debates.

Launched in the early 2000s and formally registered as a charity in 2022, WIIS-A supports women and gender-diverse individuals working, or seeking to work, across defence, diplomacy, development, intelligence, academia, industry, and civil society. WIIS-A is proudly affiliated with the global professional organisation, Women in International Security (WIIS), founded in 1987 in Washington, DC, and now the premier organisation in the world dedicated to advancing the leadership and professional development of women in international peace and security. However, WIIS-A operates autonomously to address the specific institutional, policy, and cultural dynamics of Australia’s national security ecosystem.

In practice, WIIS-A functions as both a professional network and a substantive policy platform. Its activities include convening expert panels and public forums on contemporary security challenges, fostering mentoring and leadership pathways for early- and mid-career professionals, supporting research and policy engagement on gender and security, and creating opportunities for connection across government, academia, and industry. Since becoming a registered charity, WIIS-A has delivered a growing program of hybrid and in-person events, expanded its national membership base, strengthened partnerships with organisations such as the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the Australian Gender Equality Council, and provided structured opportunities for students and early-career researchers through its internships and research associate programs.

Underlying our work is a clear normative commitment: gender equality is not a peripheral social concern, but a core capability issue for national security. Our efforts are grounded in the conviction that inclusive security institutions are more legitimate, more resilient, and better equipped to navigate strategic uncertainty. Accordingly, WIIS-A seeks not only to support

individual career progression regardless of sex or gender identity, but also to contribute to a national security culture in which gender perspectives are integrated into analysis, policy design, and decision-making at all levels.

This submission reflects WIIS-A's collective expertise and experience across research, policy, and practice. It was authored by the following WIIS-A committee members: Ms Afeeya Akhand, Dr Se Youn Park, Professor Maria Rost Rublee, Dr Elise Stephenson, and Dr Shannon Zimmerman. Biographies of each contributor can be found on the WIIS-A website. This WIIS-A submission has been endorsed by WIIS-A's Advisory Board. For more information, on WIIS-A, please see: <https://www.wiisaustralia.org/>

## 1.1 Addressing the Terms of Reference

This submission will focus on the following terms of reference:

- The economic security and national security benefits of realising gender equality for every person, and how the integration of gender equality across foreign policy supports this objective
- The international and national security implications of undermining gender equality, including in the context of humanitarian crises and climate change
- The role of locally-led leadership and decision making in advancing gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda
- The Australian government's efforts to advance gender equality and the human rights of women and girls across all aspects of foreign policy, defence and national security
- The Women, Peace and Security agenda internationally and Australia's role in promoting and implementing it.

## 2. Introduction and Context

The connection between gender equality and national security is well known. Countries with high levels of gender inequality are more likely to engage in both intrastate and interstate violence.<sup>1</sup> They are also less likely to comply with international norms. Alternatively, countries with greater levels of gender equality, indicating greater investment in women, have a higher societal capacity to handle conflict peacefully.

In countries with high gender inequality, men are more likely to join armed groups in order to fulfill masculine ideals such as that of protector or provider, roles they feel are being stymied by existing economic, social or political factors. In these cases, narratives around need to protect women or defend them from threats is a major justification for the use of violence.<sup>2</sup> Women join

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<sup>1</sup> Caprioli, M. (2005). "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 49(2): 161-178.

<sup>2</sup> Cohn, C., Ed. (2013). *Women and wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*. Cambridge UK, Polity Press.

the same groups in order to escape gender-based violence, to join an organisation in which they are treated more equally, and to fight for better equality.

Ideological beliefs with gender inequality as a core component are facilitating factors for the use of violence and recruitment into violent extremist ideologies. Male supremacy, the belief that cisgender men are superior and have the right to subjugate women, trans men, and nonbinary individuals, is a cohering factor for key extremist and hate groups across the political spectrum, from the KKK to the Islamic State, underpinning their beliefs, values, and principles. These groups rely on gender tropes, often appealing to “traditional” gender roles as a way of increasing their appeal. Sociologist Michael Kimmel has shown that the political psychology of terrorism is gendered.<sup>3</sup> All the things that extremist groups have to offer, such as identity, camaraderie, community, and meaning – as well as the obstacles to achieving those things – are gendered. These narrative appeal to individuals across continents and are used to identify and articulate “target” outgroups, including in Australia.<sup>4</sup> In February 2021, the head of the Australia Security Intelligence Organisation noted that a growing number of individuals did not fit the better understood left-right spectrum of ideologies but were instead motivated by niche issues. He specifically mentioned violent misogynists as one of these groups and concluded that actions undertaken by these groups would be considered “ideologically motivated violent extremism”.<sup>5</sup>

At the individual level, people with misogynist or hypermasculine beliefs are more likely to engage in interpersonal violence, support violence against women, and support a violent extremist ideology.<sup>6</sup> Men with rigid stereotypes of masculinity were 17 times more likely to say they have physically hit their partner.<sup>7</sup> Countries with higher rates of violence against women, including those that are highly homophobic, also have the highest levels of societal violence.<sup>8</sup> The majority of perpetrators of violence in Western countries, particularly acts of mass violence, are individuals with histories of misogynistic views and/or domestic violence.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately gender inequality plays a motivating role in state, group, and individual decisions to undertake violence.

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<sup>3</sup> Kimmel, M. S. (2003). "Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents: The Gendered Moral and Political Economy of Terrorism." *International Sociology* 18(3): 603-620.

<sup>4</sup> Phelan, A., J. White, C. Wallner and J. Paterson (2025). "Gendered Narratives and Misogyny as Motivators Towards Violent Extremism: The Case of Far-Right Extremism in the UK and Australia." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 37(7): 961-978.

<sup>5</sup> Burgess, M. (2021). Director-General's Annual Threat Assessment. Canberra, Australia, Australia Security Intelligence Organisation.

<sup>6</sup> Rottweiler, B., C. Clemmow and P. Gill (2025). "A Common Psychology of Male Violence? Assessing the Effects of Misogyny on Intentions to Engage in Violent Extremism, Interpersonal Violence and Support for Violence against Women." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 37(3): 287-312.

<sup>7</sup> Men with rigid stereotypes of masculinity were 17 times more likely to say they have physically hit their partner.

<sup>8</sup> Ekvall, A. (2019) Gender inequality, homophobia and violence: The three pillars of patriarchal norms and attitudes, and their relations. Ph.D. thesis, University of Antwerp.

<sup>9</sup> Díaz, P. C. and N. Valji (2019). "Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism: New Understandings and Policy Implications." *Journal of International Affairs* 72(2): 37-56.

Gender inequality has been particularly challenged by the digital trend towards androcentrism, meaning they exclude women through the creation of an unwelcoming environment.<sup>10</sup> Men who express sexist attitudes have found the internet to be a friendly space for sexist constructions of masculinity and femininity. The prevalence of social media has radically increased the spread of antifeminist ideas across groups, platforms, and geographical boundaries.<sup>11</sup> On these online forums misogyny acts as a sort of “common language” between groups with extreme beliefs, helping to spread their ideas.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.1 National Security and Gender Equality in Australia

Evidence shows that when countries are successful in pursuing efforts at gender equality there is often an anti-feminist *backlash* that can occur, resulting in efforts to roll back gender equality. This can include efforts to limit or prohibit abortion, birth control, and women’s right to vote or hold political positions. As men’s status is increasingly challenged by women’s equality efforts this can lead some men to feel as if they are being treated unjustly and being robbed of their entitlements.<sup>13</sup> This can lead to feelings of victimhood and resentment that can turn to a desire for renege against not just women, but other minority groups and society as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

Australia is currently experiencing a gender backlash. A 2022 survey by Ipsos found that 22% of Australian’s (30% of men and 14% of women) surveyed denied the existence of gender inequality, with 26% saying that feminism does more harm than good and 21% believing that men have lost economic, political and social power because of feminism.<sup>15</sup> A later 2025 survey of 2,048 Australians found that 30% of Australians believed that there was a “war on men” while 28% thought gender equality didn’t make sense given basic biological differences between men and women. 17% of Australian men believe gender equality efforts have gone too far and now negatively impact men, causing a crisis of masculinity.<sup>16</sup> The latter survey also showed that these beliefs are stronger in Gen Z and Millennials, indicating that the Australia population –

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<sup>10</sup> Kendall, L. (2002). *Hanging out in the virtual pub: masculinities and relationships online*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

<sup>11</sup> Ging, D. (2017). "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere." *Men and Masculinities*: 1097184X1770640.

<sup>12</sup> Phelan, A., J. White, C. Wallner and J. Paterson (2025). "Gendered Narratives and Misogyny as Motivators Towards Violent Extremism: The Case of Far-Right Extremism in the UK and Australia." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 37(7): 961-978.

<sup>13</sup> Anti-Defamation League, C. o. E. (2018). *When Women are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy*, Anti-Defamation League.

<sup>14</sup> Díaz, P. C. and N. Valji (2019). "Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism: New Understandings and Policy Implications." *Journal of International Affairs* 72(2): 37-56.

<sup>15</sup> Ipsos (4 March 2022) *One in five Australians think women who say they were abused often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape – the highest of any western nation*. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-au/one-five-australians-thinks-women-who-say-they-were-abused-often-make-or-exaggerate-claims-abuse-or> (Accessed: 20 January 2026).

<sup>16</sup> Plan International (3 April 2025) *Research reveals everyday Australian’s attitudes on gender equality*. Available at: <https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/research-reveals-everyday-australians-attitudes-on-gender-equality/> (Accessed: 20 January 2026).

particularly young men – are increasingly pushing back against support for gender equality. This is despite the fact that gender inequality clearly still exists in Australia.<sup>17</sup>

One in three Australia's are negatively biased about women's ability to fully participate in economic, political and educational spheres.<sup>18</sup> Economically, the national gender pay gap in 2025 was 21.8 percent and 41% of women have experienced workplace sexual harassment in the past five years (as well as 26% of men). Women also continue to trail in terms of political representation and leadership. One in four boards have no women and women in policy and politics continue to be sidelined, under-valued and overlooked.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Policy Recommendations

WIIS-A proposes the following recommendations for improving gender equality in national security:

#### **Recommendation 1: Domestic Focus for Australia's WPS Agenda**

Australia should place further emphasis on domestic methods of improving the inclusion of women in peace and security in addition to focusing on Australia's engagement with regional partners on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The Second Australian National Action Plan on WPS 2021–2031 (the NAP) provides a whole-of-government strategy to advance WPS commitments and identifies “demonstrating leadership and accountability” as one of its core outcomes. However, structural constraints undermine achieving meaningful accountability of WPS implementation under the NAP, including reliance on descriptive progress reporting and the challenge of translating commitments into sustained action within institutional cultures and systems.<sup>20</sup>

To address these gaps, WPS objectives should be systematically embedded into senior leadership performance and accountability frameworks across national security, defence, intelligence, and foreign policy institutions, reinforcing the NAP's leadership outcome with demonstrable domestic governance mechanisms. An independent oversight mechanism should also be established to monitor domestic implementation of the NAP and to report regularly to Parliament on progress, outcomes, and gaps, complementing existing progress reporting obligations under the NAP framework. This will help ensure that Australia's international leadership on the issue is credible and consistent with its own national implementation.

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<sup>17</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (19 August 2025). *Statistics about gender equality*. Available at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/human-rights-education/stats-and-facts-about-discrimination/statistics-about-gender-equality> (Accessed: 20 January 2026).

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Gender social norms index. United Nations, Human Development Reports.

<sup>19</sup> Stephenson, E. (2024). *The face of the nation: Gendered institutions in international affairs*, Oxford University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Caso, F. and S. Hutchinson (12 March 2025) *Australia's progress on Women, Peace, and Security: A critical look at the latest report*. Australian Institute of International Affairs. Available at: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australias-progress-on-women-peace-and-security-a-critical-look-at-the-latest-report/> (Accessed: 20 January 2026).

## **Recommendation 2: Gender Issues as a Traditional Security Threat**

The Australian Government needs to treat gendered security issues such as domestic violence and the rise of misogyny as a traditional security issue in existing policy documents such as the NAP and Defence strategy documents including the upcoming 2026 National Defence Strategy. In addition, the link between security issues like violent extremism and gender inequality needs to be better articulated in such strategies. The adoption of such an approach will increase the ability for government functions to act on gender-related issues including through access to security-related budgets.

## **Recommendation 3: Engagement with Gender Equality Expertise and Civil Society Organisations**

Gender equality expertise outside of government, including civil society organisations dedicated to the promotion of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), need to be provided with greater opportunities to contribute to policy discourse on gender equality in national security. Such grassroots forms of advocacy are integral to facilitating change. Engagement could be through more regular collaborations via community consultations with agencies including Home Affairs, Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade. One similar initiative that should be emulated in the national security sector is the “Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality” program.<sup>21</sup>

## **Recommendation 4: Public Messaging about the Importance of Gender Equality**

To combat the rise of mis- and disinformation about gender equality, including online, targeted efforts are required to educate and reinforce narratives about the importance of furthering gender equality as a national security and economic imperative. Public diplomacy functions in agencies including Home Affairs, Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade should improve their respective engagement community groups to create and disseminate these narratives, including through tailoring messaging for different social groups such as youth and migrant communities. Noting that a social media ban was implemented for under 16s in Australia from December 2025, relevant government agencies should find alternative ways such as in-person events and online webinars to engage with young people, especially young males, about the importance of gender equality.

# **4. Key Issues Relating to Gender Equality in National Security**

## **4.1 Supporting Gender Equality Including in Leadership**

Australia and other democratic countries face crisis-level workforce shortfalls in national security, putting at risk their ability to conduct maritime patrols, defend against cyber-attacks,

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<sup>21</sup> Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government (no date) *Working for Women: How we got here*. Available at: <https://genderequality.gov.au/how-we-got-here> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).



maintain force readiness, and more.<sup>22</sup> Our defence sectors also consistently fail to meet diversity and inclusion goals, e.g., recruitment and retention targets for women.<sup>23</sup>

Supporting gender equality in national security is not only a matter of fairness or representation; it is a strategic necessity. Evidence from Australia and internationally demonstrates that organisations drawing on a broader range of perspectives are better positioned to anticipate risks, challenge groupthink, and develop more robust and adaptive policy responses.<sup>24</sup> Gender-diverse teams have been shown to improve decision-making quality, organisational performance, and institutional legitimacy, all of which are required in an increasingly complex and uncertain national security landscape.<sup>25</sup>

Despite significant attention on the importance of gender diversity, only incremental progress has occurred, and women remain underrepresented across much of Australia's national security architecture, particularly at senior levels.<sup>26</sup> Persistent structural barriers, including opaque promotion pathways, uneven access to high-profile operational roles, informal networks of influence, and the disproportionate impact of caring responsibilities, continue to constrain the progression of women and gender-diverse individuals into senior leadership.<sup>27</sup>

Supporting gender equality in national security therefore requires moving beyond pipeline-focused approaches alone and addressing the structural and normative conditions that shape leadership outcomes. Structural conditions include transparent promotion and appointment processes, sustained investment in leadership development and sponsorship, accountability for diversity outcomes at senior levels, and organisational cultures that recognise diverse leadership styles and career trajectories. Normative conditions include the external and internal social signals that inform who is seen as an appropriate member of the national security community – who is allowed to speak, who is seen as an expert, and whose voices are listened to. Without deliberate action at the leadership level, gains in gender participation risk stagnating, limiting Australia's ability to build a national security workforce that is fully equipped to meet current and future challenges.

## 4.2 Intersectional Inclusion

### 4.2.1 Value-add of Intersectionality

In furthering gender equality from the national security and economic security perspectives, elevating intersectional forms of gender inclusion is pertinent. An intersectional approach acknowledges that women are not a homogenous group and that experiences of insecurity,

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Government. *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review*. Canberra, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. GAO. *Female Active-Duty Personnel*. 2020.

<sup>24</sup> OECD (2014), *Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264210745-en>.

<sup>25</sup> Egnell, R. (2016). Gender perspectives and military effectiveness: Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the national action plan on women, peace, and security. *Prism*, 6(1), 72-89.

<sup>26</sup> Cave, Danielle, Alex Oliver, Jenny Hayward-Jones, Kelsey Munro, and Erin Harris. "Foreign territory: Women in international relations." Lowy Institute (2019).

<sup>27</sup> Stephenson, E. *The Face of the Nation: Gendered Institutions in International Affairs*. Oxford, 2024.

exclusion and vulnerability are shaped by the interaction of gender with other aspects of identity including age, socio-economic background, sexuality, disability status and neurodiversity.<sup>28</sup>

Applying an intersectional lens to national security policy is critical because women from different backgrounds experience insecurity in distinct ways and bring diverse strengths to national security institutions.<sup>29</sup> Intersectional groups of women provide a clear value-add in national security, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women. Beyond the importance of reflecting the diversity of the Australian community, intercultural competence and multilingual skills are essential for Australia's engagement with international counterparts. Leveraging the lived experience of CALD Australian women with intercultural experience, foreign language proficiency and/or international experience is integral to closing key capability gaps in national security. For example, enhancing China literacy across Australian government policymaking, including in trade, diplomacy and intelligence, is particularly critical. However, the skills of Chinese-speaking diasporas across Australia continues to be a significant untapped resource.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Advancing Intersectional Leadership

While leadership across many sectors, including national security, has become more gender diverse over time, progress has been uneven when viewed through an intersectional lens. In 2023, research from the Diversity Council Australia on culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership positions found that while gender equity initiatives have made significant gains, they have often been criticised for prioritising outcomes for white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual and cisgender women.

Australian diplomacy provides a clear example of this gap in intersectional leadership. Asian-Australians comprise approximately 17.4 per cent of the Australian population, meaning roughly 8.7 per cent of Australians are female Asian-Australians. However, multicultural diversity is not proportionately reflected among women appointed as ambassadors and high commissioners. This persistent under-representation of Asian-Australian women in senior diplomatic roles reflects the “bamboo ceiling” that continues to limit their progression into leadership.<sup>31</sup>

More importantly, the under-representation of intersectional groups in leadership roles should not be understood solely as a diversity deficit. It also constitutes a governance risk. Institutions that draw leadership from a narrow social base are more likely to reproduce homogenous threat

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<sup>28</sup> Crenshaw, K. (1991). “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Institute of International Affairs (2024) *Elevating intersectionality in international affairs*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOsPAGZ8Jlo> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

<sup>30</sup> Jiang, Y. (2021). *Chinese-Australians in the Australian Public Service*. Lowy Institute. Available at: <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/chinese-australians-australian-public-service> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

<sup>31</sup> Akhand, A. (2023). *Australian diplomacy needs more women of colour*. The Strategist. Available at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australian-diplomacy-needs-more-women-of-colour> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

perceptions, policy assumptions, and engagement practices. This has direct implications for national security effectiveness, particularly in areas such as community resilience, regional diplomacy, crisis response, and conflict prevention, where local knowledge, linguistic competence, and cultural legitimacy are central to successful outcomes.

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of intersectional groups is not only harmful for the performance of the national security sector, but also for international perceptions about Australia. Poor representation in the national security community, including of CALD Australians can send the wrong message to security partners about Australia's commitment to inclusion and be perceived as hypocritical to the values of equality and fairness that the country proudly advocates.<sup>32</sup>

#### *4.2.3 Women, Peace and Security Agenda*

An intersectional approach is also necessary to ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of Australia's pursuit of the WPS Agenda. If WPS is to meet the needs of all women, regardless of race, religion, caste, disability status or other personal characteristics, intersectionality must be embedded in both policy design and implementation. However, the WPS agenda has been criticised on this basis, with scholar Nicola Pratt arguing that UNSCR 1325 "privileges gender above race, class and other relations of power in understanding women's experiences of conflict".<sup>33</sup> Soumita Basu provides another critique, noting that "UNSCR 1325 appears to be a tool that is used by powerful countries, located in the Global North, to establish favourable policies in post-conflict countries, located primarily in the Global South, in the name of gender equality."<sup>34</sup>

An associated risk in the implementation of WPS is the tendency towards proxy inclusion in leadership, whereby engagement is limited to a narrow group of women leaders who are already institutionally visible, English-speaking, or aligned with donor priorities. Such approaches risk sidelining Indigenous women, grassroots organisers, women with disabilities, and those operating outside formal civil society structures. When locally led leadership is selectively recognised, WPS initiatives may reinforce existing hierarchies rather than transform them.

Such critiques underscore the importance of ensuring that Australia's engagement with regional partners on WPS supports locally-led, context-specific approaches for the advancement of gender equality and security through an intersectional lens rather than serving a geopolitical tool of influence

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<sup>32</sup> Ajulo, A. and A. Akhand (2024). *Australia's national security community needs to become more culturally diverse*. The Strategist. Available at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-national-security-community-needs-to-become-more-culturally-diverse> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

<sup>33</sup> Pratt, N. (2013) "Reconceptualizing Gender, Reinscribing Racial-Sexual Boundaries in International Security: The Case of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security." *International Studies Quarterly* 57(4): 772-783.

<sup>34</sup> Basu, S. (2016) "The Global South writes 1325 (too)." *International Political Science Review* 37(3).

#### 4.2.4 Climate Change

The global impacts and responses so far to climate change further illustrates why intersectionality is central to national and economic security. The gendered dimensions of climate change are already well established, particularly in the Australian context where climate-induced disasters such as bushfires, floods and extreme heat events are becoming more frequent and severe. A survey conducted by Women’s Agenda in February 2023 found that 64% of polled Australian women reported already being impacted by climate change, with nearly half experiencing effects on their financial security.<sup>35</sup>

Viewed through an intersectional lens, climate impacts are most acutely felt by women from already vulnerable communities as seen in Western Sydney. More than half of the population in this region speaks a language other than English at home, and the proportion of low-income earners is higher than in other parts of Sydney. In fact, during extreme heat events, Western Sydney can be six to ten degrees hotter than coastal areas which significantly exacerbates health, economic and social risks for diverse women. This phenomenon accordingly highlights the importance of ensuring that policy responses to security challenges like climate change are viewed from an intersectional lens.

#### 4.3 Active Allyship in Furthering Gender Equality

Sustainable progress on gender equality in national security requires the active engagement of all gender equalities, especially males, as allies rather than positioning gender equality as an issue that women must advance alone.<sup>36</sup> Allyship refers to “a person with privilege who works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalised group of people to help address the systemic and interpersonal marginalisation they face”.<sup>37</sup> Effective allyship goes beyond passive or performative statements in support of diversity and instead involves an active commitment to recognising and overcoming bias, challenging exclusionary norms, and using influence to drive change.

Allyship is particularly important in the national security context. As highlighted in a joint webinar hosted by WIIS-A with AP4D about the importance of diversity in the development, diplomacy and defence sectors, “advocacy from underrepresented groups remains vital but

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<sup>35</sup> Priestley, A. (2023). *We need to talk about women and the climate load*. Women’s Agenda. Available at: <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/eds-blog/we-need-to-talk-about-women-and-the-climate-load> (Accessed at: 8 March 2023).

<sup>36</sup> Australian Public Service Commission, Australian Government. (2023). *Allyship: Learn, Listen and Advocate*. Available at: <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/allyship-learn-listen-and-advocate> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

<sup>37</sup> Diversity Council Australia. (no date). *D&I Allyship and Champions*. Available at: <https://www.dca.org.au/resources/di-planning/di-champions> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

alone cannot drive systemic change. Allies... play an essential role in opening doors, mentoring and sponsoring talent as well as challenging exclusionary practices”.<sup>38</sup>

Community organisations in Australia are increasingly actively recognising the importance of allyship for improving gender equality in national security. WIIS-A ensures that its membership and events are open to people of all genders to explicitly encourage male participation. In addition, the Australian Women in Security Network previously hosted a webinar focused on the role of male allies in advancing gender equality within the security sector.<sup>39</sup> In such way, actively embedding allies in policy responses is an effective method in mainstreaming the importance of advancing gender equality as a priority for all in national security.

## 5. Conclusion

Gender equality in national security is not a peripheral or aspirational objective. It is central to Australia’s ability to safeguard its people, interests, and values in an increasingly complex strategic environment. As WIIS-A’s submission has outlined, persistent workforce shortages, evolving security threats and growing demands for institutional legitimacy require national security organisations to draw on the full breadth of available talent. Evidence is clear that gender-diverse and inclusive institutions are better equipped to challenge groupthink, enhance decision-making, and deliver more resilient and adaptive policy outcomes. Without deliberate action, particularly at senior leadership levels, progress will continue to be incremental, and Australia will risk constraining its national security capability at a time when it can least afford to do so.

This submission has also emphasised that advancing gender equality must be intersectional in design and practice, including in Australia’s engagement with regional counterparts for advancing the WPS Agenda. Women’s experiences of insecurity, exclusion and leadership pathways are shaped by intersecting factors such as culture, race, language, disability and socio-economic background.

Finally, sustainable progress requires shared responsibility. Advancing gender equality in national security cannot be carried by women and marginalised groups alone. Active allyship from those in positions of privilege, particularly men in leadership roles, is essential to dismantling structural barriers, challenging exclusionary norms and creating pathways for diverse leadership to emerge and thrive. By embedding gender equality, intersectional inclusion and allyship into the core of national security policy and practice, Australia can strengthen its institutions, enhance its international standing, and build a national security workforce that is truly fit for purpose in meeting current and future challenges.

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<sup>38</sup> Ho, G. (2025). *AP4D x WIIS-A Panel: Diversity in Development, Defence and Diplomacy*. Available at: <https://www.wiisaustralia.org/blog/ap4d-x-wiis-a-panel-diversity-in-development-defence-and-diplomacy> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).

<sup>39</sup> Australian Women in Security Network. (no date). *Webinar: Men as Allies*. Available at: <https://www.awsn.org.au/eventdetails/20873/webinar-men-as-allies> (Accessed: 8 January 2026).