



Australian Government

Australian Government Response to the
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and
Trade report:

The pursuit of equality: Inquiry into the rights of women and
children

September 2025

Response to the recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends the Australian Government:

- Commit to accelerating action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to women and children; and
- Create a roadmap identifying measures which can be taken in order to improve Australia's performance in the SDGs and in assisting our strategic partners to meet goals under the framework.

Response:

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The Australian Government has a number of mutually reinforcing national strategies and plans to guide and report on government action to advance gender equality, including to improve Australia's performance in relation to relevant SDGs.

The Australian Government is committed to genuine outcomes for women and girls in Australia and has an ambitious domestic gender equality agenda to close the gender gaps in our community. The Australian Government's efforts to drive gender equality are underpinned by *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* (Working for Women), which was, released on 7 March 2024. Working for Women's Reporting Framework tracks and reports on measures to achieve gender equality over time.

The Australian Government's implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022-2032)* (the National Plan) coordinates action across the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to support victim-survivors and prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). The Australian Government has invested over \$4 billion from the 2022-23 (October) Budget to the 2025-26 Budget cycle to support women's safety initiatives.

Australia is committed to implementing the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and achieving the SDGs. The commitment to step up Australia's support for the *2030 Agenda* and the SDGs is reflected in *Australia's International Development Policy*, released in August 2023. *Australia's International Development Policy* recognises the *2030 Agenda* and the SDGs as the agreed norms, standards and values of the international development system, including full respect for international law and human rights. With five years left, Australia recognises the need to advance implementation of the *2030 Agenda* to achieve all the SDGs.

Recognising that over 435 million women and girls are living in extreme poverty, the *2030 Agenda* and gender equality are at the heart of *Australia's International Development Policy*, with ambitious targets to improve the lives of women and girls. The Australian Government is committed to doing its part to achieve all of the SDGs, recognising that our societies, economies and environments are interlinked and underpinned by human rights and gender equality.

Australia's *International Gender Equality Strategy*, released in February 2025, outlines how the Government is driving gender equality through all tools of foreign policy, including our international development program. The strategy includes a focus on: work to end sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and advance women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, pursue gender responsive peace and security, deliver gender equitable climate action and humanitarian assistance, promote women's economic equality and inclusive trade, and support locally led approaches to women's leadership.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends the Australian Government, when developing and implementing the new International Gender Equality Strategy, identify gender-based violence as a key strategic issue, and identify pathways and mechanisms to support its regional neighbours in addressing related issues.

Response:

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to responding to, addressing and preventing all forms of GBV. *Australia's International Development Policy* highlights this commitment, for a stronger, more secure and more inclusive Indo-Pacific region. Regional and bilateral Development Partnership Plans will be underpinned by robust gender, disability and social inclusion analyses, including in relation to GBV.

The *International Gender Equality Strategy* reinforces the commitment to tackling all forms of GBV, including through increased investment in prevention and response services in the Indo-Pacific and in crisis and conflict settings. The strategy commits to increasing support to Pacific crisis centres responding to GBV through a new initiative, Pacific Strong: Amplifying Action to End Violence against Women and Girls (PAVE). PAVE is a five-year, AUD 25 million (2026–2031) multi-country initiative to improve access, quality, and reach of VAWG response services, providing long-term support for the safety and wellbeing of survivors of violence in the Pacific.

The Government works with partners across Asia and the Pacific to support regional and bilateral programs focused on essential services for survivors, including access to justice, violence prevention, assistance to local women's organisations and evidence-building. Australia supports bilateral programs in 17 countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

For example, in the Indo Pacific the Government:

- Funds UN Women to deliver projects focused on essential services for survivors, violence prevention and assistance to local women's organisations addressing GBV (AU\$22.5 million, 2020-25);
- Supports the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) initiative, kNOwVAWdata, which is building expertise to strengthen data and research on the prevalence of violence against women and girls (AU\$3 million, 2021-24);
- Works with the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, European Union, and UN Women on the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls Phase II (Australia's contribution AU\$16 million,

2023-27);

- Partners with UNICEF on Empowered and Equal Futures for Girls in Southeast Asia to make schools safe for girls and strengthen education systems across Southeast Asia to address GBV and promote positive gender norms (AU\$7 million, 2023-27);
- Works alongside the Government of Timor-Leste through the Nabilan program to reduce the prevalence of violence and ensure services are available to women and children experiencing violence (AU\$20 million, 2022-26);
- Works with the Cambodian Government, UN organisations, civil society and private sector to ensure essential services are available for people with a disability and women experiencing GBV (AU\$30 million, 2023-28);
- Partners with the Government of Vietnam and United Nations agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women) through the Ending Violence Against Women and Children program for integrated policies and program to strengthen prevention of and response to violence against women and children (AU\$9.5 million, 2021-25); and
- Supports trusted partners such as UNFPA in Myanmar to deliver GBV and mental health and psychosocial support services, in collaboration with local organisations to reach persons in the most vulnerable situations.

In the Pacific, DFAT supports GBV prevention and survivor services, primarily through Pacific Women Lead and bilateral gender programming. Pacific Women Lead is a five-year (AU\$170 million, 2021-26) investment designed to advance the safety of Pacific women and girls, in all their diversity, and their equitable sharing of resources, opportunities and decision-making with men and boys. One of the intended outcomes of Pacific Women Lead is a reduction in violence against women and children, along with improved access to quality, comprehensive support services for survivors of GBV, including in times of disasters. Australia funds GBV services in Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Through Pacific Women Lead, Australia funds prevention mechanisms. For example, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre provides education and advocacy on gender equality and prevention of violence, and The Pacific Community coordinates the Regional Working Group on Domestic Violence Legislation that facilitates exchanges on good practices. Additionally, Australia supports education, leadership and economic empowerment of women and girls through programs such as Balance of Power, Pacific Girl and Markets for Change. Empowering women and girls and tackling discriminatory gender norms are effective ways to reduce, and eliminate, GBV.

The Attorney-General's Department works closely with the PNG Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) to address a range of law and justice priorities, including family and sexual violence, and sorcery accusation-related violence. Through the DFAT funded PNG Institutional Partnership Program, the Attorney-General's Department has assisted in law reform efforts to address family and sexual violence, and delivered, alongside DJAG and other DFAT-funded programs, training to village court officials on the Family Protection Act and the use of Protection Orders in cases of domestic violence. The Attorney-General's Department has also worked closely with DJAG to assist in the development of a sorcery National Action Plan to combat instances of sorcery accusation-related violence.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade investigate and implement strategies to assist in the improvement of legal frameworks and support services in the Indo-Pacific regarding GBV.

Response:

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to responding to, addressing and preventing GBV in all its forms. *Australia's International Development Policy* highlights this commitment for a stronger, more secure and more inclusive Indo-Pacific. The *International Gender Equality Strategy* reinforce this commitment.

The Government works with partners across Asia and the Pacific to support regional and bilateral programs focused on essential services for survivors, including access to justice, violence prevention, assistance to local women's organisations and evidence-building. DFAT respects Pacific Island governments' rights to determine their own legal frameworks.

Through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women, Australia is supporting women's machineries in Kiribati, Tonga and the Solomon Islands develop comprehensive national prevention frameworks.

Bilateral investments such as PNG Women Lead (AU\$55.2 million, 2021-28) and Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls in the Solomon Islands (AUD5.3 million, 2024-27) strengthen the operation and implementation of existing domestic legal frameworks. PNG Women Lead provides training to police and law enforcement agencies to strengthen knowledge around recognising, responding to and handling GBV matters. Under the Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls programs in the Solomon Islands, the International Women's Development Agency works with crisis centres to strengthen reporting quality in-line with SAFENET, a network of government and non-government organizations to strengthen referral and coordination of SGBV services in the Solomon Islands

As part of Pacific Women Lead, DFAT supports The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to implement the Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific program (PGEPP). PGEPP addresses the priorities identified in the 2023 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration and the 2017 Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights to support Pacific Island governments to adopt policies and legislation that support gender equality and women's and girls' human rights.

Australia, through its development partnership with Indonesia, contributed to the development of legal and policy reforms to address and prevent GBV in Indonesia. Australia continues to support the Indonesian government and civil society organisations to implement the reforms, including work to improve access to justice and essential support services for GBV victim-survivors.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends the Australian Government:

- Work with state and territory governments in identifying potential gaps in legislation where acid attacks may not be sufficiently encapsulated, and where improvements can be made to data collection, risk assessment and screening tools;
- Consider the viability of the introduction of a Commonwealth offence specifically directed at violence using acid as a weapon, including models which prohibit the sale of certain corrosive substances and potential amendments to Division 271 of the Criminal Code 1995 (Cth); and
- Conduct research in relation to the prevalence, nature and impacts of acid attacks in Australia, particularly in relation to support services and medical assistance.

Response:

The Government notes this recommendation.

Protecting Australians from harm is of the utmost importance to the Australian Government. Under Australia's federal system of government, the Commonwealth, states and territories have different areas of responsibility. States and territories are generally responsible for crimes against the person including acid attacks which may already constitute an offence such as serious assaults, grievous bodily harm, torture, attempted murder and homicide offences.

The Commonwealth regularly engages with states and territories on criminal justice issues through fora such as the Standing Council of Attorney's-General and the Police Minister Council.

The Commonwealth will continue working with states and territories to ensure acid attacks are sufficiently encapsulated as a form of criminal offending in legislation.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends the Australian Government develop and implement strategies to counteract orphanage trafficking and tourism, including:

- The adoption of a whole-of-government position explicitly condemning the practice of orphanage trafficking and orphanage tourism;
- Developing stronger guidance material for travellers in relation to potential risks in relation to orphanage tourism and volunteering;
- Working with multilateral partners (including via interparliamentary working groups and the Inter-parliamentary Union) to eliminate orphanage trafficking and tourism;
- Improved regulation and oversight by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission in relation to institutions engaging in (or suspected to be engaged in) orphanage trafficking and tourism; and
- The creation of a specific offence criminalising orphanage trafficking.

Response:

The Government agrees in part to this recommendation.

The Australian Government remains strongly committed to addressing all forms of modern slavery, including by working with multilateral partners to eliminate orphanage trafficking and related practices of orphanage tourism.

At the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council (8 March 2023), the Government delivered a national statement during the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children to reiterate the Government's commitment to keep all children safe from exploitation.

The Government will continue to engage with the work of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children; the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery; and the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children—including through Australia's Ambassador to Counter Modern Slavery, People Smuggling and Human Trafficking.

Australia also regularly engages with governments and multilateral partners on issues relating to modern slavery and human trafficking, including through forums such as Alliance 8.7, in which Australia is currently a governing member. Through DFAT, the Government also participates in global forums to share volunteering good practice on issues such as child protection and 'voluntourism'. Through the Australian Volunteers Program, the Government will continue to work with partners to draw on the program's extensive guidance material concerning safe child volunteering practices.

DFAT will also continue to use Smartraveller communications to highlight to travellers the risks associated with volunteering at orphanages and existing messaging that the Government discourages short term unskilled volunteering in orphanages.

The Government does not consider it is necessary to enact a specific offence to criminalise orphanage trafficking. Australia's offences for slavery, slavery-like practices and trafficking in persons in Division 270 and 271 of the *Criminal Code* (Cth) capture exploitation or intended exploitation in any industry or setting, including institutional settings such as orphanages. The offences apply to a broad range of criminal actors. All offences in Divisions 270 and 271, other than the domestic trafficking offences, apply to the overseas conduct of Australian citizens, residents and bodies corporate.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends the Australian Government develop legislation addressed at the rights of the victims of child sexual abuse material, including:

- The provision of legal pathways to enable victims (including those in overseas jurisdictions) to seek civil penalties from the perpetrator, including compensation and restitution; and
- Victim access to a perpetrator notification system from law enforcement agencies.

Response:

The Government agrees in part to this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in all settings and supporting victims and survivors. Every child and young person has the right to be safe from child sexual abuse, and it is our collective responsibility to protect them.

There are existing legislative and administrative pathways that enable a victim and survivor of child abuse material to seek compensation or reparations or restitution. For example, section 21B of the *Crimes Act 1914* (Cth) gives a court discretionary power to order an offender to make reparations to any person who suffers loss or expense ‘by reason of’ the offence as part of the sentencing proceeding.¹ Similar reparations or restitution provisions exist under state and territory legislation. State and territory victims of crime compensation schemes may also be available to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse material offences.

Following the Super for Survivors campaign, the Australian Government has committed to closing a loophole which allows child sexual abuse offenders to deny victims and survivors compensation through shielding assets in the superannuation system. The Government will legislate to allow victims and survivors of child sexual abuse offenders to seek a court order to access personal and voluntary superannuation contributions made by convicted offenders to pay court ordered compensation which remains outstanding for 12 months or more.

The Government will also legislate to allow compensation orders for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to survive an offender’s bankruptcy. This will prevent offenders from being able to avoid compensating victims and survivors by becoming bankrupt.

Under measure 10 of the *First Commonwealth Action Plan* of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*, the Attorney-General’s Department is conducting a scoping study on the availability of civil remedies for victims of Commonwealth child sexual abuse offences. The findings are expected to inform the National Strategy’s Second Action Plan.

The Government **notes** the recommendation for ‘victim access to a perpetrator notification system from law enforcement agencies’. Further consideration is required of the international evidence base around such notification systems and how such a scheme could apply in the Australian context. This includes ensuring that any future perpetrator notification system would achieve the objective of supporting victims and survivors of child sexual abuse material.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends the Australian Government continue to use international forums, including bilateral platforms and interparliamentary networks, to emphasise the need to strengthen laws and protections regarding the human rights of women and children in conflict and crisis situations. This should include an emphasis on developing and

¹ *Crimes Act 1914* (Cth), s 21B(1)(b).

strengthening responses to issues such as sexual and gender-based violence, children in exploitative environments and industries, and modern slavery.

Response:

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The Australian Government recognises that conflict and crisis situations heighten the risks of modern slavery, especially for women and children who remain disproportionately affected by these crimes. Australia engages with partners in our region and globally to build awareness and help countries to strengthen their responses to these inhumane crimes and their drivers.

Across its multilateral and bilateral engagement, DFAT, along with other Commonwealth departments, will continue to employ every strategy and diplomatic tool at its disposal to uphold global human rights laws and norms, as they relate to the rights of women and children, consistent with Australia's values and interests. The Government will continue to advocate and negotiate in international fora to uphold and strengthen legal and normative commitments to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of women and of children in all contexts, including in conflict and crisis situations. This includes addressing issues of SGBV, exploitation and modern slavery. Australia is supporting the establishment of a global Gender Justice Practitioner Hub which will support practitioners involved in securing gender justice for victims and survivors of international crimes.

The Attorney-General's Department leads Australia's support to the Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network (PILON), a regional network of senior Pacific law and justice officials. Combatting SGBV by strengthening justice system responses and ensuring access to justice for women and girls is a strategic priority for PILON. The SGBV Working Group has representation from 17 Pacific Island countries and territories. It has developed best practice, including model provisions and explanatory text, for supporting vulnerable witnesses in cases involving SGBV and on the use of victim impact statements. In November 2023, PILON published *Regional Guidelines for Prosecutors and Witnesses Support Officers to support Vulnerable Witnesses through the Prosecution of SGBV Offences*. These Guidelines, which are being rolled out in several countries in the Pacific, aim to expedite SGBV prosecutions, reduce re-traumatisation to vulnerable witnesses, ensure courts hear the best evidence and improve public confidence in reporting SGBV offences.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) ensure that all activities concerning humanitarian, crisis or disaster responses involving DFAT-funded or - supported entities be:

- Assessed upon application on the basis of local engagement with the community, including the requirement of a statement by the applicant on the basis of local engagement, particularly emphasising gender diversity and considerations of the needs of children;
- Monitored at appropriate intervals to determine outcomes and impact; and
- Reported to the Parliament as part of the DFAT annual report.

Response:

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to supporting gender-responsive, socially-inclusive and locally led humanitarian action. DFAT's contracts and grant agreements stipulate that all recipients must comply with DFAT policies on gender equality, child protection and preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. For DFAT procurements, tenderers must demonstrate how they will deliver on Australian international development priorities, including gender equality, Indigenous participation, disability, social inclusion, and localisation in delivering the services.

Australia is committed to increasing local engagement; and there are existing and sufficient controls in place to not require a new process for a statement on local engagement from partners. *Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework* measures outcomes and impact of humanitarian and crisis response efforts, including through a three-tier indicator framework, annual investment performance processes, annual reporting and independent evaluations.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade allocate a specific portion of Official Development Assistance funding to projects relating to data collection on issues affecting women and children.

Response:

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

DFAT already provides Official Development Assistance funding to projects relating to data collection, as part of broader programming in response to partner requests.

DFAT works with national governments and other development partners to strengthen the disaggregation of data, including by gender, disability and other social inclusion markers and to strengthen the integration of gender analyses within and across development initiatives, including support for disability-disaggregated data and the disaggregation of disability data by sex and gender, to ensure gender-responsive approaches to disability.

Australia provides various regional and country level initiatives that contribute to data for gender equality and related areas, such as the inclusion of people marginalised by disability and social protection. This includes direct support to the SPC, which manages the Pacific Statistical Support Program and oversees implementation of the Pacific Roadmap for Gender Statistics.

Since 2014, the Government has supported partners with the production and utilisation of data to enable national level policy and program development for gender equality. This includes support for UN Women's flagship gender data program Women Count to close data gaps on priority gender equality issues in the Indo-Pacific region, including on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality and the human rights women and girls. Australia also funds UNFPA kNOwVAWdata initiative which supports countries in Asia and the Pacific to undertake international best-practice violence prevalence

surveys, covering intimate partner and non-partner violence. The Equality Insights program, supported by DFAT since 2014 (including its original development as the Independent Deprivation Measure), is a unique tool for assessing poverty at the individual level, across multiple dimensions. Australian Government support has evolved alongside the development and maturation of the tool, with recent work focused on its application in Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

Australia has also provided funding to UNICEF since 2014 for projects aimed at fostering the availability and quality of data on children with disabilities, at a global level. This partnership resulted in the development of tools, including the Child Functioning Module, the Teacher Version of the Child Functioning Module and the Inclusive Education Module. Technical assistance was provided to over 60 countries on implementing the Child Functioning Module increasing the quantity of quality data on children with disabilities. The information gap on children with disabilities was addressed through analysis and reports like UNICEF's *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities* (2021). Quality data are key to eliminating discrimination against women and children on the basis of disability.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop an International Children's Development Strategy which outlines:

- Australia's commitment to upholding the rights of children internationally;
- Reflect commitments made via international legislation and agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Identify mechanisms and approaches in which it can support neighbours and partners in enhancing their international law obligations and promote the rights of children in local and regional settings; and
- Provide mechanisms in which children can be involved in policy development on matters which affect their interests, lives and rights.

Response:

The Government notes this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to work in a range of ways to support the needs of young people in partner countries, including upholding the rights of women and children internationally, and building on existing connections through education, religious and cultural institutions, and youth organisations. This is reflected in existing strategies and policies.

Australia's International Development Policy acknowledges that there are significant demographic shifts occurring across the region, bringing unique challenges and opportunities in different countries, particularly for women, youth and children, such as access to quality education and health services, and creating sufficient and decent jobs.

Australia assumes its responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the rights of children in local and regional settings, including by ensuring robust child protection requirements

under the international development program, which also includes reference to international conventions and Australian domestic legislation.

Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework includes a specific education indicator for children, tracking the proportion of children and young people achieving at least minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, with Australian support.