GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY | **GRIFFITH ASIA INSTITUTE**

Submission to the inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative

Griffith Asia Institute submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Helen Berents, Outi Donovan, Queenie Pearl Tomaro, Anggia Valerisha, Mariel Dominique Verroya and Erika Isabel Bulan Yague

Make it matter

Acknowledgment of Country

Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we learn and work and pays respect to the Elders, past and present, and extends that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Griffith University campuses sit on the lands of the Yugarabul, Yuggera, Jagera, Turrbal, Yugambeh and Kombumerri peoples. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' unique relationship with and understanding and ongoing stewardship of these lands. Through collaboration with staff, students and community members we are committed to embedding Indigenous cultures and diverse knowledge systems in our learning and teaching, research, operations, and partnerships.

Submitted by:

Griffith Asia Institute
Griffith University

170 Kessels Road
Nathan Qld 4111
gai@griffith.edu.au
+61 3735 2121

January 2026

Contents

Executive summary

Gender equality is not only a social or rights-based objective, but a structural condition for national resilience, democratic stability, and sustainable economic security. Evidence from development and governance research shows that gender inclusive participation improves decision-making quality and enhances states' ability to manage risk and crisis.[1] In this context, institutions that are more gender-equal are also more likely to earn and sustain public trust, which is a critical, but often overlooked component of states' national security.[2] We know that in contexts where these supports are absent, women often step up, taking on disproportionate and unsupported burdens in post-disaster recovery and rebuilding. For example, during the 2022 Northern Rivers floods in NSW, the scale of the disaster meant that the usual support services became scarce however, the community-led response was primarily led by women (largely volunteers who coordinated and took up leadership roles)[3]. In the Philippines, post-Typhoon Haiyan women's health and livelihood needs were overlooked because they were not included in formal planning despite women's central role in community rebuilding.[4] Therefore, there is a need to rethink how national security is understood and assessed by the Australian Government for the benefit of the nation and our regional neighbourhood. Rather than a fixed concept, national security evolves in response to changing global and regional challenges, and requires a coordinated, gender-sensitive, institution-focused response across nations.[5]

As a middle power on the global stage, Australia's influence rests on diplomacy, coalition-building, and normative leadership within multilateral systems. However, this role is becoming increasingly complex. Multilateral cooperation is under strain, highlighted by recent decisions by the United States to withdraw from several international and UN-affiliated organisations. At the same time, global progress on gender equality is falling well short of what is needed to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Together, these trends make the security consequences of exclusions and institutional weakness harder to ignore.[6] These developments underscore the growing importance of resilient institutions, inclusive governance, and trusted political systems as the foundations of long-term stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific.

At a time marked by intersecting crises such as geopolitical fragmentation, climate stress, democratic backsliding, and weakened multilateral cooperation, our security increasingly depends on the credibility of institutions, social cohesion, and the capacity to anticipate and respond to crises. Gender equality is needed now more than ever. Extensive evidence has shown the value of ensuring gender equality, both for the lives of women and girls and for the stability and prosperity of countries and our region.[7] Gender equality is not merely about 'helping' women but about partnering with women to build a more peaceful world. Women are not merely victims or beneficiaries, but are leaders and innovators and experts. There is an opportunity to recognise and enable this to strengthen Australia's own security and the security of others across our region.

Australia already has mechanisms and processes that make an impact in this space, and have already helped build a reputation in the region of the Australian Government as a champion of gender equality. However, such a reputation is risked if secure, long-term investment is absent, and there is no meaningful commitment to enduring partnerships and support for gender equality advocates on the ground around the region as well as at home. Gender *inequality* can be seen as a security risk, exacerbating social tensions, undermining political progress, and limiting economic opportunities. These gaps can provide fertile ground for opportunistic actors; and shows why gender equality must be a national security priority for Australia.

There is an urgent need to consolidate and advance efforts that take seriously political and policy change and the leadership and expertise of locally led initiatives and interventions. Women of all ages are on the frontlines of crisis response across the region.[8] Yet efforts to ensure gender equality, including targets for inclusion and participation and funding, are often the first to be put aside for things deemed more 'urgent' in crisis contexts. This can undermine the work women are doing. Ensuring their safety and supporting their work is central to ensuring coherent, organised responses to humanitarian and climate disasters at all levels from the local to the national and regional.

Our region faces multiple and compounding crises, from climate change and natural disasters, to rising authoritarianism and shrinking civil space, to regressive gender practices and gender-based violence. These crises disproportionately impact women and girls and, at the same time, magnify risks to social and political cohesion. This complexity requires bold but nuanced action. Gender equality cannot be an afterthought in national security conversations, but must be considered, integrated, and achieved to ensure a peaceful and secure region.

Overview of recommendations

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

RECOMMENDATION 1: **GENDER TARGETS FRAMEWORK**

Develop gender targets across all foreign policy areas, accompanied by effective evaluation mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATION 2: **DFAT GENDER COORDINATION**

Establish clear lines of feedback and collaboration between the Ambassador for Gender Equality and the broader gender mainstreaming processes within DFAT to advance gender equality.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA AS CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITY

RECOMMENDATION 3: **ASEAN GENDER PILLAR**

Formalise gender equality as a core pillar of Australia's ASEAN strategic partnership by establishing a dedicated mechanism to support the implementation and localisation of Women, Peace and Security commitments across Southeast Asia, particularly in ASEAN member states without National Action Plans.

RECOMMENDATION 4: **INTERSECTIONAL INCLUSION**

Strengthen gender equality efforts through an intersectional approach that recognises the capacities of young people, leveraging existing frameworks and policies for inclusion

REGIONAL AND DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN DISASTER AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

RECOMMENDATION 5: **GENDERED DISASTER RESILIENCE**

Reframe gender equality as a core security and resilience function to ensure robust and comprehensive systems for when disaster strikes.

RECOMMENDATION 6: **GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN SECURITY**

Recognise gender equality as a national and economic security imperative in humanitarian action.

URGENCY OF GENDER RESPONSIVE COUNTER-EXTREMISM MEASURES

RECOMMENDATION 7: **OPERATIONAL GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

Embed gender equality as a mandatory operational principle across all Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism initiatives, domestically and regionally, by systematically supporting women-led and community-based prevention efforts within its security and development partnerships.

RECOGNISING THREATS TO WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ROLES AS EARLY WARNING SIGN OF DEMOCRATIC AND NATIONAL SECURITY RISKS

RECOMMENDATION 8 **GENDERED DEMOCRATIC RISK**

Recognise gender inequality, particularly violence and exclusion targeting women in formal political roles, as a democratic and security risk in national and international security assessments.

GAI SUBMISSION | GENDER EQUALITY AS A NATIONAL SECURITY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY IMPERATIVE

ROLE OF LOCALLY-LED LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 9   DIGITAL GENDER INCLUSION

Invest in civil society initiatives on digitalisation that advance gender equality.

RECOMMENDATION 9   SUSTAINABLE CIVIL SOCIETY FUNDING

CSOs should be sustainably resourced over the long term to enable them to fulfil their role as policy-partners and knowledge-holders

The Australian Government's efforts to advance gender equality

The Australian Government's efforts to promote gender equality in the foreign policy context have been commendable. Take, for example, women's representation in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT). Although the prestigious diplomatic postings continue to be dominated by men[9], female Heads of Mission have increased from 27 per cent in 2015 to 52 per cent in 2024, and women account for more than half of DFAT's workforce today.[10] Alongside the increasing representation of women, a concerted effort to mainstream gender into Australia's foreign policy places Australia on par with states such as Germany that have adopted an explicitly Feminist Foreign Policy. This is evident, for example, in the gender equality funding targets in Australia's overseas development aid.[11] These and other efforts to integrate gender into Australia's foreign policy – such as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plan - represent important steps towards a more inclusive diplomatic agenda.

Yet more work remains to be done in fulfilling the aspiration to mainstream gender equality across all foreign policy portfolios, as outlined in the recent *International Gender Equality Strategy*.[12] Gender equality tends to be siloed into 'soft' policy areas such as development, while being considerably weaker in other areas. In the case of trade, for example, a careful consideration of gendered dynamics that underpin international trade and investment flows is imperative to ensure that Australia's bi- and multilateral trade agreements promote the protection and rights of the most vulnerable workers globally. Specific gender targets and requirements are therefore needed to advance gender mainstreaming across trade and other portfolios. This should be accompanied by robust and transparent evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of gender mainstreaming.

> **RECOMMENDATION 1** | Develop gender targets across all foreign policy areas, accompanied by effective evaluation mechanisms.

A strong signal of the Australian Government's continued commitment to gender equality is the establishment of the role of Ambassador for Gender Equality more than a decade ago. The Ambassador's remit includes promoting efforts that address gender-based violence, economic equality and inclusive trade, climate change and women's leadership in the context of Australia's diplomatic engagement in the region and the international community at large. To capitalise on the Ambassadorial role and to further support the Ambassador to mainstream gender across all foreign policy areas, it is necessary to ensure that the role is clearly integrated into the decision-making processes within DFAT. Alongside acting as an outward-facing representation of Australia's interests, a clearly defined internal role that allows for strategic input by the Ambassador could enhance the efforts to mainstream gender more comprehensively.

> **RECOMMENDATION 2** | Establish clear lines of feedback and collaboration between the Ambassador for Gender Equality and the broader gender mainstreaming processes within DFAT to advance gender equality.

The importance of the women, peace and security agenda as a cross-cutting priority

Australia places significant strategic value on its partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This partnership provides a concrete platform through which Australia can advance gender equality as a matter of regional stability and resilience. In 2022, ASEAN adopted a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), signalling a strengthened collective commitment to women's participation in peace and security processes and to addressing gendered protection risks.[13] As a longstanding ASEAN strategic partner, Australia is well-positioned to support ASEAN member states in meeting these commitments and in embedding gender equality as a foundation for sustainable and inclusive development across the region.

Comparable partners have already demonstrated the strategic importance of this engagement. Canada, for example, has provided targeted support to advance WPS in ASEAN, including funding of approximately $6.6 million for capacity-building initiatives and support for the development of the ASEAN WPS Localisation Toolkit and Guidelines.[14] This engagement highlights ASEAN's regional and global significance, including for countries outside Southeast Asia. Australia can build on these efforts by prioritising support for the implementation and localisation of WPS commitments, particularly in ASEAN member states that have yet to adopt national WPS action plans (i.e. Brunei, Thailand, Myanmar, and others).[15]

Australia's engagement with ASEAN is further reinforced by shared and persistent challenges relating to violence against women (VAW). Several ASEAN countries, including Viet Nam[16] and Cambodia,[17] continue to experience high rates of intimate partner violence, while Australia itself is confronting rising rates of gender-based violence domestically.[18] These harms are increasingly compounded by intersecting pressures such as climate change,[19] violent extremism, and the gendered impacts of digital transformation. Regional cooperation is crucial to address these risks; one that can move beyond policy alignment to practical, effective, sustainably resourced, and context-specific implementation, capacity-building, and local ownership of WPS frameworks. A clear example could be for Australia to establish a dedicated ASEAN-Australia Women, Peace and Security Implementation Partnership, led by DFAT, to provide sustained technical assistance, targeted funding, and policy support for the localisation and implementation of WPS commitments across ASEAN. It will also be more impactful for Australia to prioritise support for ASEAN member states *without* national WPS action plans, integrate WPS objectives into Australia's broader regional security and development engagement, and include mechanisms for monitoring impact and sharing best practice across the region.

> RECOMMENDATION 3 | Formalise gender equality as a core pillar of Australia's ASEAN strategic partnership by establishing a dedicated mechanism to support the implementation and localisation of Women, Peace and Security commitments across Southeast Asia, particularly in ASEAN member states without national action plans.

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, established by the UN Security Council in 2015, affirms the importance of institutionalising youth participation in peace and security decision-making and highlights the complementarity between the YPS and WPS agendas.[20] International evidence, including UN Security Council resolutions on YPS, underscores that peace and security outcomes are more durable when youth participation is institutionalised alongside gender equality commitments.[21]

Strengthening WPS implementation across the region also creates a strategic opportunity to advance the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, recognising that young women and men are critical actors in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and sustaining inclusive peace. There is an opportunity to build on momentum for WPS in ASEAN and regional neighbours to ensure that Australia's support is deliberately designed to reinforce intergenerational and youth-inclusive approaches, including by enabling young women's leadership and partnering with youth-led and youth-focused civil society organisations that are already advancing peace, social cohesion, and gender justice across ASEAN.[22] ASEAN experience demonstrates that youth-led organisations are key drivers of localised peace initiatives, particularly when gender equality is embedded as a cross-cutting principle.[23]

The Australian Government would benefit from recognising the interlinkages between WPS and YPS, which would enable the support of youth participation within WPS governance and implementation structures, investing in young women peacebuilders, and aligning with emerging ASEAN efforts to formalise the YPS agenda through regional frameworks and national action plans. Such an approach is consistent with DFAT's emphasis on intersectionality, participation, and locally led solutions in Australia's international gender equality and peace and security policy settings.[24]

> RECOMMENDATION 4 | Strengthen gender equality efforts through an intersectional approach that recognises the capacities of young people, leveraging existing frameworks and policies for inclusion

Regional and domestic implications of gender equality in disasters and humanitarian action

Recurring implementation weaknesses create a structural problem where gender inequality is treated as a social policy issue first and a resilience and security issue second. This separation becomes costly during crises (natural disasters, displacement, conflict escalation) where gendered vulnerabilities shape who is harmed, who recovers, how they recover and institutions' role in this recovery.

Climate change represents the most significant long-term stressor in Australia, both domestically and regionally. Disaster studies and feminist climate scholarship converge on a clear finding: climate impacts are never gender neutral.[25] Gender inequality shapes exposure to risk, access to information and resources, safety in evacuation and shelter settings, and capacity to participate in recovery and rebuilding.[26]

In Australia, bushfires, floods, and heatwaves have repeatedly revealed gaps in disaster governance where gendered needs are insufficiently anticipated or measured.[27] Crises expose the costs of treating gender equality as optional or secondary: systems designed without attention to gendered realities perform poorly under stress. As a result, undermining gender equality, whether this is through policy drift, under-resourcing, or responding to political backlash, should be understood as actively eroding Australia's crisis preparedness and strategic resilience. As climate shocks intensify, these blind spots risk entrenching inequality while simultaneously reducing the effectiveness of disaster response and recovery.

Rather than gender equality being siloed within social policy, it should be formally embedded within national security, humanitarian, disaster response and climate adaptation frameworks. This will require gender analysis as part of risk assessments and preparedness, instead of it being an ad-hoc or post-hoc mitigation tool. This also allows for the use of appropriate expertise to properly examine and understand gender-disaggregated and intersectional data. Gender disaggregated data specifically for disaster recovery, i.e. access to and use of support services, community engagement, risk management and preparedness, is largely missing in Australia, along with the intersecting dimensions of race, age, disability and socio-economic status. This means that the Australian government invest in gender-responsive data and intersectional analyses, because data gaps, particularly during crises, are not neutral and can systematically obscure harm and weaken policy effectiveness. It is crucial to study mortality data also based on gender-disaggregation so that strategic action based on gender facts can be used in emergency management and disaster recovery.

Unpaid and paid care, as outlined on the Gender Equality website, has no mention of circumstances related to emergencies where care burdens can intensify,[28] i.e. school closures, health services disruption, loss of paid work, caring for the injured, increased risk of violence against women, etc. The reframing of gender equality as a core function can also mean strengthening reporting regimes, which can look at more outcome-based accountability mechanisms for workplace equality or WPS implementation. This means using descriptive indicators as well as enforceable outcome measures with clear consequences for non-compliance.

> RECOMMENDATION 5 | Reframe gender equality as a core security and resilience function to ensure robust and comprehensive systems for when disaster strikes

Humanitarian crises—driven by conflict, climate change, and political instability—exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, increase exposure to gender-based violence, and undermine social cohesion, governance, and long-term economic recovery.[29] Evidence from humanitarian settings consistently shows that when the rights, safety, and leadership of women and girls are deprioritised, crises become more protracted, recovery is delayed, and the risk of instability, displacement, and cross-border insecurity increases.[30]

The current Humanitarian Reset represents a critical inflection point for Australia to champion gender equality as an operational and strategic imperative, rather than a discretionary or secondary consideration.[31] While the Reset seeks to improve efficiency and prioritisation amid unprecedented funding shortfalls, multiple analyses caution that reforms that focus narrowly on cost-cutting could risk sidelining gender equality, participation, and protection—particularly for women, girls, and marginalised groups.[32] Australia has both the diplomatic credibility and the policy architecture to counter this risk by championing a people-centred, gender-responsive, and accountable reset, in line with the Reset Roadmap's emphasis on protection, participation, and localisation.[33]

Australia's leadership is especially critical in humanitarian crises where gender inequality directly undermines economic and security outcomes. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, climate-induced displacement, and loss of livelihoods, yet they are also central to household survival, informal economies, and community-level resilience. Failing to invest in gender-responsive humanitarian action increases long-term dependency on aid, weakens recovery pathways, and constrains economic participation—both in crisis-affected countries and in resettlement contexts. The Australian government explicitly recognises that humanitarian entrants contribute skills, labour, and social capital to Australia's economy; ensuring gender-responsive protection and recovery in crises is therefore directly linked to Australia's future economic resilience and social cohesion.[34]

An intersectional approach is essential. Humanitarian crises affect women, men, and gender-diverse people differently across age, disability, displacement status, and socio-economic position. Young people—particularly young women—face heightened risks in humanitarian settings, including forced recruitment, early marriage, disrupted education, and exclusion from decision-making, yet they are consistently under-represented in humanitarian governance and recovery planning.[35] Integrating gender equality with youth inclusion strengthens early recovery, reduces long-term protection risks, and supports more sustainable peace and development outcomes. Australia should therefore use its engagement in multilateral and regional humanitarian fora, its funding decisions, and its humanitarian diplomacy to explicitly champion gender equality within the Humanitarian Reset. This includes advocating for the protection of women and girls as non-negotiable, directing flexible and predictable funding to women-led and youth-inclusive local organisations, and embedding gender and age analysis into prioritisation, coordination, and accountability mechanisms.

> RECOMMENDATION 6 | Recognise gender equality as a national and economic security imperative in humanitarian action

Urgency of gender responsive counter-extremism measures

Gender equality constitutes a foundational pillar of the United Nations' strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE).[36] This is reflective of existing evidence that gendered inequalities shape pathways into, and resilience against, violent extremism.[37] The December 2025 Bondi attack underscores the urgency of strengthening Australia's domestic and regional P/CVE settings, including the systematic integration of gender-responsive approaches. This need is particularly salient in Australia's cooperation with ASEAN strategic partners, where violent extremist risks intersect with social exclusion, political marginalisation, and gender-based harms.

Effective P/CVE requires deeper engagement with community-level actors, including women-led and women-focused organisations that are often at the forefront of early prevention, social cohesion, and disengagement efforts.[38] Women's central role in preventing and combating violent extremism is a key focus of international, regional, and some national policies [39][11] but also of P/CVE practice (i.e. Philippines and Indonesia).

Australia is well placed to expand its support for such actors, particularly through development and security cooperation frameworks that already prioritise stability and conflict prevention. This approach aligns with Australia's Development Partnership Plan with the Philippines, notably Objective 1 on enhancing conditions for stability, including the indicator of improved policies and institutional responses to community conflict and violent extremist offenders.[40][12] While the current plan does not explicitly apply a gender lens, it provides a practical entry point for recognising, supporting, and learning from effective women-led P/CVE initiatives already operating across the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia must re-centre gender equality and women's participation within its P/CVE policy; gender equality is a core requirement for effectiveness, sustainability, and legitimacy in both domestic and regional contexts. One way to do this is by tasking DFAT and relevant security agencies to identify, fund, and evaluate women-led and community-based P/CVE initiatives as part of Australia's broader counter-extremism architecture.

Australia's ability to integrate a mandatory gender analysis and women's participation framework into all Australia-funded P/CVE programs, domestically and in regional partnerships, can help ensure that within Australia and in the ASEAN region, gender equality is treated and prioritised as an operational enabler of prevention rather than a standalone policy objective.

> RECOMMENDATION 7 | Embed gender equality as a mandatory operational principle across all Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism initiatives, domestically and regionally, by systematically supporting women-led and community-based prevention efforts within its security and development partnerships.

Recognising threats to women in political leadership roles as an early warning sign of democratic and national security risks

For Australia and our regional partners, the quality of democratic governance, such as who participates, who is excluded, and under what conditions, has become a central determinant of long-term stability. States with weakened democratic institutions are more vulnerable to internal stability, external interference, and crisis mismanagement.[41] Gender inequality accelerates these risks by undermining one of the core foundations of democratic resilience, which is inclusive and legitimate political participation.

The exclusion, intimidation, or silencing of women in politics is not simply a matter of representation or fairness. It both reflects and reinforces deeper problems within political systems, including institutional fragility, declining public trust, and democratic erosion. These conditions are widely recognised as drivers of insecurity at both national and international levels.

Comparative political research shows that violence, harassment, and intimidation directed at women in politics distort political competition and weaken representative democracy.[42] When women parliamentarians (MPs), candidates, and public officials face threats whether it is physical, psychological, or digital, then, participation in political life becomes conditional on tolerance of abuse. Over time, this leads to self-censorship, early exits from office, and reduced diversity of perspectives in decision-making. Such dynamics weaken democratic institutions by narrowing the pool of legitimate political actors and reducing accountability, while also undermining public confidence in political systems.[43] As institutional trust declines, the risks of political instability, polarisation, and ineffective governance increase.[44]

At the national level, exclusion of women from safe political participation undermines policy quality, crisis governance, and social cohesion. Meanwhile, at the international level, it weakens the credibility of democratic states as security partners and norm leaders. For years, the Women, Peace and Security agenda has recognised that women's participation in decision-making contributes to conflict prevention and sustainable peace. Yet, the ongoing violence faced by women in politics shows a widening gap between what states commit to in principle and what women experience in political life.[45]

In this regard, violence against women in formal political roles functions as an early warning indicator of broader governance stress. It is known that such violence has happened in the Australian political environment, and it signals shrinking civic space, weakened rule of law, and declining institutional accountability. These conditions reduce a state's ability to anticipate, absorb, and respond to shocks, whether economic, climate, or geopolitical, driven both by internal vulnerabilities or external pressures.

The Australian government should explicitly treat violence against women in politics and public life as an early warning indicator of democratic erosion and institutional fragility, alongside existing political and governance risk markers. Framing gender inequality in this way would enable earlier identification of instability risks linked to declining institutional trust, distorted political competition, and weakened governance capacity – which are all factors that directly undermine national resilience and international security partnerships. This approach aligns gender equality with Australia's broader national security interests by positioning the protection of women's safe political participation as a preventive measure to strengthen democratic legitimacy, crisis governance, and long-term stability.

> RECOMMENDATION 8 | Recognise gender inequality, particularly violence and exclusion targeting women in formal political roles, as a democratic and security risk in national and international security assessments.

Role of locally-led leadership

Digitalisation represents a key, yet underappreciated, trend that significantly shapes gender equality and human rights.[46] On the one hand, digital platforms have provided a new site for gender-based violence against human rights activists and gender advocates around the world. On the other hand, however, they have the potential to create additional access points to political processes and economic and educational opportunities for women, girls and marginalised communities. These threats and opportunities afforded by rapid digitisation are highly relevant to the pro-gender foreign policy priorities of the Australian Government, such as addressing gender-based violence and increasing women's participation. Much of the practical work on incorporating digitalisation into key gender equality strategies, such as WPS, is currently done by civil society and grassroots organisations with limited funding and resources.[47] This presents an opportunity for the Australian Government to invest in locally led digitalisation initiatives that aim to advance gender equality and address gender-based violence in digital settings.

> RECOMMENDATION 9 | Invest in civil society initiatives on digitalisation that advance gender equality.

The under-resourcing of Community Service Organisations (CSOs) can be understood as a risk multiplier. The current funding architecture reflects a deeper power asymmetry between the state and civil society. CSOs, as defined by the Australian Taxation Office,[48] are positioned mainly as service deliverers instead of policy partners or knowledge-holders despite their proximity to the affected communities, mostly affected by inequalities, violence, displacement and climate impacts. The current funding model also amplifies CSOs' vulnerability to political shifts and cultural backlash against gender equality. CSOs are not immune to higher operational costs in service delivery; they can also experience higher demand while operating on lower funding and reductions in volunteerism. The current cost-of-living crisis, including the housing affordability crisis, means that people are increasingly turning towards the community sector for support and yet the funding to adequately sustain staff within CSOs remains precarious.[49]

The short-termism of funding is also damaging, particularly because climate adaptation requires sustained engagement, trust-building and reliance on locally grounded knowledge, which are capacities that are often compromised by insecure funding models.

> RECOMMENDATION 10 | CSOs should be sustainably resourced over the long term to enable them to fulfil their role as policy-partners and knowledge-holders

Notes and references

1   Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2023). Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-international-gender-equality-strategy.pdf

2   Lee Y. Gender equity and trust in government: Evidence from South Korea. *Sexuality, Gender & Policy*. 2019; 2: 132–142. https://doi.org/10.1002/sgp2.12008; Lee, Yunsoo, and Mattias Ottervik. 2024. " Investigating the relationship between gender equality and citizen trust: Evidence from Latin America." *Social Science Quarterly* 105: 242–252. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13350

3   McNaught, Rebecca, Emma Pittaway, Loriana Bethune, Dominica Meade, and Jo Longman. "Governance, collaboration and community organising in rural Australia: A case study of women's experiences and contributions to community health and well-being in the Northern Rivers, Australia floods." *Women's Health* 21 (2025): 17455057251345938. https://doi.org/10.1177/17455057251345938

4   Su, Y., & Tanyag, M. (2020). Globalising myths of survival: post-disaster households after Typhoon Haiyan. *Gender, Place & Culture,* 27(11), 1513–1535. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1635997

5   Australian Government, Department of The Prime Minister & Cabinet (2025). Corporate Plan 2025-2026, p.10-12. https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/corporate-plan-2025-2026.pdf

6   UN Women & UN DESA (2023). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf

7   Tomaro, Q. P. (2025). Beyond motherhood: women's agency as mediators and monitors in preventing and countering violent extremism initiatives in the Philippines. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 20(4), 434–451; Alston, M., Fuller, S., & Kwarney, N. (2025). Women and climate change in Vanuatu, Pacific Islands Region. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 32(1), 83–104.

8   Gan CCR, McNamara C, Gunasiri H, Oliva P and Sebar B (2023). Women and planetary health in Asia-Pacific. *Frontiers in Climate*. 5(1058432). https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2023.1058432

9   Flitton, Daniel 2024. Wong's Century: a closer look at gender mix in Australia's top diplomatic roles. *Lowy Interpreter*. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/wong-s-century-closer-look-gender-mix-australia-s-top-diplomatic-roles

10 Commonwealth of Australia (2024) *Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Strategy*. Canberra. p.5.

11 Investments of 3 million dollars or above must include a gender equality objective, and that 80 per cent of investments must effectively address gender equality in implementation

12 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2025). *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

13 Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2022). *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* [Action plan]. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/32-ASEAN-Regional-Plan-of-Action-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf

14 Government of Canada. (2025, October 24). *Canada and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*. Global Affairs Canada. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/asean/index.aspx?lang=eng

15 Localizing Women, Peace and Security. (n.d.). *WPS-ASEAN*. https://wps.asean.org/localization/

16 Viet Nam Hepvic Team. (2008). Country report on health policy-making, its determinants and their inter-relationships. Hanoi, Viet Nam: Hanoi School of Public Health.

17 Vyas, S., Jansen, H., Gardner, J. *et al.* (2023). An analysis of changes in the prevalence and patterns of intimate partner violence against women in seven Asian countries. *BMC Women's Health,* 23, 399 . https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02534-6

18 Duncan, A., Mavisakalyan, A., & Twomey, C. (2025). Family and domestic violence in Australia 2025: is enough progress being made?. Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre.

19 Allen E. M., Munala L., Henderson J. R. (2021). Kenyan women bearing the cost of climate change. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(23), 12697. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182312697

20 Berents, H., & Mollica, C. (2022). Reciprocal institutional visibility: Youth, peace and security and 'inclusive' agendas at the United Nations. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 57(1), 65-83.

21 United Nations Security Council, Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020) on Youth, Peace and Security.

22 Yague, E. I. B., & Berents, H. (2025). The paradox of youth engagement: the role of young people in historical and contemporary Southeast Asian peace. *The Pacific Review*, 1–30.

23 ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR), Regional Study on Youth, Peace and Security, 2024, Sections III and V, documenting the role of youth-led organisations in peacebuilding and the value of integrating gender equality into youth-focused peace initiatives.

24 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy (2023) and Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2021–2031, which emphasise intersectional approaches, meaningful participation, and locally led peacebuilding, and acknowledge linkages with broader peace and security agendas, including Youth, Peace and Security.

25 Huyer, Sophia, Mariola Acosta, Tatiana Gumucio, and Jasmin Irisha Jim Ilham. "Can we turn the tide? Confronting gender inequality in climate policy." *Gender & Development* 28, no. 3 (2020): 571-591.

26 Fruttero, Anna, Daniel Halim, Chiara Broccolini, Bernardo Coelho, Horace Gninafon, and Noel Miller. "Gendered Impacts of Climate Change Evidence from Weather Shocks". Policy Research Working Paper 10442 (2023). https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/WB-gendered-impacts-climate-change.pdf

27 Hazeleger, Tricia. "Gender and disaster recovery: strategic issues and action in Australia" Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub. https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-apr-2013-gender-and-disaster-recovery-strategic-issues-and-action-in-australia/

28 *Priority area 2: Unpaid and paid care* (no date) *Australian Government*. Available at: https://genderequality.gov.au/working-for-women/priority-area-2-unpaid-and-paid-care (Accessed: 28 December 2025).

29 IASC Policy (and Accountability Framework) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action. 2017. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-gender-and-humanitarian-action/iasc-policy-and-accountability-framework-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls

30 Welt Hunger Hilfe, Policy Brief: The Humanitarian Reset – From Crisis Mode to Realignment, 2025. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-reset-crisis-mode-realignment-impulses-humanitarian-reset

31 The Humanitarian Reset is a UN-led reform process launched in 2025 to prioritise life-saving assistance amid unprecedented funding shortfalls and rising global crises, by concentrating resources on highest needs, simplifying delivery, and strengthening protection and accountability. The Reset is intended to reduce protracted instability, displacement, and conflict risks that have direct implications for international security and economic resilience. For countries such as Australia, the Humanitarian Reset shapes how limited humanitarian funding is allocated, who delivers assistance, and which risks are prioritised. Active engagement allows Australia to safeguard gender equality, protection of civilians, and local leadership within humanitarian reform, helping prevent future instability, forced displacement, and economic disruption that would otherwise increase long-term security and fiscal costs. See: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/humanitarian-reset-0

32 ICVA, *The IASC Humanitarian Reset Examined: A Strategic Briefing for NGOs*, May 2025, pp. 16–18, noting NGO concerns that efficiency-driven reforms risk weakening participation, accountability, and gender equality.

33 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *Humanitarian Reset Roadmap*, 10 November 2025, Actions 7–8 and Vision Statement place protection of women and girls, participation, and accountability at the centre of reformed humanitarian action.

34 Australia, Department of Home Affairs. 2024. Discussion paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2025–26. https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/PDFs/2025-26-humanitarian-program-discussion-paper.pdf

35 IASC, With us & for us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises, UNICEF and NRC for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, 2020.

36 United Nations General Assembly. "*Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*. New York: United Nations." (2025) https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

37 Phelan, A., White, J., Wallner, C., & Paterson, J. (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. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2025.2498505

38 Tomaro, Queenie Pearl. "Beyond motherhood: women's agency as mediators and monitors in preventing and countering violent extremism initiatives in the Philippines." *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (2025): 1-18.

39 Tomaro, Q. P. (2025). Preventing and countering violent extremism: the logics of women's participation. Australian Journal of International Affairs, 79(3), 341-363.

40 DFAT (2024). Australia-Philippines Development Partnership. p. 1-29. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-philippines-development-partnership-plan-2024-2029.pdf

41 Freedom House (2024). Freedom in the World 2024: The mounting damage of flawed elections. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf

42 Krook, M.L. (2017). Violence Against Women in Politics. J*ournal of Democracy* 28(1), 74-88. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0007

43 Krook, M. L. (2020). *Violence against Women in Politics.* Oxford University Press.

44 OECD (2025). Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/03/drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-in-australia_122472c8-en.pdf

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

46 Fal-Dutra Santos, Agnieszka & Donovan, Outi (2025). Between contested narratives and transformative actions: digitalization discourse, policy, and practice in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *27*(2), 425–453; Donovan, Outi (2025) Gendering Zoom Diplomacy: Women's Participation in Digital Diplomacy, *International Studies Perspectives*, 26(2) 238–256,

47 Fal-Dutra Santos and Donovan 2025.

48 Australian Taxation Office 2025. Community Service Organisations. https://www.ato.gov.au/businesses-and-organisations/not-for-profit-organisations/your-organisation/does-your-not-for-profit-need-to-pay-income-tax/types-of-income-tax-exempt-organisations/community-service-organisations

49 Australian Government. "A stronger, more diverse and independent community sector" (2023) https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/stronger-more-diverse-independent-community-sector-1.pdf

About the Griffith Asia institute

The Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) is a leading interdisciplinary centre dedicated to advancing sustainable development and regional cooperation across the Asia–Pacific. In 2026, GAI continues to address emerging challenges and opportunities through research, partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives that span sustainable economics, green finance, governance, international relations, and inclusive rural development. Our work supports Griffith University's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting economic prosperity, social inclusion, environmental resilience, and strong institutions across the region.

GAI's research examines key issues shaping the Asia–Pacific, including energy transitions, digital and financial inclusion, governance reform, climate resilience, and sustainable urban and rural development. As environmental pressures intensify and regional geopolitics evolve, our researchers provide evidence-based insights to help governments, industry and communities navigate complexity, strengthen resilience, and seize new opportunities. Collaboration with policymakers, multilateral organisations, and local partners ensures our work remains grounded in real-world needs and delivers practical, impactful outcomes.