



Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

20 January 2025

To the Committee Membership,

The **International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)** welcomes the opportunity to engage in the consultation of the inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative.

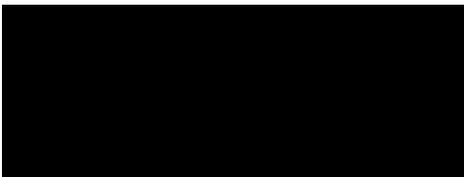
About IPPF

IPPF is a global service provider and leading advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all. As a locally owned, globally connected movement, IPPF works alongside national Member Associations and collaborative partners towards our vision for a world in which all people are free to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health (SRH), without discrimination. IPPF has supported advocacy efforts in Australia for the region and has provided technical and advisory support to DFAT on a range of SRHR matters in foreign policy and development.

In the following submission, we have set out responses to each of the seven guiding questions as stipulated in the Terms of Reference, with **recommendations** offered where relevant. Our overarching message is that Australia must acknowledge gender as a national security priority, in order to recognise and respond to gendered security threats.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission.

Sincerely,



Phoebe Ryan
Chief, Australia & New Zealand Office
International Planned Parenthood Federation



Responses to TOR questions

1. The economic security and national security benefits of realising gender equality for every person, and how the integration of gender equality across foreign policy supports this objective;

Gender equality is both a human right and a strategic investment. Economies grow faster, institutions are stronger, and societies are more peaceful when women, girls, and people of all genders can participate fully and safely. By integrating gender equality across its diplomacy, development and security agenda, Australia advances its strategic interest in a stable, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific – one where dignity is respected, and every person has the agency to shape their own future.

There are numerous **economic security benefits to realising gender equality**, including:

- Inclusive growth that is rooted in dignity and equal opportunity - Empowering women and gender diverse people to access education, decent work, financial services and leadership roles enables societies to reach their full economic potential.
- Making gains towards more resilient and diversified regional economies - Gender equality expands the labour force, supports innovation across sectors, and strengthens household financial security. For Indo-Pacific partners facing climate, demographic and economic pressures, this resilience reduces vulnerability to shocks.
- Higher returns on development investments - Globally and across the Indo-Pacific, evidence shows that development investments yield stronger outcomes when they address gender-based barriers and promote inclusion. This aligns with Australia's commitment to a development program that is respectful, locally led, and centred on dignity for all people.

Likewise, **national security benefits** include:

- More stable and peaceful societies anchored in rights and inclusion - Minister Wong rightly notes that the stability of the Indo-Pacific is strengthened when societies are more inclusive and when human rights are upheld. Advancing these conditions—especially the safety, leadership and participation of women at all levels of decision-making processes—directly supports regional stability and therefore Australia's national security.
- Stronger governance and resistance to coercion - Gender-inclusive institutions, across parliaments, justice systems, and the security sector, are more representative, transparent and accountable. This reduces corruption, strengthens public trust, and builds resilience against coercion, authoritarianism, and extremism. Such governance outcomes directly support Australia's strategic interest in a stable, rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- More effective peacebuilding, crisis response, and climate resilience - Evidence demonstrates that women, girls and people of diverse SOGIE are among the most impacted by humanitarian crisis, conflict, climate change, and insecurity differently. When their perspectives and needs are integrated into peacebuilding, humanitarian response and climate adaptation, policies become more accurate, responsive and effective. UN data also show that when women participate in peace processes, peace agreements are significantly more likely to be reached and to endure.



In short, meaningfully integrating gender equality across Australia's foreign policy advances numerous strategic interests. It supports a region that is more peaceful, stable and prosperous, strengthens Australia's credibility and influence, and sets our development partnerships up for success.

Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Adopt a more holistic approach towards national security** that looks beyond hard policy, militarisation and defence, and instead considers the wellbeing and human rights of members of Australian society, including the wellbeing of women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

2. Evidence and data that demonstrates the links between gender equality and economic growth and prosperity, including in food security and labour markets;

Gender equality is a critical driver of economic growth and prosperity, intrinsically linked to the ability of all women and gender-diverse people to fully participate in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. Yet, inequitable access SRHR services continues to hinder education, workforce participation, and broader opportunities, particularly for young and marginalised women.

SRHR is foundational to gender equality: without access to contraception, maternal health services, and comprehensive reproductive care, women's ability to plan their lives, complete education, and pursue employment is constrained¹. Greater access to contraception, for example, increases rates of school completion and professional education attainment², as well as reducing likelihood of poverty³. Despite this, an estimated 164 million women worldwide who want to avoid pregnancy are not using contraception, and in the Asia-Pacific region alone, around 140 million women have an unmet need for family planning.

These statistics directly correlate to the perpetuation of inequitable labour markets, with just 61% of women of working age participating in the labour force globally, compared to 91 % of men⁴. Among those who are working, women are still more likely than men to work in the informal economy, experience underemployment and occupy precarious labour roles⁵. Additionally, women perform around three-quarters of all unpaid care and domestic work globally, spending roughly **2.5 times more hours performing care duties than men**, which severely constrains their

¹<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/09/bodily-autonomy-dignity-and-freedom-choice-must-be-respected-say-un>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5987803/>

³ <https://iwpr.org/the-economic-effects-of-contraceptive-access-a-review-of-the-evidence/>

⁴ <https://unwomen.org.au/the-11-biggest-hurdles-for-womens-equality-by-2030/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1767686205854039&usq=A0vVaw219LcXWKyG2Qhmw4w6ip8N>

⁵https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_protect/%40protrav/%40travail/documents/publication/wcms_869188.pdf



ability to secure full-time, formal employment or advance into leadership roles⁶. Evidence from the ILO shows that investing in the care economy, through quality childcare, elder care, health and social services, and decent jobs for care workers, can generate millions of jobs, boost women's labour-force participation, narrow pay gaps and strengthen productivity and fiscal revenues⁷. However, these gains will be limited without equal prioritisation of access to comprehensive SRHR. Only when women, in all their diversity, can decide whether and when to have children, can care investments truly redistribute burdens equitably, reduce care intensity and unlock women's full time for education, decent work and economic contribution.

While Australia has long been a leading champion for SRHR and gender quality, concerns about falling fertility and ageing populations across the Indo-Pacific are fuelling a resurgence of pro-natalist narratives that risk undermining hard-won gains for SRHR, gender equality and economic inclusion. These trends mirror those taking place within ultra-conservative circles globally, where figures such as billionaire Elon Musk, former Hungarian President Katalin Novák, US Vice President JD Vance and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni have prioritised efforts to boost birth rates, often in ways that sideline bodily autonomy and gender equality in favour of nationalist and culturally conservative ideals. Indeed, some governments, including in China and Vietnam, are promoting measures that restrict access to SRHR services, including proposals such as taxes on contraceptives or administrative barriers to safe abortion care as a means of boosting birth rates⁸. **These approaches are being justified as tools to address “demographic crisis”, however, have been shown to be incompatible with human rights obligations and public health evidence, and often fail to deliver sustainable demographic or economic benefits.** Such measures disproportionately harm young women, migrant women, women with disabilities, women of colour and transgender people, who already face greater obstacles in accessing comprehensive SRHR and quality health services, further constraining their education and employment opportunities.

For example, a 1966 ban on abortion in Romania that intended to boost the country's fertility led to soaring rates of **unsafe abortions, maternal deaths, and abandoned children**, and failed to achieve the desired long-term impact on fertility rates⁹. In the United States, new evidence shows that states with the most restrictive abortion laws tend to have **weaker labour-market outcomes**, such as lower female employment growth and labour-force participation, and smaller economies per capita, with national estimates suggesting that abortion bans and restrictions reduce GDP by tens of billions of dollars each year¹⁰. Heightened financial and emotional stress for women, caused by barriers to SRH care, has also been shown to adversely impact job performance, career advancement, and disrupt women's ability to maintain stable and productive work lives.

⁶ https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/policy_brief_gender_gaps_social_protection_en.pdf

⁷

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_protect/%40protrav/%40travail/document/s/publication/wcms_869188.pdf

⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-04/china-add-tax-on-condoms-and-contraceptives-to-boost-birth-rate/106097254>

⁹ <https://srh.bmj.com/content/39/1/2?utm>

¹⁰ https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The-Economic-and-Workforce-Impact-of-Restrictive-Abortion-report_2024.pdf



By undermining bodily autonomy and access to SRHR, these approaches entrench gendered labour-market inequalities, reduce women's labour force participation and productivity, and ultimately weaken the very economic growth and demographic resilience they claim to pursue. Conversely, enabling all people to exercise agency, and access the services, resources and support needed to obtain decent work generates profound multiplier effects for entire families, with greater economic empowerment strongly associated with improved health, education and development outcomes for children, further demonstrating how gender equality drives compounding economic and social benefits¹¹.

Australia can show leadership in the region by showing how economic growth and prosperity gains go hand in hand with rights-based sexual and reproductive health care access, recognising bodily autonomy and the ICPD First Principles¹² as an inalienable part of pursuing gender equality.

Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Champion comprehensive rights-based SRHR as a gender equality and economic imperative.** In regional diplomacy and financing, explicitly reject coercive pro-natalist and anti-rights narratives, affirming access to SRHR for all people as foundational to labour force productivity, economic resilience and long-term prosperity.
- **Embed ICPD first principles in economic cooperation.** Align development and economic partnerships with the ICPD Programme of Action by placing bodily autonomy, reproductive choice and gender equality at the centre of population, health and labour-market strategies, and support partner governments to adopt demographic and labour policies that expand people's choices, for example through investment in childcare, social protection, gender-responsive labour regulations and violence-prevention measures that enable full economic participation.
- **Invest in care systems, decent work and gender-responsive economic policy.** Through bilateral and multilateral channels, prioritise investments in the care economy, decent work, equal pay and social protection as evidence-based responses to demographic and economic challenges, and support data and research on the gendered impacts of demographic and SRHR policies, including for marginalised groups, to inform rights-respecting, pro-equality economic strategies.

¹¹ <https://jogh.org/documents/issue202002/jogh-10-020406.pdf>

¹² <https://www.unfpa.org/news/explainer-what-icpd-and-why-does-it-matter#:~:text=The%20ICPD%20Programme%20of%20Action,realize%20their%20own%20fertility%20goals.>



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

Efforts to undermine gender equality and SRHR are increasing and intensifying by anti-rights movements, particularly those rooted in authoritarian, patriarchal, nationalist, and religious fundamentalist ideologies. Gender equality has been successfully rebranded by malign actors and forces as a radical “woke” ideology, a Western import, and something to be firmly rejected by traditionalist societies globally, including in the Indo Pacific.

Anti-gender and anti-rights actors deploy identity-targeted disinformation, harassment, and violence to polarise communities (“us vs them”), erode trust in institutions and in each other, and raise barriers to participation for women and LGBTQI+ people. This causes withdrawal, self-censorship, and fear, which in turn weakens social cohesion and democratic pluralism.

Coordinated global campaigns by ultra conservative, religious and political groups aim to delegitimise terms like “gender-based violence”, “gender identity,” and “feminism”. Indeed, \$1.18 billion in anti-gender funding was tracked in Europe from 2019 to 2023, targeting state and private institutions, and media, effectively mainstreaming extremism by using sanitised language like ‘family values’ to mask ultra conservative agendas¹³. Similar tactics extend to replacing gendered language in laws and UN resolutions with “family values” or “sex-based rights.” These risk diluting SGBV, SRHR, gender, and LGBTQI+ rights frameworks¹⁴. There remain significant challenges to uncovering and understanding the full extent of anti-rights networks in Australia and the wider region, particularly regarding the flow of funding and connections to overseas counterparts. Further research and intelligence are urgently required in order to sufficiently counter and combat security threats posed by these groups.

Digital Threats

We are now witnessing foreign interference leveraging divisive identity issues, including gender, to polarise public debate, weaken trust in institutions, and erode social cohesion—all of which “soften the ground” for further interference¹⁵. Disinformation, extremism, foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), online harm, and coercive statecraft are increasingly being designed to exploit gender divisions or target people based on gendered vulnerabilities¹⁶. Both state and non-state actors are using social media to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion on contentious issues, which can include gender rights, roles, and identity narratives. Recently, this has extended to reproductive health care choices, with targeted attempts to discourage women from using hormonal contraceptives in the name of “feminism”.¹⁷

¹³ <https://www.epfweb.org/node/1152>

¹⁴ <https://www.epfweb.org/node/1147>

¹⁵ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Interference_through_Social_Media/ForeignInterference47/Report/Chapter_2_-_Foreign_interference_in_Australia

¹⁶ <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/nato-policy-on-women-peace-and-security-2024>

https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/feminist-foreign-policy-analysis/gendered-disinformation/B834970997489D5F2CA98BA851278C6?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=bookmark

¹⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/14/politics/maha-birth-control-politics-of-the-pill>



Between 2017 and 2022, Meta, Facebook's parent company, dismantled over 200 covert influence operations from over 60 countries that were seeking to create social division¹⁸. However, since then, the degree of controls in place by social media institutions have weakened dramatically. In early 2025, Meta announced that it would be ending its use of third-party fact checkers on Facebook, Threads, and Instagram, instead putting the onus onto users to flag misinformation and disinformation¹⁹. This follows a similar move to remove self-reporting for political misinformation on X (formerly Twitter) after billionaire Elon Musk took over the platform²⁰. With right-wing governments such as the Trump administration pushing back against fact-checking under the guise of protecting "free speech"²¹, preventing the spread of disinformation online has become increasingly difficult. This has major implications for Australia's national security and the international security landscape.

Extremist, violent and misogynistic content – including messaging associated with “the manosphere” – is spreading online in Australia rapidly, with young people particularly at risk as a result of algorithm manipulation on social media²². This involves content which condones violence against women, encourages anti-LGBTQI+ hostility (particularly towards trans people), and frames gender equality as a threat to national identity. Young men in particular are being increasingly targeted through grievance-based narratives, including misogynistic “incel” ideology and messaging²³. The increase in anti-gender content online has also coincided with an increase in sexist views and behaviour in Australian schools directed towards other students and teachers, as well as a rise in sexual violence in Australia²⁴.

Security agencies internationally have recognised misogyny as a gateway into violent extremism. Indeed, a recent 2024 study by the University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland, based on a 1,020-person survey in Australia, found that anti-feminist beliefs and hostile sexist attitudes are statistically significant predictors of support for violent extremism²⁵. Almost one in five men (19.4%) surveyed believed it was legitimate to violently resist “feminism” if necessary, whilst over 30% of respondents agreed (or slightly agreed) with statements expressing hostile sexist views. Further research in late 2025 (with forthcoming publication) indicates that almost 40% of Australian boys identify with violent extremist ideologies, with 36% agreeing with misogynistic attitudes, 29% minimising violence towards women, and 18% sympathising with radical violence²⁶. The lack of regulation, both by governments and by social media companies themselves, coupled with the volume of content that is published makes this difficult to monitor and combat, even if it breaches site guidelines.

The Global Landscape

¹⁸ [Final report of the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media: a quick guide – Parliament of Australia](#)

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/01/07/business/meta-fact-checking>

²⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/27/tech/x-twitter-misinformation-reporting-feature-scraped>

²¹ <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/24/nx-s1-5270071/eo-weaponization>

²² <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-must-stop-overlooking-misogynistic-youth-extremism/>

²³ [What is an Incel \(Involuntary Celibate\) and do they pose a threat to Australians?](#)

²⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-victims/latest-release>

²⁵ <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/items/9c386698-5d92-4667-8bbb-4060ed59f42b>

²⁶ <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/education/schools-hub/disturbing-aussie-boys-turn-to-violent-extremism-with-antifeminist-views-an-early-warning-sign/news-story/5740de7567a66f02f4beb67407acad26>



When looking to global landscape, reduced development assistance and shifting policy priorities are driving instability and democratic declines. Funding cuts from a number of major OECD donors have decimated foreign aid budgets, with budgets instead being directed to greater military and defence spending^{27,28}. These decisions directly undermine gender equality, SRHR, and LGBTQI+ rights, and lead to increased maternal morbidity and mortality among women and girls who bear the brunt. In 2025, the Trump Administration began with a flurry of executive orders that set in motion the total dismantling of USAID and US foreign assistance. 12 months on, health assistance compact agreements have been formed by the US Administration with several countries, with some containing almost no allocation whatsoever for maternal and child health²⁹. Anecdotal reports received by IPPF also suggest that compact agreements are being developed to directly align with Geneva Consensus Declaration aims. These actions do not align with Australia's interests in supporting gains towards gender equality, bodily autonomy, SRHR, and the rights of LGBTQI+ people, and will likely have implications for a number of Australia's neighbouring countries in the Asia Pacific.

Flow On Effects for Humanitarian Crises and Climate Change

By undermining gender equality through funding cuts, increasingly restrictive policy settings and rising extremism, the international security landscape is weakened, as is global capacity to respond and mitigate the impacts of humanitarian crises. We are witnessing an increasingly unstable humanitarian landscape, heightened by the erosion of democratic institutions and social systems, human rights, international norms, and the climate crisis.

In conflict and humanitarian settings, we know that women and girls face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), such as rape, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced sterilisation and forced pregnancy. This often results in serious health complications, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, maternal and infant mortality, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Lack of access to SRHR services in these contexts means that many women and girls are unable to access the care and support they need. Moreover, early and unplanned pregnancies can disrupt or end a girl's education, further limiting her opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

IPPF service providers are increasingly reporting SGBV being used as a weapon of war to terrorise and destroy communities, particularly women and girls. In 2023 alone, the United Nations verified more than 3,600 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, a 50% increase on the previous year³⁰. In 2024, this rose again to 4,600 cases, with the highest number of cases recorded in the Central African Republic, DRC, Haiti, Somalia, and South Sudan³¹. This is compounded by the collapse of the rule of law which allows impunity for perpetrators. As a regional leader and a middle power, Australia has a responsibility to reverse the trend.

²⁷ <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-development-aid-cuts-defense-spending-donald-trump/a-73093270>

²⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1wpr39zg5xo>

²⁹ <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/what-we-know-and-dont-know-about-trump-administrations-global-health-agreements>

³⁰ <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/page/conflict-related-sexual-violence>

³¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165650>



Climate change further exacerbates this situation. Deeply ingrained, systemic discrimination means that women and girls are at a higher risk of experiencing harmful effects of the climate crisis. Where women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as on account of their ethnicity, disability or migrant status, their vulnerability is heightened even more. Climate-induced displacement exposes women and girls to trafficking, exploitation, and abuse in camps and informal settlements.³² Rising temperatures are also linked to increases in intimate partner violence (IPV). UNFPA projects that a 4°C temperature rise, combined with the volatile socioeconomic conditions that result from it, would be associated with a tripling of people experiencing IPV in sub-Saharan Africa, from 48 million in 2015 to 140 million in 2060³³. Gender equality efforts and climate action must therefore go hand-in-hand, as worsening climate impacts disproportionately affect women and marginalised populations, amplifying vulnerabilities linked to SRHR – including mental health, access to reproductive health services, and protection from SGBV in climate-affected contexts. IPPF underscores these intersecting risks, emphasising that the climate crisis is additionally a SRHR crisis and calling for inclusive, human rights-based and gender-transformative action in response³⁴. Integrated climate and gender investments offer strong co-benefits for health equity, gender equality, and regional stability.

Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Acknowledge and integrate gender as a core national security priority across policy, intelligence, and operational responses to safeguard Australia's stability and uphold its values.** In doing so, Australia will be more capable of anticipating, mitigation and responding to threats that exploit gendered dynamics, and undermine human rights, social cohesion, democratic institutions, and community resilience.
- **Establish a gender and national security division within national security and intelligence infrastructure,** borrowing from the approach being undertaken by the UK Government. Within this, create a dedicated portfolio to test new approaches for intelligence gathering and strategic response on gendered security threats.

³² https://spotlightinitiative.org/sites/default/files/publication/2025-05/Colliding%20Crises%20How%20the%20climate%20crisis%20fuels%20gender-based%20violence_1.pdf

³³ <https://www.unfpa.org/press/domestic-violence-sub-saharan-africa-will-triple-2060-due-extreme-heat-epidemic-and-stalling>

³⁴ <https://www.ippf.org/resource/ippf-position-paper-climate-crisis-and-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights>



4. The role of locally-led leadership and decision making in advancing gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda;

Driving effective and long-lasting progress towards gender equality is highly dependent on prioritising gender-diverse local leadership. Trust is a critical component of ensuring productive relationships between decision-makers and local communities, particularly in the context of peacebuilding. Locally led leadership helps foster this trust by ensuring that community voices are centred, and decision-makers are informed on local issues and best placed to implement effective solutions. Promoting local leadership also builds capacity for communities for development and humanitarian action, providing stability and resilience. Further, as those who are disproportionately affected by conflict and its aftermath, and who are so often overlooked in the peacebuilding process, women and their participation in locally-led leadership are vital in ensuring effective decision-making and equitable outcomes.

This is exemplified by the role of **grassroots indigenous organisations** and their involvement in championing gender inclusion in leadership. Contrary to false claims that gender equality goes against traditional values and is a Western imposition, indigenous communities have indeed long-held traditions of women in positions of power and leadership. In many communities, indigenous women around the world play key roles in cultural conservation, transmitting indigenous knowledge, maintaining and preserving natural resources, and decision-making³⁵. In the Pacific, for example, women have traditionally taken on a variety of leadership roles and play an important part in maintaining culture³⁶.

Peace agreements and processes that are gender-inclusive and implement rights-based approaches are more durable and inclusive. Research indicates that increased gender diversity in peace agreements both increases the likelihood of reaching an agreement and the probability that an agreement will hold³⁷. Health and human rights investments (including SRHR) build community resilience, rebuild trust in institutions, and address root causes of instability. Yet, despite progress in elevating marginalised groups in peacebuilding, the involvement of women in peacebuilding-related decision-making remains low, and SRHR remains underrepresented in national and regional action plans. In 2023, only 9.7% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators and 26.6% of signatories to peace agreements were women³⁸. With gender being such a significant factor in determining outcomes in times of conflict, this discrepancy means that those who are most affected by issues are sidelined, and SRHR and gender-related elements of peace agreements are being overlooked.

However, simply increasing the number of women involved in the peacebuilding process is not sufficient. Rather, women must be afforded more power to enact lasting peace. Peace agreements involving women as leaders and decision makers, rather than as observers, prove

³⁵<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/Briefing%20Notes%20Gender%20and%20Indigenous%20Women.pdf>

³⁶ <https://pacificdata.org/data/dataset/pwl-thematic-brief-myths-about-gender-equality-in-the-pacific/resource/38b3e82c-ca53-4725-8d62-bf7a25f0e77a/view/549c82f7-f573-4f37-af91-27afefe937ea>

³⁷ <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>

³⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/page/women-peace-and-security>



more effective and contain greater provisions for women in their design³⁹. In Bougainville, for example, women acted as key grassroots mediators and decision-makers during conflict with Papua New Guinea and the subsequent peace process, resulting in reserved seats for women in Bougainville's parliament and executive council in an effort to counter male dominance in political leadership⁴⁰.

IPPF has a unique added value as a global SRHR provider and advocate, working across local, national, regional, and global levels. Across the Federation, many Member Associations and collaborative partners already contribute to the WPS agenda through their humanitarian and sexual and reproductive health in emergencies (SRHiE) work. The locally led status of IPPF MAs is key to their success in delivering effective service delivery in a variety of contexts. For example, the Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA) and Syrian Family Planning Association (SFPA) are among the only remaining civil society SRH service providers within their respective countries, both of which have experienced decades of protracted conflict and crisis. **Within these contexts, local organisations play a crucial role, reaching communities that other actors – including public health services and international organisations – often cannot.**

The silencing and sidelining of civil society and local leadership weakens democratic stability and threatens to reverse gains made toward gender equality. In several countries, governments have passed laws limiting NGOs' ability to register, receive foreign funding, or operate freely – often under the guise of national security or public morality. Local advocates and service providers increasingly face harassment, threats, and abuse, stifling their capacity to operate and deliver essential services. These measures heavily impact organisations advocating for SRHR, gender equality, and marginalised populations and undermine the very foundation of the WPS agenda. Locally-led leadership is essential for ensuring that decision-making processes reflect the realities and needs of those most affected by conflict—particularly women and gender diverse peoples. **Australia must therefore continue to support civil society organisations and recognise the essential role they play in promoting local leadership that delivers more sustainable and equitable peace outcomes.**

³⁹ https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/power-over-presence-womens-representation-in-comprehensive-peace-negotiations-and-gender-provision-outcomes/BF6C310AB2A66AE34A8B0BCD75B75116?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=bookmark

⁴⁰ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/meaningful-participation-women-peacebuilding-pacific>



Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Prioritise gender-diverse local leadership in WPS implementation:** Champion locally-led, gender-inclusive decision-making as essential to sustainable peacebuilding, recognising that women’s leadership yields more durable peace agreements with stronger gender provisions. Commit to ensuring the meaningful inclusion and leadership of women, LGBTQI+ and indigenous representatives in implementation of the WPS agenda, including during peace talks, regional and global forums and development of WPS-related policies and programming.
- **Defend civil society’s essential role in peace and security:** Counter shrinking civic space by providing local organisations, particularly those advancing SRHR and gender equality, with direct flexible funding, capacity-building to anticipate and counter regulatory attacks, and diplomatic support through bilateral engagements with governments to halt civic space restrictions and expand freedoms. Recognise local civil society as the foundation of trust-based peacebuilding and democratic stability, ensuring women and gender-diverse voices remain central to conflict prevention and recovery.
- **Support and leverage local leaders to dismantle harmful narratives:** Amplify the voices and leadership of indigenous women, LGBTQI+ advocates and grassroots organisations to counter false narratives framing gender equality as a Western imposition, while ensuring SRHR, bodily autonomy and gender considerations are systematically embedded as core priorities in local peace processes.

5. 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;

Meaningful integration of gender equality across Australia’s foreign policy advances core national interests – promoting social cohesion, democratic stability, and peace in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond – **and strengthens the credibility and influence of Australia as a principled middle power.** Australia has progressively embedded gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, particularly through its promotion of the WPS agenda, however it needs to ensure that it takes a transformative, rather than an instrumental approach in its implementation⁴¹. As a middle power, Australia has the capability and responsibility to step up – by forging alliances with civil society and human rights defenders, and by defending advances towards gender equality and human rights with courage and clarity. **This is an opportunity for Australia to lead.**

The adoption of a **National Security Strategy** would strengthen its commitment to advancing gender equality. Australia finds itself in an increasingly militarised Indo-Pacific with an outdated

⁴¹ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/australia-treats-gender-equality-foreign-policy-tool-not-principle>



approach to national security that leaves it without a framework to help align priorities across agencies or respond to hybrid threats⁴². Security challenges intersect with human insecurity and impacts of climate change—dynamics that disproportionately affect women, girls, and gender diverse peoples. A National Security Strategy would provide a comprehensive framework to prepare Australia for a more turbulent global landscape. Crucially, it would also provide an opportunity for gender considerations to be further embedded as a national security imperative, signalling Australia’s leadership as a champion of gender equality.

Australia’s **International Gender Equality Strategy** is a welcome step in centring gender equality and recognising that protecting SRHR is a fundamental part of pursuing peace and stability. During a time in which many governments are shifting away from prioritising gender equality, Australia’s commitment is important. Indeed, it is this same global context that demands bold action so as to not render this strategy insufficient. For Australia to position itself as a leader, key elements missing from the current strategy must be addressed. Notably, with a significant increase in attacks against the transgender community—both in Australia and abroad—the strategy does not sufficiently address gender equality beyond the gender binary.

Additionally, the strategy does not make reference to masculinity and its role to both aid and hinder efforts to achieve gender equality. The perception that the pursuit of gender equality is predicated on the exclusion and demonisation of men and masculinity is a prevalent one pushed by anti-rights actors, and one that has proven itself to be incredibly destabilising to equality advancements, with evidence suggesting notable violent responses to women’s empowerment⁴³. Involving men and boys in gender equality work is also imperative, particularly to counter the narrative that there is a “war on men”⁴⁴. Gender equality produces societal and economic benefits that benefit the community as a whole, including men. Advancing gender equality additionally offers men an opportunity to gain a sense of purpose and pride, with men in privileged positions holding immense power to enact change by challenging misogynistic behaviour, questioning patriarchal systems, and promoting healthy ideas of masculinity. There is an opportunity for men to gain purpose and pride from the advancement of gender equality for all.

Furthermore, like Australia’s National Action Plan for the implementation of the WPS, the International Gender Equality Strategy lacks due consideration of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse peoples. In future policy and strategic interventions, Australia should address the intersection between Indigenous and gender issues, such as the higher rates of SGBV experienced by Indigenous people⁴⁵.

⁴² <https://perthusasia.edu.au/research-and-insights/australia-urgently-needs-a-national-security-strategy/>

⁴³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-makes-gender-equality-key-foreign-policy-aid-2025-02-05/>

⁴⁴ <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/06/the-new-global-struggle-over-gender-rights-and-family-values?lang=en>

⁴⁵ <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-women-are-most-affected-by-domestic-violence-but-have-struggled-to-be-heard-its-time-we-listened-229720>



Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Develop and adopt a holistic National Security Strategy** that recognises that gender equality as a key national security imperative. This not only ensures that Australia is prepared for an increasingly militarised region but provides an opportunity for Australia to assert itself as a leader in upholding gender equality and human rights.
- **Strengthen and expand implementation of the International Gender Equality Strategy** to affirm gender equality beyond the binary, include acknowledgements of the intersecting issues faces by Indigenous women, and consider the role of masculinity in the pursuit of equality for all.

6. The Women, Peace and Security agenda internationally and Australia's role in promoting and implementing it;

SRHR is intrinsically linked to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and is essential for advancing gender equality and protecting the rights of all women and girls. Beyond the provision of health services, addressing SRHR within the WPS framework empowers women to make informed decisions about their bodies and lives, enabling their full participation in peacebuilding and security processes. Without comprehensive access to SRHR and consistent implementation of the WPS agenda, women's ability to engage meaningfully in these processes is severely restricted, undermining inclusive and sustainable peace outcomes. It is also vital to ensure early identification and deployment of preventive measures that provide security and access to relevant services, including SRH services, such as contraception and safe abortion.

The UN Security Council has integrated aspects of SRHR into the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, through **three resolutions**⁴⁶ which explicitly call for access to SRH services for women and girls affected by conflict. These resolutions underscore the need for SRHR as a core component of humanitarian response and the importance of the participation of women at all stages of peace processes. Yet, an increase in opposition to the linking of SRHR and the WPS agenda has resulted in progress stalling since 2013. This is despite mounting evidence that violations of SRHR – such as conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, unsafe abortion, maternal mortality, and displacement – directly undermine security and peace. These violations erode women's agency and social standing, perpetuate stigma, and hinder their ability to participate in public life, including matters of peace and security. This reality directly conflicts with the four pillars of the WPS Agenda by limiting women's role in shaping peace processes, conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts aiming to ensure their safety, prevent further conflict, and aid in post-conflict recovery.

Australia's diplomatic and humanitarian profile depends on a credible, rules-based multilateral order. Its foreign policy and strategic commitments on gender equality, human rights,

⁴⁶ S/RES/1889 (2009), S/RES/2106 (2013), and S/RES/2122 (2013)



international law, conflict prevention, and accountability for conflict related sexual violence rely on a functioning Security Council. Upholding SRHR within the WPS framework is both a matter of principle and a strategic imperative for global peace and security.

Australia has been a strong advocate for the WPS agenda, emphasising that SRHR is inseparable from peacebuilding and stability. During its 2013–2014 UN Security Council term, WPS was a core priority, which helped safeguard important gains made in the promotion and protection of women’s rights, including in peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding negotiations (such as in Afghanistan) and supported further measures to ensure women are more meaningfully engaged across all aspects of these discussions. Australia’s National Action Plan remains one of the few globally to explicitly commit to full SRHR access. **At a time when gender equality and SRHR face unprecedented pushback across UN fora, including the Security Council, Australia’s leadership is more crucial than ever** to ensure that hard-won gains are safeguarded and that WPS remains at the core of negotiations, rather than being sidelined for military reasons.

However, whilst Australia has continued to promote SRHR, gender equality and the WPS agenda at a time of great uncertainty and wavering commitments, it has limited its engagement to a mechanism for advancing its own foreign policy ambitions. Analysis from the Lowy Institute⁴⁷ and the Australian Institute of International Affairs⁴⁸ illustrate that Australia’s implementation of the WPS agenda through its National Action Plan (NAP) is inconsistent and lacks robust mechanisms for measuring progress. For example, there are insufficient gender security considerations in the domestic space. In Defence, WPS responsibilities have been distanced from operational spaces and reassigned to its human resources division, gender advisors remain under resourced⁴⁹, and sexual violence remains a persistent cultural issue in the Australian Defence Force⁵⁰. Additionally, there remains no WPS framework for issues pertaining to the intersectional identities of Indigenous women and refugee and asylum-seeking women⁵¹. This in turn risks failing to recognise the ongoing effects of colonisation—such as higher rates of SGBV, increased securitisation and policing of Indigenous communities, and the impact of Australia’s strict immigration system⁵².

⁴⁷ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/australia-treats-gender-equality-foreign-policy-tool-not-principle>

⁴⁸ <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australias-progress-on-women-peace-and-security-a-critical-look-at-the-latest-report/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/operational-importance-of-gender-advisors-armed-forces/>

⁵⁰ <https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-3>

⁵¹ <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2014.902031>

⁵² <https://www.acmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-03/What%20do%20peace%20and%20security%20mean%20to%20diverse%20Women%20in%20Australia.pdf>



Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Strengthen its National Action Plan on the implementation of Women, Peace, and Security by explicitly maintaining and reinforcing strong commitments to SRHR and by including more robust monitoring and evaluation and transparency mechanisms.** Additionally, Australia must broaden its approach to implementing WPS to integrate an intersectional gender perspective in all work related to peace and security. It should increase its focus on domestic implementation efforts in addition to including considerations for the security of marginalised groups, such as Indigenous and refugee women.
- **Take a leadership role in the UN system, including by consistently advocating for the comprehensive inclusion of SRHR as a core element of WPS in all UN spaces,** and also by actively defending the WPS agenda in UN Security Council negotiations, including during the renewal or establishment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Additionally, Australia could demonstrate leadership by joining and advancing priorities from ad hoc informal spaces (such as the shared commitments on WPS, Informal Expert Group on WPS, Group of Friends on WPS, and the NGO working group on WPS).

7. Any related matters.

The rise and proliferation of global anti-rights agendas threaten social cohesion, national security and regional security. Attacks on gender, the transgender community, and migrants are increasing in frequency and intensity. Conservative religious and political groups are actively campaigning against SRHR, framing it as a threat to traditional values – this is playing out at national, regional and international levels.⁵³ These attacks undermine work to counteract SGBV, particularly where practices such as early marriage and FGM are justified through invoking religion and/or traditions. The anti-rights movement is also implicitly validating attacks on LGBTQI+ communities and women seeking abortions by condoning hate speech under the guise of freedom of speech principles.

Recent developments illustrate the growing influence of these agendas. Attacks on “woke” policies have seen the U.S. administration direct the removal of references to gender ideology throughout government departments. Argentina has pursued the reversal of the criminalisation of femicide⁵⁴, and the UK’s Reform Party has seen unprecedented levels of support and funding, campaigning against “woke” agendas and “transgender ideology”. These actions reflect a broader backlash against feminism, fuelled by democratic decline and the spread of anti-rights content in online spaces.

Similar groups and ideologies are gaining ground in Australia, with parties such as One Nation escalating their anti-gender and anti-immigration rhetoric as it records its highest polling

⁵³ <https://www.epfweb.org/node/1147>

⁵⁴ <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/06/the-new-global-struggle-over-gender-rights-and-family-values?lang=en>



figures in the party's history⁵⁵. This attempt at mainstreaming anti-rights ideology reveals the need for the Australian government to better understand both the funding and tactics of these groups in order to limit their threat to national security, including the safety and security of women, girls and LGBTQI+ people.

Looking ahead, an increased focus on intersectional movement building will be critical. There is an urgent need for those working on gender equality efforts to move beyond traditional siloes and coordinate through an integrated response to emerging threats and challenges.

Accordingly, IPPF recommends that Australia:

- **Improve transparency mechanisms**, including requiring timely disclosure of political donations. Increased visibility of political funding, including real-time disclosure and reduced disclosure thresholds are key to limiting the influence of anti-rights groups and upholding democratic stability.
- **Speak out consistently and unequivocally** when SRHR, WPS, the human rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people, the independence of civil society, or the integrity of the multilateral system are threatened or undermined.

Conclusion

IPPF's current strategy to 2028 commits to shaping laws, policies, norms and programmatic interventions that support advances toward gender equality and protect SRHR through feminist action and international cross-movement solidarity. We recognise that our work is deeply intertwined with the struggles for human rights, climate survival, social justice and equality. Our cross-movement advocacy efforts provide opportunities for shared platforms, intelligence, and collective action. We welcome further collaboration with the Australian Government to continue progress towards gender equality as a fundamental aspect of Australian society and Australia's international engagement.

⁵⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/dec/10/guardian-essential-poll-one-nation-records-highest-ever-primary-vote>