



Australia Awards

Australia Awards Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The Australian Government's commitment to gender equality, social inclusion and women's empowerment are strongly articulated in specific policies of its overseas aid program, (which includes reference to people from LGBTQIA populations). Inclusion is seen as a cross-cutting issue in all aspects of Australia's aid investments. These policies include:

- [Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy](#)
- [Development for All 2015–2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program](#)
- [South Asia COVID-19 Development Response Plan](#)
- [DFAT Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan May 2019 – June 2022](#)

What is gender equality?

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy](#), defines gender equality as 'equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys. It does not mean that women and men are the same'. Men and women should both be afforded the same rights and opportunities and be held equally accountable to laws and regulations.

Sometimes it may be necessary to treat people differently to achieve equality. This is because differences between people may make it difficult for them to enjoy their rights without support. The substantive model of equality, therefore, requires using the actual conditions of women's lives, rather than the wording used in laws and policies, as the true measure of whether equality has been achieved.¹

The principle of intersectionality

Our lives and experiences are multidimensional and complex and shaped by all the facets that make us who we are (our identity), e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, race, and cultural background. Who we truly are (our authentic self) is often a combination of multiple identities. For example, a person may identify as a woman with

a disability, transgender or as belonging to an ethnic minority. Therefore, our experience of advantages and disadvantages results from intersecting identities; rather than just one identity. The person who identifies as a gay person from South Asia experiences disadvantage and exclusion because we live in a predominantly Caucasian (white) society that upholds heterosexuality as the norm.

Considering these intersections when thinking about gender equality is important because it can help foster a culture of care, equality and respect. By putting the voices and experiences of people experiencing overlapping forms of exclusion at the centre of our work, we are best placed to understand different forms of inequalities and the relationships among them and respond appropriately.

Intersectionality helps us to recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach to gender equality won't work for everybody, as it doesn't account for the barriers experienced by different people. Intersectionality recognises that people's experiences of gender inequality can look very different. It, therefore, promotes an inclusive approach to gender equality initiatives, which ensures that everyone is treated equitably regardless of their gender and other identities. This includes men, women and gender diverse people.

Gender equality in Australia²

Levels of gender inequality vary worldwide, and within each of the contexts mentioned above. The World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Index placed Australia at 50 (among 156 countries), six places lower than 2020 and down from 24 in 2014.

- Gender pay gap continues to fall, but women still earned \$25.8K less, on average, than men
- 3 in 5 employers now offering paid parental leave.
- Women make up over 50% of the workforce, but less than 20% of CEOs
- Women comprised more than 41% of all managers (up from 36% in 2013).
- Women account for less than 1 in 5 CEOs or board chairs, and 1 in 3 board members

¹ UN Women (n.d.) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about CEDAW, UN Women, accessed 30 April 2021. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/cedaw-human-rights/faq>

² <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard>





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Australia's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment internationally

Gender equality is an important priority for Australia's foreign aid programs and the Australian Government has an ongoing commitment to promoting the empowerment of women and girls.

DFAT outlines four commitments in Australian international aid programs:

- Integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into Australia's foreign policy.
- Integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into aid for trade investments and economic diplomacy.
- Invest in gender equality through Australia's development program.
- Commit to promoting gender equality in corporate and human resource policies and practices.

DFAT's strategy employs a twin track approach, meaning that gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives are implemented both through mainstreaming and integration in all development practice, and through specific initiatives that actively target and promote women.

These commitments underpin Australia Awards initiatives and practice regarding gender equality and women's empowerment.

Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

Reducing inequality between women and men is everyone's responsibility; every individual, no matter their gender, can take action to improve fairness of opportunity, participation and contribution in many different parts of our lives.

There are many simple, practical steps that anyone can take in everyday work, at home and in the community to improve equality and empower women and girls. Some examples of these steps are:

- Advocate and support steps towards gender equality, and strengthen empowerment of women in your place of work, study and community.
- Recognise and rebalance unpaid domestic responsibilities that women and girls often have.
- Model equality to children and young people in our homes and more broadly in our community.

Resources and further information

The resources below will help further develop your knowledge and understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment. We strongly encourage you to read more and find ways you can engage with some of the organisations below.

A number of these resources have been used to inform this document.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy
www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.aspx

Australian Human Rights Commission
www.humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality-2018

Women's Empowerment Principles
www.empowerwomen.org/en/weps/about

Workplace Gender Equality Agency
www.wgea.gov.au

Diversity Council Australia
www.dca.org.au

Equality Rights Alliance
www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au

