



Australia Awards

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

This resource provides an overview about gender equality in Australia. It also outlines strategies that protect and promote the rights of women and enable their fair and equal participation in society.

What is gender equality?

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* (2016) 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.

Education, employment, health and social wellbeing, decision-making, and economic and political participation are all examples of the opportunities and rights that should be equally accessible regardless of gender. Women and girls tend to experience less representation in these areas and are more likely to experience discrimination and violence in their lives.

Levels of gender inequality vary worldwide, and within each of the contexts mentioned above. The World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report* rates the gender parity of 144 countries, based on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Australia is ranked at 35.

Gender equality in Australia

In 1984, the Sex Discrimination Act was passed in Australia, making it against the law to discriminate on the basis of gender, sexuality, marital status, family responsibilities or pregnancy. The Act has played an important role in changing attitudes and advancing gender equality in Australia.

Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is a policy priority for Australia. This policy is centred on women's economic empowerment, women in leadership and the elimination of violence against women.

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 promote 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

The World Bank defines *empowerment* as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes". Women's empowerment is often discussed in terms of economic empowerment, access to education and political participation.

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.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Global Compact collaborated to launch seven Women's Empowerment Principles on International Women's Day in 2010. These principles were initially a guide to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community; however, they have since been used in broader contexts to commit to empowering, advancing and investing in women worldwide generally.

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

Office for Women

www.pmc.gov.au/office-women

Workplace Gender Equality Agency

www.wgea.gov.au

Diversity Council Australia

www.dca.org.au

UN Women National Committee Australia

www.unwomen.org.au

Equality Rights Alliance

www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au

White Ribbon Australia

www.whiteribbon.org.au

