



**NATIONAL  
FOUNDATION FOR  
AUSTRALIAN  
WOMEN**

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POLICY TOWARDS EQUALITY

# **Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in response to its inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative**

[www.nfaw.org](http://www.nfaw.org)

Prepared by

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Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the NFAW Board.

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# National Foundation for Australian Women

The National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests and human rights of Australian women, including in intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women. We are a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of Country throughout Australia and pay our respects to their elders past and present.

NFAW welcomes this inquiry into gender equality as a national and economic security imperative and thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make this submission. We are available and would be pleased to address any questions and give further evidence to the Committee during hearings.

## Recommendations

NFAW recommends:

1. The development of an Australian National Security Strategy which:
  - a. identifies gender equality as a critical element of the definition of 'security';
  - b. uses a human rights framework and maps risks and actions against the impact on human rights in Australia;
  - c. identifies the elimination of gender inequality as a priority action;
  - d. articulates the benefits of gender equality for all Australians vis a vis Australia's national security;
  - e. adopts an intersectional approach to identifying and addressing gender inequality;
  - f. requires Commonwealth Departments and other federal entities to conduct gender impact analysis across all policies and areas of responsibility (particularly all domestic areas of policy and responsibility) which are identified in the strategy as critical to Australia's national security and incorporate the results into its policies and practices. This activity should include but not be limited to recommendations 2 and 3 below;

- g. directs adequate resourcing to the Commonwealth Office for Women and / or other relevant bodies to support Departments and entities to build internal capacity to perform the above analysis.
2. That the Commonwealth Office for Women develop a second iteration of the National Strategy on Gender Equality *Working for Women* with a focus on aligning *Working for Women* with the National Security Strategy, the *Second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2021-2031*, Australia's international commitments under UN human rights treaties, the relevant Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Sustainable Development Goals. The development process should include a robust and adequately resourced national consultation on priorities for action.
3. That the Department of Energy, Climate, Environment and Water commission intersectional gendered analyses to support the following documents:
  - a. *National Climate Change Risk Assessment 2025*.
  - b. The upcoming *National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy*.
  - c. *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* and the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, with particular emphasis on aligning these documents with the *Gender Action Plan to Support Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*.
4. That the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department implement the recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission in *Free and Equal: Final Report 2023*, including enacting a Commonwealth Human Rights Act.
5. That the Commonwealth encourage and support States and Territories to prepare local security strategies which align with the National Security Strategy, identify the gendered implications of local security issues and include the elimination of gender inequality as a key action.
6. That the Commonwealth support and resource local councils to implement gender impact analysis across all areas of their work to identify and capitalise on opportunities to improve local gender equality, including developing greater capacity for local leadership in the development and implementation of responses to security risks, including climate change.
7. That the Commonwealth Office for Women commission research to identify whether a gendered funding gap exists across Commonwealth grants and programs, including a gendered analysis the quantum of funding allowances for

salaries and operating costs across programs and grants focused on women, those focused on men and those without a gendered focus.

8. That the Commonwealth maintain and grow Australia's investments in and capacity to produce gender data broadly, and particularly in individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of and multidimensional poverty, including resourcing coalitions across government and civil society to support uptake and use.
9. The incorporation of training in gender analysis as a core element of the APS Graduate Training Program and including gender as a cross-cutting theme in all events held under the whole of APS Graduate Event Series.
10. That the Commonwealth work with the Australian National University to establish *Gender in Public Policy* as a specialisation within the Master of Public Policy program and with Monash University to develop *Gender in Public Policy* as a policy specialisation within option 2 of the Master of Public Policy program.

## Submission

This submission responds to the following terms of reference:

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***
2. ***Evidence and data that demonstrates the links between gender equality and economic growth and prosperity***
3. ***The international and national security implications of undermining gender equality, including in the context of humanitarian crises and climate change***
4. ***The role of locally led leadership and decision making in advancing gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda***
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***

## Introduction

*“The confluence of economic, political, social and environmental crises with rising levels of inequality within and between countries is not coincidental. Inequality is both a root cause and an amplifier of crises”<sup>1</sup>*

Australia has a strong record in articulating the links between gender equality and national security. In international forums, we are vocal about the need to ensure gender equality is a core outcome of peace building and development work. We have well developed infrastructure to support a focus on gender equality in Australia’s international relationships and engagement, including the office of Ambassador for Gender Equality, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s *International Gender Equality Strategy* and the *Second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2021-2031*.

However, Australia has a poor track record of articulating the importance of gender equality for strong, resilient communities at home. With a few important exceptions, most levels of government in Australia do not approach gender equality as critical to good policy or as a core focus. While we have made strong progress towards gender equality in a range of areas, governments, businesses and communities tend to view gender equality as something we strive for to improve the lives of women and girls, not because gender equality is critical to everyone’s wellbeing and security. Gender is not mainstreamed in Australian policy and decision making. Policy and initiatives aimed addressing gender inequality are generally treated as siloed actions which are separate from core functions and often regarded (incorrectly) as only benefiting a particular demographic. Gender impact analysis is not widely understood or resourced across Australian governments and business.

This lack of progress in mainstreaming gender in public policy leaves Australia vulnerable. Efforts to address gender inequalities rooted in negative social norms are hampered by poor public understanding of key concepts such as human rights and gender bias. Negatively gendered narratives play a key role in motivating Australians who join extremist groups. Intervention and response planning to local security threats generally lacks a nuanced understanding of gender, despite the critical role gender plays in determining capacity for survival and recovery from shocks. Australia is planning for current and emerging challenges such as AI, the need to modernise our economy, challenges to democracy, cyber-threats and climate change in a gender-oblivious manner, which means our responses and plans are less likely to be effective.

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<sup>1</sup> Staab, S. et al 2024 p21

## **Gender equality is a strength. Gender inequality is a risk.**

National and international approaches to national security are evolving. Traditional approaches to national security focused primarily on external threats to the nation state, to be addressed through military or diplomatic strategy. In recent decades a more nuanced understanding has broadened the focus of national security analysis to include the wellbeing and safety of communities and individuals within Australia, as well as recognising threats posed by non-state actors, and domestic and non-geographic factors, such as cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, climate change, environmental threats and domestic extremism.

The ANU's National Security College recently parsed the current approach to national security in terms of risk management and resilience:

*“One way to think about security is as a state of mind that helps us handle anxieties by engaging confidently with risk. It requires strength and vigilance, and it requires physical protection. But it also involves a mindset about risk-management, rather than a pursuit of absolute safety or control at any cost.*

*Security may be a leading priority of government, but it is not the only one. For government, making good decisions about security involves understanding how those decisions affect other things citizens value, such as prosperity, wellbeing or personal freedoms.*

*This is one reason why the way that governments and experts think about security has been changing in recent years, towards looking for ways in which security, prosperity and social cohesion can reinforce each other in building a resilient nation: an Australia that can withstand many kinds of shock.”<sup>2</sup>*

Using this risk-oriented approach, modern national security analysis recognises factors such as social cohesion, trust, and inclusive governance as security assets, and their absence as security risks.

Gender equality is fundamental to the stability, resilience, and connectedness of societies. When all genders can participate equally and safely, communities are more cohesive, more trusting under pressure,<sup>3</sup> and better equipped to face shared challenges and deal with change. Without gender equality, the overall wellbeing of the population is reduced and thus made more vulnerable to shocks. In this context, actions which

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<sup>2</sup> AUN National Security College 2025 p7

<sup>3</sup> Audette, A.P. et al 2019

improve gender equality are not just a matter of fairness, of benefit only to those who experience gender inequality, but an important tool in managing risk and responding to or countering threats to national security.

## **Taking a nuanced approach to gender**

It is important to note that in the context of national security, gender must be understood in terms of its full complexity.

*“Too often, security studies has either ignored the role of gender or understood gender as synonymous with women. Gender is not just about women. It [also] concerns power, masculinities, norms and how these entwine”<sup>4</sup>*

Gender inequality affects people differently across the gender spectrum and can have negative impacts on people of all genders, especially in times of crisis. In societies with rigid, traditionally binary gender roles, women are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, reducing their capacity to take action to preserve their own safety and to recover from shocks, and are more likely to experience gender-based and intimate partner violence from men who have experienced disaster-related trauma. At the same time, when faced with an environmental crisis such as bushfire, men are more likely to exhibit gendered behaviours which threaten their lives.<sup>5</sup> More generally, patriarchal structures and organisations tend to establish hierarchies and relationships of power which valorise rigid stoicism, individualism, conformity and physical risk-taking over teamwork, emotional resilience and diversity.<sup>6</sup>

Rigid, binary approaches to gender also produce negative outcomes for gender diverse people. A trans or gender diverse person is more likely to experience discrimination when accessing services, denial of healthcare, increased risk of violence due to perceived gender transgression and denial of access to public spaces. They also find that emergency responses and services fail to acknowledge or respond to their needs, delivering services in inappropriate or harmful ways. Finally, patriarchal social structures tend to emphasise a deep heteronormativity, manifesting as homophobia with heightened risks of discrimination, denial of essential services and outright violence for queer people.

It's also critical to take an intersectional approach to gender in national security analysis. Vulnerability is multidimensional and barriers to wellbeing and security can

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<sup>4</sup> Pearson, E 2023. p 491

<sup>5</sup> Haynes, K et al 2010

<sup>6</sup> Tyler, M et al 2012

compound in ways which massively increase vulnerability. Using gender as the only dimension of vulnerability in any analysis of national security risks missing critical opportunities to address barriers to equality along with wastage of resources on gender equality initiatives which fail to address the reality of living with intersecting and compounding disadvantage.

If a rigorous, intersectional approach is taken, achieving gender equality has the potential to benefit all Australians, regardless of gender. Conversely, a nation with limited access to the stability, resilience and economic gains which result from increased equality must expend a reduced pool of national resources on reacting to the negative social and economic effects of inequality in addition to addressing threats to national security, without the benefits of high social cohesion and a population which is resilient to shocks.

Despite this, Australian domestic policy and decision-making often approaches gender equality as an action taken solely for the benefit of cis women and girls (and occasionally for gender diverse people) and too often fails to capitalise on the broader benefits of addressing intersecting dimensions of disadvantage.

Gender relations are relations of power, and gender can act as a template for broader power relations.<sup>7</sup> It is important to use gender as an analytical lens in thinking about all aspects of national and international security. Feminist notions of power are relevant for thinking about how Australia positions itself in the world. Rather than seeking to replicate dominance relations, as a key middle power, Australia should focus on creating power sharing and cooperation both nationally and internationally to reflect how Australia operates in the world. Gender equality is a core component of these cooperative relations.

## **Gender equality as a precondition for economic security**

Research has consistently demonstrated links between higher levels of gender equality and improved economic performance since the late 1980s. We refer the committee to the survey of findings by Stephan Klasen and Francesca Lamanna, which covers the period from the late 1980s to 2000 in their study entitled: *The impact of gender inequality in education and employment on economic growth: new evidence for a panel of countries*.<sup>8</sup> More recently, higher or improved levels of gender equality have been clearly correlated with:

- increased subjective wellbeing for both women and men;<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hudson, V et al 2020

<sup>8</sup> The summary runs from p 92-97 in Klasen, Stephan et al 2009

<sup>9</sup> Audette, A.P et al 2019

- a positive growth differential of about 26% over a decade between industries located in a low gender inequality country when compared to a country with high gender inequality;<sup>10</sup>
- increased national economic output;<sup>11</sup>
- faster per-capita economic growth;<sup>12</sup>
- increased economic complexity at the national level;<sup>13</sup>
- reduced corruption in governance;<sup>14</sup> and
- increased entrepreneurial intention and activity among women.<sup>15</sup>

At the global level, OECD modelling in 2024 showed that women's increased employment has already been a major driver of past growth, and that closing persistent gender gaps would generate substantial additional GDP gains across member countries.<sup>16</sup>

At the level of individual businesses in Australia, increased gender equality in the workforce has been shown to result in lower staff turnover, more women in leadership and better shareholder value. The 2025 Gender Equity Series Report by Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency found that moving towards a gender balance in leadership in a company valued at \$500 million would drive an uplift in shareholder value of around \$47.5 million.<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, failing to address the effects of gender inequality, such as gender-based violence, has an economic cost; recently calculated as at least \$26 billion in Australia.<sup>18</sup>

## Gender equality and resilience

Economic measures are not the only measures relevant to national security. Resilience to shocks and progressive social or structural change is a measure of national security which is strongly linked to gender equality. The National Institute of Strategic Resilience defines resilience as:

*“[t]he ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and*

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<sup>10</sup> Bertay, A.C. et al 2025

<sup>11</sup> Onaran, Ö. et al 2022

<sup>12</sup> Minasyan, A et al 2018

<sup>13</sup> Nguyen, C.P. 2021

<sup>14</sup> Swamy, A et al 2001. See also Mason, A et al 2002

<sup>15</sup> Kong, H. et al 2022

<sup>16</sup> Fluchtmann, J. et al 2024

<sup>17</sup> Bankwest 2025 p81

<sup>18</sup> Summers, A; et al 2025

*restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.”<sup>19</sup>*

Our systems are constructed, maintained and driven by humans. Therefore, the capacity of Australia’s governmental, economic, social, environmental, and technological systems to withstand shocks depends to a significant extent on the resilience of Australia’s population. The behaviour of individuals under pressure can be the difference between a strong recovery and cascading national crisis. Individual resilience strengthens democratic stability<sup>20</sup> and contributes to social cohesion.<sup>21</sup> Resilient citizens are less vulnerable to information warfare and extremist recruitment.<sup>22</sup>

Gender inequality is highly detrimental to individual resilience. In a national security context, gender inequality reduces the resilience of women and gender diverse people by:

- reducing or restricting access to resources (eg: finances, healthcare) to facilitate adaptation and recovery;
- reducing or restricting access to or involvement in decision-making, limiting individual agency and weakening community-level preparation, response and adaptation initiatives;
- increases the amount of unpaid care and household work;
- increases the disproportionate share unpaid care and household work carried by women;
- limiting access to information and services; and
- reducing mobility.

Persistent issues of gender inequality such as gender-based violence, inequitable distribution of unpaid care work and economic inequities (particularly when compounded by long-term challenges such as housing affordability), constitute long term and persistent threats to Australia’s national security, because they reduce the resilience of individuals and communities. Women, girls and gender diverse people suffer disproportionately when Australia’s security is compromised, particularly in relation to health outcomes, personal safety and economic recovery. Levels of gender-based violence increase in the aftermath

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<sup>19</sup> Quote from the website of the National Institute of Strategic Resilience *Australia Resilient and Secure* <https://www.nisr.org.au/understanding-resilience>

<sup>20</sup> Holloway, J. et al 2023

<sup>21</sup> Pi Ferrer, L. et al 2025

<sup>22</sup> Rød, B. et al 2025

of disasters.<sup>23</sup> Women are more likely to die in heatwaves than men.<sup>24</sup> Food insecurity disproportionately affects women and children.<sup>25 26</sup>

Such inequities also constitute a lost opportunity to harness all available resources to address security challenges. Barriers to women's leadership and decision-making deny Australian peacebuilding efforts the advantages which come from gender equitable participation in the development of locally led solutions to conflict. Barriers to women's economic participation, such as the highly gendered distribution of unpaid care work, reduce the capacity of women to volunteer to lead or contribute to community responses to national security threats. Barriers to women's workforce participation reduce their ability to contribute to the formal economy, which in turn reduces the resources available to fund climate change adaptation efforts.

A gendered analysis and planning can also be critical to understanding and combatting specific threats to national security. The nexus between misogyny and violent extremism has been clearly demonstrated by researchers, who have identified gender as a consistent ideological touchstone across movements despite varied and sometimes diametrically opposing beliefs.<sup>27</sup> Researchers have found that negatively gendered narratives play a key role in influencing motivations for joining extremist groups and that a nuanced understanding of gender is necessary for all intervention and response planning.<sup>28</sup> Normalising an understanding of the mechanisms and effects of gender inequality across all genders is an effective intervention tactic for both violent extremism and gender-based violence in intimate, domestic and family relationships.

Consequently, while incorporating gender equality measures into Australia's international-facing national security planning remains important, reducing gender inequality *within* Australia should also be a key focus of Australia's national security planning. To achieve this, intersectional gender impact assessment and gender analysis tools should be mainstreamed across all levels of government and supported in business and community settings.

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<sup>23</sup> Parkinson, D 2017. See also ANROWS 2021

<sup>24</sup> Folkerts, MA et al 2022

<sup>25</sup> ACOSS 2023

<sup>26</sup> For further about the gendered effects of climate change in Australia, NFAW recommends consideration of the Position Paper of AWAHA 2025

<sup>27</sup> Pearson, E. 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Phelan, A. et al 2025

## Mainstreaming gender across Australian policy and planning

A fundamental early step in addressing gender inequality is overcoming gender bias in decision-making and policy processes. This is most effectively achieved by implementing an active policy of mainstreaming gender analysis across all areas of government which play a role in supporting national security. Although Australia has recently taken some strong steps towards mainstreaming gender analysis,<sup>29</sup> most Australian policy- and decision-making remains gender-blind (or worse), with the problem particularly acute in domestic national security planning.

For example, climate change policy in Australia tends to identify gender briefly as a salient factor and then take no further steps to identify specific risks or require action. Australia's first *National Climate Change Risk Assessment* is almost silent on gender equality. It acknowledges that “[r]isks and impacts from climate change are unequally distributed, reflecting and exacerbating pre-existing inequalities... Factors such as gender and other intersectional characteristics can significantly affect individuals' decision-making influence and the impact of climate change on already vulnerable groups”<sup>30</sup> but does not identify gender inequality as an area of focus and does not include increased gender equality in Australia as a potential asset.

The National Climate Change Adaptation Plan is currently in development. The *Issues Paper* prepared as part of the national consultation process makes only one passing reference to prioritising adaptation actions which “assist groups who are disproportionately affected by climate impacts and ensure that adaptation addresses equity and human rights, such as gender-responsive adaptation, intergenerational equity and equity for people with a disability.”<sup>31</sup>

Conversely, Australian policies and decision-making which are specifically aimed at addressing gender inequality tend to ignore relevant national security implications.

Australia's national strategy for gender equality *Working for Women* makes one mention of climate change as a future direction for the strategy, noting: “the importance of ensuring that women can lead action on climate change and are represented in disaster and crisis mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, including in leadership and

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<sup>29</sup> See for example, the gradual Federal implementation of gender responsive budgeting and the adoption in 2024 of *Working for Women: A National Strategy for Gender Equality*.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Climate Service 2025 p235

<sup>31</sup> DCCEW 2024 p12

advisory positions.”<sup>32</sup> This is the only reference to climate change or disaster in the strategy and is not accompanied by any climate-specific action. While the Federal Government’s gender responsive budgeting process has the potential to produce a full gender analysis of Commonwealth expenditure on environment policy and climate change response, there has been no mention of climate change or the environment in its annual *Women’s Budget Statement* since 2022, with the exception of support for the green iron investment fund and the future green metals workforce, which includes support for the participation of women and First Nations Australians in non-traditional roles (in 2025/26).

The *National Women’s Health Strategy 2020–2030*<sup>33</sup> makes no mention of how climate change affects women and girls. *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* and the associated *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* both briefly recognise that crises such as pandemics and disasters lead to increased rates of gender-based violence, but don’t position that statement within the context of climate change or national security.

Among the States and Territories, Victoria has the nation’s most comprehensive gender equality infrastructure and is the most advanced Australian government in terms of gender mainstreaming. Victoria’s *Gender Equality Act 2020* requires all public service entities, local councils, courts and universities with more than 50 employees to have a gender equality action plan relating to their workforce, to report on progress, and to consider and conduct gender impact assessments of their work to assist in promoting gender equality in the services they provide.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the Federal approach, Victoria’s strategy for addressing gender equality, *Our Equal State*,<sup>35</sup> identifies climate change as a gendered challenge and commits Victoria to “consider women’s and gender diverse people’s expertise and needs in preparing for disaster, response and recovery, particularly given Australia’s increasing risk of natural disasters.”<sup>36</sup> As a result, entities covered by the *Gender Equality Act* have a clear obligation to consider gender equality in any climate change response work. However, NFAW notes that the *Gender Equality Act* does not require publication of gender impact assessments, which makes it difficult to assess the success of this measure in climate change response or

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<sup>32</sup> Priority Area 5 – Women’s leadership, Australian Government [Gender and Climate Change: Submission on the progress of implementation of activities under the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan](#) March 2024 p4

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-womens-health-strategy-2020-2030?language=en>

<sup>34</sup> Ss.7 (duty to promote gender equality), 10 (Gender Equality Plans), 16 (must make reasonable progress), 17 (targets and quotas) and 19 (progress reports) [Gender Equality Act 2020 \(Vic\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Our Equal State: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2003 - 2027](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Our Equal State: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2003 - 2027](#) See p61-62, recommendations 101 (p75) and

environment policy. The next *Victorian Climate Change Response Strategy* is currently being drafted.

The few Australian policies and strategies which address both gender and national security tend to be solely focused on the international context. For example, Australia has several strategies which set out our commitment to gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) principles in development, climate and disaster response. *Australia's International Development Strategy (2023)*, *Australia's International Disability, Equity and Rights Strategy (2024)* and *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy (2025)* commit Australia to ensure 80% of funding investments address gender equality effectively and require all new investments over \$3 million to include gender equality objectives, including climate change response programming and assistance – but only in relation to international programming and assistance. There are no domestic national equivalent strategies.

Similarly, *Australia's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031*<sup>37</sup> (NAPWPS) commits Australia to ensuring gender-responsive approaches in disaster management, conflict prevention and peace building and identifies gender equitable participation in leadership and decision-making as an essential aim. The NAPWPS particularly identifies climate change as a security risk with strongly gendered implications and requires implementation agencies to mainstream a gender perspective in their work. However, despite the obvious domestic applicability of a plan addressing women and climate-related national security issues, the focus of implementation is almost exclusively on Australia's *international* development and security policy. State and Territory policy forces and other elements of the justice system are not covered by the NAPWPS. The Australian Federal Police's involvement in the Plan is limited to its activities overseas, not to domestic policing, despite extensive involvement of all Australian police services in climate change disaster response and in work on countering domestic extremism and cyber threats. Involvement of women in leadership and decision-making within Australia's domestic security planning is apparently not within the scope of the NAPWPS. Indeed, the NAPWPS generally reads as though gender equality is not an issue within Australia's borders.

A national security-oriented focus on gender inequality in Australia should have a core focus on:

- Improving women's economic security and resilience.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/second-australian-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2021-2031>

- Removing barriers to participation in decision-making and public life by women, girls and gender diverse people.
- Ending gender-based violence.
- Addressing the inequitable distribution of care and household work between genders.
- Identifying and addressing gender differences in needs, effects and outcomes for individuals in the context of both crisis and slow change.

Responses to national security threats, (particularly climate change-related threats) often focus on technology and infrastructure projects, but a gendered approach to national security should recognise the central economic and social importance of care work, both paid and unpaid, which is primarily performed by women. Valuing care work requires coordinated investment and professionalisation across sectors such as aged care, childcare, and disability support, along with increasing workplace flexibility and improving social protection measures and infrastructure to facilitate unpaid care work, including volunteer climate adaptation and crisis response work. It involves shifting social norms to promote gender-equitable distribution of care responsibilities. It also involves shifting care from a task to a state of mind in which our interconnections and our support for each other becomes a strength. Care needs to shift to the centre of our relationships and economy, and community roles such as emergency response, land management, and leadership should be recognised as forms of care work in national security planning.

## **Increasing human rights literacy in Australia**

While Australia has made extensive human rights commitments in international forums, including ratifying seven UN human rights treaties and championing a range of recent developments in human rights,<sup>38</sup> domestic implementation of those commitments has been patchy, largely limited to a suite of aging anti-discrimination legislation. NFAW is concerned that this lack of infrastructure and national leadership on human rights in Australia could have implications for our national security, most critically for those already experiencing inequality in Australia.

At a time when multilateralism is under pressure<sup>39</sup> and democracies are being undermined, a common international language on rights will be an essential element of Australia's toolkit for working with other States to support regional and local security.

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<sup>38</sup> See for example, Australia's role in championing resolutions on the rights of LGBTIQ+ people during its 2018-2020 term on the Human Rights Council, its early adoption of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, its role in supporting the development of implementation models for the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture in the Asia-Pacific region and its championing of human rights informed language at the UN's Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>39</sup> IPI et al 2024. See also: Le Monde 2024

Building a robust human rights culture is important in the context of national security planning. A well implemented and widely understood human rights culture allows government to build stronger, trust-based relationships with the Australian community, clarifies the role of government, particularly in relation to security interventions and systems change and creates a framework and shared language for incorporating equality issues into planning and implementation activities.

In the sections above, we have advocated a gender mainstreaming approach to incorporating gender equality into national security planning. Similarly, the Australian Human Rights Commission's Free and Equal Report advocates building an 'upstream' consideration of human rights into legal and policy systems, as opposed to having a human rights system which focuses solely on providing redress following breach.<sup>40</sup> NFAW endorses the recommendations made in that report. A strong human rights culture is an important element of national security infrastructure and an enabler of gender equality. Consequently, national security planning in Australia should use a human rights framework from inception and apply it consistently across all planning areas.

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<sup>40</sup> AHRC 2023 p16

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