

CEW Submission: Inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative

About CEW

Chief Executive Women (CEW) is Australia's leading network of women leaders, united in the purpose of women leaders empowering all women. Since 1985, we have worked with business, government, and the community to advance gender equity and remove barriers to women's progression, participation, safety, and security.

Our 1,400 members are among the most senior and influential women across business, academia, government, sport, the arts, and the not-for-profit sector, together overseeing more than 1.3 million employees and \$749 billion in revenue. Their organisations represent a combined market capitalisation of over \$1.144 trillion and contribute more than \$249 billion to Australia's GDP.

Through advocacy, research, targeted programs, and scholarships, CEW delivers practical impact: accelerating women into leadership, shaping policy, and influencing the systems that drive economic and social progress.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. CEW celebrates the diversity of First Nations people and their continuing connection to land, water, and community, and acknowledges the strength of First Nations women leading their communities. We extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of the CEW community.

Message from CEW

Gender equality is not just a social issue. It is a strategic imperative for security and economic prosperity, both domestically and internationally.

Gender inequality is a roadblock to economic progress, national security and community wellbeing. It depresses workforce participation, leaves talent underutilised and increases the likelihood of violence.

At the current pace of change, it will take 130 years to achieve global gender parity.¹

- 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal economic opportunities.²
- Only 27% of parliamentary seats globally are held by women.³
- 708 million women are excluded from the labour force due to unpaid care responsibilities.⁴
- Globally, at least 50,000 women die each year at the hands of family members approximately 137 women daily.⁵

The economic case for change:

- Equal representation of women in leadership positions could add \$10.8 billion per year to the Australian economy.⁶
- Women's full economic participation could add US\$28 trillion to the global economy.⁷
- In Australia, violence against women costs an estimated \$21.7 billion annually, with projections indicating this could reach \$323.4 billion by 2045 if left unaddressed.⁸

The security implications of gender inequality are significant. Gender equality is the strongest predictor of peace, more so than national wealth or political systems.⁹ There are strong links between domestic violence, extremism and broader patterns of violence.¹⁰ As such, gender-based violence should be considered a national security threat and domestic violence histories should be treated as red flags.

Australia: an international leader in gender equality

¹ World Economic Forum, [Global Gender Gap Report](#) 2025

² The World Bank Group: [Women, Business and the Law Report](#) (2022)

³ UN Women analysis of [data on women Heads of State and Government](#) as of 15 September 2025.

⁴ ILO, [The impact of care responsibilities on women's labour force participation](#) (2024)

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: [Femicides in 2024: Global Estimates of intimate partner/family member femicides](#) (2025)

⁶ Deloitte Access Economics: [Breaking the norm: Unleashing Australia's Economic Potential](#) (2022)

⁷ McKinsey Global Institute: [The Economic Benefits of Gender Parity](#) (2016)

⁸ Our Watch: [Quick facts about violence against women](#)

⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Australia's International Strategy for Gender Equality (2025)

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council: [Women and peace and security](#), 28 September 2023

Australia has made progress in gender equality – rising from 47th to 13th in the World Economic Forum global rankings since 2022¹¹ and achieving its most gender-balanced parliament in history¹². CEW welcomes *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy* and commends the Government's commitment to a target of 80% of development investments effectively addressing gender equality.¹³

As a middle power with significant regional influence, Australia has the opportunity, experience and responsibility to lead on gender equality as a strategic investment in regional stability and prosperity.

Gender equality is not peripheral to Australia's security interests. Enhanced focus on gender equity will assist Australia to achieve its security objectives. By embedding gender equality across foreign policy, defence and national security frameworks, Australia can unlock economic potential, strengthen regional stability, and model international best practice in linking security to national prosperity.

CEW calls on the government to:

- **Strengthen Australia's international leadership in gender equality advocacy** by embedding gender equality as a core objective across foreign policy, defence and national security decision-making.
- **Resource locally led leadership and decision-making**, particularly supporting First Nations women-led solutions.
- **Treat violence against women as a national security threat**, including for First Nations women who experience disproportionate rates of violence, by integrating prevention into counterterrorism frameworks, treating domestic violence histories as red flags in threat assessment, and addressing online misogyny and gendered disinformation.

CEW members, as community and business leaders, will continue to collaborate with the Australian Government in building a stronger, more prosperous economy for all Australians.

¹¹ World Economic Forum. (2024). *Global Gender Gap Report 2024*

¹² Parliament of Australia n.d., [Hansard display](#), Parliament of Australia,

¹³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; [Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy](#) (2025)

Australia: an international leader in gender equality

Australia is uniquely positioned to lead on gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative across the Asia-Pacific region. This leadership opportunity comes at a critical moment, as regional security challenges intersect with gender inequality, climate vulnerability disproportionately affects Pacific women, and democratic institutions face threats from gendered disinformation and extremism.

Australia's Role in Advancing Global Gender Equality

Australia helped establish the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946 and continues to lead on international gender equality. At the 69th CSW Session in 2025, on the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Padma Raman PSM, Executive Director of Australia's Office for Women, emphasised:

*"Australia has a strong and enduring commitment to the Commission on the Status of Women and our shared goal of achieving gender equality... we are acutely aware more needs to be done. Achieving gender equality and protecting women's rights demands consistent and vigilant action. Now is the time to strengthen our determination... These rights have been so fiercely advocated for, so strongly fought for, and agreed upon internationally – we must not let our efforts backslide."*¹⁴

Strategic impact of Australia's Leadership

Australia's gender equality leadership delivers strategic security advantages:

- **Regional Influence:** Australia's commitment shapes regional norms and practices, influencing approaches to peace, security, and development that enhance stability.
- **Credibility:** Domestic progress provides credibility for international advocacy, strengthening Australia's influence in multilateral forums.
- **Security and Economic Outcomes:** Demonstrating gender equality as a force multiplier shows the region that security and equality are mutually reinforcing priorities.

Whole-of-government approach

CEW commends the Commonwealth Government's implementation of comprehensive whole-of-government approaches that demonstrate meaningful commitment to gender equality across security contexts, including:

¹⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet: [Australia's National Statement to the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#), 26th March 2025

- The Second Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security providing a whole-of-government framework for integrating gender considerations into peace and security efforts.¹⁵
- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade embedding gender equality as a central pillar of Australia's international engagement.
- The Australian Defence Force introducing doctrine on Gender, Peace and Security, embedding gender analysis into military operations and planning.

These initiatives position Australia as a regional leader - demonstrating that investing in gender equality strengthens national security, enhances economic prosperity, and builds more resilient communities.

Recommendation

- Strengthen Australia's international leadership in gender equality advocacy by embedding gender equality as a core objective across foreign policy, defence and national security decision-making.
- Integrate gender equality into Australia's security frameworks at both domestic and regional levels, demonstrating practical implementation.
- Enhance Australia's credibility and influence in multilateral forums by ensuring consistency between domestic gender equality achievements and international advocacy positions.
- Position security and equality as mutually reinforcing priorities that collectively strengthen regional stability, drive economic prosperity, and build community resilience.

¹⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: [Second Australian Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031](#) (2022)

Locally led leadership and decision-making

Supporting locally led leadership and decision making should be central to Australia's international gender equality strategy. This approach recognises that sustainable change emerges when those most affected by inequality, particularly First Nations women and women in Pacific communities, lead the design and implementation of solutions.

When women lead, communities are safer, economies are stronger, and peace is more durable.

Women's meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making delivers measurable security and economic outcomes:

- When women are involved in peace negotiations, agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.¹⁶
- Analysis across 40 countries found that a higher proportion of female police correlates with higher reporting of sexual assault.¹⁷
- More women in national parliaments leads to more ambitious climate change policies and lower emissions.¹⁸

The impact is most significant when women, particularly those from the communities most impacted by inequality, have genuine decision-making authority, adequate resourcing and structural support.

First Nations Women's Leadership: A Strategic Asset for National and Economic Security

First Nations women's leadership constitutes a strategic asset for Australia's national and economic security. Self-determination, empowerment, and Indigenous cultural resources prevent violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through culturally-grounded solutions that build social cohesion.¹⁹ Which is a fundamental component of national security.

Economic transformation demonstrates this impact: over twenty years, First Nations communities have revolutionised tertiary education participation, positioning First

¹⁶ Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, [Chapter Three: Women's Participation and A better understanding of the political](#)

¹⁷ Journal of Criminal Justice: [Effects of female representation in law enforcement on victim centred practices and victim cooperation](#)

¹⁸ European Journal of Political Economy: [Gender and Climate Change: Do female parliamentarians make a difference?](#) Volume 56, January 2019

¹⁹ Filev, A., Pedersen, J., Oscar, J., Hunter, K., & Spry, S. (2022). *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's voices): First Nations Women's Safety Policy Forum Outcomes Report November 2022*. Australian Human Rights Commission.

Nations women in leadership roles previously inaccessible.²⁰ Corporate access to resources and capital represents a critical pathway to economic prosperity that strengthens national resilience. The Martu Leadership Program exemplifies this approach, combining Western systems with Martu Law to enable effective Martu-led initiatives and transform mainstream engagement.²¹

First Nations cultures provide alternative leadership models that recognize the equal value of women's and men's business, contrasting with Western hierarchies, while kinship structures demonstrate collaborative, consultative leadership that builds more resilient communities.²² First Nations women's leadership strengthens social cohesion, reduces violence, drives economic participation, and models inclusive governance. Investing in First Nations women-led solutions constitutes an investment in a secure and prosperous Australia.

Women, peace and security implementation

Australia's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda provides a framework for operationalising locally led gender equality as a security priority. However, implementation must move beyond rhetoric to embed meaningful participation mechanisms, accountability structures, and adequate resourcing.

To strengthen WPS implementation Australia should:

- Embed meaningful participation requirements: Fund women-led and locally led mechanisms with clear participation standards that exceed the 30% minimum threshold for women's representation and ensure diverse women's voices, including First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically marginalised (CARM) backgrounds, and women with disabilities.
- Build accountability pathways: Establish transparent monitoring and evaluation frameworks that prioritise community codesigned metrics.
- Strengthen regional partnerships with local leadership: Support Pacific-led WPS implementation that prioritises locally led approaches.
- Resource First Nations women-led solutions: Ensure that domestic WPS implementation includes dedicated funding and structural support for First Nations women's leadership.

Recommendations

- Resource locally led leadership and decision-making by: Embedding meaningful participation requirements that ensure diverse women, including First Nations women, lead decision-making in the WPS agenda.

²⁰ Coates, S. K., Trudgett, M., & Page, S. (2020). Indigenous higher education sector: the evolution of recognised Indigenous Leaders within Australian Universities. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 50(2), 215–221.

²¹ Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa. (n.d.). *Martu Leadership Program*. <https://www.kj.org.au/martu-leadership-program>

²² Diversity Council Australia. (n.d.). *Lessons from First Nations Leadership*. <https://www.dca.org.au/news/blog/lessons-from-first-nations-leadership>

- Building accountability pathways that centre community codesigned data and ensure transparency in measuring outcomes.
- Strengthening regional partnerships through support for Pacific-led WPS implementation that prioritises locally led approaches and adequate resourcing.

Gender-based violence as a national security threat

Gender equality is a stronger predictor of peace than a nation's wealth or political systems. Countries with greater gender equality are less likely to experience armed conflict.²³ Misogyny and gender-based violence serve as both warning signs and gateways to broader forms of political violence, including terrorism and violent extremism.²⁴ Between 2009 and 2022, at least 15 attacks in Western countries potentially had misogynistic incel ideology as a motivating factor, plus at least 5 interrupted plots.²⁵

Recognising and addressing these connections is essential to Australia's national security.

Domestic, family and sexual violence is a scourge on our society. Its impact on many Pacific nations is even more pernicious. By demonstrating leadership at home, we will earn the right to assist Pacific nations in tackling this deep-seated problem.

The evidence is clear - extreme misogyny and violence against women function as both warning signs and gateways to broader forms of violence:

Research shows that intimate partner violence and violence against women can be risk factors or warning signs for later targeted violence and terrorism. Whilst rare, Australian cases of mass violence illustrate this pattern:

- The Lindt Cafe siege perpetrator had a documented history of domestic violence.²⁶
- The Bondi stabbing attack perpetrator specifically targeted women and had a history of misogyny.²⁷

Misogyny undermines economic productivity and workforce participation by creating hostile environments that deter talent, reduce innovation, and increase organisational costs through harassment, attrition, and reduced performance.²⁸ Gender-based discrimination constrains access to economic opportunities, limiting GDP growth potential and reducing the competitive advantage of organisations and nations that fail to leverage diverse perspectives and leadership capabilities

²³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Australia's International Strategy for Gender Equality (2025)

²⁴ Jones, S. G., Doxsee, C., Harrington, N., Hwang, G., & Suber, J. (2025). The Nexus Between Misogyny and Violent Extremism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2025.2498505>

²⁵ Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Incels in Australia; [the ideology, the threat and the way forward](#) (2023)

²⁶ Monash University: [We won't stop lone-actor attacks until we understand violence against women](#) (2018)

²⁷ Tomkinson, S., & Harper, T. (2025). If it looks like violent extremism, and acts like violent extremism ... : comparing the framing of two Sydney stabbing attacks. *Communication Research and Practice*, 11(3), 384–400.

²⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report*. <https://humanrights.gov.au/?a=45874>

Based on a nationally sampled survey of 1,020 Australians, misogyny-related attitudes predict support for multiple forms of violent extremism:

- Hostile sexist attitudes are strongly associated with support for anti-feminist violent extremism (5.84× more likely)²⁹
- Anti-feminist violent extremism is the most prevalent extremist attitude measured, with 13.6% overall agreement, rising to 19.4% among men and 18.9% among 18-29 year-olds.³⁰

Online misogyny and gendered disinformation

Gendered disinformation and online misogyny act as pipelines to democratic destabilisation and radicalisation. Online ecosystems accelerate this radicalisation through algorithmic amplification, echo chambers, and normalised misogyny, which lower the visibility of radicalisation red flags and make early intervention more difficult.

The evidence indicates misogyny and racism should be treated as security-relevant risk factors that are measured, monitored, and prevented through coordinated national security and prevention architecture.³¹

Addressing violence against women should be recognised as integral to national security, not peripheral to it. Prevention is a security investment, and addressing violent misogyny early reduces the downstream costs of policing, intelligence, justice and crisis services.³²

Women's safety is foundational to broader community security and economic prosperity.

Recommendations

Treat violence against women as a national security threat, integrating gender-based violence prevention into counterterrorism frameworks by:

- Treating domestic violence histories as red flags in threat assessment processes.
- Addressing online misogyny, gendered disinformation, and extreme misogyny as national security threats through monitoring and early intervention strategies.
- Building structured collaboration between counter-terrorism, anti-racism/social cohesion, and violence against women sectors, including civil society input.
- Increasing education and social resourcing to reduce hostile sexism and permissive attitudes toward violence against women as a national security priority.

²⁹ University of Melbourne: [Misogyny, Racism and Violent Extremism in Australia](#) (2024)

³⁰ University of Melbourne: [Misogyny, Racism and Violent Extremism in Australia](#) (2024)

³¹ University of Melbourne: [Misogyny, Racism and Violent Extremism in Australia](#) (2024)

³² University of Melbourne: [Misogyny, Racism and Violent Extremism in Australia](#) (2024)



- Strengthening national measurement through diverse and gender-disaggregated datasets to inform policy design and track outcomes.