Gender equality and the empowerment of women contributes to economic recovery, stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Strategic direction**

Advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment are key to sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls in the Indo-Pacific region. Our approach to responding to their needs during the COVID-19 response is outlined in *Partnerships for Recovery*.

We focus on three connected and mutually reinforcing priorities that guide our investments on gender equality:

- enhancing women’s voices in decision-making, leadership and peace-building;
- promoting women’s economic empowerment; and
- ending violence against women and girls.

**Current Priorities**

DFAT’s Indo-Pacific Gender Equality Fund (estimated $65 million in 2021-22) is responding to the needs of women and girls in the Indo-Pacific during the COVID-19 pandemic. It supports investments across the priority areas of DFAT’s Indo-Pacific Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy and contributes to implementation of *Partnerships for Recovery*, as well as supporting the Women, Peace and Security agenda, women’s resilience, and investing in global gender data, research and performance.

**Sector Performance**

Investments are funded through the Indo-Pacific Gender Equality Fund as well as through our bilateral, regional and global programs, for example:

- Australia is supporting regional gender equality through the new Pacific Women Lead program, ($170 million, 2021-2026). This will complement Australia’s existing bilateral gender partnerships. Pacific Women Lead will be delivered with Pacific partners including the SPC. It will focus on women’s leadership and women’s rights including safety, health and economic empowerment.

- Australia has provided an additional $10 million over two years (2020-2022) to UN Women to deliver activities focused on prevention, essential services and support for local women’s organisations to end violence against women and girls, particularly in response to the intensification of gender based violence during and following the COVID-19 crisis.

- In Vietnam, the Aus4Equality program ($35 million, 2017-2022) supports women in Vietnam’s disadvantaged remote northern areas start businesses to build their skills to take on leadership roles and break out of the cycle of poverty.

- Through the Investing in Women Initiative ($102 million, 2016-2023) we work to accelerate women’s economic empowerment in South-East Asia as a vital element of effective COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. We are supporting positive shifts in workplace policies, practices and norms around women’s economic participation, and encouraging investors to increase access to finance for women-owned and led small and medium enterprises.

- Australia is a donor to two key Women Peace and Security (WPS) funds ($19 million, 2015-2022). Funding supports preventing and countering of violent extremism, supporting women in peacekeeping operations, strengthening leadership and peacebuilding capacity of young women, supporting women’s civil society organisations working on peace and security, and promoting regional and multilateral cooperation and knowledge sharing amongst diverse stakeholders on the WPS agenda.

**Development cooperation expenditure targeting gender equality, 2019-20**

In 2019-20, Australia spent $1.3 billion on investments that targeted gender equality as a principal or significant objective, reflecting in large part the Department’s efforts to integrate gender equality objectives across the development cooperation program. This equates to 46 per cent of DFAT’s country, regional and global development cooperation investments by value across a range of sectors.
Leaving No One Behind

Australia invests in improved availability of data and evidence on gender equality, including evidence regarding intersecting disadvantages facing women and girls. Australia has supported UN Women’s programs Women Count and Building Back Better, which are at the forefront of efforts to shed light on the gender impacts of COVID-19 and policy responses to the crisis in the Indo-Pacific region. Our partnership with the International Women’s Development Agency is also furthering Australia’s investment in innovative, gender-sensitive multidimensional poverty measurement, through the Equality Insights survey.

Gender Equality Mainstreaming Performance in 2019-20

77% of DFAT’s development cooperation investments effectively addressed gender equality during implementation, regardless of their objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Resilience: humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction and social protection</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, fisheries and water</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective governance: policies, institutions and functioning economies</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure, Trade Facilitation and International Competitiveness</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>