



THE AUSTRALIAN  
**APEC** STUDY CENTRE  
Asia-Pacific  
Economic Cooperation



In partnership with

# The Australian APEC Study Centre at RMIT University

## Submission to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

### Re: DFAT's New International Gender Equality Strategy



Name	Ms Briony Wood-Ingram	Mr Aaron Soans
Position	Program Director Australian APEC Study Centre	Senior Advisor for Research Australian APEC Study Centre
E-mail	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Phone	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Address	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

## Introduction

The Australian APEC Study Centre warmly welcomes DFAT’s initiative to develop a New International Gender Equality Strategy. With its deep understanding of regional economic cooperation and development and having seen the economic and social progress that can be achieved when economies work together at a regional level, the Centre firmly believes that such a strategy is pivotal for addressing gender disparities and essential for harnessing the full economic potential of our nation and the Asia-Pacific region.

## APEC and the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum is a regional economic group created in 1989. It comprises 21 Pacific Rim member economies that collectively work to promote free trade, regional economic integration, and economic and technical cooperation among its members on topics such as sustainable development and inclusion.

APEC has recently adopted the [La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth](#). Initiated in 2019, this roadmap provides a framework for APEC economies to bolster women’s economic empowerment and stimulate inclusive growth. Key objectives include amplifying women’s role in all economic sectors, bridging the gender wage divide, uplifting women’s leadership roles, and ensuring women entrepreneurs’ access to essential resources. This roadmap stands as a testament to APEC’s commitment to gender equality as both a social mandate and a cornerstone for sustained economic growth.

APEC provides an ideal platform for Australia to share best practice on gender equality policies, build capabilities of APEC government officials, and develop common regional approaches amongst a diverse group of Member economies.

## Contributions of Other International Forums:

While APEC offers a robust platform, other international fora such as the G-20, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) have also begun to highlight gender disparities, foster global collaboration and take domestic policy actions. Australia should continue to engage with these regional and multilateral groups on developing capacity of domestic policy makers in alignment with its New International Gender Equality Strategy.

## Priority Areas:

Based on its experience working in APEC and across the region, the Centre highlights the following priority areas of focus for DFAT to consider in its International Gender Equality Strategy.

### 1. Women in the Digital Economy, STEM, and Green Transition:

The digital economy is driving innovation and progress in the modern economy. At the same time, economies are rapidly transitioning their industries to be more 'green', including through the application of digital technologies. Ensuring women's active participation in the digital economy and green transition is paramount for unlocking untapped potential, fostering creativity, and promoting balanced perspectives moving forward.

This will require the application of a gender lens when developing policy in these emerging areas and developing a pipeline of suitably skilled candidates. Women's access to STEM education and careers therefore becomes a key requirement. When women are actively engaged in STEM, it enriches the breadth of scientific inquiry, catalyses socio-economic growth, and acts as a beacon for young girls to envision a future unencumbered by traditional gender roles.

#### Recommendations:

- Addressing barriers and promoting equitable industry cultures: Endeavour to dismantle structural, cultural and societal barriers such as conscious and unconscious bias; inequitable and harmful workplace practices; gendered expectations of care responsibilities amongst others that discourage women from pursuing careers in the digital economy, green transition and STEM and give rise to inequitable and unsafe experiences for women who are in these sectors.
- Fellowship Opportunities: Establish and promote fellowship programs between institutions in Asia Pacific economies to support women's research and innovation in these fields.
- Private Sector Engagement: Collaborate with industries and corporations in Australia and the region to collect data and open more doors for women in STEM, ensuring that their talents are not just recognised but actively sought, and equitably recognised and remunerated.
- Promote online safety of women and girls: As the digital economy becomes more prevalent in every aspect of our lives it becomes increasingly important for governments to take responsibility for establishing principles and practices to safeguard against online violence and harm directed towards women and girls, and the use of tech/AI to perpetuate gender-based harm.

### 2. Climate Change and its impact on women in developing economies:

Climate change disproportionately impacts women in developing economies. Women, often the primary caregivers and agricultural workers, face amplified challenges as a result of changing climate patterns. Reduced agricultural yields due to erratic rainfall, increased water scarcity, and heightened risk of natural disasters put an undue burden on them. Additionally, women are often at the forefront of community efforts to adapt to these challenges and thus, their roles are crucial in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Yet, their voices are frequently underrepresented in climate-related decision-making at both local and global levels. The dominant sectors that are currently shaping climate change policy – such as resources, mining, farming, emergency disaster management, manufacturing, science/engineering – are generally male-dominated.



## Recommendations:

- **Participation in Decision Making:** Ensure women's equal representation in climate-related forums and decision-making bodies at the local, national, and international levels. This will ensure that their unique insights and challenges are incorporated into policies and strategies.
- **Community-Based Adaptation:** Prioritise and support community-based adaptation strategies that are gender-responsive. Recognise and amplify the traditional knowledge and skills that women bring to the table in adapting to climate challenges.
- **Targeted Financial Assistance:** Establish special funds or financial mechanisms that cater to women in developing economies to bolster their resilience against climate change impacts. This can be achieved through grants, low-interest loans, or insurance schemes specifically designed for women.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide training and resources to women in these economies to better understand, adapt, and combat the impacts of climate change. This includes understanding climate data, engaging in sustainable agricultural practices, and harnessing renewable energy sources.

### 3. Domestic Policy Reform:

Domestic policies directly influence the day-to-day experiences of women. Through gender lensing and gender responsive/aware budgeting, the unique challenges faced by women can be spotlighted and addressed, ensuring equity in resources and opportunities. In addition, policies that support women's labour force participation, such as child care, directly contribute to economic growth. A regulatory environment conducive to women's businesses and innovation further ensures women's financial independence and entrepreneurial spirit, invigorating the national economy and challenging societal norms. An often-overlooked barrier is access to finance for female innovators and female-led start-ups which leads to a disproportionate share of the economic benefits of R&D claimed by men.

## Recommendations:

- **Gender Lensing and Budgeting:** Incorporate gender perspectives at all stages of policy processes to ensure that the distinct experiences of women are addressed.
- **Supporting women's labour force participation:** Reinforce childcare facilities, flexi-work hours, and parental leave policies. Remove gender discrimination in hiring and promotion, and in training and development activities. Support women's transition from informal to formal work.
- **Supporting men's involvement in unpaid work and care:** Promote policy design and cultural change to encourage and legitimise men's participation in care and unpaid work and promote healthy ideals of masculinity.
- **Promoting a gender-sensitive business environment:** Offer targeted assistance, such as access to finance, mentoring, and capacity-building programs, to encourage women entrepreneurs.
- **Promoting women in the innovation ecosystem:** Facilitate private/public/not-for-profit partnerships in the innovation space to ensure that women participate in the diffusion of innovation and thereby increase the diversity of contributions leading to productivity breakthroughs.

### 4. Inclusive Trade:

Trade is a powerful engine for development, and gender-inclusive trade ensures that the benefits are widespread and equitable. When gender perspectives are integrated into trade

agreements, they can help facilitate women's active involvement in trade, promote justice and tap into diverse viewpoints and approaches that can redefine commerce. Women's participation in the 'green' economy, in particular, can bring a wider variety of solutions to our sustainability challenges while also promoting inclusion.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Trade agreements:** Support the inclusion of gender-responsive clauses within trade agreements that safeguard women's interests and promote gender equality.
- **Trade facilitation measures:** Undertake research to identify the particular barriers and inequities that women face in participating in supply chains. Prioritise measures, such as capacity-building programs, that facilitate women's effective participation in trade.
- **Green economy:** Advocate for women's active role in the emerging green and sustainable sectors, tapping into their unique insights and contributions. Ensuring that women are represented in leadership and decision-making forums, including in the design of policies in disaster resilience and the green economy transition.

### **5. Gender Data:**

Data is pivotal for evidence-based policymaking. Gender data is a compass that measures and tracks progress towards gender equality outcomes and helps inform policy design so as to improve these outcomes in future. Gender-disaggregated data helps quantify challenges, monitor progress, and set tangible goals. An international commitment to consistent data collection also enables nations to learn from each other, sharing best practices and coordinating efforts for a more equal society.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Data Significance:** Prioritise the collection of gender-disaggregated data to monitor progress and discern gaps effectively.
- **Capacity Building:** Strengthen national capacities in data collection, interpretation, and utilisation for gender-responsive policymaking.
- **International Coordination:** Collaborate with international partners to ensure consistent and high-quality gender data collection practices across borders.
- **Raise awareness** about the importance of intersectional gender data, and time use data, and support knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in this area.

### **6. Women in Leadership:**

Diverse leadership is synonymous with diverse perspectives, leading to more robust and holistic decision-making processes and therefore outcomes. Women leaders bring unique experiences and insights to the table, fostering an inclusive environment and addressing the concerns of half the world's population. By promoting women in leadership positions, balanced representation is ensured, driving home the point that leadership is based on capability, not gender.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Organisational change:** Promote training programs for organisational leaders (men and women) on creating more gender-equitable and inclusive organisations and workplace cultures.
- **Support Programs:** Launch mentorship and training programs tailored for women, ensuring their ascent in both governmental and business leadership roles.
- **Advocacy:** Amplify the voices of female leaders as role models, inspiring younger generations to aspire to leadership positions. Develop programs that promote male

role models who give time to unpaid care and who promote inclusive, respectful and safe organisations and cultures.

- Networks: Establish and provide support to a panel of Australian and International experts on priority themes listed above to advise on policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. It is important that government policy and strategy draw on research and evidence combined with the lived experience and practical insights shared by local communities.

## Conclusion

The Australian APEC Study Centre strongly believes in a proactive approach to gender equality, one that strengthens societal bonds and magnifies economic strength. As Australia charts its course, the La Serena Roadmap and other international paradigms offer essential guidance. The Centre is committed to further assisting DFAT in refining and implementing this important strategy.

Warm regards,



**Craig Emerson**

Director



The Australian APEC Study Centre at RMIT University

 | [www.apec.org.au](http://www.apec.org.au)



THE AUSTRALIAN  
APEC STUDY CENTRE  
Asia Pacific  
Economic Cooperation

In partnership with  
 RMIT  
UNIVERSITY

Follow us on  

---

## The Australian APEC Study Centre

The Australian APEC Study Centre is a regional centre of excellence on trade and development policy issues affecting the Asia-Pacific region. The Centre's goal is to promote international cooperation and economic prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. It is based in the heart of RMIT University's Innovation District in Melbourne and is supported by RMIT University's services across Finance, ICT, human resources and procurement.

The Centre conducts research and analysis, designs and delivers capacity-building activities, and provides thought leadership and policy advisory services on trade and economic policy to government and business leaders in Australia and region. The Centre continues to work closely with the Asia Trade and Innovation Hub following the collaboration that delivered the Southeast Asia and Vietnam engagement reports.

The Centre serves as the Secretariat for AusPECC and supports its research projects. It is also the Secretariat for The Australian APEC Business Advisory Council Members.





## Current projects supporting gender equality priorities in APEC:

<p><b>2023 APEC-Australia Women in Research Fellowship</b></p>	<p>This fellowship program offers 20 women researchers from developing economies up to AU\$20,000 each, to work in partnership with an Australian education institution to undertake a research project over one to three months. This round of the fellowship aims to support women's economic empowerment in the APEC region and human capital development in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related fields in developing economies.</p> <p>Since 2015, the APEC- Fellowship has helped many women in STEM fields by providing them with opportunities to work with professionals from reputable Australian research institutions and is specifically designed to assist with the particular challenges women in research face in undertaking cross-border research activities by providing financial support, helping them to connect with international researchers and world-class facilities, and developing a professional network.</p>
<p><b>APEC Women's Business Activator Program</b></p>	<p>This is a joint program run with RMIT Activator to support women-led businesses on their global growth journey by strengthening capacity, building business competencies and helping to navigate through barriers in local and global markets. Selected candidates from eligible economies will receive free access to training material, participation in online workshops, personalised mentoring, and travel allowance to attend an intensive 3-day session in Melbourne, Australia.</p>
<p><b>APEC Gender Data Masterclass Series to Advance Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment</b></p>	<p>This project will target mid-level officials from APEC economies with an interest in utilising data to inform policymaking to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment. As with the 2020 Gender Data: Online Training Course funded by Australia, participants will be sought from a range of government departments/agencies including Ministries for Women, Trade, SME's, Finance, Economic Affairs, Transport, Statistics etc.</p>
<p><b>Advancing APEC Women in STEM - Challenges, Good Practices, and Recommendations. Report prepared for the APEC Business Advisory Council</b></p>	<p>The Centre supported Gabby Costigan and the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) to commission a report on the current status of women in STEM in APEC economies, highlight good practices to attract, retain, and promote women with STEM skills, and provide recommendations for APEC governments as they implement the APEC Women in STEM Principles and Actions.</p> <p>This work supports the APEC Women in STEM Principles and Actions (2019) and the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth. The project utilised new aggregated data provided by LinkedIn, especially for this report, data derived from a literature review, and interviews with ABAC members.</p>