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Submission in response to the International Gender Equality Strategy

Harmony Alliance welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the International Gender Equality Strategy. This submission responds to the questions DFAT has developed to guide this consultation process:

- **What are international gender equality priorities?**
- **What are the most effective approaches for achieving gender equality internationally?**
- **How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally?**
- **What should the government/DFAT consider when developing the new international gender equality strategy?**

About Harmony Alliance

Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change is one of the six National Women's Alliances supported by the Australian Government to promote the views of all Australian women and to ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

Harmony Alliance's purpose is to provide a national, inclusive, and informed voice on the multiplicity of issues impacting the experiences and outcomes of migrant and refugee women and to enable opportunities for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to directly engage in driving positive change.

The Harmony Alliance membership comprises over 180 organisations and individuals representing and/or working for the advancement and inclusion of migrant and refugee women. We acknowledge the diversity of experiences of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds and recognise the inherent value of each person of all backgrounds, genders, ages, social standards, sexual orientations, or religions. We promote the principles of dignity, equality, autonomy, non-discrimination and mutual respect.



What are international gender equality priorities?

- **Gender-based violence is a global emergency.** The World Health Organization has estimated that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, and most of the violence is perpetrated by an intimate partner.¹ Globally, 81,000 women and girls were killed in 2020; around 58% of them were murdered by an intimate partner or a family member. This is a woman or a girl being killed every 11 minutes in their home.² Despite all women and girls being at risk of gender-based violence, it is more prevalent in developing countries where women have less economic security or where laws protecting them are not adequately enforced.³ Gender-based violence is preventable, and the International Gender Equality Strategy should prioritise and support interventions that address the causes of gender-based violence and risk factors—including in the context of crises such as wars, humanitarian disasters, health crises (such as Covid-19) or natural disasters.
- **Climate change** is undeniably the most challenging issue of current times; however, this is not only an environmental crisis. The gendered implications of climate change are also linked to and compounded by structural inequality and discrimination. For example, despite women playing a pivotal role in agricultural production, they do not equally share access to production, land ownership or access to decision-making processes on agriculture and climate change.⁴
- **Global displacement.** People forced to leave their homes increase every year across the globe. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stated that the number of people forcibly displaced in 2021 doubled in only ten years to 100 million.⁵ Women and girls face additional risks during the displacement journey, such as physical and sexual violence, human trafficking and forced marriage. The Australian Government should work globally to pursue solutions for displaced people and adequately provide settlement in Australia.

¹ World Health Organization (2021). [Violence against women](#). 9 March 2021.

² UN Women (2022) [Facts and figures: Ending violence against women and girls](#). February 2022.

³ See for example: Palermo T, Bleck J, Peterman A. [Tip of the iceberg: reporting and gender-based violence in developing countries](#). March 2014.

⁴ See for example: United Nations. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2019) [Analytical study on gender-responsive climate action for the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of women: report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#). May 2019.

⁵ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2022) [UNHCR: Global displacement hits another record, capping decade-long rising trend](#). June 2022.



- **Women's leadership.** Women in leadership positions are crucial to achieving gender equality and strengthening progress for all; however, women are globally underrepresented in decision-making in politics, businesses, and communities. The UN Women reported that only 22.8% of women were Cabinet members heading Ministries.⁶ Including diverse women in leadership positions and decision-making processes brings invaluable benefits in all spheres and increases productivity. Still, black and racialised women experience further discrimination to reach leadership positions.
- **Women's economic participation.** The OECD's research shows that the income loss associated with gender discrimination in social institutions means 16% of world income.⁷ Women face further barriers to accessing the labour market, equal pay or to own resources and also experience unsafe conditions in workplaces – for example, sexual harassment is experienced by women at higher rates than men. Traditional gender roles such as being the main carer in the household – for children and adults – and historically undervaluing women's labour contributions are important barriers preventing women from equal economic participation and outcomes.
- **Access to education and health are human rights essential to women's empowerment and key to sustainable global development.** Despite women's and girl's education being proven to lead to economic growth and health benefits, women and girls do not have equal access to education due to gendered reasons such as prohibition for girls to access secondary education or prioritising boys over girls in families, as boys have better employment prospects and girls are not seen as productive in their families after marriage.

What are the most effective approaches for achieving gender equality internationally?

Our recognised experience has brought the following principles and approaches to achieve gender equality:

- **Intersectionality:** is central to the values of Harmony Alliance, and this lens should be incorporated in all spheres of policy and practice. The intersectionality theory – first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw – recognises that systemic power and privilege cause multiple layers of discrimination and entrenched societal inequality. This means that when considering strategies to achieve gender equality, the intersectional disadvantage experienced by women in all spheres of life should be carefully considered.⁸

⁶ UN Women (2023) [Facts and figures: Ending violence against women and girls](#). March 2023.

⁷ Ferrant, G. and A. Kolev (2016), "Does gender discrimination in social institutions matter for long-term growth?: Cross-country evidence", *OECD Development Centre Working Papers*, No. 330, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jm2hz8dgl6-en>.

⁸ Harmony Alliance Migrant and Refugee Women for Change (2020). [Position Statement on Intersectionality](#).



- **Community-led and co-design:** Change can only be achieved when communities are actively and equally involved in their own development. It should be recognised that community members – including women – have valuable insights and experiences that will inform and improve policy design and development. This also has the potential to build constructive and long-lasting relationships and communications. By adopting a community-led and co-design approach, we ensure that determined needs are met and that preferred approaches are used, fostering respect and self-determination.
- **Strength-based:** is proven to provide more inclusive outcomes to individuals and communities. This approach should be consistent and in agreement with the target community.
- **De-colonial:** As an organisation focused on migrant and refugee women, we recognise the ongoing impacts of colonisation and seek to ensure that our work is grounded in respect and that we do not reproduce systems of coloniality.

How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally? What should the government/DFAT consider when developing the new international gender equality strategy?

Close consideration should be given to:

- Embedding an intersectional lens that prioritises women's equality, leadership, economic participation and elimination of gender-based violence for women in all their diversity places Australia as a facilitator to achieve gender equality internationally.
- Strengthening Australia's position as a host country for displaced people, including increasing humanitarian uptake and improving settlement and support services.
- Address the effects of poverty, climate change, war, conflict and natural disasters as drivers increasing women's vulnerability.
- Increase initiatives with gender equality as the principal objective.