

AUSTRALIA

Australian Government Response to United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)

Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

Please refer to Australia's implementation report on the Beijing Platform for Action (2000) and Australia's combined fourth and fifth CEDAW report.

A range of initiatives has been developed and implemented for women in all spheres of Australian life – and there have been major advancements in the status of women in Australia since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Women and girls have made steady progress in their participation in education, training, employment, decision-making and leadership. An example of where these changes are evident is in the area of education. In 2003 women made up 57.3 per cent of higher education students commencing an undergraduate qualification and 51.5 per cent of post-graduate students. This compares to 55.9 per cent and 50 per cent respectively in 1993.

There has also been a general upward trend in the labour force participation rate of all women (15 years and over), which was 55.8 per cent in March 2004, compared to 52.4 per cent in December 1993.

Australian women are taking the lead in many areas of public life. In 2003 women comprised more than 33 per cent of Commonwealth government board positions and 26.5 per cent of Federal parliamentarians.

There have also been improvements in the area of women's health. In particular, Australia has recorded a significant decrease in the number of deaths resulting from breast cancer. In 2002 there were 25.1 deaths per 100,000 females, compared to 28.1 deaths per 100,000 females in 1996. Between 1982 and 2001 there was a 53 per cent decrease in deaths from cervical cancer.

Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Please refer to Australia's implementation report on the Beijing Platform for Action (2000) and Australia's combined fourth and fifth CEDAW report.

Australia has a comprehensive range of measures to protect and advance women's human rights. Some examples of action in priority areas are provided below.

Gender based violence

The Australian Government has nominated domestic violence as an issue of national importance. The Australian Government is working with State and Territory governments, business and the community to help prevent violence against women in all its forms. The Australian Government has committed \$50 million over the years 2001-2005 to the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* (PADV) initiative. PADV is managed by OSW to gather knowledge and find better ways of preventing and addressing domestic violence in the community.

The initiative to date has funded over 230 diverse and innovative projects related to domestic violence at local, regional and national levels, and has supported the development of research and the documentation of good practice. It has produced a wide range of publications relating to domestic violence and held national forums covering the areas of children and domestic violence, men and relationships, indigenous family violence, and domestic violence across the lives of women and girls. The key goal of the current phase of PADV is to create comprehensive, coordinated and effective whole of government and sector responses to domestic violence and to break the cycle of violence across the lifespan. A major element of the current phase of PADV is a \$6 million *Indigenous Family Violence Grants Programme*. The grants are assisting Indigenous non government organisations to work with local communities to help them develop and implement grass roots, culturally appropriate projects which will strengthen their capacity to prevent and address family violence.

Another major PADV initiative has been the establishment of the *Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse* which gathers together, and facilitates public access to, domestic violence research and publications from states, territories and overseas. The Clearinghouse provides information and research services and conducts research into a wide range of domestic violence issues. It produces regular newsletters and issues papers.

The *PADV: A Business Approach* is working with the business community to raise their awareness of domestic violence in the lives of their employees, and its impact on workplace productivity. The initiative has developed a range of workplace measures including training materials, to assist the corporate sector to support their staff.

The Australian Government launched a national campaign in June 2004 to address domestic and family violence and sexual assault in Australia. The campaign delivers the very strong message that violence against women is totally unacceptable. The campaign comprises:

- A nation-wide, purpose-built 24 hours a day, 7 days a week helpline;
- TV, radio, cinema and magazine commercials;
- A householder booklet;
- A schools kit; and
- A website.

Funding for the campaign is provided under PADV and the National *Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault*. It is part of the Australian Government's \$73.2 million commitment to address domestic and family violence and sexual assault in Australia. This campaign will cost just over \$20 million.

Sexual assault

The \$16.5 million *National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault* was announced in the 2001-02 Budget and is managed by OSW. The initiative represents the Australian Government's commitment to the important area of sexual assault and aims to increase women's safety and build safer communities by reducing the incidence of sexual assault. The initiative aims to foster the development of an Australian culture that will not tolerate violence. The initial focus of the initiative has been the establishment of a sound evidence base to ensure that the most effective policy and service responses are developed and implemented. Specific strategies include:

- making better use of data currently available on sexual assault by developing a Sexual Assault Information Development Plan which will identify existing sources of data on sexual assault, identify gaps in data currently available, and propose strategies to address these gaps;
- improving understanding of specific aspects of sexual assault through the funding of a full-time data analyst position at the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) to work solely on sexual assault. To date the data analyst has produced an international literature review on the non-reporting and hidden recording of sexual assault, and work is currently being finalised on a research paper examining sexual assault recidivist offenders;
- funding Australia's participation in the first International Violence Against Women Survey run by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and administered by the AIC. Results from the Survey will be available in early 2004; and
- providing mechanisms to encourage sharing of information across jurisdictions, including through the funding of an Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The initiative will also focus on raising awareness in the community on the impact of sexual assault, in an attempt to reduce its incidence, through a National Community Awareness Campaign.

People Trafficking

The Australian Government's *Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons*, released in June 2004, outlines Australia's efforts in the four key areas of prevention, detection and investigation, criminal prosecution and victim support.

On 13 October 2003 the Australian Government announced a major strategy to combat people trafficking. The \$20 million strategy will complement existing efforts to significantly enhance the detection, investigation and prosecution of traffickers and improve the range of support available to victims.

As part of the strategy, the Office of the Status of Women coordinates support for victims of trafficking through the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Programme*. The Programme provides financial and other support to victims around Australia who are of interest to the police or assisting with criminal investigations and prosecutions in Australia. The support provided assists with victims' living expenses and their general well-being and includes income support, accommodation, medical treatment, basic legal advice, counselling, training and social support.

The support is provided by a case manager who is responsible for ensuring the appropriate coordination or delivery of these support services from the time the client is referred to them by police to the conclusion of the victim's assistance with the investigation and prosecution in Australia.

Key measures of the government strategy also include the establishment of the new 23-member Australian Federal Police (AFP) mobile strike team (the *Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Team*) to investigate trafficking and sexual servitude. A Senior Migration Officer (Compliance) of Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) is based in Thailand to focus on trafficking in the South-East Asia region. The officer has completed a survey of the region and has established productive working relationships with key regional stakeholders. AFP and DIMIA working closely on the detection and investigation of trafficking, with enhanced training on trafficking issues being provided for AFP and DIMIA officers.

Australia also supports the reintegration of victims of trafficking upon their return to their home country. AusAID, in association with the International Organization for Migration, is establishing a capacity building reintegration assistance project for trafficking victims who are returned to key source countries in South East Asia.

The Government remains committed to monitoring the impact of these measures to ensure Australia remains at the forefront of efforts to eradicate trafficking in persons.

Part Three: Institutional Development

Australia has a comprehensive range of social, economic, political and legal frameworks that seek to advance the status of women and eliminate discrimination and violence against women and girls. Please refer to Australia's implementation report on the Beijing Platform for Action (2000) where they are outlined in detail. Australia's *Beijing Plus Five Action Plan 2001-2005* outlines measures to be taken by the government to further progress the *Platform for Action* and *Outcomes Document*.

Key institutional government measures include:

- Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women and the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) located in the Department of The Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984;
- Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999;
- Workplace Relations Act 1996;
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, with a Sex Discrimination Commissioner;
- Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency; and
- Parliamentary Advisory Group on Women.

In line with international best practice, the Australian Government has pursued a strategy of integrating women's issues into mainstream policy making and practice across all government agencies. Ministers and agencies consider women in mainstream programmes, policy development, evaluation and reporting and work closely with the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women. The important role of gender specialists and gender units is also recognised.

The Australian Government Office of the Status of Women (OSW) and its equivalents in each State and Territory are key focal points for promoting the status of women and are supported by various other mechanisms throughout government. These offices provide policy advice on gender integration issues and a range of gender mainstreaming services. These include: ensuring that the needs of women are recognised, addressed and integrated into government planning, policy development, programmes and projects; ensuring that women have access to and are participants in government decision making; and providing advice and assistance to government agencies on policy issues affecting women to achieve equal opportunities and outcomes. Government agencies report on the range of programmes and investments made for the benefit of women on an annual basis through action plans for women and/or annual reports. In addition, specialist gender units have been established in several government agencies to assist with the integration of gender issues.

Women's budget information

Women's budget information is produced annually in conjunction with the government's annual budget. The information highlights new, continuing and ongoing measures designed to promote and assist women in all facets of life. In previous years, the information was released in the form of a Ministerial Statement highlighting the government's commitment to women through initiatives primarily in the areas of employment, education, health and aged care, child support, women's leadership and development and violence against women. In 2004, it was released in the form of a publication entitled *What the Australian Government is Doing for Women*.

In 2001, the Australian Government established the Regional Women's Advisory Council, a 12 female member body, to provide advice on issues impacting on regional, rural and remote communities. Advice of the Council is taken into account in the development of policies and programmes. In 2001, the Council conducted a national research project focussing on views and perspectives of regional women and

examined the means of helping regional communities undergoing economic and social transition to produce positive outcomes. The final report, *The Success Factors*, was widely distributed to communities and the government. In its current term (September 2002 to September 2004), the Council is focussing on encouraging informed debate on key areas including reducing family violence, promoting diversity and inclusion, expanding women's representation and promoting economic growth.

State and Territory Initiatives

Australian Capital Territory

In March 2003, the ACT Legislative Assembly established a Select Committee, to report on the effectiveness of existing activities and make recommendations for future priorities on issues affecting women. One of the key recommendations from the Committee's Report was the development of an ACT Strategic Plan for Women. An Interdepartmental Committee, with representation from the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, is overseeing the development of the Plan. The Strategic Plan will identify current and future priorities, effective data collection, performance measurements and policy directions. The current draft identifies five key outcome areas: healthy lifestyles; representation and recognition; economic security; violence and community safety; and supportive structures and processes. The Strategic Plan is due to be launched in 2004.

Western Australia

The Office for Women's Policy provides strategic policy advice to the Western Australian Government on issues of concern to women. The Office uses a community engagement approach to identify priority areas for action, and works in partnership with other government agencies, community groups and the business sector to develop policies and strategies that promote the well-being of women. The Office is working with the Women's Advisory Council (community-based women's representatives) to develop a *Women's Progress Report* using gendered social indicators to measure and evaluate women's progress. The first report was released in late 2003.

A major new initiative to develop and test a gender impact assessment tool for government was announced in the 2003/04 Budget. This partnership project will involve the Office in collaboration with the South Australian Office of the Status of Women, and researchers from the University of Western Australia's Business School and the University of Adelaide. Based on international best practice, a gender impact assessment tool will be trialed in a small number of government agencies, with a view to extending gender analysis in all policymaking activities across government. The long term objective of the project is to ensure that all government policy has equally beneficial effects on both women and men. An important first step is raising awareness of the benefits of using gender analysis in public policy development. In-house training sessions will be conducted for key policy staff in agencies on the collection of gender disaggregated data. This will include the use of checklists in determining the differential impacts of policies on women and men.

Victoria

The Victorian Government's *Forward Plan for Women 2000–2003* was a whole-of-government initiative that details strategies being undertaken by government to improve the lives of women. As well as detailing government initiatives for women, the Plan also indicates the government department responsible for implementation of each strategy and the timelines for implementation, to enable measurement of the effectiveness of government policy for women. In addition, the *Indigenous Women Going Places Strategic Plan* identifies key goals, related actions, targeted partnerships, other related policy areas and measures of progress. The goals, objectives and actions of the Plan are related to

Victorian Government policies to ensure a whole of government and integrated approach to indigenous women.

New South Wales

The New South Wales Department for Women collates a statistical profile of Women in New South Wales that includes statistics on areas such as employment, sport and leisure, leadership, education, and health. The Department undertakes an audit of initiatives for women in government departments annually. From the audit, the department creates Action Plans for Women. The current plan runs from 2002-2004. The plans outline government commitments, policy and programme initiatives, and measures the progress of initiatives.

Part Four: Main challenges and actions to address them

While we have made great gains for Australian women in recent years, some areas of challenge remain and there are some areas where progress has been slower. Key areas where the government is continuing to focus its efforts include:

- family/domestic violence and sexual assault against women and girls;
- the concentration of women in some fields/sectors/occupations in education, training and labour markets such as hospitality, nursing and retail; and
- the under-representation of women in high-level decision-making, particularly in political and judicial systems.

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