

Australia

Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/73/148)

1. Measures to address sexual harassment against women and girls, as per resolution 73/148.

The Australian Government has zero tolerance for violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. Since 2013, it has invested over AU\$1 billion to reduce violence against women and their children in Australia.

Ending violence against women and girls in all its forms, including sexual harassment and abuse, is a priority for Australia domestically and in our international efforts. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a gross violation of their human rights. It has a profound and devastating impact on its victims, on communities, and on society as a whole. It requires transformation of the structures, systems and social norms that embed gender inequality.

Reducing violence against women

The Government continues to deliver *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (National Plan), a 12-year strategy that brings together the efforts of all Australian governments and the community. The *Fourth Action Plan (2019-2022)* of the National Plan seeks to make a significant and sustained reduction in violence by targeting its investment of AU\$340 million into five priority areas, including *responding to sexual violence and sexual harassment*. For the first time, the National Plan specifically addresses sexual violence through primary prevention by raising awareness and understanding of issues such as gender equality, consent, bodily autonomy and respectful sexual relationships, particularly for young people. It also aims to stop victim blaming, particularly for people who are at greater risk of experiencing violence.

Workplace health and safety

In Australia, Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions implement and enforce work health and safety (WHS) laws. Most jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, have implemented the model WHS laws, which Safe Work Australia administers. Victoria and Western Australia have similar laws in place.

Under the model WHS laws, persons conducting a business or undertaking (such as employers) have a duty to ensure the workplace is healthy and safe, as far as reasonably practicable. This duty requires risks to health and safety, such as violence and harassment, to be eliminated or minimised as far as is reasonably practicable. Workers and other persons at a workplace (such as customers and visitors) also have a duty to ensure their acts and omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons. Similar requirements are in place under Victorian and Western Australian WHS laws.

Recognising the importance of measures to support employees experiencing family and domestic violence, in December 2018 the Australian Government introduced five days' unpaid family and domestic violence leave each year for all employees covered by the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth). The

leave is available in full to all full-time, part-time, and casual employees and may be taken to deal with the impact of family and domestic violence. In June 2019, the Government issued an *Employer Guide to Family and Domestic Violence* under the Third Action Plan 2016-2019 of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, providing information on how family and domestic violence can impact the workplace, employee entitlements and employers' legal obligations.

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces

In June 2018, Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins announced the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces ('the Inquiry'), with the support of the Australian Government. Its final report, *Respect@Work*, was launched with Australia's Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Marise Payne on 6 March 2020.

This ground-breaking and world-first Inquiry considered the nature, prevalence, and drivers of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. It also examined the measures available under existing legislative frameworks to address sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. The Australian Government contributed AU\$550,000 towards the cost of the Inquiry.

Respect@Work drew on a 2018 survey of 10,000 workers, 60 public consultations with 600 participants, 460 written submissions, and economic modelling by Deloitte Access Economics. Consultations held by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner with key international stakeholders in the margins of the 63rd Session on the Commission on the Status of Women, during visits to China, Brazil (funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Hong Kong also informed the report. It made findings and recommendations in relation to the prevalence, nature, cost, and drivers of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.

The Inquiry made 55 recommendations, many of which are directed at improving the legislative framework that regulates sexual harassment. Recommendations also focus on prevention and driving positive action from employers, and advocate for an evidence-based, victim-focused approach framed through an intersectional lens. Recommendations encompass actions by government, professional associations and business and community organisations, and focus on five key areas: data and research; primary prevention initiatives; legal and regulatory framework; workplace prevention and response; and victim support, advice and advocacy.

The Inquiry highlighted that monitoring and evaluation are critical components of effective action to prevent sexual harassment. Ongoing evaluation would develop an evidence base and collate lessons learned which, in turn, can inform policy development, planning and investment. The Inquiry recommended that the AHRC work with key regulatory players to develop good practice indicators and methods for measuring and monitoring sexual harassment prevalence, prevention, and response. The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry included an assessment of progress three years after the Inquiry is completed, with potential for further recommendations.

The Australian Government is currently considering the report and recommendations in detail.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1984

The Australian Government is committed to eliminating discrimination against women. Federal and State and Territory laws protect Australians against discrimination and sexual harassment. The federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of sex, marital or relationship status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, breastfeeding and family responsibilities in

certain areas of public life. The Sex Discrimination Act also prohibits sexual harassment¹ in areas of public life including employment, education, and the provision of goods and services.

Commonwealth Criminal Law Framework

The Australian Government has a comprehensive criminal law framework to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, consistent with its constitutional mandate. States and territories are also responsible for making and enforcing criminal laws in respect of violence against women and girls.

Overseas and online child sexual abuse offences

Evidence suggests girls are overrepresented as victims in child abuse material² and are more likely to suffer sexual abuse.³ Consistent with its constitutional mandate, the Australian Government comprehensively criminalises child sexual abuse and dealings with child abuse material committed via the internet and postal services, and by Australian citizens and residents while overseas. These offences offer important protections against the sexual abuse of girls. With the ever-evolving threat landscape, including as a result of rapid technological development, the Australian Government continually monitors its criminal laws to ensure they reflect offending trends and meet the needs of law enforcement. The Government also works closely with State and Territory governments—who have responsibility to criminalise child abuse more generally—to ensure that Australia’s criminal law frameworks provide robust protections for children.

The Government recently progressed a range of reforms to better safeguard children from sexual abuse in Australia, online and abroad through the *Combatting Child Sexual Exploitation Legislation Amendment Act 2019*, which came into force on 21 September 2019. That Act strengthened Commonwealth offences relating to overseas child sexual abuse and forced marriage, and addressed new trends in child abuse material including child-like sex dolls. In line with recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse⁴, the Act also introduced new offences to criminalise the conduct of Commonwealth officers who fail to take certain actions relating to the protection of children in their care, supervision or authority.

Telecommunications offences for online abuse

Women and girls are more likely to be targets of online abuse⁵ in all forms, and are particularly vulnerable to image-based abuse.⁶ The Australian Government continues to assess and respond to the rise in technology-facilitated abuse (such as cyberbullying and the sharing of private sexual material). This has included assessing whether applicable criminal penalties meet community expectations;

¹ Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by males and females against people of the same or opposite sex.

² ECPAT and Interpol (2018), “Towards a Global Indicator on Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material”, <http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Technical-Report-TOWARDS-A-GLOBAL-INDICATOR-ONUNIDENTIFIED-VICTIMS-IN-CHILD-SEXUAL-EXPLOITATION-MATERIAL.pdf>.

³ ABS Personal Safety Survey 2016-17, [https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4906.0~2016~Main%20Features~Characteristics%20and%20Outcomes%20of%20Childhood%20Abuse%20\(Feature%20Article\)%20~30](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4906.0~2016~Main%20Features~Characteristics%20and%20Outcomes%20of%20Childhood%20Abuse%20(Feature%20Article)%20~30)

⁴ <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

⁵ Amnesty - Ipsos MORI poll (February 2018, Australia), retrieved from <https://www.esafety.gov.au/women/know-facts-about-women-online>

⁶ Henry, N., Powell, A. & Flynn, A. (2017). Not Just ‘Revenge Pornography’: Australians’ Experiences of Image-Based Abuse, retrieved from <https://www.esafety.gov.au/women/know-facts-about-women-online>

offences sufficiently cover technology-facilitated abuse online; and the impact on both young person victims and offenders.

Australia has a comprehensive legislative response to these crimes. In particular, Commonwealth criminal law contains a number of offences targeted at criminal use of the internet. For example, Division 474 of the Commonwealth Criminal Code criminalises the use of the internet to threaten, menace, harass, or to distribute private sexual material (including intimate images shared without consent). These offences attract penalties ranging from maximum periods of imprisonment from 3-10 years. Consistent with Australia's constitution, State and Territory governments oversee general offences for making threats, stalking, intimidation and other conduct that may also capture online or ICT-facilitated forms of abuse and violence against women and girls.

National Domestic Violence Order Scheme

In 2017, all Australian State and Territory jurisdictions legislated to create a national approach to recognising and sharing information about domestic and family violence protection orders under the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme. The Scheme helps ensure that people at risk of domestic and family violence are afforded protection under the law regardless of where they are located in Australia. All jurisdictions continue to work together on the Scheme, including to ensure it is underpinned by robust information sharing capabilities.

International Development Assistance

Australia is working to address gender discrimination and harassment through its women's economic empowerment programs in the Indo-Pacific:

- Through the International Labour Organization's (ILO) *Better Work Programme* (AU\$8.85 million, 2016-22), Australia is helping to improve labour standards and reduce gender discrimination and harassment in garment factories in Asia, with particular focus in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam. In 2019, Australia supported a convening of garment industry leaders from across Asia to devise solutions to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.
- In 2017-19, Australia, through the *Investing in Women* program and in partnership with UN Women, supported the Government of Vietnam to undertake five major pro-equality reforms to the Labour Code in Vietnam, including on a proposal to strengthen the anti-sexual harassment provisions in the Code, in alignment with international labour standards. The revised Labour Code, passed in October 2019, introduced a more specific definition of sexual harassment, including the recognition of quid pro quo harassment or 'work benefits' for sexual acts.
- In 2019, the Australian Government provided funding to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to research the prevalence and impacts of gender discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace in Myanmar. With this funding, the IFC produced guidance for business leaders, human resource managers, employees and other workplaces to help create workplaces that are free from bullying and harassment. Funding also enabled the IFC to develop two studies and reports on the impact of domestic and sexual violence on the workplace in the Solomon Islands and in Fiji.

Through the aid program, Australia supports a number of regional programs that address gender based violence (GBV) in all its forms, including:

- UN Women's regional violence prevention programs, *Blueprint for Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls* (AU\$1.23 million, 2017-2020) and *Stepping Up Solutions to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls in Asia and the Pacific* (AU\$1.658 million, 2017-2021). These programs

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UN reference: UNW/2020/0002

seek to address the underlying social norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive GBV and increase accountability and institutional capacities at the regional and national level to implement policy commitments to end VAWG in the Indo-Pacific.

- UN Population Fund (UNFPA) initiative, *kNOwVAWdata* (AU\$2.685 million, 2016-2020), which is building expertise and capacity in the Indo-Pacific for conducting studies on the prevalence of violence against women in partnership with the University of Melbourne and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

In the Pacific, the Australian Government is focusing efforts on working with Governments, the private sector and women's organisations in the region to expand counselling, health and legal services for survivors; strengthen the responsiveness of the law and justice system; and work to prevent violence through advocacy and outreach. This is being achieved through:

- Support for women's crisis centres in Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, PNG, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga.
- Assistance, with the European Union, to the *Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women* to partner with the Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and UN Women to step up efforts to end GBV. Australia's contribution (AU\$7.6 million, 2018-22) supports UN Women to work with Pacific island countries to promote gender equitable social norms to prevent violence, and ensure survivors have access to quality response services.
- The *Safe Families* program in the Solomon Islands, which seeks to change social norms around violence (AU\$9.3 million 2013-23).
- Support for preventing violence through the *Strengthening Peaceful Villages in Kiribati* program using local approaches (AU\$1.53 million, 2-17-20) and Respectful Relationships school-based program.
- Work with faith-based coalitions, *Channels of Hope* in Solomon Islands (AU\$5.9 million, 2013-22) and *Gender Equality Theology* in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands (AU\$1.9 million, 2018-21), to transform behaviours and attitudes regarding gender equality and violence against women.
- Support for the delivery of the *Stay Safe* project and *Think Big* awareness-raising sessions in Tonga to give young people the information they need to be safe and make good life decisions. These sessions have reached over 6,000 primary and secondary students in the past three years.
- The *Safe Public Transport for Women, Girls and Children* initiative (UN Women and the Ginigoda Foundation) to establish a women-only bus services operating in Port Moresby and Lae, Papua New Guinea (AU\$4.1 million, 2015-21). 558,839 women accessed the service between 2015-2018.
- Support for the *Regional Rights Resource Team* to support improved domestic violence legislation in Cook Islands, Nauru, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Kiribati (AU\$5.75 million, 2015-20).

Australia also supports a number of bilateral programs in the Indo-Pacific:

- The *Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MAMPU)* (AU\$112.3 million, 2012-2020) works with selected Indonesian civil society organisations (CSOs) to improve women's access to essential services and other government programs in order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, including on issues of VAWG. In 2019, *MAMPU* alongside the *Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice Phase 2 (AIPJ2)* supported CSO advocacy and policy engagement to contribute to the change in legislation to prevent child marriage in Indonesia, to increase the marriageable age of girls from 16 to 19 years old. *MAMPU* and *AIPJ2*, in collaboration with UN agencies, also worked with the national government to prepare a National Strategy on the Prevention of Child Marriage, launched in early 2020.

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- The *Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice (AIPJ)* (AU\$44 million, 2017-2022) successfully supported the development and implementation of the Indonesian Supreme Court Regulation on Women in Contact with the Law, which provides direction to judges to identify and address unequal treatment of, and discrimination against, women. The Regulation aims to improve equitable access to justice for women, especially in sensitive cases such as sexual assault, and reduce instances of judicial bias against women victims before the courts. AIPJ plays an ongoing role through technical advice, training and peer learning to support the implementation of the Regulation.
- Through the *Australia-Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services (ACCESS)* program (AU\$15 million 2018-2021), the Australian Government is working with the Royal Government of Cambodia, civil society and the private sector to sustainably improve services for persons with disabilities and women affected by GBV. ACCESS is targeting health care, legal protection services, and other critical social services, while supporting a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to service delivery.
- In Timor-Leste, the Australian Government is working to end violence against women and girls (EVAWG) through the Nabilan program (AU\$31.95 million, 2014-2022). Implemented by The Asia Foundation, in partnership with the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion and the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion, *Nabilan* works to provide access to services for women and children experiencing violence, and to promote social norms change to reduce violence against women and children.

The Australian Government supports efforts to end VAWG through the *Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)* and *Gender Action Platform (GAP)*, such as CARE's *Enhancing Women's Voice to STOP sexual harassment* project in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. Through this project, Australia supports activities that seek to prevent violence, improve access to crisis support services, and build capacity of and linkages between social welfare, police, health and education to better protect women and girls from violence and harassment.

International Engagement and Advocacy Efforts

Australia's humanitarian assistance is complemented by ongoing advocacy for the implementation of international commitments relating to women and girls, such as the Joint Communique on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Australia is also working to eliminate VAWG through our human rights advocacy. Since 2018, Australia has consistently worked to promote and protect gender equality in Human Rights Council resolutions and in 87 national and joint statements. These included resolutions and statements on violence and discrimination against women and girls, women human rights defenders, political participation, economic empowerment, indigenous women, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), participation in peace processes, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), and the persecution of LGBTI persons.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Internal Policies

The Australian Government takes seriously its responsibility to ensure women and children's protection from violence and harassment through our international engagement. Our aid program safeguards consider and address the risks of violence and harassment towards women and children across all our aid programs. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) does not tolerate sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment of any kind – both in its own organisation or those that it

works with. In 2019, DFAT released its Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy to strengthen accountability and tackle impunity.

2. Impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in regards to violence against women and girls and measures undertaken to address those in the short, medium and long-term, particularly in the following areas:

While the COVID-19 outbreak is having a major impact on all Australians, measures in place to restrict the spread of the virus are expected to contribute to an increase in violence against women and their children. In particular, quarantine and self-isolation measures may further exacerbate the risk for women and children who may be forced to remain in their homes with a perpetrator of violence. Women may face increasing risks of abuse when they are online and other external stressors are likely to act as a compounding factor, including health and economic concerns.

This situation is placing additional pressure and demand on services, increasing the complexity of cases and requiring service providers to transition rapidly to new ways delivering support. Notably, at 31 March 2020, Google reported the highest magnitude of searches for domestic violence help seen in the past five years, with an increase of 75 per cent.

Women and their children are expected to be at greater risk of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. To help respond to this, on 29 March 2020, the Australian Government announced an AU\$150 million Domestic Violence Support Package to help family and domestic violence support services meet the growing demand as a result of the impacts of the coronavirus crisis. This investment is strengthened by the continuing efforts and enhancements made by Australian State and Territory governments in responding to family and domestic violence, including emergency and crisis accommodation, counselling and other support services. The Package also includes funding for the national domestic, family and sexual violence hotline, 1800RESPECT, as well as MensLine Australia, and a new national information campaign with clear information on where people experiencing violence during this period can access support. The "Help is Here" campaign was launched on 3 May 2020, with television advertisements from 7 May 2020. It reinforces the message that violence is always unacceptable and encourages people to reach out for support, including clear information about where to seek help for family, domestic and sexual violence. The campaign will be run through a range of channels including TV, out of home placements (public transport and street furniture etc.), shopping centres, online social media and placement in supermarkets.

On 5 May 2020, the Australian Government announced a further AU\$63.3 million for the legal assistance sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the initial emergency investment of AU\$150m. Of this, AU\$20 million will be used to assist those dealing with domestic violence matters.

Australia is also concerned by the reported spike in VAWG in other parts of the world during this pandemic. Failure to respond to increasing GBV during the crisis could see significant backsliding in gender equality gains, with long-term development and recovery consequences. Increased VAWG will significantly affect the ability of communities to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, including economically.

Prior to the crisis, our region had some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world, with 68 per cent of women in the Pacific, and 40 per cent of women in South-East Asia having

experienced violence by an intimate partner⁷. This places the Indo-Pacific as one of the highest risk regions for increased GBV as existing gender inequalities are exacerbated.

Development Assistance

The Australian Government is responding to the urgent need to address VAWG in the Indo-Pacific during the COVID-19 crisis, using our development assistance to address and prevent VAWG, and ensure services remain available, accessible and safe for women and children. For example, through existing bilateral programs:

- We are working with the Timor Leste Government through the *Nabilan* program to implement practical measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Women's shelters and to ensure essential services are available to women and girls experiencing violence during the COVID-19 crisis;
- We are working with Cambodian Government agencies and civil society through the *ACCESS* program to ensure services are available for people with disability and women experiencing GBV during the crisis;
- In response to COVID-19 in Indonesia, Australia has worked with government and civil society partners through the *MAMPU* program to ensure poor and vulnerable women can access new social assistance measures and sexual and reproductive healthcare; support alternative livelihoods for informal workers who have lost their jobs; and address the increased risk of VAWG as a result of COVID-19 in Indonesia.

The Australian Government is also working with partners across the Pacific region to ensure continued delivery of essential services for women and girls experiencing violence, and providing targeted messaging around COVID-19. This includes support through the *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* initiative to mitigate the social impacts of COVID-19, including preventing and responding to increased VAWG. For example, through this initiative we are supporting GBV service providers in the Pacific, such as Bel isi PNG, Chuuk Women's Council and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, to adapt their approaches to ensure help is available when needed, especially with physical distancing measures.

Australia's *ANCP* initiative is supporting a targeted approach to addressing GBV in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Sixteen *ANCP* projects have pivoted to prevent GBV/Child Protection focus from 15 different countries in East Asia, Pacific, South Asia and Africa. Activities include supporting existing community mechanisms using webinars for staff, online counselling by trained staff, hotline services, using digital messages and online forms of communication, and collaborating with government and local partners to relay messages and deliver equipment and services to those affected.

Through our humanitarian program, the Australian Government is working to address increases in GBV as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis:

- In Myanmar, UNFPA reports there are growing reports of increases in GBV, and related services for prevention and response are under pressure. Australia's humanitarian partners in Myanmar have scaled up life-saving assistance, adapted programs where necessary and implemented preventative measures.

⁷ WHO (2013) London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and South African Medical Research Council, *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, pp. 16 and 20.

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- In Bangladesh, Australia’s humanitarian assistance is providing life-saving assistance and protection services including to prevent and address VAWG. Through our humanitarian assistance, Australia’s implementation partners (UN Women, Oxfam, BRAC and CARE) are supporting Bangladesh to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 in Cox’s Bazaar. This includes increased GBV monitoring, women-only isolation and treatment facilities, increased access to sexual and reproductive health services, messaging on how to access VAWG services during the crisis, and protection activities in camps and host communities.
- Australia’s humanitarian sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programs (delivered through UNFPA and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)) are pivoting to respond to COVID-19 either directly through providing women and girls with hygiene supplies, health services and GBV mitigation and response, or indirectly through support to fragile health systems. *The Regional Prepositioning Initiative*, a DFAT partnership with UNFPA to preposition SRH supplies throughout the Indo-Pacific region, is providing direct COVID-19 prevention and response through:
 - Engaging a GBV in emergencies consultant focused on mental health and psychosocial support for the Pacific, based in Fiji, and to develop IEC materials on COVID-19 and maternal health;
 - Inclusion of increased hygiene and sanitation supplies in Dignity Kits, as well as health messaging and GBV support in some countries; and
 - Provision of 1,100 women with essential supplies while under lockdown in remote villages in Sri Lanka.
- Through the *SPRINT* program (Sexual and Reproductive Health Program in Crisis and Post Crisis Settings), Australia will support IPPF to provide 379,125 women in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services as well as personal protective equipment, referrals for COVID-19 and GBV support.

International Engagement and Advocacy Efforts

The Australian Government is also advocating in international fora for a strong focus on addressing VAWG as part of the global COVID-19 response. Australia was one of 146 countries to respond in a statement to the Secretary General’s call to action on GBV and COVID-19. In addition Australia was one of the first States to co-sponsor a new resolution led by Spain in the General Assembly on “Women and Girls and the Response to COVID-19”, which expresses deep concern about the reports of increased VAWG and urges States to integrate prevention and response efforts on sexual, gender based and domestic violence. Negotiations on the resolution are ongoing.

Australia continues to advocate for action to prevent GBV in humanitarian contexts, including in relation to COVID-19. Australia has signed onto a Joint Statement issued by the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, a global multi-stakeholder initiative for which Australia was a founding member. It urges all actors in the humanitarian community to integrate GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures into all COVID-19 emergency appeals, funding and programming from the earliest stage to address the pandemic. Australia has also joined the global call for a specific GBV objective in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

a. Impact on the nature and prevalence of violence against women and girls, including violence in private and public spaces, and in on-line settings.

Survey on COVID-19 and domestic and family violence

With reports of domestic and family violence surging around the world amidst COVID-19 restrictions⁸, the Australian Institute of Criminology is conducting a survey of 15,000 women to capture their recent experiences of violence. The survey will build a national picture of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including social distancing measures and financial insecurity and stress, on the prevalence and nature of domestic violence (including coercive controlling behaviours) and on help-seeking behaviours. The survey results are expected to be completed in mid-June 2020 and will be used to inform the Government's response to domestic and family violence.

Online safety

Australia's Office of the eSafety Commissioner released public advice and information for staying safe online during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included targeted safety help for women, to help address the increased prevalence of gendered online and technology-facilitated abuse in the context of the pandemic. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner also released global online safety advice for frontline workers. This guidance material provides information to identify and support women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

b. Adaptation of service delivery and prevention interventions to lockdowns and restricted movement.

The Safe Work Australia⁹ website has been updated to provide a central hub of practical WHS guidance and tools to help Australian workplaces manage the health and safety risks posed by COVID-19. This includes additional guidance on family and domestic violence in recognising that public health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as self-isolation and work from home arrangements, may increase workers' exposure to family and domestic violence.

In March 2020, the Australian Government launched Australia.gov.au – a website that provides essential up to date information and advice about COVID-19. The website facilitates citizen's access to essential services, including family and domestic violence support and crisis services. There is a specific family and domestic violence portal on the home page. When accessed, the portal provides further information about how to seek help from police and counselling services such as 1800RESPECT.

c. Use of technology and innovation in responding to and preventing violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19.

Frontline domestic violence services are changing the way they conduct their work, with 73.6 per cent of workers having reported that they are no longer providing face-to-face support¹⁰ and are instead

⁸ Various media reports, for example: <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>; <https://time.com/5812990/france-domestic-violence-hotel-coronavirus/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

⁹ Safe Work Australia is the national policy body responsible for the development and evaluation of the model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws, codes of practice and other WHS guidance material as well as the policy dealing with compliance and enforcement of WHS laws.

¹⁰ Workforce survey by Women's Safety NSW

using technology and innovation in responding and preventing to violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19.

The challenges to service delivery posed by COVID-19 has further reinforced the importance of Australia's national online and telephone counselling and support service, 1800RESPECT. 1800RESEPECT provides support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence, their family and friends, and frontline and isolated workers. Counsellors can also refer people to other support services in their local area. In Australia, if someone is in danger they can call 000 for police assistance or other emergency responses. Since Australian measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were announced in March 2020, there have been increased rates in contact to 1800RESPECT and other like services via online chats.

The Australian Government is monitoring trends in ICT-facilitated abuse amidst the restrictions and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Government's objective is to ensure that our criminal law framework is comprehensive, effective and adequately reflects the seriousness of ICT-facilitated abuse, and its impact on victims.