



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



**DFAT and UN Women working together this
International Women's Month to**

BALANCE THE SCALES

For ALL Women and Girls



Photo: UN Women/VANWODS Solar Project

#BALANCETHESCALES

This International Women's Month

Balance the Scales is a promise that every woman and girl – regardless of background or identity – should be safe, heard, and free to shape her own future. Yet in 2026, millions of women and girls across Australia and the world are still denied that fair go. Discriminatory laws, harmful practices, and gender-based violence remains widespread, while structural barriers continue to block access to justice.

These barriers are not inevitable. They are built – and they can be dismantled.

Equality is not about advantage for some; it's about dignity, safety, and fairness for all.

When women and girls stand equal, families are stronger, workplaces are fairer, communities thrive, and society becomes safer for everyone.

This International Women's Day, let's Balance the Scales together.

First Nations Women

First Nations women in Australia face unique and complex challenges in accessing justice. Overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, intergenerational trauma, and limited access to culturally safe legal support are just some of the barriers.

Justice for First Nations women must be community-led and grounded in respect for self-determination. By centring First Nations women's voices and leadership, and ensuring communities play an active role as partners in change, we can drive meaningful change and create pathways to justice that are culturally informed and truly inclusive.

Access

Across the globe, women and girls continue to face significant barriers to accessing justice – barriers rooted in discriminatory laws, social stigma, and under-resourced legal systems.

From gender-based violence and discrimination to economic injustice and sexual violence, the challenges are complex and deeply rooted. In Australia, legal protections exist on paper, but the justice system often fails women in practice. Many women face high costs, delays, and limited legal aid. Legal processes can retraumatise, dismiss, or fail to support survivors. Additionally, women from marginalised communities – including First Nations women and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – face additional disadvantage.

Achieving real justice means transforming our systems – globally and here at home – to be accessible, survivor-centred, and truly responsive to the needs of every woman and girl.

Climate

Climate change is not gender neutral. In the Pacific and across our region, women and girls are on the frontlines of climate impacts – yet are often excluded from legal protections and decision-making. Displacement, loss of land, and increased vulnerability to violence compound the challenges they face.

Australia plays a critical role in supporting regional leadership and resilience, ensuring women's voices – including those from First Nations and culturally diverse backgrounds – shape solutions to both climate and justice challenges. Climate justice is gender justice.



Did you know?

-  Globally, **3.9 billion women and girls** live in countries with at least one law restricting their economic opportunities and access to justice.
-  Across Australia, conviction rates for sexual assault cases remain persistently low - with the latest NSW figures revealing just a **7% conviction rate** in 2023, underscoring how justice remains out of reach for most survivors.
-  First Nations women are **34 times** more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-Indigenous women in Australia.
-  **1 in 3 women** worldwide experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, yet most will never seek formal help or justice.
-  Women make up **less than 40%** of judges globally, and in some regions, less than 10%.

Sources: World Bank (2025), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2025), AIHW (2023), WHO (2023), UN Women (2023).

DFAT AND UN WOMEN

Working together to advance gender equality globally

The Australian Government is a long-time and valued partner of UN Women. We work together to support programs which protect and promote the human rights of women and girls in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, advancing women's economic empowerment and leadership, tackling sexual and gender-based violence, improving access to education, upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights, and implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

UN Women Australia is responsible for raising funds to advance UN Women's agenda worldwide, with a particular focus on the Pacific region.

The Australian Government and the Department of Foreign Affairs have proudly partnered with UN Women Australia for more than a decade to deliver International Women's Day events across Australia.

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**IWD
2026**



Photo: UN Women/Maikolo Fonua

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

WOMEN-LED GROUPS STRENGTHENING DIGITAL ACCESS AND DEFENCE AGAINST ONLINE HARASSMENT

In Southeast Asia, women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) are at the forefront of advocating for gender equality and human rights. But as their work becomes more visible online, many face significant challenges from technology-facilitated violence.

A 2024 study found that 73% of these CSOs experienced online harassment, 71% faced trolling, and 61% were victims of doxing (the sharing of private information without consent). These forms of abuse aim to silence women's voices and limit their participation in digital spaces.

For women-led CSOs in Cambodia, these threats are particularly pressing.

Chhun Sokchan, from the women's rights group Klahaan explains, *"As organisations advocating for women's rights, we face harassment and hate speech all the time. It's part of the job, but it shouldn't be normalised. I hope we keep working together and stay true to our feminist values as we build a safer digital future."*

To address the issue, UN Women, with support from the Australian Government's Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program, brought together 28 representatives from 12 CSOs in Cambodia for a workshop on cybersecurity capacity building. The training combined practical sessions with e-learning tools, helping women activists strengthen their digital skills and protect themselves from online abuse.

Pho Sophea, from Rainbow Community Kampuchea said:



Photo: UN Women/Fitria Rifkii

"We learned practical things like how to create strong passwords and back up important documents - essential not just for ourselves but for our organisations."

Cambodia's rapid digital growth has outpaced digital literacy, with only 30% of the population having basic digital skills. This gap creates fertile ground for cyberattacks like identity theft, impersonation, data breaches and ransomware.

By equipping women-led groups with knowledge and tools, these initiatives are not only strengthening digital resilience but also empowering activists to reclaim online spaces. Their efforts ensure that women's voices continue to be heard and that future generations of women activists in Cambodia inherit safer, more inclusive digital environments.

By working together, individuals and communities – supported by UN Women and the Australian Government – are creating safer, stronger, and more supportive environments where women and girls can thrive.