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Research Article

Implementing CEDAW to Address Violence against Women and Children in Australia (2023–2024)

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Abstract

Violence against women and children remains a serious social problem in many countries, including Australia. Despite Australia's formal commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), gender-based violence continues to occur at alarming rates. This study aims to analyze Australia's efforts in addressing violence against women and children through the implementation of CEDAW during the period 2023–2024. This research employs a qualitative method using document analysis. The data are obtained from official government reports, policy documents, international conventions, and relevant academic literature related to CEDAW and gender-based violence. The analysis focuses on Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and its First Action Plan 2023–2027. The findings indicate that Australia demonstrates normative and procedural compliance with CEDAW through policy alignment, institutional mechanisms, and intergovernmental coordination. However, most programs and action plans remain in the implementation or development stage, indicating that substantive outcomes are still limited. Challenges such as cultural norms, data gaps, and coordination between federal and state governments continue to hinder effective implementation. This study concludes that while Australia shows strong commitment to CEDAW principles, sustained implementation and outcome-oriented evaluation are required to effectively reduce violence against women and children.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights that comes from gender inequality and represents a serious public health and social welfare issue. According to data from the Respect Women report released by the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly one in three women worldwide—approximately 35%—have experienced physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. Globally, 30% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most often perpetrated by an intimate partner. Intimate partner homicide against women accounts for approximately 38%–50% of all female homicides (WHO, 2019). Gender-based violence is not an inevitable phenomenon and can be prevented through coordinated actions undertaken by individuals, organizations, and states. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women (*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 1979). The complex interplay of cultural values, beliefs,

norms, and social institutions related to gender often implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—supports violence within intimate relationships, offering little protection for victims, particularly women. Gender roles, male privilege, power imbalances, and the sexualization of women continue to contribute significantly to the persistence of violence against women across societies. Women and girls around the world continue to experience gender-based violence throughout their lives—at home, in schools, places of worship, workplaces, and public spaces (Kingsley et al., 2025).

Gender-based violence has existed for a long time and must be urgently addressed by all nations (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). One major response by the international community has been the establishment of international regimes aimed at addressing gender inequality and violence. An international regime refers to a set of social institutions formed around shared principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures, where the expectations of international actors converge. Stephen D. Krasner defines international regimes as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations" (Krasner, 1983). Such regimes influence state behavior by shaping policy priorities, legitimizing certain actions, and constraining unacceptable practices. One of the most prominent international regimes addressing gender-based violence is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was established to monitor the situation of women, promote women's rights, and identify areas in which women remain unequal to men. The convention provides a comprehensive framework of human rights principles, standards, and state obligations for member states that have ratified it. Adopted on December 18, 1979, CEDAW entered into force as an international treaty on September 3, 1981. Women's rights, as articulated in CEDAW, are human rights that apply to all individuals regardless of gender, race, religion, origin, or social status.

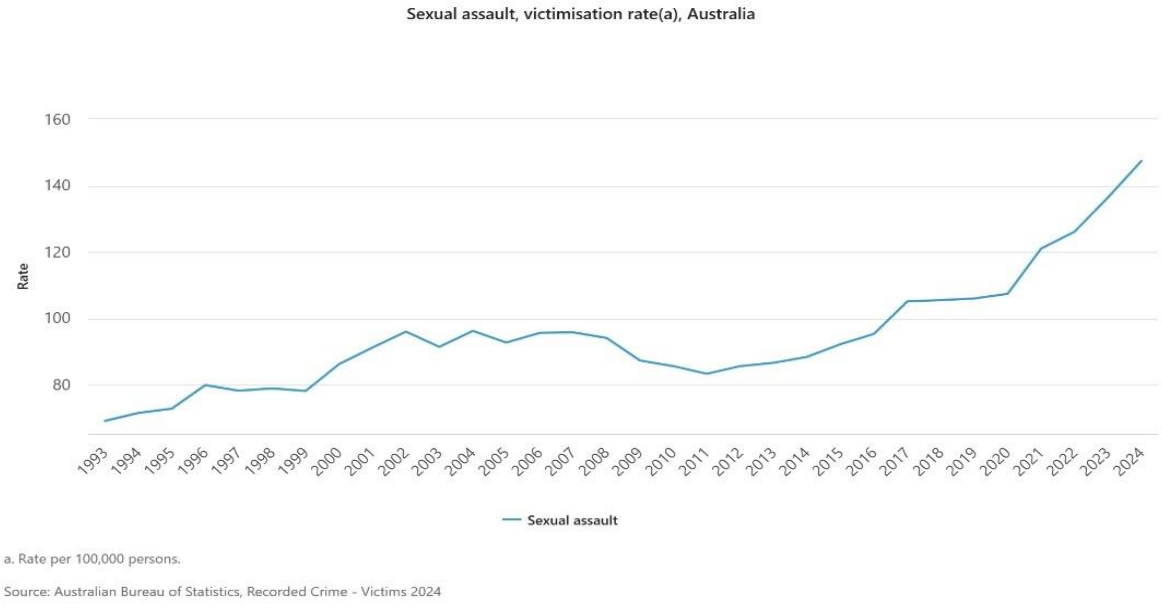


Figure 1. Graphic of sexual assault victims in Australia
Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025)

The graph above shows the rate of sexual violence in Australia over the past two decades, indicating a significant increase from 2016 to 2024, with the highest peak occurring in 2024. In that year, there were 40,087 victims of sexual violence, representing a 10% increase compared to the previous year. The majority of victims were women, accounting for 81% or 32,372 cases. Most incidents occurred in residential settings, and approximately 41%

were classified as family and domestic violence (FDV). Australia signed CEDAW on 17 July 1980 and ratified it on 28 July 1983 (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2025). Since ratification, Australia has formally committed to aligning its national policies with CEDAW's principles.

Sexual violence is defined as a sexual act carried out against a person's will through physically force, intimidation, or coercion, including attempted acts (Mohammed & Hashish, 2015). his includes attempted rape, sexual assault involving a weapon, indecent assault, penetration with an object, forced sexual activity without penetration, and attempts to force a person to engage in sexual acts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Although Australia has shown positive attitudinal shifts rejecting gender inequality between 2009 and 2021, structural challenges remain significant. Historically, Australian society has been shaped by colonial and patriarchal legacies that positioned women in subordinate roles. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, approximately 41% of Australians have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15, with women disproportionately affected (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Economic inequality, limited access to education, and media representations that objectify women continue to normalize misogynistic culture and contribute to violence.

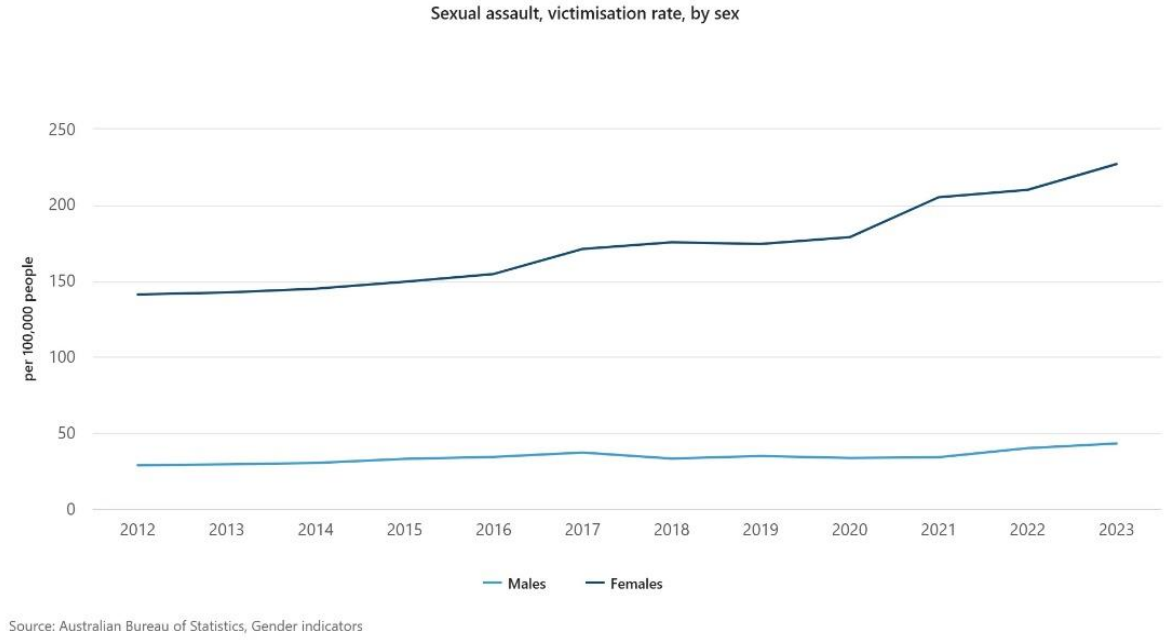


Figure 2. Graphic of sexual assaults victims by sex
Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025)

The graph above illustrates that women constitute the majority of sexual violence victims in Australia, with the number of cases increasing annually. Women are particularly vulnerable to domestic and intimate partner violence, which remains a dominant form of sexual violence. These data highlight the urgency of effective national action, especially as women account for 81% of reported cases (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025). CEDAW supports this commitment by promoting non-discriminatory practices across legal, political, educational, economic, and social sectors. As an international regime, CEDAW operates through three core principles: equality, non-discrimination, and state obligation. However, despite these frameworks, many women in Australia continue to experience insecurity and violence, indicating that substantive gender equality has not yet been fully realized.

The Australian Government's efforts to address this issue are reflected in the National

Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032, launched in October 2022. This long-term strategy represents a significant shift from earlier policy approaches by adopting a ten-year, whole-of-government framework. The National Plan guides coordinated action among the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments in prevention, early intervention, response, recovery, and healing, with the aim of breaking cycles of violence and supporting victims and survivors.

Several previous studies inform this research on CEDAW implementation. Existing literature largely focuses on evaluating formal compliance and identifying implementation barriers in different national contexts. Studies on Indonesia, China, and South Korea demonstrate that while legal and policy adoption of CEDAW is often achieved, cultural, institutional, and enforcement gaps continue to undermine substantive gender equality (Ngelo et al., 2025; Rahminita et al., 2017; Kardina & Yurisa, 2021). Research on Australia, meanwhile, tends to emphasize gender inequality trends and political discourse rather than examining CEDAW compliance in recent policy frameworks (James, 2023; Bromfield et al., 2024).

Based on this background, this study identifies a research gap in the limited analysis of Australia's recent efforts to comply with CEDAW through the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children during the period 2023–2024. This research therefore examines how the Australian government implements CEDAW as an international regime in addressing violence against women and children, with particular attention to policy alignment and implementation progress.

METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative, aiming to analyze the Australian government's compliance with the principles ratified in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), particularly in addressing violence against women and children through a case study of Australia. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research examines policy implementation and social phenomena rather than numerical measurement. The qualitative method was chosen because the research object is a social phenomenon—gender-based violence experienced by women in Australia.

This study focuses on the extent to which the Australian government complies with CEDAW as an international regime, using international regime theory as an analytical lens to assess adherence to principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures established at the international level. Australia ratified CEDAW in 1983, which makes it obligated to adhere to and adopt the international standards established by CEDAW regarding the elimination of discrimination against women. Compliance is examined by analyzing policy alignment, institutional mechanisms, and implementation efforts reflected in national strategies and action plans.

The researcher collected data for analysis through a literature study, using books, academic journals, official documents from international organizations, official documents from Australian government institutions, and relevant articles. These documents were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns of compliance, policy commitment, and implementation progress related to CEDAW principles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Gender inequality remains one of the main factors driving violence against women in Australia. Women in Australia continue to experience disproportionate and harmful impacts from family violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence. Violence against women is a manifestation of inequality and discrimination based on gender, race, and power imbalance. These forms of violence reflect deeply embedded structural inequalities that persist within social and institutional frameworks. This phenomenon is rooted in historical power relations that have long regarded women and girls as unequal and inferior to men and boys. Gender-based violence against women has been a long-standing and sensitive human rights issue, affecting women of all ages and backgrounds.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008). In practice, this definition encompasses a broad spectrum of abusive behaviors that vary across cultural and social contexts. These include practices such as female genital mutilation, as well as more globally prevalent forms such as domestic violence and rape. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that perpetrators are often intimate partners, parents, or family members. Violence against women stems not only from gender inequality, but also from power imbalances and mechanisms of oppression, both conscious and unconscious.

It takes many forms and has distinct characteristics. Most forms of violence do not occur as isolated incidents but persist over extended periods, reinforcing cycles of abuse. For instance, intimate partner violence, child sexual abuse, and non-partner sexual harassment often span years or even decades. One of the most prevalent forms of violence against women is intimate partner violence, commonly referred to as domestic violence. This can take various forms, ranging from physical violence such as slapping, hitting, assault with weapons, or murder, to sexual violence that severely undermines women's dignity. Such violence is often accompanied by emotional abuse, including restricting women's social interactions, belittling, humiliating, intimidating, and controlling them, such as preventing women from working or participating in public life.

Violence against women constitutes a significant barrier to women's ability to develop their potential, as it affects mental health, restricts social participation, and limits autonomy in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. These impacts highlight the obligation of states under CEDAW to address violence not only as a criminal issue but also as a structural human rights concern. Violence against women and children remains a national crisis in Australia despite ongoing policy efforts. The increasing rate of intimate partner homicides indicates persistent gaps in prevention and response mechanisms, underscoring the need for stronger and more coordinated government action.

The Australian Government's Effort to Implement CEDAW through the National Plan

Australia's accession to CEDAW represents the government's commitment to promoting the rights and wellbeing of women. Ratification of CEDAW obliges the Australian government to adopt laws, policies, and programs aligned with international standards on gender equality and non-discrimination. The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children serves as the primary national policy framework guiding collective action to eliminate violence within

one generation. The plan reflects Australia's aspiration to become a nation free from gender-based violence, where individuals can live safely in homes, workplaces, communities, schools, and digital spaces.

The National Plan emphasizes collaboration across all sectors of society to achieve its goals. This approach reflects CEDAW's principle of state obligation, which requires governments to take active responsibility for preventing and responding to gender-based violence. The plan is guided by six core principles, including promoting gender equality, closing gaps, centering victim-survivors' experiences, ensuring accountability, applying an intersectional approach, and fostering coordinated and person-centered integration. The Australian Government has demonstrated significant institutional commitment through investment, coordination, and policy development across federal, state, and territory levels.

The National Plan is articulated through four key pillars: prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing. These pillars correspond closely with CEDAW's emphasis on prevention, protection, and effective remedies for victims. Prevention aims to stop violence before it occurs by rejecting tolerance of violence and promoting gender equality and respectful relationships. Early intervention focuses on preventing escalation by identifying risks and supporting women and children at an early stage. Response mechanisms emphasize coordinated, well-resourced services and justice system effectiveness. Recovery and healing aim to break cycles of violence by providing trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support tailored to diverse groups (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022).

Implementation of the First Action Plan 2023–2027

The progress of the National Plan is monitored through a performance measurement framework that establishes six national indicators, including rates of intimate partner homicide, public attitudes toward violence against women, and understanding of family and sexual violence. These indicators function as tools for evaluating Australia's progress in meeting its CEDAW obligations. The implementation of the plan is operationalized through the ten actions of the First Action Plan 2023–2027.

Table 1. List of Actions in the First Action Plan 2023–2027

Action 1	Advancing Gender Equality and Addressing Its Root Causes
Action 2	Strengthening the national evidence base through the use of consistent terminology and a monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as enhancing the collection and sharing of data and evidence
Action 3	Enhance and build the capacity of both mainstream and specialist workforces to provide high- quality services, programs, and activities across the four domains, ensuring they are tailored to address the distinct needs and experiences of all victim-survivors
Action 4	Strengthening service capacity and systems that support victim-survivors as a response
Action 5	Strengthening systems and services to effectively protect victim-survivors
Action 6	Enhancing the prevention and response to sexual violence and harassment
Action 7	Working in formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in alignment with goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan
Action 8	Developing and implementing age and culturally appropriate programs
Action 9	Enhancing police and justice system responses to support victim-survivors and hold perpetrators accountable
Action 10	Improving access to housing for women of children who are victims of violence

Source: (Department of Social Services, 2025)

The ten actions reflect Australia's efforts to address the root causes of gender-based violence, strengthen service systems, and improve accountability mechanisms. Each action demonstrates varying degrees of alignment with CEDAW principles, particularly in relation to prevention, protection, and institutional capacity-building. For example, Action 1 addresses coercive control through national principles, while Action 2 focuses on strengthening evidence

and data systems to support informed policymaking. Actions 3 to 5 emphasize workforce capacity and system responses, and Actions 6 to 10 extend prevention and protection efforts to workplaces, Indigenous communities, young people, justice systems, and housing access.

The Australian Government and 1800respect.org.au reports a total of 463 activities implemented across federal, state, and territory levels. The classification of activities into 'in progress,' 'implemented,' and 'finished' provides insight into the current stage of Australia's policy execution rather than final outcomes. According to the report, 245 activities are classified as in progress, 197 as implemented, and 21 as finished (Department of Social Services, 2025). This distribution suggests that while institutional and procedural compliance with CEDAW is evident, substantive outcomes remain in development.

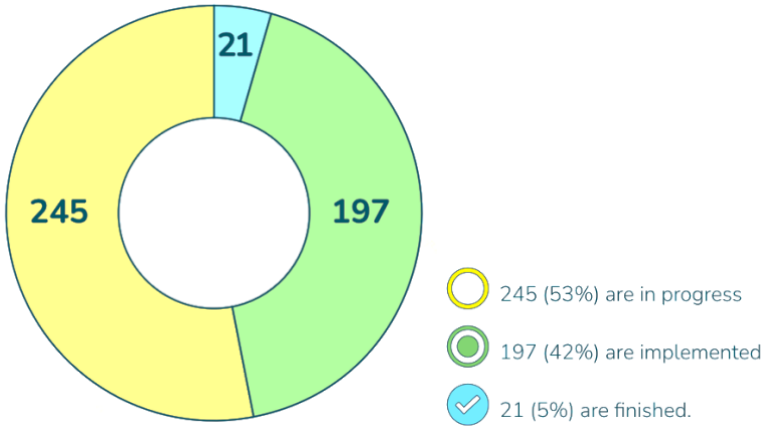


Figure 3. Status of all activities of the First Action Plan Activities Addendum Update 2024
Source: (Department of Social Services, 2025)

Stakeholder Involvement and Policy Effectiveness

The involvement of multiple stakeholders is a key factor in implementing the First Action Plan. Federal, state, and territory governments collaborate with communities, law enforcement agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such multi-actor engagement reflects CEDAW's emphasis on shared responsibility and inclusive governance. Collaboration with organizations such as SNAICC, Families Australia, and Our Watch demonstrates efforts to address violence through prevention, advocacy, and community-based approaches, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children (Our Watch, 2024).

These activities have contributed to increased public awareness and institutional responsiveness. However, their uneven reach across different social groups indicates ongoing challenges in translating policy commitments into comprehensive societal change. This finding underscores the need for sustained implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure that Australia's compliance with CEDAW results in measurable reductions in violence against women and children.

Discussion

The author argues that within the first year of implementing the short-term National Plan, the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments have acted as the primary agents in executing related policies and programs. A total of 21 activities have been successfully completed, representing 5% of all initiatives. These completed activities indicate early institutional

responsiveness rather than final policy outcomes. These completed activities share several common characteristics, as most deliver direct and tangible outputs. For instance, under Action 1, activities focused on developing resources to promote and implement the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence. The production of educational materials, including videos, fact sheets, and digital content for First Nations communities, reflects an emphasis on awareness-building and normative change. Similarly, Actions 2 and 3, as well as subsequent actions, produced concrete outputs such as program evaluations, the launch of digital platforms, the ratification of international conventions supporting gender equality, and reviews of existing legislation related to sexual violence survivors. These outputs demonstrate procedural compliance with CEDAW through policy alignment and institutional reform.

The majority of activities, however, remain in the 'In Progress' category, accounting for 53% of the total. This suggests that most initiatives are still in the developmental or preparatory phase and have not yet produced measurable social outcomes. This status demonstrates that Australia's efforts to eliminate gender-based violence remain largely transitional, requiring further consolidation across sectors. Meanwhile, 42% of activities are classified as 'Implemented', comprising routine programs and services already accessible to the public. The impacts of these implemented initiatives are beginning to emerge through counseling services, awareness campaigns, and workforce capacity-building programs. One notable example is *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, launched on 7 March 2024, which serves as a national framework encouraging collaboration among stakeholders to advance gender equality.

The author further argues that fully implementing Australia's commitment under CEDAW is a complex and gradual process. Social and cultural dynamics continue to present significant challenges for federal, state, and territory governments in translating policy commitments into substantive change. The involvement of both governmental and non-governmental actors is essential, as priorities and capacities differ across jurisdictions and communities. Transforming deeply embedded patriarchal norms requires long-term, inclusive, and adaptive policy approaches. Consequently, the Australian Government must ensure that policies remain equitable, culturally sensitive, and responsive to diverse social contexts while continuously evaluating both ongoing and completed initiatives.

The introduction of 66 new activities addressing online gender-based violence, the needs of survivors with disabilities, and women's safety in sports and politics has further expanded the scope of implementation. The integration of new initiatives with existing programs has increased the complexity and duration of the implementation cycle. Additionally, evidence-based data collection mechanisms remain under development, with the National Outcomes Framework serving as the primary monitoring and evaluation tool. The absence of fully processed and comprehensive data limits the government's ability to assess safety outcomes, social impact, and program effectiveness conclusively. This condition explains why many initiatives cannot yet be categorized as 'finished'.

Other contributing factors—such as limited-service capacity, ongoing legal and policy reforms, intergovernmental coordination challenges, and the slow pace of social change—also account for the high number of unfinished activities. Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that the implementation of the National Plan through the First Action Plan is iterative and evolving rather than linear or final. This reflects Australia's continued commitment to refining its strategies to address gender-based violence.

The progress of the National Plan indicates Australia's compliance with CEDAW as an international regime. Compliance is reflected in the alignment of national policies with

CEDAW principles, the establishment of institutional mechanisms, and the engagement of multiple stakeholders. Australia promotes collaboration among government institutions, civil society organizations, and women's groups to strengthen a multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence. However, the involvement of men remains limited across many initiatives. Greater male engagement is necessary to address the root causes of gender-based violence and to challenge harmful constructions of masculinity.

Additionally, the mechanisms for processing and holding perpetrators accountable require further regulatory development. Strengthening rehabilitative and consistent legal frameworks for perpetrators could complement existing victim-centered approaches. Such measures would enhance Australia's long-term compliance with CEDAW by addressing both prevention and accountability, thereby contributing to more sustainable efforts to eliminate violence against women.

CONCLUSION

Gender-based violence in Australia is a complex and structural issue arising from gender inequality, power imbalances, limited female representation, and deeply rooted social discrimination. These structural factors continue to shape women's vulnerability to violence across social, economic, and cultural spheres. As a state party to CEDAW, Australia has reaffirmed its commitment through the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 as a long-term framework, and the First Action Plan 2023–2027 as a medium-term implementation strategy.

The National Plan illustrates that Australia's initiatives to eliminate gender-based violence, particularly against women, are still in the developmental phase. Most implemented activities emphasize system-building, policy formulation, data development, and capacity enhancement within public services and professional workforces. The progress of the First Action Plan reflects Australia's adherence to CEDAW principles and demonstrates a gradual yet positive trajectory toward ensuring safety, equality, and dignity for women.

A collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based approach remains the cornerstone of Australia's strategy to realize the objectives of both CEDAW and the National Plan. This approach underscores the importance of intergovernmental coordination, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation in addressing gender-based violence. Therefore, Australia must continue to strengthen community participation and ensure equitable policy implementation across all regions to translate procedural compliance with CEDAW into substantive and measurable social outcomes.

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