

ODA funding for gender equality is on the rise, but is it enough?

by Isabela Vera, Francesca Sanders and Zoe Johnson

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Home workers in Indonesia, part of the Australian Aid funded MAMPU program (Credit: Luna Purification/DFAT/Flickr CC BY 2.0)

2019 was a year for gender equality and women's empowerment on the global development agenda. International events such as [Women Deliver 2019](#) resulted in unprecedented commitments to women's empowerment. In June 2019, the G20 included a strong commitment to gender equality in their [G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration](#). Meanwhile, the US launched the [Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative](#), a whole-of-government approach to promoting women's economic empowerment.

However, to understand the progress being made on [SDG5](#) ('Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'), we at [the Donor Tracker](#)—an online resource created by [SEEK Development](#) that offers free, independent, up-to-date analysis of 14 major Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors—wanted to go beyond the headlines. How are OECD donor countries, including Australia, prioritising gender equality in their development policy? How much official development assistance (ODA) do they give? Which projects are they funding?

Analysing funding for gender equality

We can answer these questions using data from the OECD's [Creditor Reporting System \(CRS\)](#) and the [Development Assistance Committee's \(DAC\)](#) [gender equality policy marker](#), which records development assistance activities that target gender equality as a policy objective.

The marker has three possible scores:

1. Principal: gender equality is the main objective of the project/program;
2. Significant: gender equality is an important and deliberate, but not the main, objective of the project/program; and
3. Not targeted: project/program does not target gender equality.

For the purposes of this analysis, we consider all ‘Principal’ and ‘Significant’ funding to be ‘gender-focused’.

- In 2017, the 30 DAC members spent US\$39.0 billion on overall bilateral allocable ODA in gender equality related projects (projects in which gender equality is either a ‘principal’ or ‘significant’ objective). This is 6% (US\$2.2 billion) higher than spending in 2016 and double the amount given in 2009 (US\$19.7 billion), the first year of reliable data based on the OECD DAC gender equality policy marker.
- Four donors—the US, Germany, the EU, and the UK—provide 60% (US\$23.6 billion) of the funding for gender equality, each spending between US\$5.5 billion and US\$6.5 billion in 2017.
- The share of total bilateral ODA that DAC donors spend on gender equality (including both significant and principal funding) is increasing. This share of funding has risen from 27% of total DAC ODA spending in 2009 to 35% in 2017.
- A concerning trend in funding for gender equality initiatives emerges from the data; the 6% (US\$2.2 billion) increase in gender-related funding in 2017 was entirely driven by funding for projects that integrate gender equality as just one of multiple significant goals. By contrast, funding for projects with gender equality as the principal goal dropped by 5% between 2016 and 2017 (from US\$4.9 billion to US\$4.7 billion).

Evidently, there is a large gap between projects integrating gender equality objectives and those targeting gender inequality as a stand-alone development goal.

Key findings on Australia

- Australia’s funding for gender equality is slightly above average: 49% of Australia’s bilateral ODA is spent on projects which have gender as a significant or principal objective (DAC average: 41%), while 11% is spent on projects which name gender as their principal goal only (DAC average: 6%).
- Australia spends about US\$1.0 billion per year on bilateral ODA with a focus on gender equality, making it the 9th largest donor in this area.
- In Australia, education (14%), health (7%), and agriculture (7%) are the sectors that receive the most ODA for gender equality.
- Australia’s funding for gender equality is decreasing. Australia reported that 50% of ODA activities in 2017 were ‘gender-focused’ (down from 63% in 2016). ‘Gender-focused’ ODA decreased by 22% from US\$1.4 billion in 2016 to US\$1.1 billion in 2017, but over half of funding was not used to tackle gender inequality or is not screened against the gender marker.

Donors need to step up

In light of Australia's downward trend, now is the time for development advocates working in Australia to highlight the importance of gender-focused ODA funding for achieving SDG5.

Meanwhile, all donors should urgently scale up funding for projects whose principal objective is the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Increased funding and more and better data on gender-related ODA are critical to meeting SDG5. Recent [research by Oxfam](#) found that around 25% of projects self-reported by donors using the gender equality marker to the OECD DAC were mismarked. This has implications for the validity of funding figures. Gender equality advocates everywhere should be aware of these issues and highlight the need for more accurate reporting.

For more information on the state of development financing for gender equality, check out the Donor Tracker's latest report, '[Words to action: the state of ODA funding for gender equality](#)', which analyses trends in OECD DAC members' development assistance funding and policy for gender equality in the years leading up to 2017. A new Donor Tracker report with OECD DAC 2018 funding figures will be published by mid-2020.

Source for all data: OECD CRS, aid projects targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, gross disbursements, in constant 2017 prices. Includes funding for projects with gender equality both as a significant and principal goal. Graphs conveying the findings for Australia available [here](#).

The [Donor Tracker](#) is an online resource that offers free, independent, up-to-date analysis of 14 major OECD donors (including Australia), which together contribute 85% of global ODA. Funding for the Donor Tracker is provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. All content is created by [SEEK Development](#), a Berlin-based consulting group dedicated to supporting human development globally.

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