

AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Australia's new Humanitarian Policy

ACFID HUMANITARIAN REFERENCE GROUP REVIEW

Baheer and Yasmeen are a young couple from Gaza whose triplets were born premature amidst the ongoing conflict. CARE International's local partner in Gaza, Juzoor, has set up clinics offering ante- and post-natal care. Despite the tremendous challenges in Gaza they have mobilized volunteers from their network of midwives to assist vulnerable women to deliver babies safely in their shelters with specialized equipment. Photo credit: CARE/Team Yousef Ruzzi.

Foreword

Global outlook and context

The Humanitarian Policy acknowledges the stark and confronting challenges the world is facing: the deterioration of respect for international law, highest number of conflicts globally since the end of the Second World War, and 2024 on track to be the deadliest year to be an aid worker.

Against this backdrop, the delivery of Australia's new Humanitarian Policy could not be better timed. As major global players in crises recede behind domestic political constraints, multilateral institutions experience significant funding shortfalls and the number of violent conflicts increases, Australia's voice, action and leadership is needed now more than ever. In larger quantities than ever before. For longer time. In more complex environments.

As crises become more protracted and interconnected, effective humanitarian response will increasingly depend on the resilience, strength and agility of donor relationships with implementing partners. ACFID's Humanitarian Reference Group and ACFID humanitarian agencies and their local partners stand ready to work with the Australian Government in the implementation of this Policy.

ACFID's Humanitarian Reference Group

The Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG) is the independent voice of humanitarian agencies in Australia. It is made up of ACFID's members with significant operational involvement in humanitarian response. The HRG works in international humanitarian assistance to share information, strengthen coordination, advocate to strengthen humanitarian response and engage in policy dialogue with DFAT. HRG members work across a range of areas including protracted crises, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian effectiveness, civil-military engagement, and protection.

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Headlines

What we welcome

- The Policy's **broad, cohesive commitment to equity, inclusion, participation and diverse voices** and knowledge in Australia's humanitarian action.
- The Policy's focus on **addressing root causes to crises**, including the priority area: "embed conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crises resilience into foreign policy and development programs," which sits alongside the Policy's other three priority areas.
- The Policy's prioritisation of "**readiness and preparedness**" with a commitment to do more to build these capabilities and strengthen anticipatory action.
- The Policy signals Australia's continued commitment to providing support that aligns with our strengths. Commitments to building support for **sexual and reproductive health services and response to sexual and gender-based violence** are welcome future directions.

What needs more work

- The Policy sets out a number of **promising commitments and future directions**, however current reporting and performance requirements do not make clear how these will be actioned or implemented.
- The Policy indicates **deepening expertise and increasing capability** for crises preparation and response. This should extend across the humanitarian and development portfolio areas to ensure resourcing and expertise complements current work and is commensurate with current and future global challenges.
- **The Policy signals strong future directions in disaster readiness and preparedness and conflict prevention and peacebuilding** however it is unclear how investments and approaches will work across DFAT's humanitarian and development approaches.
- **The policy broadly acknowledges the importance of locally-led humanitarian action** and local leadership but does not deliver tangible commitments to ensure the implementation of a truly locally led humanitarian program.

Priority next steps we recommend

→ **Develop an implementation plan to sit alongside the Policy with tangible key outcomes and timelines** to ensure the Policy's commitments and 'future directions' are translated to actions that realise the ambition set out in the Policy.

→ **Strengthen capability and greater resourcing** to fully realise the Policy's potential, particularly in sectoral areas where technical expertise has been eroded such as conflict prevention.

→ Take a cohesive approach to ensuring that underlying risk factors are reduced through long-term development assistance including by **mainstreaming conflict sensitivity into program design and systematically embedding disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation** across relevant humanitarian and development investments.

→ **Develop a roadmap to more locally led humanitarian assistance** that clearly articulates Government's conception of 'locally led', sets out a program logic for implementation and signals the Government's commitment and intention to the locally-led agenda.

OVERALL DIRECTION: ACFID'S VIEW

Australia's new humanitarian policy has potential if adequately funded & resourced

ACFID welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to and delivery of a standalone Humanitarian Policy. This is the first overarching document setting the future directions of Australia's humanitarian program since 2016.

ACFID welcomes the central role of inclusion and equity throughout the policy, recognising that marginalised groups are at increased risk during times of disaster and must be included and supported during and after humanitarian response. **We welcome the strong focus on readiness and preparedness** together with the Policy's future ambitions of 'elevating **conflict prevention, peacebuilding, crisis resilience** in Australia's foreign policy.'

The policy signposts strong direction for future humanitarian action which must be accompanied by strengthened capability and greater resourcing of the Department to realise this ambition. This is particularly important for areas of technical expertise such as conflict prevention and fragility that have been eroded overtime but have an elevated focus in the Policy as a result of the current global context. This capacity and capability build-up to support the Department's current and future efforts must be accompanied by robust financial investments in humanitarian programming to operationalise the vision set out in the Policy.

For this policy to succeed, it requires an implementation plan with tangible key outcomes and timelines. Many of the future directions are simply that; broad directions. ACFID's HRG looks forward to seeing how the Australian Government will hold itself accountable to this policy through measurable outcomes, suggestions for which are throughout this review. To ensure policy cohesion, the recently released and forthcoming Development Partnership Plans should be reviewed to ensure alignment and integration as the DPPs and Humanitarian Policy move to implementation phase.

"We are currently facing the highest number of conflicts globally since World War II. Amidst humanitarian catastrophes in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Yemen, Lebanon and more, a standalone humanitarian policy could not come at a more pressing time.

It is imperative the Australian Government urgently implements the Policy's commitments, through ensuring Australia's humanitarian program is resourced and supported to meet the moment.

We will be looking for clear actions against these commitments; accountability, funding, resourcing of DFAT and an enabling legislative framework."



Naomi Brooks, ACFID Humanitarian & Public Engagement Lead

[Read ACFID's full media release here](#)

2022 HRG Submission to the New International Development Policy

"Australia has committed to the principles of **humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence**, which are fundamental to humanitarian action. They distinguish humanitarian aid from other activities; for example, those of a political, religious, ideological or military nature.

Complex emergencies - where political and security dynamics define the operating environment and require particular attention to neutrality and independence are only going to increase in number, and we cannot shy away. **We must be active protectors of humanitarian access, particularly in the context of the application of counter- terrorism measures and sanctions.**

Humanitarian aid should not be instrumentalised to achieve tactical foreign policy goals and geography should not drive decisions on where humanitarian aid should be spent. There are concerning signs that this is becoming a trend, for example, the Australian Humanitarian Partnership was activated in Kiribati for potential drought but not for globally significant crisis, such as the humanitarian emergencies in Tigray or Afghanistan.

Improving Australia's assistance in insecure environments and creating a globally focused strategy are important to ensuring that Australia's humanitarian assistance is not guided by political, religious, ideological or military factors and therefore ensures our ability to abide by the humanitarian principles. **Adherence to the humanitarian principles facilitates access and acceptance and helps humanitarian workers carry out their work.**

The new Humanitarian Strategy should be a whole- of-government, coordinated policy and response plan to humanitarian crises guided first and foremost by humanitarian need and a do no harm approach, to ensure consistency across government initiatives and with humanitarian principles." Read the full submission [here](#).

Policy on a page

OVERARCHING GOAL

The overarching goal of the Policy is outlined here. The Policy retains a focus on the Indo-Pacific but a view to act globally where ‘needs are most acute’ and where Australia can make a ‘tangible difference.’

CHAPTER 1

Not included on this page but sets the scene and outlines the current global context which forms the backdrop of the Policy.

CHAPTER 3

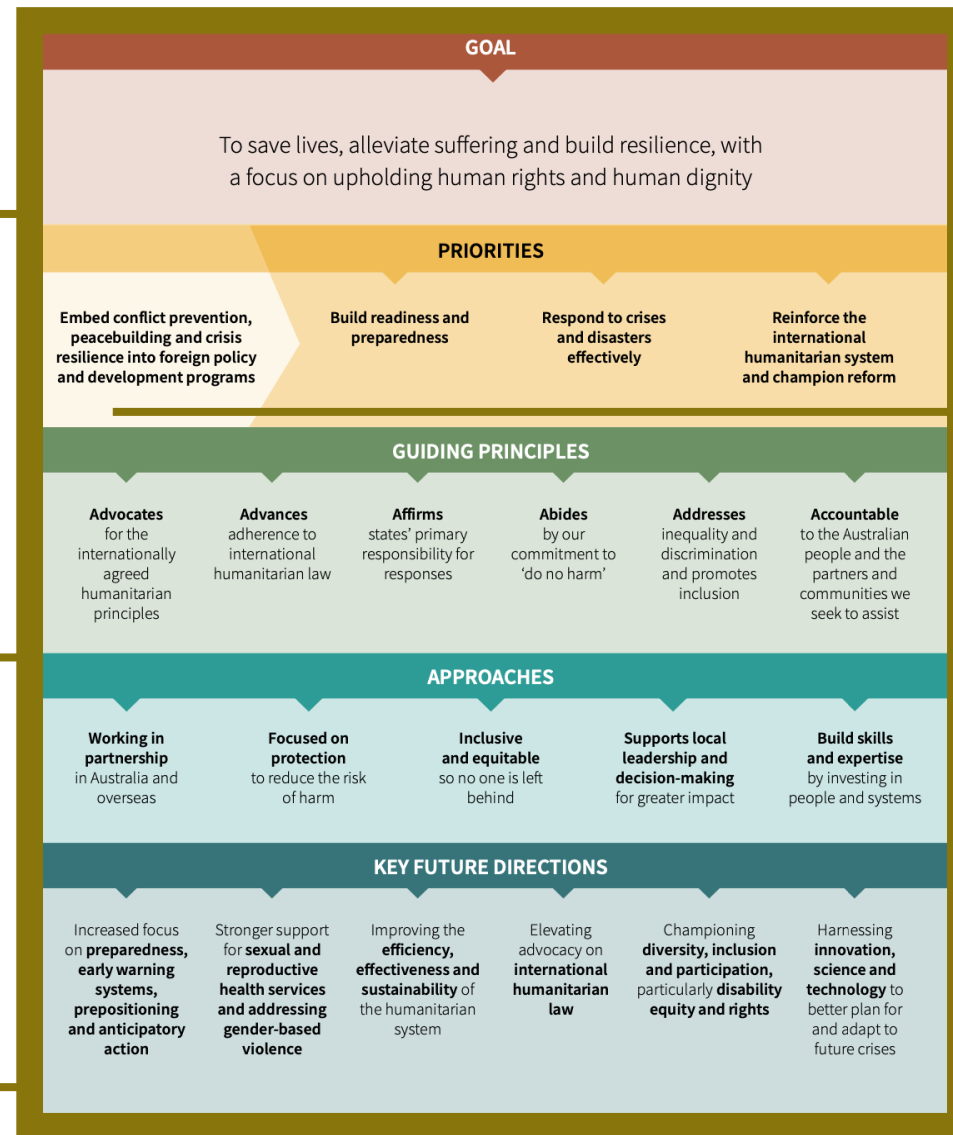
The Policy sets out five approaches that underpin the way Australia’s humanitarian action is carried out.

CHAPTER 4

Is not included on this page but sets out Australia’s commitment to accountability, performance and risk.

SUMMARY OF FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future directions signpost Australia’s commitments to future action for Australia’s humanitarian program. The Policy’s core commitments are highlighted here - drawing on Australia’s strengths and priorities.



CHAPTER 2

Sets out six guiding principles to underpin Australia’s humanitarian work and out three (+1) priority areas:

- Build **readiness and preparedness** to support governments and communities to lessen the impact of crises and enable faster and more effective humanitarian responses.
- **Respond to crises and disasters effectively** and promote humanitarian action that meets the needs of crisis-affected populations and protects the most vulnerable.
- **Reinforce the international humanitarian system** and champion reform to push back against growing disregard for international humanitarian law.

The priority areas sit alongside an **additional priority area** to “embed conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crises resilience into foreign policy and development programs,” signaling a recognition that a ‘comprehensive and sustained’ approach is needed to address the root causes of humanitarian need as opposed to a solely responsive approach.

Effective humanitarian action

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS

-  Harnessing capability from across the Australian Government to respond to humanitarian emergencies, providing a range of expertise, capabilities and resource.
-  Support for efficient and effective humanitarian funding models through multi-year flexible contributions during protracted crises and using pooled funds where appropriate.
-  Promoting women's leadership on solutions to prevent, prepare, respond to and recover from disasters.
-  Responding in a timely manner to crises and within 48 hours of a request for assistance from a country in the Indo-Pacific to rapid onset emergencies.
-  Partnerships with international organisations allow Australia to pool contributions with other donors to maximise impact.
-  Strong commitments to inclusion, participation and equity for marginalised and vulnerable groups in Australia's humanitarian action.

Humanitarian need must be the focus of each response, above geopolitical or other strategic considerations. Australia must always prioritise the principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence first.

Humanitarian response should be as civilian led as possible and as military led as necessary.

It was a missed opportunity that this policy did not define how Australia will implement and prioritise a whole-of-government approach to humanitarian crises involving a range of actors at the decision-making table. These decisions should be informed by and decided on with civilian actors, including civil society, as partners at the table.

HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

-  **Promote policy coherence across humanitarian, development, trade, diplomacy and other foreign affairs agendas to ensure that Australia's policies and approaches do not work against one another.**
 - Policy coherence could be promoted through developing whole-of-government strategies to major regional and global humanitarian crises and appointing high-level humanitarian envoys to guide implementation and engagement.
 - Civil society, for example representatives of the HRG, should be regularly engaged given their direct links with affected populations and local partners.
-  **Resource DFAT capability and increase capacity in humanitarian technical expertise to effectively support response to sudden onset humanitarian emergencies,** as well as engage on medium-term priorities such as the development-humanitarian-peace nexus, protracted crises, anticipatory action, resilience and adherence to Good Humanitarian Donorship principles more broadly.
-  **Ensure that Australia's approach to humanitarian responses are civilian-led and military only on request for particular areas such as logistics and transportation.**
 - This is crucial as the Government takes a broader approach towards harnessing capability from across the Government to respond to crises.
-  **Ensure that investment in military capabilities is complemented with increased investment in civil society's capability to respond to disasters and crises** and that both capabilities are coordinated.
-  **Continue support for effective disaster laws, International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) and disaster risk governance** to develop strong, effective disaster and health frameworks, laws and policy to keep communities safe and save lives before, during and after disasters.

Inclusive humanitarian action

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS



Inclusive and equitable humanitarian action is elevated and embedded throughout the policy including as one of six guiding principles and one of the five implementing approaches with the objective that “no one is left behind”.



Commitments to “stronger support for sexual and reproductive health services and addressing gender-based violence” and “championing diversity, inclusion, participation, particularly disability equity and rights” are two ‘key future directions’ of the Policy.



Commitment to actions and future directions are integrated throughout the Policy to address unique risks of diverse groups - including for women and girls, children, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ communities.

The centrality and strong commitment to inclusivity, equity and participation is a particular strength of the Policy with these principles firmly embedded into the Policy’s guiding architecture. There is a clear link between the Policy’s recognition of the unique risks and barriers faced by particular diverse groups and the corresponding “actions underway” and “future directions”. For example, the Policy recognises that increasing women’s participation in preparedness, response and peace processes is crucial to ensuring women and girls have the support, services and protections they need in times of crises. The Policy outlines corresponding “actions underway” to address these issues including “promoting the participation of women in peace processes” and “ensuring more attention is paid to protection issues, including sexual violence in conflict.”

HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS



The Policy’s ambition of **no one being left behind** should extend to humanitarian funding provisions.

- Funding mechanisms must be structured in a way that enables and encourages local organisations, particularly those representing diverse groups to access and receive international humanitarian funding without having to compete with international actors.
- This requires building systems to directly fund and share decision-making power to local partners and civil society, taking an inclusive and equitable approach.



To support the Government’s actions on **‘better integrating disability equity and rights and the needs of LGBTQIA+ people in humanitarian assistance’**, priority next steps include:

- Investing in disaggregated data collection and data analysis to identify the most vulnerable individuals and groups in a population group.
- Investing in research on the humanitarian and disaster preparedness needs of sexual and gender minorities to better inform policy and practice decision-making and implementation of sexual and gender minority inclusion in humanitarian and preparedness programs.



Performance reporting through the new Transparency Portal and Performance of Australia’s Development Cooperation Report **that tracks Australia’s progress on inclusive and equitable humanitarian action overtime** to identify strengths and areas for improvement.







- This is particularly important where commitments made in the Policy are not accompanied with corresponding measurement indicators in the Government’s Performance and Delivery Framework (ie LGBTQIA+ inclusion).



Continue to invest in implementation of the WPS agenda, including through supporting local civil society and women’s organisations to promote women’s leadership in peace and stability in the region.

Disaster preparedness and anticipatory action









WHAT THE POLICY SAYS

-  Increase support for innovative technology to aid prediction and planning and strengthen anticipatory action efforts to limit disaster impacts.
-  Investing further in early warning systems and anticipatory action initiatives, climate adaptation and disaster resilience.
-  Working with governments, non-government organisations, UN agencies and international financial institutions to expand the use of innovative finance to reduce disaster risks and impacts.
-  Amplifying diverse voices in disaster preparedness and resilience efforts, including those of First Nations and Indigenous Peoples, women and people with disability.
-  Supporting Indo-Pacific countries to build and enhance anticipatory actions empowering women to lead solutions to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.
-  Affirms that response activities include consideration of recovery with a view to longer-term rebuilding and adaptation to cement preparedness for future crises.

While the first priority of the Policy is to ‘build readiness and preparedness’ and there is strong recognition of the importance of investing in preparedness, it is unclear from the Policy how preparedness and disaster risk reduction investments and approaches will bridge and sit across the Government’s humanitarian and development portfolios.






The Policy recognises the crucial role that engaging local communities in preparedness plays in ensuring their success, however it is unclear how the Policy sees locally-led preparedness and risk reduction efforts being carried out in practice.

HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

-  **Systematically embed Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation** across relevant humanitarian and international development investments, ensuring that underlying risk factors are reduced through long-term development assistance.
-  **Invest in the technical expertise and resources** required to carry out deep and thorough context analysis to inform all disaster risk reduction and anticipatory efforts to ensure programming is practical, effective and informed by the needs of local communities.
-  **Continue to build deliberate flexibility into programs, particularly multi-year, by requiring scenario planning, context monitoring, and rapid modalities to pivot activities** to meet an impending threat, such as crisis modifiers.
-  **Scale up multi-hazard early warning systems and robust early action and contingency planning for known and anticipated risks.**
 - These should be reinforced with predictable pre-positioned financing, ensuring timely action is taken and the impacts of disaster events on lives and livelihoods are mitigated.
-  **Ensure country-level investment plans support enhanced social safety nets** that address the humanitarian needs of those experiencing the greatest vulnerability.
-  **Invest in community-level Early Warning, Early Action, ensuring communities and local civil society can access timely information on impending crises**, have inclusive plans to prepare and react, and have resources and capabilities to carry out these plans in the event that support from outside actors is interrupted.
-  **Continue to grow DFAT’s delivery of cash-based humanitarian assistance** which links or aligns with local and national mechanisms such as social protection systems.
-  **Increase recognition and integration of mobility considerations (migration, displacement, and planned relocation)** in national and regional climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resilience policies and strategies.





Locally-led humanitarian response

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS

-  Working with governments, regional bodies, non-government organisations and local communities to strengthen disaster preparedness.
-  Strengthening global and regional coordination and collaboration, including through mechanisms that support local leadership and decision-making.
-  Commitment to progress reforms that are most needed and where we have the greatest capacity to make a difference: in crisis prevention and early action; more efficient and effective funding mechanisms; and supporting local leadership and decision-making.
-  Recognises local communities and leaders know their contexts best and as a result best-placed to identify challenges and solutions to crises.
-  Recognises the value of traditional and Indigenous knowledge, sciences and practices in humanitarian response.







The policy broadly acknowledges the importance of locally-led humanitarian action but does not deliver tangible commitments to ensure the implementation of a truly locally led humanitarian program. Australia is an outlier in terms of its under-utilisation of NGOs in humanitarian aid delivery. By funding NGOs and civil society directly, Australian funds can bypass an unnecessary intermediary and reach people in need faster. While the UN and multilateral organisations play a key role in coordinating and enabling humanitarian assistance, particularly through the cluster system, a global humanitarian system which does not equally empower NGOs and local civil society organisations is poorer in its ability to be locally led, inclusive and accountable to communities. The Policy expresses a preference for working through non-NGO partners to support local actors in conflict and fragile contexts.

HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

-  **Develop a roadmap to more locally led humanitarian assistance** that clearly articulates Government's conception of 'locally led', sets out a program logic for implementation and signals the Government's commitment and intention to the locally-led agenda.
 - This includes identifying and implementing systemic policy changes such as multi-year flexible support that strengthens and sustains capacity.
 - This would go some way to help realise Australia's commitments under the Grand Bargain. An example includes the USAID Policy for Localisation of Humanitarian Assistance.
-  **Implement a plan and pathway to increase funding to local actors** and meet the Grand Bargain target of providing at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders.
 - Where appropriate, funding should be direct, flexible and multiyear with the aim of increasing local capacity to manage more local programs and strengthening partnerships with civil society groups directly linked to affected communities.
-  **Undertake a review on the impact that procurement, risk and financing guidelines and rules have on local actors** and examine how to better balance the focus on partnerships and funding compliance. This should be informed by:
 - commissioned research to survey local organisations on their preferences for funding modalities and ensure funding decisions are informed by local voices;
 - co-creating reporting, risk management requirements and program design settings with local partners;
 - specialist in-house expertise;
 - regular independent reviews on DFAT's approach which incorporate the views of local actors impacted
-  **Ensure adequate funding provisions for the complementary role that Australian humanitarian agencies** play in assisting local organisations to engage with the humanitarian sector. This could include support, learning and organisational development and donor compliance and/or built-in budgetary provisions for core funding for local organisations.

Peacebuilding and conflict prevention

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS

-  Conflict and fragility analysis will form part of Australia's development planning and will be embedded where appropriate.
-  Australia already undertakes a range of foreign policy initiatives to work towards peace, security and equality, and thereby addressing the root causes of crises.
-  Will build in flexible and shock responsive programming to enable quick reallocation of resources and scale up.
-  In 2025, Australia will join the UN Peacebuilding Commission to work with other states to build peace in conflict-affected countries.
-  Australia will continue to support peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.
-  Elevate conflict prevention, peacebuilding, crisis resilience in Australia's foreign policy.

A 2025 seat on the UN Peacebuilding Commission is welcome, but to be most effective, Australia must first invest in its own peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity & fragility expertise. DFAT dismantled its Conflict and Fragility Team in 2020 and investment in peace and conflict expertise in the department is at an all-time low.

Australia's current approach to development and humanitarian programming is largely siloed with rigid and inflexible funding mechanisms that constrain a 'nexus' approach to peace and conflict prevention. The policy does not demonstrate engagement with nexus or plans for incorporating and managing nexus.

HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

-  **Restore the fragility and conflict prevention section in DFAT** and revise and implement the framework for working in fragile and conflict-affected states. See Appendix A for further details.
-  **Mainstream conflict sensitivity in program design** to ensure that underlying grievances and conflicts are not exacerbated and integrate through consultation the perspectives of First Nations people peacebuilders.
-  **Enable nexus-bridging coordination between funding programs**, such as through deliberate layering of humanitarian funds into development programs via crisis modifiers - enabling emerging needs to be met while maintaining development gains.
-  **Apply a greater oversight and results-driven perspective to funds given to humanitarian multilaterals**, requiring these to show how they are coordinating with development and peacebuilding actors to work towards shared outcomes.
-  **Enable nexus-bridging work within individual funding packages, particularly those targeted towards fragile and conflict-affected contexts.** Design multi-year funding packages that are risk-ready and implement them through partners or consortia with demonstrated ability to blend humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding modalities and adapt to rapidly shifting contexts.
-  **Explore and support options to make ANCP funding eligible for nexus programming.** This will protect Australian aid investments while also working to address underlying causes of conflict and disaster, including climate change and food insecurity, in places of greatest need.

Protracted crises & displacement

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS



Commitment to addressing the shared global challenge of displacement including championing the global expansion of durable solutions for refugees, and working with refugee-hosting states to advance the protection needs of refugees and displaced people within their borders.



Reaffirms Australia's support for the Global Compact on Refugees.



Considers future thinking on how humanitarian programs can be better linked with broader development efforts to ensure that people in protracted crises are able to access education, livelihoods and social supports.



Using Australia's role as a leader in refugee resettlement efforts to influence protection and resettlement approaches globally, particularly for women and girls.



Reaffirms current approaches for humanitarian funding models that take a multi-year flexible approach during protracted crises, including the use of pooled funds.

The Policy's reference and recognition of Australia's role in addressing the global displacement crises is a promising step in furthering Australia's commitments towards durable solutions and protection for displaced persons made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

As Australia's humanitarian program moves towards addressing root causes and prevention, it's crucial that Australian humanitarian partners are enabled to undertake nexus-bridging programming to ensure investments are effective and well-positioned in the face of increasingly protracted and complex crises. There is a broad vision throughout the Policy to address needs of affected populations, especially those that are displaced, over the longer-term however there are few steps outlined in the Policy on how this will be done in practice.

HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS



Development and implementation of a strategy that sets out a clear direction for a whole-of-government approach to displacement and protracted crises. Core goals of the strategy would be to:

- prevent, respond to, and address the root causes of protracted crises;
- finance investments in protracted crises on a multi-year basis;
- ensure that civil society and all agencies relevant to protracted crises across the disaster cycle, including displacement and conflict contexts, are involved, and;
- prevent, respond to, and develop durable solutions for displaced people.



Enable and prioritise Australia's meaningful participation and leadership of displaced peoples in keeping with its Pledge, its commitment to the Global Refugee Compact, its participation commitments under the Grand Bargain 2.0 and associated reporting obligations. This should also link with climate change and disaster risk reduction initiatives to support climate change refugees.



Advocate for, and contribute to, implementing the recommendations of the UN High Level Panel on Internal Displacement.



Appoint an Ambassador for Global Displacement within DFAT, focused on: reducing displacement drivers, including conflict and climate change; strengthening assistance and protection; supporting nexus-bridging investments and finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people.



Promote inclusive and resilient food systems by:

- Promoting and directly funding local leadership and engagement of civil society to build resilience to food insecurity.
- Scaling up approaches that support gender equality and women's economic empowerment outcomes in agriculture and food systems.

Risk, transparency & accountability

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS



DFAT will report progress against each of the Policy's priorities and commitments through the DFAT annual report and the Performance of Australian Development Cooperation report. Results will be published in the Transparency Portal each year.



DFAT will report against relevant indicators in Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework. These will be supplemented when appropriate by targeted research, rapid reviews of emergency responses and program and strategic evaluations.



Acknowledges partnerships with Australian non-government organisations, a cornerstone of humanitarian assistance in the Indo-Pacific region. UN agencies and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement critical to Australia's support in high-risk settings, as they have the footprint, flexibility, resources and access to deliver where others cannot.



While we agree with the undeniable role of the United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross in delivering urgent humanitarian assistance in high-risk settings, HRG is deeply concerned by the framing of this policy to push Australian NGOs from these environments despite high-quality reporting, evaluation and due diligence standards as accredited through ACFID's Code of Conduct and DFAT accreditation. A zero tolerance to risk in fragile, violent and conflict environments is not sustainable for an Official Development Assistance Program.

The trend of humanitarian funding and focus on multilateral partners is at odds with the track record NGOs have as valuable partners of Australian Aid in such 'high-risk' settings including in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, and continued in Ethiopia and Myanmar. In a majority of contexts, NGOs are key delivery partners to UN agencies in effective, locally-led humanitarian action at scale. Further, our agencies are trusted partners of several other humanitarian donor governments, including the United States and United Kingdom.



HRG RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS



Develop an implementation plan to sit alongside the Policy with tangible key outcomes and timelines to ensure the Policy's commitments and 'future directions' are translated to actions that realise the ambition set out in the Policy.



Proactively incorporate clear and consistent humanitarian exemptions across all counter terrorism laws and sanctions regimes.



Improve the consistency of reporting of Australia's official humanitarian assistance to enhance transparency and accountability to the Australian public and demonstrate the value of Australia's humanitarian program, including but not limited to DFAT's Transparency Portal and PAD-C reporting.

- Improve the transparency of Australia's humanitarian program by publishing an annual official humanitarian assistance report to provide clear information to the public about how much humanitarian assistance Australia has provided, where and to whom the funding has gone, and its overall impact on the lives of people affected



Information relating to humanitarian allocations, decisions, policies and roadmaps should be public-facing strategies that the sector can align and coordinate itself with, not just internal departmental ways of working.



Increase transparency in humanitarian funding, including for new funding: clearly stating the funding source, whether the funding is new or part of existing allocation and indicating which category the funding relates to in the Federal Budget. This should reflect costs across Government, including military expenditure.

International humanitarian law: The Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel

HRG RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE DECLARATION



Among other commitments and ambitions to advocacy on international humanitarian law, the Policy outlines Australia's work to lead efforts on a new Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel.

To support the Declaration in achieving its goal of improving safety and security of humanitarian personnel the ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group provided the following recommendations to member states, including the Australian Government, on what the Declaration must include.

Humanitarian Personnel:

- **Recommendation:** employ expansive definition of an aid worker- any individual who works for or with an impartial humanitarian organization should be covered.
- **Recommendation:** prioritize national and local humanitarian actors, and national and local staff (these are distinct categories)
- **Recommendation:** include language that covers people who work 'for' NGOs and 'with' NGOs. This would cover volunteers, 'incentive workers', and civil society staff who work separately but in close coordination with humanitarian NGOs delivering the front-line response.
- **Recommendation:** include 'on and off duty.' Language that notes humanitarians protections are not time limited. Humanitarian workers do not stop being humanitarians when their hours of employment end on any given day end. They must be protected at home, and while in transit. Many of the humanitarians who have been killed in Gaza were targeted while at home, with their families.

Humanitarian deconfliction zones

- **Recommendation:** expand humanitarian deconfliction zones to include activity implementation areas including but not limited to schools, health facilities, residences, offices, access roads for humanitarian aid. This should include local, national and international operational areas.

Monitoring and accountability

- **Recommendation:** include a mechanism to regularly, publicly condemn perpetrators of attacks on humanitarian personnel in the Security Council.

Gendered impacts

- **Recommendation:** ensure gender analysis is based on sex, age, disability disaggregated data, and provided by senior staff with the requisite gender expertise. Gender analysis should be included in any monitoring and reporting mechanism that is proposed.

Unlawful and arbitrary detention of humanitarian personnel

- **Recommendation:** condemn both 'unlawful and arbitrary' detention. Often detention of humanitarian workers is rooted in arbitrary application of national law and therefore not technically unlawful.

Reaffirm humanitarian principles in respect to sanctions and counter-terror

- **Recommendation:** reaffirm the ability of humanitarians to engage with all parties to conflict regardless of counter-terror and sanction designations, in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence as set out in GA Resolution 46/182.
- **Recommendation:** Streamline the incorporation of clear and consistent humanitarian exemptions across all counter terrorism laws and sanctions regimes in line with IHL, humanitarian principles and the scope of UNSCR 2664
- **Recommendation:** There should be a clear link and reference to Resolution 2664, in particular OP4, noting that this OP applies to all previous resolutions. OP4: 4. "Emphasizes that where paragraph 1 of this resolution conflicts with its previous resolutions, paragraph 1 shall supersede such previous resolutions to the extent of such conflict..."



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[acfid.asn.au](https://www.acfid.asn.au)



advocacy@acfid.asn.au



[/ACFID](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ACFID)



[/acfid](https://www.facebook.com/acfid)



[@acfid](https://twitter.com/acfid)



14 Napier Close, Deakin

Matthew with his grandson Charlie outside their home which Matthew has pieced together using items salvaged after Tropical Cyclone Harold destroyed their home. Matthew says that thanks to the unblocked cash program he now has a chance to build a house. After purchasing essentials like food and soap, Matthew now plans to purchase timber for his new home. Photo: Arlene Bax/Oxfam.