



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Australia's Humanitarian Policy

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR PEOPLE IN CRISIS

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Government acknowledges Australia's First Nations peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognises and respects their continuing connections to lands, waters and communities.

The Government pays respect to Elders past and present, to emerging leaders, and to all First Nations peoples, and recognises the continuation of diverse cultural, spiritual and educational practices.

This publication may contain images or references to First Nations people who are deceased. The Australian Government does not wish to cause distress to any First Nations community members.

**Australia's Humanitarian Policy:
Making a difference for people in crisis**
ISBN 978-1-74322-634-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-1-74322-653-3 (Online)

Creative Commons

With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence. The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au>), as is the full legal code for the CC BY 3.0 AU licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode>).

The document should be attributed as:

Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT,
**Australia's Humanitarian Policy:
Making a difference for people in crisis**

Contact

Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade,
RG Casey Building,
John McEwen Crescent,
Barton ACT 0221 Australia

+61 2 6261 1111 (Phone)

Published October 2024

Cover Images Credit:

Clockwise from top left: UN Women;
Turkish Red Crescent; DFAT; UNICEF

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	2
Ministerial Forewords	4
Executive Summary	6
Strategic Overview	8
Chapter 1: A changing humanitarian landscape	9
Chapter 2: Australia’s humanitarian action	11
Goal	12
Guiding principles	12
Priorities	12
Embedding conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis resilience	13
Priority 1: Build readiness and preparedness	13
Priority 2: Respond to crises and disasters effectively	15
Priority 3: Reinforce the international humanitarian system and champion reform	18
Chapter 3: Our approach	20
Working in partnership	21
Focused on protection	22
Inclusive and equitable	22
Supporting local leadership and decision-making	23
Building skills and expertise	24
Chapter 4: Australia’s commitment to accountability	25
Performance and risk	26
Assessment and reporting	26
Glossary	28
References	30

Ministerial Foreword



Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Australian Government is committed to humanitarian action which saves lives, alleviates human suffering and builds resilient communities.

Helping others in crisis reflects Australian values, and helps achieve our national interest in a peaceful, stable and prosperous world for all, where sovereignty is respected and civilians are protected.

This Humanitarian Policy outlines the role Australia will play at a time when need is outstripping the world's capacity to respond.

The climate is changing faster than our combined efforts to stop it.

More people are displaced from their homes.

There is more conflict than any time since World War Two. These conflicts are becoming more complex and difficult to resolve, with devastating consequences for civilians.

Respect for international humanitarian law is severely undermined, with consequences for current and future conflicts.

Australia will provide effective, principled and accountable humanitarian action, that protects civilians, as well as the humanitarian personnel that provide relief. We will deliver humanitarian assistance that addresses the human rights of those in the most vulnerable situations.

The Policy maintains Australia's particular focus on the Indo-Pacific, where we can make the greatest impact, drawing on our strengths and our deep relationships. Australia offers genuine partnerships, based on respect, listening and learning from each other. Where humanitarian need exceeds a partner country's ability to manage alone, Australia will be there to help, just as others have done for us.

When we all play our part as a global community, humanitarian assistance makes a meaningful difference. We seek to make a contribution beyond our region to support humanitarian responses where need is the most acute, including in the Middle East and Africa.

This Policy is not just about saving lives and meeting humanitarian needs. It is also about promoting the peace, stability and prosperity that we want for Australia, our region and the world.

Ministerial Foreword

Australia has a proud history of humanitarian action in our region. It's in our values: when our friends and neighbours need help, we respond—just as they have consistently helped Australia in our own time of need.

We build our relationships in times of peace and stability, and forge even stronger bonds in times of disaster.

As outlined in Australia's International Development Policy, partnerships are critical to this approach, with a focus on listening, equality and respect for each other.

We are there for the long haul, helping partners to build preparedness and resilience to disasters so they are better equipped to tackle the challenges of the future.

We do this in support of regional architecture, recognising the deep expertise and experience that exists in a region too regularly exposed to disaster risks.

We are steadfast in our objective to limit human suffering in crises, including by upholding and championing international humanitarian law.

And we are committed to not leaving anyone behind, including women, children, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people. We know that a disaster affects vulnerable communities to a much greater degree, so protection of those communities must inform how we respond to crises.

We will ensure accountability to the partners and communities we seek to assist, and to the Australian people.

In keeping with our partnership approach, we consulted and listened to stakeholders to inform this Policy. We thank those who engaged in this process.

We recognise that Australia's humanitarian action is a whole-of-country endeavour — we will work together to build a region that is more prepared to tackle disasters.



The Hon Pat Conroy MP

Minister for International
Development and the Pacific



The Women's Resilience to Disasters program elevates women's voices and agency in disaster and disaster risk reduction. Credit: UN Women

Executive Summary

The Australian Government is committed to humanitarian action which saves lives, alleviates suffering and builds resilience. The world is changing, and the future we face globally is one of protracted conflict and more frequent and intense disasters. Calls for compliance with international humanitarian law are not being heard. But our commitment to people in crisis is unwavering.

This Humanitarian Policy outlines how Australia will harness its resources and expertise to navigate the challenges ahead — to better prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises, now and into the future. It also highlights the importance of directing our efforts at the root causes of humanitarian need. We should collectively aim for a world where preparedness and early action reduces the impact of crises.

Australia will focus on 3 priorities. We will build **readiness and preparedness**, anticipating shocks before they occur and working with our partners to lessen their impact. We will **respond** to crises and disasters, delivering support that meets the needs of crisis-affected populations and protects the most vulnerable, both immediately and over the longer term. We will **reinforce** the international humanitarian system, working to take practical and actionable steps to strengthen adherence to international humanitarian law and leading reform efforts where needed to ensure greater effectiveness. To support delivery of these priorities, conflict prevention, peace building and crisis resilience will be embedded into Australia's foreign policy, including development programming.

We will continue Australia's proud legacy of humanitarian leadership in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. But we also recognise the need to elevate our efforts if we are to meet the challenges of the future, drawing on our strengths and driving change where we can make the biggest difference. We will:

- increase our focus on **preparedness and prepositioning**;
- strengthen our support for **sexual and reproductive health services** and **addressing gender-based violence**;
- strive to improve **the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the humanitarian system**;
- elevate our **advocacy on international humanitarian law**;
- champion **diversity, inclusion and participation**; and
- harness **innovation, science and technology** to better plan and adapt.

The need for effective, principled, and accountable humanitarian action is more crucial than ever. Working in partnership and supporting local leadership, this Humanitarian Policy commits Australia to deliver our priorities **responsibly, effectively, inclusively, and respectfully** — with the communities we seek to protect and assist at the centre of our endeavours.

Strategic Overview



GOAL

To save lives, alleviate suffering and build resilience, with a focus on upholding human rights and human dignity

PRIORITIES

Embed conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis resilience into foreign policy and development programs

Build readiness and preparedness

Respond to crises and disasters effectively

Reinforce the international humanitarian system and champion reform

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Advocates for the internationally agreed humanitarian principles

Advances adherence to international humanitarian law

Affirms states' primary responsibility for responses

Abides by our commitment to 'do no harm'

Addresses inequality and discrimination and promotes inclusion

Accountable to the Australian people and the partners and communities we seek to assist

APPROACHES

Working in partnership in Australia and overseas

Focused on protection to reduce the risk of harm

Inclusive and equitable so no one is left behind

Supports local leadership and decision-making for greater impact

Build skills and expertise by investing in people and systems

KEY FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Increased focus on **preparedness, early warning systems, prepositioning and anticipatory action**

Stronger support for **sexual and reproductive health services and addressing gender-based violence**

Improving the **efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability** of the humanitarian system

Elevating advocacy on **international humanitarian law**

Championing **diversity, inclusion and participation, particularly disability equity and rights**

Harnessing **innovation, science and technology** to better plan for and adapt to future crises



Australia helped fund a new solar water distillation unit in Kiribati following a drought emergency in 2022, providing clean water to the local community. Credit: ChildFund Kiribati

Chapter 1

A changing humanitarian landscape

Across the world, humanitarian need is increasing. An ever-growing number of factors, such as climate change, economic uncertainty, health emergencies and conflict are both driving humanitarian need and making the conditions to respond more complex. The gap between acute need and global response capacity continues to widen, and those who are in the most vulnerable situations suffer the most. Humanitarian action supports the Sustainable Development Goals by addressing factors that prevent their achievement, protecting and rebuilding hard-won development gains. Yet crises are undermining growth, reversing these gains, increasing poverty and inequality, and contributing to global and regional instability.

The challenges we are facing are complex and interconnected:



At times of crisis, humanitarian action is essential to saving lives and alleviating suffering, protecting those in the most vulnerable situations and safeguarding and advancing human rights – even in the world’s most dire situations.



Australia providing humanitarian relief supplies for communities displaced by the eruption of Mt Ulawun volcano in Papua New Guinea. Credit: DFAT

Chapter 2

Australia's humanitarian action

Australia has a proud history of humanitarian action. Our region — the Indo-Pacific — is where we have the most experience, where we have our strongest and deepest partnerships, and where our efforts make the biggest difference. We will continue to prioritise this region in our delivery of humanitarian assistance. But we recognise that in an interconnected world, events occurring in other regions can impact our own. We will work globally, addressing humanitarian needs where they are most acute and we can make a tangible difference. When we work as a global community, humanitarian assistance makes a meaningful difference to promoting global peace, stability and prosperity.

Goal

Australia’s goal for humanitarian action is to save lives, alleviate suffering and build resilience, with a focus on upholding human rights and human dignity.

Guiding principles

Six guiding principles underpin this Policy. These reflect international standards that we will meet across all our humanitarian work. The Policy:

- **advocates** for the internationally agreed humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence
- **advances** adherence to international law, including international humanitarian law, international refugee law and international human rights law
- **affirms** that affected states have the primary responsibility and right to respond to the needs of populations within their borders in times of crisis; Australia’s role is to work with partners to help meet critical needs recognising that in some cases this may be when states are unable or unwilling to do so
- **abides** by our commitment to ‘do no harm’, and ensure our assistance does not lead to unintended consequences, create new risks or exacerbate existing risks
- **addresses** inequality and discrimination and promotes inclusion
- is **accountable** to the Australian people, and the partners and communities we seek to assist.

Priorities

Australia’s humanitarian action has 3 priorities:

1. **Build readiness and preparedness** to support governments and communities to lessen the impact of crises and enable faster and more effective humanitarian responses.
2. **Respond to crises and disasters effectively** and promote humanitarian action that meets the needs of crisis-affected populations and protects the most vulnerable.
3. **Reinforce the international humanitarian system and champion reform** to push back against growing disregard for international humanitarian law. We will also advocate internationally for ways that better meet the needs of affected populations, while also promoting our values and strategic interests.



Embedding conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis resilience

Fiji Red Cross Society relief teams providing support to communities affected by Cyclone Yasa in 2020. Credit: Fiji Red Cross Society

Australia works towards a world focused on addressing the root causes of humanitarian need, where humanitarian assistance is needed less often. The causes of crises such as conflict, famine and climate change cannot be prevented or resolved by humanitarian assistance. A comprehensive and sustained approach is required to address the key drivers of crises — using all the tools available to us across development, foreign policy and humanitarian action.

Through *Australia's International Development Policy*, we will draw on our investments in social protection, climate and environment, health and nutrition, food systems, education and governance. Australia's international development efforts tackle poverty and help communities and countries build resilience to crises. Conflict and fragility analysis forms part of our development planning and will be embedded where appropriate.

In addition, Australia undertakes a range of foreign policy to work towards peace, security and equality, thereby addressing the root causes of crises. These include peacebuilding, global arms control and human rights. For example, in 2025, we will join the UN Peacebuilding Commission to work with other states to build peace in conflict-affected countries. We will continue our long history of supporting peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Our efforts to promote practical disarmament action, strengthen the global non-proliferation architecture, and enhance arms control outcomes, are also long and distinguished. We will continue to engage constructively with other countries, international organisations, and civil society to achieve these goals.

Priority 1: Build readiness and preparedness

Being better prepared for disasters and crises saves lives, minimises damage and reduces costs. Australia's investment in preparedness in our region has supported local leadership and safer communities, and reduced demand for assistance. When we do respond, our support is more effective and efficient.

Australia is committed to doing more to build readiness and preparedness. We will increase our support for innovative technology to aid prediction and planning (see *Box 1*) and strengthen our anticipatory action efforts to limit disaster impacts (for example, funding ways to protect crops from floods). To enable early and effective response, we will deliver a new initiative to pre-position humanitarian supplies, so local communities can distribute these supplies in addition to locally sourced goods and services (see *Case study 1*).

Climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.²

Anticipatory action means acting ahead of predicted hazards to prevent or reduce humanitarian impacts. It can return up to a sevenfold saving in costs compared with responding after a disaster.³

Box 1

Harnessing innovation, science and technology

Innovation, science and technology can be used to better predict, target and respond to humanitarian crises, saving lives and money. We will make better use of advanced weather forecasting to predict and plan for disasters and we will use data to inform decision making. Data can help better identify people most in need of assistance and determine the type of support they need. Drones can support needs assessments and monitoring of responses. These advances help us to be more proactive and less reactive.

Case Study 1

Storing supplies before a disaster strikes

Storing humanitarian supplies closer to anticipated need in advance means countries can lead their own response and distribute relief supplies soon after a disaster strikes, without having to rely on international assistance. Australia — together with partners — has established the Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Program. The program will improve the capacity of Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste to prepare for and respond to disasters by refurbishing or building new warehouses that will store humanitarian relief supplies in key locations.

Preparedness activities are most effective when they engage local communities, who best understand their own needs and context.

We work with partner governments across the Indo-Pacific to increase their disaster risk management and preparedness capabilities, so they are better equipped to lead their own responses when disasters strike. Preparedness activities are most effective when they engage local communities, who best understand their own needs and context, and when they incorporate the views of diverse groups such as women, children, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people. We will seek to draw on traditional knowledge, sciences and practices, and build on the strengths of groups including First Nations (see Box 2) and Indigenous Peoples.

How we deliver on Priority 1

Actions under way:

- working with **governments, regional bodies, non-government organisations and local communities** to strengthen disaster preparedness
- 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
- investing in **climate adaption** and **disaster resilience**

Future directions:

- elevating **conflict prevention, peacebuilding, crisis resilience** in Australia's foreign policy
- investing further in **early warning systems and anticipatory action** initiatives
- harnessing **innovation, science and technology** to better forecast and plan for disasters
- 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

Box 2

Embedding First Nations perspectives

First Nations peoples have a deep connection to, and understanding of, the natural environment and weather patterns – knowledge that has been passed down over generations. They have cared for Country and communities for millennia, including during natural hazards such as droughts, floods and bushfires. We recognise that First Nations peoples have much to contribute to disaster planning and preparation, both in Australia and overseas. We will work in partnership with First Nations communities to inform areas of our humanitarian action overseas. This will necessarily take time and involve new ways of working to foster genuine connections, to promote shared growth and understanding.



The Australian Humanitarian Logistics Capability warehouse in Brisbane provides stores supplies which are transported to communities affected by crisis. Credit: Reginald Ramos/Humanitarian Logistics Capability

Priority 2: Respond to crises and disasters effectively

Australia is a fast, reliable and principled humanitarian responder, ready to deploy our own capabilities and work with others when called upon. Many partner governments in our region are already self-reliant in disaster response or working towards this, and we will continue to support their leadership. We work closely with partners, drawing on our specialist capabilities. These include logistics and technical expertise from across government, civil society and the private sector. In keeping with our commitment to ‘do no harm’, we work to make our assistance environmentally responsible — for example by reducing packaging and sourcing items locally where possible.

In protracted crises, where people experience prolonged need and are often displaced, Australia seeks to address needs over the longer-term. We do this through multiyear funding to our partners which enables longer term planning and support. We use our international advocacy to seek solutions to crises and conflict, including through the multilateral system. We will continue to support and advocate for consideration of recovery during response activities, providing links to longer-term rebuilding and adaptation efforts to enhance preparedness for future crises. We will look for ways to better join humanitarian programs to broader development efforts so that people in protracted crises can access education and support services and improve livelihoods.

Australia is committed to addressing the shared global challenge of displacement, ensuring protection and humanitarian needs are met for displaced persons, and finding durable solutions for refugees. Durable solutions are sustainable outcomes that enable refugees to live in safety and rebuild their lives. We support the Global Compact on Refugees — the international framework to improve global responses — and provide practical support to refugees and host communities (for example, see *Case study 2*).

A person in Asia and the Pacific is 6 times more likely to be affected by a disaster than someone living outside the region.⁴

At the end of 2023, more than 117 million people remained forcibly displaced from their homes. This included people fleeing persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations.⁵

Case Study 2

Assisting Rohingya refugees and their host communities

Approximately 700,000 Rohingya people fled across the border to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh following violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State in August 2017. Cox's Bazar is the world's largest refugee camp, with over 1 million people.⁶ Most of these refugees remain dependent on humanitarian support, with no legal status or right to work. Australia is one of the largest donors providing life-saving assistance to people in need, including Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh. Our support is flexible and committed over several years, enabling our partners to adapt and respond effectively as needs evolve. It includes food, water and shelter, as well as essential education and sexual and reproductive health services. We support people with disability in the camps through 'accessibility audits' to help ensure sites are disability-inclusive. We also support the appointment of people with disability as community leaders to help ensure they are meaningfully included in decisions that affect their communities.

Almost two thirds (60 per cent) of preventable maternal deaths in the world take place in settings of conflict, displacement and disasters.⁷

In February 2024, 302.2 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, an increase of 28.2 million over the previous 2 years.⁸

As crises become more frequent and severe and funding gaps persist, it remains crucial that our funding has the greatest impact possible. Australia will increase our funding flexibility so that our partners can quickly adapt their assistance according to need and changing circumstances. We will increase our support for pooled funds, which enable multiple donors to contribute to a single fund that can quickly and flexibly respond to needs on the ground and enable the delivery of more timely and effective assistance.

Crises and disasters are costly. Australia will continue to explore innovative financing approaches to uncover new sources of funding to address humanitarian needs. Harnessing the capital and expertise of the private sector, international financial institutions and multilateral development banks is key if we are to address current funding gaps in the international system. These organisations can also offer new approaches to crisis prevention, preparation and response and promote strengthened community resilience through access to economic resources and opportunities.

Our humanitarian response activities will focus on those most at risk of harm. Crises pose additional risks to the safety, health and wellbeing of women, children, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people. For example, during and after crises, these groups experience greater rates of sexual and gender-based violence than at other times. Access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion, can be limited when they are needed the most, creating additional vulnerabilities. We will increase our support for sexual and reproductive health services and addressing gender-based violence (see Box 3).

Box 3

Supporting gender equality

Australia is concerned that despite prohibitions under international law, sexual and gender-based violence is being used during armed conflict to assert power and control over women and girls, and as a weapon of war. Australia will increase our engagement and leadership to address these serious threats to women's safety and opportunity. We recognise that when people of diverse genders are equally engaged in decision-making, crisis response is more effective and peace negotiations are more likely to succeed. Australia will continue to invest in women's participation in peace processes through the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda.



Members of the Taipalong youth club in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, which is supported by the Australian Humanitarian Partnership. Credit: AHP Bangladesh

How we deliver on Priority 2

Actions under way:

- 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
- harnessing **capability from across the Australian Government** to respond to humanitarian emergencies, providing a range of expertise, capabilities and resources
- support for **efficient and effective humanitarian funding models** through multi-year flexible contributions during protracted crises and using pooled funds where appropriate
- **strengthening global and regional coordination and collaboration**, including through mechanisms that support local leadership and decision-making
- better integrating **disability equity and rights** and the needs of **LGBTQIA+ people** in humanitarian assistance.

Future directions:

- ensuring our response and recovery efforts are **environmentally responsible** by supporting our partners to adopt sustainable and resilient practices when delivering humanitarian support
- build in **flexible and shock responsive programming** to enable quick reallocation of resources and scale up
- supporting more **durable solutions** for forced displacement to enable refugees to live in safety and rebuild their lives, while also meeting their ongoing protection and humanitarian needs
- building our support for **sexual and reproductive health services** and **prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence** in humanitarian response

“No matter the circumstances that give rise to war, limiting its human cost is a legal obligation that cannot be swept aside.”¹⁰

Mirjana Spoljaric, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, 2022

Priority 3: Reinforce the international humanitarian system and champion reform

The international humanitarian system is essential for the safe and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. But the system is under immense strain. The gap between acute humanitarian need and global response capacity continues to widen, with approximately 300 million globally in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.⁹ Armed conflict continues to increase and is becoming more complex and difficult to resolve, with devastating consequences for civilians. Getting emergency assistance to people affected by crises is increasingly difficult.

International humanitarian law is the foundation for alleviating human suffering in wars. It limits the effects of armed conflict and regulates the conduct of hostilities. It provides for the protection of civilians, including the protection and respect of humanitarian personnel who assist and protect the victims of armed conflict (see *Box 4*), and notably provide the food, water and medical care that civilians in conflict zones need to survive. Australia has a long history of promoting compliance with international humanitarian law. We were one of the first signatories to the Geneva Conventions and have ratified all 3 Additional Protocols. Globally, respect for international humanitarian law is severely undermined, with consequences for current and future conflicts. Calls for compliance with international humanitarian law are not being heard.

Box 4

Protecting humanitarian personnel

2023 was the deadliest year on record for humanitarian personnel, with more than 280 killed, and 2024 is on track to be even worse.¹¹ This trend signifies that the rules and norms that are needed for the protection of humanitarian personnel are at risk, with consequences for current and future conflicts. Calls for compliance with international humanitarian law are not being heard. Local humanitarian workers, who are crucial for the final delivery of assistance, represent the majority of those kidnapped, injured and killed.

Australia is leading efforts to galvanise international commitment to uphold international humanitarian law for the protection of humanitarian personnel. In September 2024, Australia established a Ministerial Group to pursue a new Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel. The Declaration will demonstrate the unity of the international community's commitment to protect humanitarian personnel and to channel that commitment into action in all current and future conflicts. The Declaration will support the United Nations Secretary-General in his endeavours to improve the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, including in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2730. Australia will work with other countries, the UN, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, non-government organisations and others to advance this effort.

Australia will use our engagement in the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, UN Peacebuilding Commission, the UN Human Rights Council and other multilateral forums to reinforce the importance of international humanitarian law to saving lives and alleviating suffering in armed conflict.

The multilateral system also provides Australia with a platform to share challenges and achievements and champion reforms to make the humanitarian system work better. Australia is regarded as a principled and experienced humanitarian leader focused on continuous improvement. We will amplify voices from the Indo-Pacific to highlight disaster risks faced in the region and the benefits of preparedness and building resilience. We will emphasise the role Australia plays in refugee protection and resettlement and our readiness to work with others to find solutions to the global displacement crisis.

We will also use our multilateral engagement to advocate for reforms that will help the humanitarian system adapt and become more effective into the future. We will progress those 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. We will advocate for full inclusion and participation of the most marginalised people in humanitarian emergencies, including people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people.

How we deliver on Priority 3

Actions under way:

- delivering on our commitment as a global leader in **international refugee resettlement efforts**, to influence approaches to protecting and resettling refugees with a particular focus on the needs of women and children
- promoting the participation of women in **peace processes** and ensuring more attention is paid to **protection issues**, including sexual violence in conflict
- **leveraging our strategic partnership agreements** with international organisations to drive our priority reform areas and improve the performance of the humanitarian system.

Future directions:

- elevating our advocacy for adherence to **international law, including international humanitarian law, international refugee law and international human rights law**
- working with international partners to **galvanise international commitment to uphold international humanitarian law**, pursuing a new Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel
- 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
- elevating our efforts to address the root causes of crises by focusing on **peacebuilding and conflict prevention**, serving on the UN Peacebuilding Commission for a 2 year term in 2025–26
- elevating our advocacy for **disability equity and rights** in humanitarian assistance
- advocating with our humanitarian partners to include an examination of the **needs of LGBTQIA+ people and communities** in humanitarian investments
- strengthening coalitions with other donors, interested states and partners to **champion reform** of the international humanitarian system.

International humanitarian law protects people who are not, or who are no longer, participating in hostilities, and restricts the means and methods of warfare.



Action Aid's Women I Tok Tok Tugeta Sunshine Group supports women with disability during disasters in Vanuatu.
Credit: Australian Humanitarian Partnership

Chapter 3

Our approach

Australia's humanitarian assistance is guided by a commitment to listening, respect and learning. We believe the voices, needs, experiences and aspirations of people affected by crises should be at the centre of everything we do, and we are strongly committed to leaving no one behind. Five approaches underpin the way we work:

- working in partnership
- focused on protection
- inclusive and equitable
- supporting local leadership and decision-making
- building skills and expertise.

We approach our relationships with partner governments with respect for their leadership and inherent capability.

Working in partnership

Australia recognises that effective humanitarian action can only be achieved in partnership with others. We adopt a whole-of-nation approach, working across government agencies and in partnership with non-government organisations. Through our partnerships we will continue to drive better humanitarian action.

In the Indo-Pacific, we work as a member of the existing disaster response architecture (see Box 5) and we approach our relationships with partner governments with respect for their leadership and inherent capability. We collaborate with international, national and regional organisations, including non-government organisations, and through mechanisms such as the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the United States) and FRANZ (France, Australia and New Zealand) to enhance efficiency and coordination. Our goal is to ensure coordination with other countries providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

We have enduring partnerships with Australian non-government organisations, which are a cornerstone of humanitarian assistance in the Indo-Pacific region and also make important contributions globally. UN agencies and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are critical to our support in high-risk settings, as they have the footprint, flexibility, resources and access to deliver where others cannot. Our partnerships with international organisations allow Australia to pool our contributions with other donors to maximise impact. They are also critical in upholding humanitarian principles and norms and promoting international coordination and system reform.

We recognise the value of the private sector in building disaster resilience and assisting recovery. We also acknowledge the vital role that host communities, development practitioners and peace actors play during protracted humanitarian crises.

Box 5

Working together in our region

In the Indo-Pacific, Australia shares a commitment with its neighbours to the peace, stability and prosperity of the region. We strongly support the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Community (formerly South Pacific Commission, and still often referred to as SPC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and work closely with each of these institutions to strengthen our collective resilience and enhance our response to emerging regional challenges.

The Pacific Islands Forum has adopted the Boe Declaration on Regional Security which outlines cooperation on all dimensions of security, including human security and humanitarian assistance. The Pacific Community is the principal scientific and technical organisation of the Pacific region, helping to realise sustainable development goals and aspirations. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and Australia advances a range of shared priorities, including in disaster management and humanitarian assistance. Australia was a founding supporter to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management, and we continue to support the Centre to build capacity and respond to crises in the region. These arrangements pave the way for more effective humanitarian preparedness and response — when disaster strikes in our region, the foundation for working together is already in place.

Focused on protection

A protection approach places safety and human rights at the heart of humanitarian work. “Protection” refers to all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of individuals in accordance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. The upheaval associated with crises — violent or otherwise — gives rise to many threats to safety and wellbeing as people are forced from their homes and lose their livelihoods. Additional harm can occur when people lose access to health services, food and water, and when rights to education, decent work and protection under the law are removed. If humanitarian assistance is delivered without a full understanding of the range of protection needs and risks, it can have a limited or even detrimental effect.

Displaced people, women, children, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people are particularly at risk of harm in times of crisis, and are more likely to experience violence and exploitation than other groups. The personnel who provide humanitarian assistance require protection, particularly in situations of armed conflict. Civilians can only be protected if the humanitarian personnel providing assistance are protected.

Australia emphasises protection in all our humanitarian investments. We expect our partners to deliver activities which consider risks and avoid harm. We also advocate for improved global capacity for humanitarian protection to help ensure a coordinated and sustained focus on the rights and safety of crisis-affected people.

Australia believes that the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse groups in humanitarian decision-making saves lives and accelerates recovery.

Inclusive and equitable

Inclusion, equity and respect for universal human rights are essential for resilient and peaceful societies. Crises can exacerbate power imbalances, with marginalised groups experiencing greater barriers to accessing assistance. When people belong to several marginalised groups, the impacts are often greater. Australia believes that the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse groups in humanitarian decision-making saves lives and accelerates recovery.

- **Gender inequality** can worsen during crises and disasters, and impacts are not gender neutral. Women and girls often experience increased vulnerability and risks and have greater difficulty accessing resources and services. There are also higher rates of violence against women and girls during disasters and conflict than at other times. Increasing women’s participation in disaster preparedness, response and peace processes can help to ensure women and girls have access to the support, services and protections they need. Australia will prioritise and promote gender equality across all our humanitarian action and response efforts.
- **Children** are disproportionately affected by crises and disasters. They can miss critical learning at school and are at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse. This includes child, early and forced marriage and abduction, and recruitment to armed groups. Australia is committed to protecting the rights of children during conflict. We have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, an international commitment to reduce the likelihood that students, teachers and schools are targeted during armed conflict.
- **People with disability** are at significant risk of being left behind in periods of crisis. They experience a mortality rate that is 2 to 4 times higher than people without disability.¹² Crises also amplify existing environmental, physical and social barriers, and introduce new obstacles. Australia will ensure that the needs of people with disability are integrated across our humanitarian and disaster risk reduction efforts.
- **LGBTQIA+ communities** experience intensified stigma, harassment and violence in the wake of crises. Their needs for shelter, sanitation and health services may not be adequately addressed, and they can be actively excluded from accessing services if humanitarian responses do not recognise their individual or family circumstances. Australia recognises these needs and the importance of working with partners to sensitively address the needs of these communities.

Australia has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, an international commitment to reduce the likelihood that students, teachers and schools are targeted during armed conflict.

Supporting local leadership and decision-making

Local communities and leaders are best placed to identify challenges and appropriate solutions to humanitarian crises. They are also the first responders in a crisis. Australia will continue to support local leadership and decision-making wherever possible and appropriate. In situations of conflict and fragility, we work through our partners, supporting them to invest in the capability and capacity of local actors. We also recognise the value of traditional and Indigenous knowledge, sciences and practices in crisis preparation and response. Support for local leadership and decision-making — including through partnerships with governments and civil society — can improve the impact of development and humanitarian projects and build local capacity and resilience to future crises (see *Case study 3*). It can also benefit communities, creating local jobs and delivering economic benefits.

Humanitarian assistance should be “as local as possible, as international as necessary”¹³

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 2016

Supporting local leadership in the Philippines

Australia works closely with the Philippines to support its local leadership capacity and resilience to disasters, underpinned by our Strategic Partnership. Our enduring partnership has focused on long-term governance strengthening to ensure effective and efficient humanitarian systems and processes. In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, claiming the lives of more than 8,000 people and affecting more than 14 million. Eight years later in December 2021, a typhoon of similar intensity passed through the country and claimed around 400 lives — 5 per cent of the lives lost in 2013. Strong local governance, disaster preparedness and response systems and community resilience have been critical over this time period.



Australian officials visiting Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Credit: WFP

Building skills and expertise

Australia must respond quickly to assistance requests from countries affected by humanitarian crises. We will maintain and increase our deployable capabilities by investing in the people and systems that enable us to provide humanitarian assistance in real time, particularly in our region.

We will achieve this by:

- continuing to participate in international, regional and domestic response exercises and the systems that support our operational readiness
- partnering with experts to maximise opportunities for joint approaches to crisis prevention and response
- deepening our expertise and increasing our capability to prepare for, respond to and manage crisis situations
- investing in the skills and knowledge of our Australian and locally engaged staff, both in Australia and overseas, to deliver humanitarian assistance to the highest standards — including staff in our disaster assistance response and Australian medical assistance teams
- building our capability and specialist knowledge to ensure we integrate gender equality and disability and social inclusion into our deployments, helping us meet our aims of doing no harm and leaving no-one behind
- strengthening our conflict prevention and peacebuilding approaches, to better address the root causes of crises.



Supported by Australia, UNICEF provides winter kits to help families in Pakistan affected by the devastating floods of 2022 through the cold.
Credit: UNICEF

Chapter 4

Australia's commitment to accountability

Our approach to accountability manages risk, emphasises performance and continuously improves the quality of our humanitarian work.

Performance and risk

Humanitarian crises are high-risk settings and challenging operating environments. In these contexts, good program management involves strong risk management and adherence to the principle of ‘do no harm’. We anticipate and mitigate risk through early assessments, regular monitoring, building strong delivery systems, embracing flexible and adaptive programming, and encouraging innovation. We draw on the best available real-time information during crises to inform and continuously adapt our strategies and responses.

We will adhere to Australian Government standards, including mandatory compliance and reporting standards, and have zero tolerance for inaction when an incident occurs. The risk management policies of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) guide our humanitarian support, including the policies on fraud; anti-corruption; environmental and social safeguards; child protection; preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; and counter-terrorism financing risk.

We draw on the best available real-time information during crises to inform and continuously adapt our strategies and responses.

Assessment and reporting

We will report progress against each of this 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. We will also 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.

We are committed to generating and sharing learning with all our partners about what is working and what could be improved. This includes sharing with partner governments, local delivery partners, regional and multilateral partners, Australian Government partners and non-government organisations.



Australia supports displaced Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh to access education and social activities through Child Learning Centres. Credit: AHP Bangladesh

Glossary

These definitions are provided only for the purpose of the Policy

Term	Definition
anticipatory action	A set of actions taken to prevent or mitigate potential disaster impacts before a shock or before acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out in anticipation of a hazard impact and based on a prediction of how the event will unfold. ¹⁴
development assistance	Support to improve the economic prosperity and welfare of countries.
disaster risk reduction	Actions aimed at preventing new, and reducing existing, disaster risks. Disaster risk reduction contributes to strengthening resilience and achieving risk-informed sustainable development.
disasters	Serious disruptions to the functioning of a community that exceed its capacity to cope using its own resources.
‘do no harm’	A principle for humanitarian actors which requires them to prevent and alleviate any unintended adverse consequences of their actions on affected populations.
durable solutions	An outcome that enables refugees and other displaced persons to live in safety and rebuild their lives. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees traditionally pursues 3 categories of durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation into the country of origin, local integration into the host country and resettlement to a safe third country.
early warning and early action	A range of activities responding to a hazard forecast, including evacuation, provision of cash advances and prepositioning of resources and supplies.
geophysical hazard	Hazards brought about by tectonic activity below the Earth’s surface. They include earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. For most geophysical disasters, there is a degree of unpredictability that makes it hard to properly forecast the onset.
humanitarian action	Encompasses humanitarian assistance as well as advocacy and reform efforts intended to strengthen the humanitarian system and uphold international humanitarian law.
humanitarian assistance	Relief efforts intended to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for when such situations occur.

Term	Definition
humanitarian crises	A time of intense difficulty in which the health, safety or wellbeing of a community or population are affected.
humanitarian principles	<p>Four guiding conventions that underpin how humanitarian assistance is delivered:</p> <p>Humanity: human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable.</p> <p>Neutrality: no side will be favoured in armed conflicts or other disputes.</p> <p>Impartiality: aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination.</p> <p>Independence: humanitarian objectives must be autonomous from political, economic, military or other objectives.¹⁵</p>
humanitarian reform	Actions that enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action by pursuing improvements such as greater predictability, flexibility, accountability and partnership.
internally displaced people	People forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence, persecution or disasters, but remaining within the borders of their own country.
natural hazard	Environmental phenomena that have potential to impact societies and the human environment.
protection	Assuring the safety of people affected by crises from serious harm. Protection refers to all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of individuals in accordance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.
resilience	The capacity to prevent, manage and recover from impacts of disasters and crises.

References

- 1 International Monetary Fund, *Fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS)*. <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>
- 2 Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe declaration on regional security*, 2018. <https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf>
- 3 Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, *The Impact of Disasters on Agriculture and Food Security: Avoiding and reducing losses through investment in silience*, 2023, <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/7c48cdf4-6153-41df-b3ed-4db1d09a1b0f/content>
- 4 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *The Asia-Pacific riskscape: how do the changes in weather, climate and water impact our lives?* [blog], 23 2023. <https://www.unescap.org/blog/asia-pacific-riskscape-how-do-changes-weather-climate-and-water-impact-our-lives>
- 5 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global trends report 2023*, 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2023>
- 6 Inter Sector Coordination Group - Rohingya Refugee Response, Bangladesh 2024 Joint Response Plan <https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/JRP-2024.pdf>
- 7 S Zeid, F Bustreo, MT Barakat, P Maurer and K Gilmore, '*For every woman, every child, everywhere: a universal agenda for the health of women, children, and adolescents*', *The Lancet*, 2015, 385(9981):1919–1920, doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60766-8.
- 8 OCHA, *Global humanitarian overview 2024*, February update, 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-february-update-snapshot-29-february-2024>; OCHA, *Global humanitarian overview 2022*, 2022. <https://2022.gho.unocha.org/>
- 9 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global humanitarian overview 2024*, February update, 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-february-update-snapshot-29-february-2024>; OCHA, *Global humanitarian overview 2022*, 2022. <https://2022.gho.unocha.org/>
- 10 M Spoljaric (President of the International Committee of the Red Cross), *It's time to elevate the laws of war to a political priority*, [speech], 28 November 2022. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/international-humanitarian-law-in-divided-world>
- 11 Humanitarian Outcomes (2024). Aid Worker Security Report 2024. *Balancing advocacy and security in humanitarian action*. https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/AWSR_2024
- 12 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability Inclusive Humanitarian Action 2024*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/whs.html>
- 13 United Nations Press Release, 23 May 2016: *Secretary-General, at Round Table, Commits to Making Humanitarian Action 'Local as Possible, International as Necessary'* <https://press.un.org/en/2016/sgsm17778.doc.htm>
- 14 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World disasters report 2020: come heat or high water – tackling the humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis together*, 2020. https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/20201116_WorldDisasters_Full.pdf
- 15 OCHA, *OCHA on message: humanitarian principles*, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-humanitarian-principles-enar>

