

# SHE CAN LEAD

Young people in  
Australia share their  
views on women in  
politics and leadership.

---

Plan International Australia  
2017 survey

October 2017





## **INSIDE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5**

**KEY FINDINGS 8**

**WHAT GIRLS THINK ABOUT  
LEADERSHIP AND GENDER 10**

**GENDER INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA  
AND ABROAD: THE FACTS 20**

**WHY WE NEED TO ACT NOW 22**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE 23**

---



## FOREWORD

### Caitlin Figueiredo Plan International Australia Youth Ambassador

As children, we are asked a common question, 'What do we want to be when we grow up?'

When my teacher first asked me this question, I told her it was my dream to be Prime Minister of Australia. Thinking that my dream would be met with encouragement and admiration, I felt discouraged when told to sit down and choose a dream more appropriate to my gender. This was the first time I was confronted with the reality that some of my dreams would be harder to follow or even out of reach because I was born a girl.

However, my experience is not unique. Millions of girls around the world live in fear of discrimination, stigmatisation and violence for daring to dream. Many are forced to abandon their dreams to fulfil a pre-ordained 'destiny' society has bestowed upon them by virtue of their gender. Whether that's being forced into early marriage, or being held back by sexism, it's a pattern that repeats in every city, in every country of the world.

Looking back, I wish I could tell my younger self that times have changed, that in 2017, young girls in Australia are encouraged to pursue their dreams and have the ability to turn their dreams into a reality. But unfortunately, almost two decades on, our country is still facing a dream gap.

The *She Can Lead* report will open your eyes to the dream crisis facing young women and girls in our country. It is a call to action, for our State and Federal Members to recognise the discrimination and prejudices that continue to hold girls back. I hope, that by reading this report, you will agree that it's time to close the 'dream gap' between what girls are capable of and what girls are allowed to be.

The time for action is now. I call on all leaders, civil society and young people to recognise that our country is facing an emergency when it comes to gender and leadership inequality. If we want to future proof our nation, we require innovative corporation and partnerships to ensure no girl is left behind.

Together, you can help us to ignite girls' belief in their own potential so the next time a young girl says what she wants to be when she grows up, she is not met with barriers but only support. And maybe by closing the dream gap between what girls are capable of and what they are allowed to be, we will inspire our next future female Prime Minister.

**“WOMEN ACROSS HISTORY HAVE MADE INCREDIBLE LEADERS. OUR POTENTIAL SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED BY OUR GENDER.”**  
– Georgia, age 18, Plan International Australia youth activist

## THE UPSHOT

In 2016 Plan Australia and Our Watch found five out of six girls believed they, compared with boys, are not given the same chances in life to get ahead. And this is the reason that Australian girls, even 114 years after women got the vote in this country, think they shouldn't pursue their dreams—it's just not worth trying.

But no society can thrive if half its population can't achieve its potential. So we should be very worried if young women can't find an equal place in the country's leadership, because that will mean they do not find equality in the rest of life.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Australia, women hold less than a third of seats in parliament<sup>1</sup>. Countless businesses still have just one or two 'token' women on their boards<sup>2</sup>. The women that are represented, from politics to the boardroom, are paid less, talked over and scrutinised for everything from what they wear to whether or not they have children.

Girls are learning these harsh realities during the very years when they are forming their future aspirations. The result, this report finds, is shocking: half of young women in Australia believe their gender is the biggest factor holding them back from becoming leaders.

Plan International works with girls in countries as far away as Rwanda and as close as Timor-Leste, supporting girls to lead their way out of poverty, inequality and injustice. We know the transformative power that girls can have when they become leaders in their communities and their countries.

That's why we have commissioned this survey of young Australians, to gauge their beliefs and feelings about young women leading and participating in public life, particularly around gender inequality.

For transformative change to take place, gender equality must become a key social and political issue, and power holders must use their authority to challenge the deeply held attitudes that perpetuate misogyny, waste talent and impoverish all our lives.

Around the world, girls are too often held back from power. Some are denied the chance to go to high school, others are forced to marry as teenagers, and many are told that only boys are allowed to become CEOs or Prime Ministers.

But girls are also the ones breaking down these barriers, smashing gender stereotypes in their homes and communities, fuelling the global movement towards gender equality and proving that they can do anything. When we listen to these girls, we change the world.

That's where this report comes in. It's time to listen to what Australian young people have to say about leadership and public life. Do young women aspire to leadership? Do they even care about politics? And what obstacles do they feel are in the way of girls and young women leading?

This survey is unique in that it captures the views of girls as young as 10, who are rarely given a voice in public life, through to young women up to 25. The age range gives an insight into how, as girls get older, they see more inequality around them and experience it themselves, and this affects their ambitions.

Specifically, this report finds that girls want to lead, but they're too often lacking confidence in their abilities. They don't believe they'll have the same opportunities that boys do. They see a career in politics as being incompatible with being a mother. Day in and day out, they witness women leaders being treated unfairly in the media, or talked over in parliament, or judged for their looks rather than their abilities. It chips away at their confidence and they start to believe that because of their gender, they won't be able to achieve their dreams.

But by listening to these girls, we also find that change is possible. This report is a call to action to all those in power – in media, in business, in politics – to stand with girls and help create the change they want to see. When we do, we'll unlock the extraordinary potential of Australia's young women, and everyone will benefit.

1 [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The\\_gender\\_composition\\_of\\_the\\_45th\\_parliament](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament)  
2 <http://amp.smh.com.au/business/workplace-relations/11-asx-200-companies-have-zero-women-on-their-boards-20170924-gynuba.html>



Nyasha, Plan International Australia Youth Activist.



Plan International Australia Youth Activists, Sydney.

## GIRLS HAVE TOLD US WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE.

1. It's time to get ready for Australia's first Gender Equal Election, and demonstrate to girls that women in politics can be treated better.

Ahead of the 2018/19 federal election, political parties should **review their selection procedures** to encourage more women to stand for election, for example by enforcing 50/50 targets or pre-selecting women in winnable seats. At the same time, the federal government should introduce robust rules to **ban sexist reporting** and champion those who are already upholding higher standards, so that commentary doesn't focus disproportionately on politicians' fashion choices or family life.

2. We need to make sure no one is deterred from leadership just because they want to have a family.

All political parties should formally adopt a **gender equality strategy** as part of their party platform that recognises the specific needs and challenges for young women and girls. Parliament, and all employers, should **review and extend flexible working arrangements** for all parents, as well as supporting shared parental leave and childcare duties.

3. All those in power have a responsibility to nurture girls' leadership ambitions.

Parliamentarians and business leaders can offer **paid internships** to break down barriers, whilst state governments should **invest in leadership programmes** and introduce targets and incentives to **promote gender equality in schools**.

See page 23 for the full list of recommendations.

## ACHIEVING THE GLOBAL GOALS FOR GIRLS

The Sustainable Development Goals, which seek to change the course of history, commit every country to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.'

If we are to reach this target by 2030, we urgently need to step up the pace of change. The young women we spoke to in this research will be in their 60s and 70s by the time women around the world have equal representation in politics<sup>3</sup>. We need nothing short of a gender revolution.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Chungong, Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, has said that 'At this rate, it will take 50 years to reach 50-50 parity.'

## ABOUT THE SHE CAN LEAD SURVEY

Essential Research conducted a series of online surveys (hosted by Online Research Unit) for Plan International Australia from 24 July 2017 to 14 August 2017. This report covers the survey responses of 530 participants who were aged 18–25 and living in Australia. The Online Research Unit's online panel recruited these respondents.

The survey results were weighted for gender and location. The data were analysed using SPSS and Excel, and the open ended questions were analysed using a custom code frame developed by Essential Research.

Overall, the confidence level was set at 95 per cent (meaning there is a 95 per cent likelihood that the sample accurately reflects the attitudes of young women aged 18–25 across Australia). At this confidence level, for the sample size, the margin of error is 3–4 per cent.

Additional data has been collected from a separate cohort – a survey of 817 girls aged 10–14 years and 925 girls aged 15–17 years. The results from that survey were not weighted. This data was analysed in Plan International Australia's 2017 report, The Dream Gap: Australian girls' views on inequality.

For simplicity, data percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number (which may result in some percentage totals being 99 per cent or 101 per cent).

## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

Plan International is one of the world's oldest and largest child rights development agencies. We work in over 70 countries around the world to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice. Our flagship campaign, 'Because I am a Girl', is working to create a world that values girls, promotes their rights, and ends injustice.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Fewer young women than young men aspire to a leadership position in their profession or community. And girls' leadership aspirations diminish as they become older. More than two thirds of 15–17 year old girls aspire to be leaders, compared with only half of 22–25 year old young women.
- More than half of young women think it is harder for women to become politicians, and that female politicians are treated unfairly by male politicians and the media.
- Compared with young men, fewer young women care about politics and its impact on their life, or follow politics in Australia. Yet fewer than 10 per cent think men make better politicians than women.
- Nearly all young men and women believe boys and girls are treated differently, and only 57 per cent think politics is an equal space for women and men.
- Young women want more female leaders, and they think women are just as good as men at being leaders. But they are less optimistic than young men about their opportunity to become a leader.
- Many young women don't believe they have the qualities required of a leader. For example, most young women believe leaders must be hard-working, confident and ambitious, but far fewer described themselves as having those traits.
- Young women indicated their top three barriers to political leadership were (1) a lack of opportunities, (2) the desire to start a family, and (3) their gender. They agreed it would be easier for women to be leaders if they were treated fairly in the media or not judged on their looks over their abilities.
- More than half of young women think political parties should do more to increase the number of female politicians in their party and in cabinet. Yet less than half of young women support the idea of reserved seats for women in parliament; to increase the number of women aspiring to politics, they would prefer the media, their male colleagues and political parties treat female politicians more fairly.

## Young women in Australia are ambitious but held back

Young women want to lead. At least 95 per cent of girls aged 10-17 believe girls are just as good at being leaders as boys, and an overwhelming majority say it is important to them that more women become leaders.

Specifically, young women want to lead their way out of gender inequality, listing this as the number one change they want to see in the world for girls like them. They are also powerful agents of change; Plan International Australia's work with young activists has seen time and again that they can articulate solutions to gender inequality, build respect within their communities, and take action to improve the lives of girls and young women.

Yet, whilst girls have both the ability and passion to create change, worryingly there are a significant number of young women who don't feel they have every opportunity to become a leader. Three out of four girls age 10-14 believe they have every opportunity to lead, but by the age of 18-25 this drops to just 57 per cent. They see their gender as the biggest factor holding them back, with almost half of young women listing this as the top barrier to leadership.



Girl in her role as Justice of the Supreme Court of Uganda.

## Girls are clear on what needs to change

We asked girls aged 10–14 what need to change to improve their ability to become leaders. They flagged various changes that would enable them to know they can take leadership roles as adults, including:

*Being able to express your ideas in class without being interrupted.*

*Being able to speak about my opinion more openly.*

*For adults to listen and not interrupt when they think they know what I am saying but I have not finished or made my point. Adults mostly assume what is going to be next instead of letting others finish speaking.*

*For all women around the world to be brave and stand up to someone that tells you that you are not able to do something that you know you are able to do.*

Girls clearly think boys have a role to play in pushing such change. Among girls aged 15-17, 78 per cent felt it would be easier for girls to be leaders if they had more support from boys to get ahead. Yet, strikingly, twice as many young men as young women (26 per cent versus 13 per cent) consider women should focus on family life before political life.

*"I am a woman of colour wanting to be Prime Minister and have been told that such a goal is "unrealistic" for people like me. Furthermore, society questions the loyalty of women of colour to this country by asking 'where are you from?' This imposition of disadvantage on women, particularly women of colour and the resulting self-victimisation practiced by all women is something I would change if I was Prime Minister for one day ... Identity is not a source of disadvantage, but a source of pride<sup>4</sup>."*

- Nupur, age 18, winner of Plan International Australia's MP for a Day competition.



Nohelia, as President of the National Assembly, leads the plenary session

## Girls take over parliament

We must close the ‘dream gap’ between what girls aspire to do and what they are allowed to do. Empowerment alone is not enough; we need a political and social revolution that makes girls and their lives visible to governments and policy makers. That is, we need girls and young women to have a voice in places of power and influence, where they are rarely seen or heard.

When girls have a political voice, they can demand action to ensure all girls can learn, lead, decide and thrive. This vision has prompted an historic ‘takeover’ in October each year, coordinated by Plan International and the young activists we work with, when hundreds of girls from Peru to Japan step into the shoes of presidents, ministers and CEOs for a day. They raise their voices for justice and equality, demanding a fair world where boys and girls have equal opportunities.

In Australia, in 2017, young women will take the place of ministers and parliamentarians from across the political spectrum on 18 October, to ensure their voices are heard by politicians. This takeover is a symbol that by encouraging and enabling girls to pursue political, community and workplace leadership, we can take a huge step towards girls’ leadership being the ‘new normal’.

## WHAT GIRLS THINK ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND GENDER

Girls are growing up with a profound sense that the world is unequal for men and women. Our research with young women aged 18-25 finds that:

- 82 per cent of young women think more attention is placed on women’s looks than men’s looks.
- 75 per cent of young women think women do more housework than men, but only 62 per cent of young men agree.
- Fewer than 1 in 4 young women believe that men and women are treated equally on TV or in magazines.

This is the context in which girls are experiencing the world and forming their future aspirations.

## Gender inequality affects girls’ leadership ambitions

Young women want more female leaders, and they think women are just as good as men at being leaders, including top jobs such as Prime Minister and CEO. But they are far less optimistic than young men about their own opportunities to become a leader.

Views on leadership	Total who agree	Women aged 18–25	Men aged 18–25	Difference (percentage points)
It’s important to me that more women become leaders		69%	50%	19
I have every opportunity to become a leader		57%	74%	-17
Women are just as good at being leaders as men		89%	72%	17

Whether men or women are equal or better at the following roles—all respondents	Women are better	Men are better	They are equal
CEO	1%	13%	84%
Prime Minister	3%	14%	80%

Only one young woman (out of 267 surveyed) indicated an interest in a career in politics, compared with eight young men (out of 263). Similarly, fewer young women (49 per cent) than young men (60 per cent) aspire to a leadership position in their profession or community.

What’s more, girls’ leadership aspirations diminish as they become older: over two thirds of 15–17 year olds aspire to be leaders, compared with only half of 22–25 year olds. Plan International Australia’s 2017 report, *The Dream Gap: Australian girls’ views on inequality*, found that<sup>5</sup>:

*We keep telling girls that they can achieve anything they desire, but ... there is a ‘dream gap’ between what girls aspire to early in life, and what they believe is realistic for them as they become young adults. The inequality they perceive in adolescence weighs directly on their dreams. We can’t let this go on.*

Both young women and young men think women are better at traditional ‘women’s jobs’ such as childcare, secretarial work, nursing and stay-at-home parenting, and less capable than men at traditionally ‘male jobs’ such as construction worker, plumber, firefighter and pilot.

**“I’D LIKE TO SHOW THAT WOMEN ARE MORE THAN CAPABLE OF TAKING ON THE TOP JOB – AND TRY TO MAKE IT THAT TINY BIT EASIER FOR BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN TO JUMP INTO POLICY AND POLITICS...<sup>6</sup>”**

- Linda, age 22, winner of Plan International Australia’s MP for a Day competition.

### Are women or men better or equal at the following jobs?

\* Responses marked ‘not sure’ have been removed.

	Women are better at this job		Men are better at this job		Equal	
	Men aged 18–25	Women aged 18–25	Men aged 18–25	Women aged 18–25	Men aged 18–25	Women aged 18–25
<b>Career*</b>						
Childcare worker	57%	46%	3%	-	39%	53%
Secretary	39%	31%	3%	1%	55%	68%
Nurse	42%	25%	2%	-	54%	75%
Stay at home parent	40%	23%	1%	-	57%	75%
Journalist	15%	8%	6%	2%	78%	89%
Artist	15%	3%	4%	2%	78%	94%
Doctor	7%	3%	11%	5%	81%	92%
Actor	7%	2%	6%	2%	86%	95%
Lawyer	3%	2%	15%	4%	80%	93%
<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>88%</b>
Astronaut	2%	1%	23%	14%	71%	82%
Chef	3%	1%	12%	6%	83%	92%
Jockey	3%	2%	23%	21%	65%	73%
Construction worker	2%	-	67%	49%	30%	50%
Plumber	2%	1%	55%	45%	40%	53%
Firefighter	2%	1%	53%	36%	43%	62%
Pilot	1%	1%	24%	18%	73%	80%
<b>CEO</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>84%</b>
Police chief	2%	1%	32%	21%	64%	77%



Selestra Fatima fought to become her villagers next Chief, Timor-Leste.

### Leading the way in Timor-Leste

“Sometimes when men talk about politics they just say ‘ignore women, don’t involve them,’” says Candida, one of the many women in rural Timor-Leste who has spent much of her life excluded from politics. By running for election, Candida and her peers are changing everything.

Plan International has been working with women’s NGO Patria to make women aware of their rights under Timorese law, and to build their public speaking, advocacy and leadership skills to help them run election campaigns. By doing so, we have witnessed something unprecedented: 29 women were candidates at the latest local government elections, up from just two in 2009.

Candida is clear about the changes she wants to create in her community. “I want to empower women by helping them with agricultural activities – building greenhouses, and creating some sewing groups for women to improve their economic security. I also want to take care of vulnerable people in the community like elderly people.”

In addition to helping more women enter political life, Plan International’s work in Timor-Leste has also been beneficial for younger girls: seeing women taking a stand and fighting for their right to be heard is an incredible driver for girls’ empowerment. Many of them feel more confident, see their self-esteem rise and finally consider positions of power as something they might want to pursue in the future – and that’s where it all starts.



Girl ambassadors in front of the United Nations building in Geneva.

## Politics isn't speaking to young people

The research has found that young women and men want diversity (youth, gender, religion, race) represented in politics, but the majority do not follow politics themselves. Compared with young men, fewer young women care about politics and its impact on their life. Yet less than 10 per cent think men make better politicians than women.

This finding correlates with perceptions around youth representation, with almost three quarters of all respondents agreeing that there aren't enough young people in politics. Female respondents (75 per cent, compared with 67 per cent of male respondents) were more likely to agree with this question.

**"THE PRIME MINISTER'S INNER CIRCLE WILL INFLUENCE THE DECISIONS THEY MAKE, BOTH CONSCIOUSLY AND SUBCONSCIOUSLY. WHEN YOU ARE SURROUNDED BY A CERTAIN TYPE OF PEOPLE, YOU TEND TO BE MORE BIASED TOWARDS THAT GROUP. CREATING A MORE DIVERSE, GENDER EQUAL CABINET WOULD HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON DECISIONS MADE IN PARLIAMENT".**

- Asha, age 18, winner of Plan International Australia's MP for a Day competition

## Views on politics, and young people's involvement

\* 60% of respondents with parents born overseas agree with this question.

	Men aged 18-25	Women aged 18-25	18-21 year olds	22-25 year olds	Total
<b>Total agree</b>					
There aren't enough young people in politics	67%	75%	73%	69%	71%
More people of different religious and racial backgrounds need to be involved in politics*	50%	67%	55%	61%	58%
I care about politics and its impact on my life and my community	63%	44%	58%	49%	54%
I follow politics in Australia	47%	32%	44%	35%	39%

## Young women don't think they have the qualities of a leader

Most young women believe leaders must be hard working, confident, brave and ambitious, but far fewer described themselves as having those traits. Interestingly, less than half of young men described themselves as confident, and fewer young men than women think of themselves as hard working or ambitious.

Similarly, 39 per cent of young women consider themselves to be shy, and 46 per cent consider themselves to be quiet, but very few young women consider these qualities to be valuable in a leader. More can be done to encourage girls to lead even if they're quiet, breaking down the misconception that leaders must have bold, extraverted personalities.

### Qualities needed by a great leader, and own qualities (all respondents)

Total agree	18-25 year olds	
	Leader	Self
Confident	83%	34%
Hard working	84%	60%
Ambitious	60%	46%
Friendly	65%	73%

### Qualities that respondents think a great leader needs, vs how respondents describe themselves (young women)

Women aged 18-25	Qualities of a great leader	My own qualities
Hard working	90%	65%
Confident	88%	27%
Ambitious	71%	42%
Friendly	68%	80%
Strong	72%	31%
Brave	58%	18%
Kind	68%	68%
Powerful	39%	7%
Fun	17%	41%
Popular	15%	6%
Aggressive	6%	11%
Good looking	3%	18%
Bossy	3%	13%
Quiet	2%	48%
Shy	-	42%

7 Quote from entry to 'If I were Prime Minister for a day' competition September 2017.



## Qualities that respondents think a great leader needs, vs how respondents describe themselves (young men)

Men aged 18–25	Qualities of a great leader	My own qualities
	Hard working	79% 55%
	Confident	78% 41%
	Ambitious	62% 36%
	Friendly	62% 66%
	Strong	57% 32%
	Brave	59% 28%
	Kind	50% 58%
	Powerful	35% 19%
	Fun	28% 49%
	Popular	26% 12%
	Aggressive	11% 11%
	Good looking	10% 22%
	Bossy	4% 8%
	Quiet	6% 44%
	Shy	2% 36%

## Refugee girls take the lead

Life in a refugee camp is not easy for girls and young women. There are many challenges to face, especially concerning reproductive health and the lack of opportunities to build a successful future.

Plan International is working with Congolese refugees in Rwanda, equipping young people with the skills needed to lead happy and productive lives once they reach adolescence. This includes expanding young people's knowledge of goal setting, career planning, rights and responsibilities, reproductive health, and other life skills that are not fully addressed in the formal school system.

Tantine, 17, is one of the girls taking part in the project. 'A lot of things have changed since I joined this project. I used to be so nervous and could get angry so easily, but now I am able to handle any situation, however tough it might be. I liked very much the sessions about having a purpose and confidence with money.

'After taking part in financial lessons, I asked for 500 RWF from my mother and bought some avocados so I could resell them in the camp to make a profit. My ultimate goal is to one day earn enough money to pay for hairdressing lessons. Apart from managing finances, I also learnt how to avoid being forced into sexual activities by boys.'



#GirlsTakeover flashmob at the Place des Nations in Geneva.

## The barriers to leadership are clear

Young women agree that changes in a number of areas would make it easier for women to be leaders. In particular, they pointed to:

- Not judging women on their looks over their abilities (identified by 77 per cent of young women).
- Treating women fairly in the media (73 per cent).
- Living in a more equal society (75 per cent).

The significance of the media in these responses cannot be underestimated: the majority of young women are emphatic that treating women fairly and reporting on their abilities rather than their looks would help them become leaders in politics or business. In this way, the media industry has a significant opportunity to lead positive change.

## It would be easier for women to be leaders if...

Total agree	Women aged 18–25	Men aged 18–25
Women weren't judged on their looks over their abilities	77%	58%
We lived in a more equal society	75%	59%
Women were treated fairly in the media	73%	55%
Women had more support from men to get ahead	65%	54%
More women were shown doing men's jobs in the media and in advertisements	64%	50%
Women had more mentoring opportunities	64%	50%
Quotas were enforced in politics (e.g. 50/50 split)	52%	35%
Quotas were enforced on boards (e.g. 50/50 split)	51%	32%

## Young women are under no illusions about gender equality in politics

Plan International Australia asked young women about the barriers specific to a career in politics. Two of the top three barriers identified are gender related:

- 41 per cent of young women say their desire to start a family is a barrier to entering politics (compared with only 11 per cent of men)
- 35 per cent say their gender is a barrier to entering politics (compared with only 4 per cent of men).

Another 45 per cent of young women point to a lack of opportunities, compared with 26 per cent of men, pointing to systematic gender inequality.

### Barriers to the respondent having a career in politics

\*18% of respondents with parents born overseas answered yes.

\*\* 10% of respondents with parents born overseas answered yes.

Total agree	Men aged 15–25	Women aged 15–25
Not enough opportunities	26%	45%
Lack of qualifications	31%	27%
I don't feel confident to be a leader	25%	29%
Wanting to start a family	11%	41%
Too much responsibility	23%	24%
Lack of encouragement	20%	28%
My gender	4%	35%
The colour of my skin*	15%	12%
I would rather follow than lead	11%	8%
My religion**	6%	7%

With women making up less than a third of parliamentarians in Australia, young women have no illusions about gender parity in politics. More than half of young women think it is harder for women to become a politician (62 per cent), and that female politicians are treated unfairly by male politicians and the media (56 and 57 per cent respectively). Notably, young men were only half as likely to say that female politicians are treated unfairly in the media or talked over.

Young women want to change this political disparity: more than half (63 per cent) think political parties should do more to increase the number of female politicians in their party and in cabinet.

Globally, the idea of introducing quotas has divided opinion, although it has proved highly effective in countries such as Rwanda which now has the world's highest proportion of women in parliament. Around half of young women in Australia support the idea of 50/50 targets in parliament, yet fewer (40 per cent) would go as far as wanting women to have reserved seats. Overwhelmingly, they would prefer to see the media, male politicians and political parties work to improve selection processes and treatment of female parliamentarians, in order to encourage more women to participate.

In a three-year study, researchers in Pittsburgh, US have uncovered that many women are discouraged from entering political life because of the challenging nature of the election process<sup>8</sup>. With elections bringing politics into the public eye more actively than at any other time, media organisations have a responsibility to ensure equality in their reporting (for example, not paying undue attention to women's fashion choices or family life), to ensure girls aren't discouraged by the way female candidates are treated.

### Views on reaching gender parity in parliament

Total agree	Men aged 18–25	Women aged 18–25
Political parties should do more to increase the number of female politicians in their party and in cabinet	42%	63%
It is harder for women to become politicians than it is for men	45%	62%
Female politicians are treated unfairly by male politicians	36%	56%
Female politicians are treated unfairly by the media	31%	57%
Female politicians are talked over more than male politicians are	27%	52%
Women should have reserved seats in Parliament to ensure equal representation	28%	40%
Women should focus on family life before political life	26%	13%
Men make better politicians than women	19%	8%

**“THE FUTURE OF OUR YOUNG WOMEN MOVING INTO LEADERSHIP ROLES DEPENDS UPON SEEING OTHER WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND SHARING THEIR LEADERSHIP TRIUMPHS AND TRIBULATIONS. TO HAVE ACCESS TO SUCH WOMEN ... CAN BE THE INFLUENCE AND CHANGE WE WISH TO SEE, TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN ON THEIR LEADERSHIP PATHWAY<sup>9</sup>.”**

- Jacqui, entrant in Plan International Australia's MP for a Day competition.

<sup>8</sup> Kristin Kanthak and Jonathan Woon, Women Don't Run?, University of Pittsburgh, 2014.  
<sup>9</sup> Quote from entry to 'If I were Prime Minister for a day' competition September 2017.

# GENDER INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA AND ABROAD: THE FACTS

*Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalised from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women. – 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women and political participation<sup>10</sup>.*

## Women are significantly underrepresented in the Australian parliament

At the 2016 Australian federal election, the number of women in parliament rose slightly, from 69 to 73, yet this still amounts to women occupying less than a third of all seats<sup>11</sup>. This places Australia 50th in the world in terms of female representation in parliament, according to a 2017 analysis by UN Women<sup>12</sup>.

What's more, women occupy fewer than a quarter of Australian ministerial roles; this is less than half the proportion of the leading countries including Bulgaria, France, Nicaragua, Sweden and Canada<sup>13</sup>.

Governments at every level—local, state and federal—need to drive female representatives, not only to enable women to contribute to the decisions that affect families, communities and the economy, but also to provide girls with the role models who can inspire them to become leaders themselves.

Similarly, political parties need to encourage and support women to run for office and to drive policies that uphold gender equality in all places and spaces. Whilst many Australian political parties have stated that they will work towards 50/50 targets, more can be done to accelerate change ahead of the next federal election. This could include reviewing selection procedures, pre-selecting women in winnable seats, and formally adopting a gender equality strategy as part of their party platform that recognises the specific needs of young women and girls.

## At this rate, political parity worldwide is at least 50 years away

According to UN Women, women's voices 'are still missing from the executive branches of governments and parliaments worldwide, slowing achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals'<sup>14</sup>. Martin Chungong, Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, has said that 'At this rate, it will take 50 years to reach 50-50 parity. This is a warning signal; we have to do something about this'<sup>15</sup>.

The number of women in parliament is just one indicator of women's opportunities in politics; how those women are treated is an equally important part of the story. Our research shows that young women perceive that female politicians are treated unfairly in the media or by their parliamentary peers. More can, and must, be done to ensure women in power are treated with equality and respect, to help ensure girls are not discouraged from their political aspirations.

Plan International's report *Unlock the power of girls now* (2017) looks at the experiences of girls in Colombia, Uganda and Spain to identify lessons about how to advance gender equality. The report notes<sup>16</sup>:

*"It is always men who participate in politics... Women should have a greater participation in business and politics"*  
Maria, 16, Colombia

*"The state could say: 'everyone has the right to this, be it man or woman', but it is not what you see, it is not what is happening, there are always stereotypes, beliefs that are always marking us and telling us what men and women should do, and that limits us to do things or fills us with fear."*  
Alejandra, 14, Colombia

## The gender balance in executive roles in Australia has improved but is not near parity

According to a 2017 census of ASX200 executive leadership teams<sup>17</sup>:

- Men hold 79 per cent of roles in the ASX200 executive leadership teams, with women holding just 21 per cent (381 of 1804). Whilst this highlights significant inequality, it is an improvement from 2008 when women held 11 per cent of roles (182 of 1700).
- 41 companies in the ASX200 have no women in their executive leadership team.
- 126 companies in the ASX200 have no women in line roles in their executive leadership team. Line roles drive a business's key commercial outcomes and usually involve profit and loss accountability.
- Women hold 11 CEO positions in ASX200 companies, compared with four in 2008.

Women clearly remain underrepresented in senior leadership positions. Gender balance is commonly expressed as being 40 per cent of each gender and 20 per cent of either gender. But the census showed only 16 ASX200 companies have 40 per cent or more females in their executive leadership team. In other words, women are still missing.

To improve women's representation in both line roles and executive teams, corporate leadership is vital: a company's chair, board, CEO and leadership team must all prioritise and commit to gender diversity.

## Gender imbalance affects too many industries

The United Nations released the following statistics on power and gender in 2014. Its key message was that women's participation in leadership is improving but not fast enough<sup>18</sup>:

- Women made up less than 4 per cent of CEOs of the world's largest 500 corporations.
- Women made up only 10 of the 152 elected Heads of State worldwide.
- Women headed only 14 of 194 governments.

Yet, taking a leadership role and holding a position of power can ignite a girl's belief in her potential.

## Women are changing the world

Research shows that all over the world, female parliamentarians are leading efforts to tackle gender based violence in their societies, put issues such as childcare and parental leave onto the legislative agenda, advance gender equality laws, and promote measures that increase women's access to politics<sup>19</sup>. Through these policies, women's leadership not only benefits women and children, but their entire communities.

In India, for example, research has found that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with men-led councils. Greater female participation was found to not only increase the provision of public goods, but also to reduce levels of corruption<sup>20</sup>.

Globally, however, women are still under-represented in high-ranking ministerial roles traditionally seen as 'male' responsibilities, such as foreign affairs and the economy. As of January 2017, only 18.3 per cent of government ministers globally were women, with most of those holding portfolios such as environment, social affairs, education and women's affairs.<sup>21</sup>

*"What would I say if I was Prime Minister for a day? I would discuss starting more education, support, and health care programs into isolated Indigenous communities within Australia. I would discuss our current issues with vulnerable children in care by the state to ensure they are being provided for in a safe environment. I would discuss our current restorative justice system and its issues in providing offenders with the proper care to survive. I would discuss the current issue of racially profiling terrorism, it's not a religious or race issue, it's an extremist issue. I would discuss our plan to diminish climate change. And most importantly I would discuss how important it is to have role models of all ethnicities, sizes, shapes and gender in positions of power<sup>22</sup>."*

- Brianna, age 19, winner of Plan International Australia's MP for a Day competition.

10 UN General Assembly resolution on women and political participation, 2011  
11 [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The\\_gender\\_composition\\_of\\_the\\_45th\\_parliament](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament)  
12 UN Women, Women in Politics 2017, January 2017  
13 UN Women, Women in Politics 2017, January 2017  
14 <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/03/womens-political-parity-slow-to-grow-as-un-launches-latest-women-in-politics-map/>  
15 <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/03/womens-political-parity-slow-to-grow-as-un-launches-latest-women-in-politics-map/>  
16 Plan International 2017, *Unlock the power of girls now: why gender equality is the social and political issue of our time*, London, September, p. 22.

17 Chief Executive Women census, collecting information in August 2017 from ASX200 company websites and BoardEx, <https://cew.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/MR-CEW-Executive-Census-2017.pdf>, accessed September 2017.  
18 [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/Ch5\\_Power\\_and\\_decision\\_info.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/Ch5_Power_and_decision_info.pdf), accessed September 2017.  
19 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Equality in Politics: A survey of women and men in parliaments*, 2008  
20 R. Chattopadhyay and E. Dufo, *Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India*, *Econometrica* 72(5), 2004  
21 Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, *Women in Politics 2017 Map*, 2017, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/4/women-in-politics-2017-map>  
22 Quote from entry to 'If I were Prime Minister for a day' competition September 2017.



Caitlin, Plan International Australia Youth Activist.

## WHY WE NEED TO ACT NOW

Progress towards equality in Australian workplaces and politics has been far too slow to date. Closing the gender gap and opening doors for women and girls to lead will have dramatic benefits for the economy, for the community and for families.

### A stronger economy

Economic growth and national competitiveness are strongly linked to women's participation in the workforce. Evidence suggests that if female university graduates were able to enter the workforce at the same rates as their male counterparts, the Australian economy would gain \$8 billion<sup>23</sup>. When women occupy positions of leadership it increases business performance. Research by the Peterson Institute for International Economics of 21,980 firms from 91 countries showed that firms with at least 30 per cent female leaders were up to 15 per cent more profitable<sup>24</sup>.

### A more socially cohesive society

There is a clear link between gender equality and violence against women and girls both in the home and in public spaces. In order to reduce violence against women and girls, the gendered drivers of violence such as men's control of decision-making, rigid gender roles and identities and disrespect towards women must be tackled and changed<sup>25</sup>. Leadership in politics and in the workplace plays a key role in challenging traditional gender roles and promotes equitable decision-making.

## Gender equality is every woman and girl's right

Many of Australia's laws and institutions are underpinned by a fundamental right to equality and non-discrimination. This is reaffirmed by Australia's commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which prohibits discrimination against women and girls in all walks of life.

In September 2015, the Australian Government also signed up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda includes 17 ambitious global goals and related targets. Goal 5 relates to achieving gender equality.

Underpinning this goal are various targets, including a target to 'ensure women's full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life'. In 2018, the Australian Government will be reviewing its progress toward these targets and will need to report on measures taken to achieve them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Girls have told us that change is too slow. They seek solidarity and action with others to bring about the changes that will empower all young women to fulfil their potential. Achieving gender equality is everyone's responsibility.

Around the world, Plan International is working with girls to achieve their leadership ambitions and to address gender discrimination. In Australia, our work with girls has highlighted the following specific recommendations that would help ensure they are encouraged and supported to become leaders.

### 1. Get ready for a Gender Equal Election

Our research shows that girls are more conscious than boys of the unfair treatment women receive in politics, and see this as a barrier to entering political life. Now is the time to put measures in place that can make the next federal election Australia's first Gender Equal Election, removing the barriers that can discourage girls from leadership.

- Before the next federal election, **political parties** should review their candidate selection procedures, putting in place specific measures to encourage female candidates to stand for election and to increase the number of women selected in winnable seats. This could include affirmative measures such as 50/50 targets and women-only shortlists for pre-selection in safe seats.
- Ahead of the next federal election, the **federal government** should work with the media industry to develop robust rules on reporting about female and male politicians and candidates. This should include banning sexist commentary that disproportionately focuses on women's fashion choices, family life or other areas where men aren't as commonly scrutinised. The rules should also compel editors and broadcasters to give an equal share of voice to both women and men as political commentators and experts.

### 2. Ensure no one is forced to choose between leadership and family life

Too many girls are deterred from pursuing a political career or having management aspirations because they don't believe it can coexist with family life. We need to crush this perception and ensure that politics and business are designed to work for young women.

- All **political parties** should formally adopt a gender equality strategy as part of their party

platform that recognises the specific needs and challenges for young women and girls, with clear actions that address barriers and create pathways for girls and young women in all areas of life.

- **Parliament** should comprehensively review its processes and extend flexible working arrangements to address the systemic barriers to participation. For example, action should be taken to mainstream and normalise the ability for parliamentarians with childcare duties to participate remotely in sitting weeks and meetings.
- Within the workplace, **employers and managers** must take active steps to support parents to share childcare equally. This not only includes encouraging women to return to work if they wish to, but also actively encouraging men to take parental leave or share childcare duties. Flexible working should be made available to all parents, especially in low paid sectors.

### 3. Nurture girls' leadership ambitions

Too many young women are growing up to believe that they won't have the same opportunities as men to become leaders, or that they don't possess the qualities of a great leader. We need to equip girls with the skills, networks and role models that will unlock their potential.

- Individual **parliamentarians and business leaders** should offer summer paid internships to high school aged girls and other under-represented groups, to break down barriers and nurture leadership ambitions at the age when they are at greatest risk of decline. Male and female leaders both have a role to play in hosting such paid internships.
- **State and territory governments** should invest in young women's emerging leadership programs in Australian high schools, to provide skills, networks and mentorship to girls to become leaders across government, business and civic life.
- Additionally, **state and territory governments** should provide targets and incentives for schools to promote gender equality focussing, in particular, on introducing respectful relationships education, gender training for staff, integrating gender equality into school curriculums, developing school based programs to empower girls to lead, and supporting youth led initiatives such as feminist clubs.

23 Poynton, A & Rolland, L 2013, Untapped opportunity – The role of women in unlocking Australia's productivity potential, EY, p. 6.  
 24 Marcus Noland (PIIE), Tyler Moran (PIIE) and Barbara Kotschwar (PIIE), Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Study, Working Paper 16-3 (February 2016)  
 25 Our Watch, Change the Story

 /planaustralia

 @PlanAustralia

 @plan\_australia

**13 75 26**

**plan.org.au**

**Plan International Australia**

18/60 City Road, Southbank VIC 3006 GPO Box 2818, Melbourne VIC 3001

Tel: 13 75 26 Fax: +61 (3) 9670 1130 Email: [info@plan.org.au](mailto:info@plan.org.au)

ABN 49 004 875 807

