



Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

Each year nearly 4,000 NGO representatives and UN member states participate at the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). It is the largest annual gathering of the international women's movement at the UN – a time of collective advocacy and action to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls. CSW is an important advocacy avenue by which we as a nation, and as a global community can hold our governments to account and ensure we are making progress.

The theme for CSW62 is the *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*. At NCOSS we have heard from our members and women and girls from across the state about the key priorities for women and girls living in rural and remote areas. We have undertaken grassroots regional consultation, comprising six regional conferences and 38 workshops, attended by 570 people across NSW.

We have drawn this together with the intelligence and insights from our NCOSS Women's Advisory groups including our Seven Sisters (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's) Panel, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Women's Panel, Young Women's Advisory Panel and the 150 organisations engaged with NCOSS Women. All these groups are represented by committed and dedicated leaders from the community sector, government, business, unions and academia, who are developing innovative and creative solutions for women's equality in their communities.

What we heard from them was a clear set of priorities. Priorities that highlight the strength of our communities in NSW, their resilience and innovation in guiding solutions that will make change. We will take these priorities with us, and advocate strongly to see that the outcomes from CSW reflect the voice of our members, and the diverse women and girls that we represent in NSW.



Priority issues

Human rights instruments and institutions

- In recent years the space for meaningful Civil Society Organisations (CSO) engagement at CSW has shrunk significantly. We commend the Australian Government's leadership in continuing to advocate for women's, human rights and feminist CSOs and their participation at CSW.
- These organisations are central to the achievement of economic security for women, and have a critical role in driving change, ensuring accountability for gender equality and the implementation of actions from the Commission.
- We call on the Government to ensure effective pathways for CSO engagement, and to continue to advocate for the vital role of CSOs and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) at CSW in championing gender equality.

Intersectionality

- We know that the inequality faced by women is exacerbated by, and intersects with, other forms of disadvantage, such as racism, and discrimination based on age, sex, disability and physical isolation. This is particularly the case for Indigenous women, migrant and refugee women, women with disability, regional, rural and remote women, women experiencing poverty, LGBTIQ communities, young women and girls and older women.
- In order to ensure no women and girls are left behind it is imperative that further emphasis be placed on solutions to address the multiple and intersecting forms of inequality, discrimination and disadvantage faced by many women, throughout their lifecycle.

Indigenous Women

- We commend the Australian Government's role in advocating for strong language on Indigenous women at CSW61.
- We urge the Australian Government to advocate for the retention of this language in the CSW62 Agreed Conclusions and to strengthen and build upon this language to include text that references:
 - 'Free, prior and informed consent'
 - Indigenous women's leadership
 - The role of Indigenous women as the stewards of their ancestral lands and that their traditional knowledge is essential to all efforts to address climate change.

'Aboriginal women need to own the voice of their issues, not have white women speak for them... There needs to be truth in the support of emerging Aboriginal leaders, rather than just ticking a box.... They need to take the grass roots community with them'

Seven Sisters Advisory Panel member

Rural, regional and remote women and girls

- We know from visiting regional, rural and remote communities across our State that place-based, community driven solutions and community based services are vital to achieving gender equality for women.
- We need to support and empower rural women and girls to participate in leadership at all levels of decision-making so to shape the policy, strategies, laws, and programmes that affect their lives.
- All rural women and girls need access to universal, quality, affordable and culturally appropriate education, health, and essential services (such as energy, water and sanitation), along with employment opportunities and access to justice. This includes funding the infrastructure needed to achieve this access – such as transport.
- Rural women play an important role in achieving food security, poverty eradication, and sustainable development. However, they often face additional insecurity and increased cost of living pressures – including access to healthy and fresh food – due to the cost of transportation, globalised supply chains and limited local competition.
- The impact of climate change on rural women must also be addressed. We need to ensure that inclusive climate management initiatives, policies and solutions are developed, and that gender equality is placed at the centre and women are recognised as agents for change to address climate change.

‘There is a huge disparity in job opportunities between larger centres and smaller towns. In smaller places the jobs always seem to be given to the men, and women are expected to go and find work elsewhere, often in unstable, low paid jobs’

Participant, Regional Consultations

Media and information and communications technology

- Ensuring women’s digital inclusion and representation in media and communications spaces is vital to progressing gender equality. Digital inclusion and representation enables access to education, information, support services, social connection and employment opportunities (particularly for those that are self-employed or entrepreneurial).
- We need to eradicate the digital divide by facilitating equal access to reliable and affordable telecommunications, digital connectivity, and funding the appropriate infrastructure to support this. This is vital to supporting rural women and girl’s connection, opportunity and empowerment.



Economic empowerment

- It is important to retain and build on language of economic empowerment secured at CSW61 – including retaining the recognition of the vital role of the International Labour Organization, references to 'decent work', addressing gender-based occupational segregation, and gender responsive budgeting.
- We know the gendered nature of poverty and that rural women and girls face additional barriers including:
 - Limited employment opportunities and access to decent work
 - Informal economies with unrecognised and unprotected workers' rights
 - Gender-based occupational segregation
 - Limited inheritance rights
 - Lack of leadership roles
 - Unpaid work.
- To truly ensure economic empowerment, all women and girls must have access to decent work; including a 'living wage', employment opportunities, rights at work, and access to social protection systems without discrimination. Equally, all women and girls need access to quality, relevant and affordable work-related and vocational education and training, so to provide opportunities to progress and thrive in the workforce.
- All women and girls must have access to quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and care and paid parental leave.
- All States must address gender norms that exist in society, and put in place measures to address:
 - Unpaid care
 - The gender pay gap
 - Rising casualization and insecure work for women
 - inadequate retirement income
 - Implementation of progressive taxation systems.
- All women and girls needs access to gendered responsive education. This includes access to lifelong and non-formal learning, gendered financial literacy education programs, leadership and career programs, and education about sexual and reproductive rights.
- All states must acknowledge and address the unique economic challenges faced by migrant and newly arrived refugee women in regional and remote locations, and work to protect their rights and economic empowerment.

'Childcare is just impossible in Australia. In addition to food, clothing, rent, electricity, health needs, transport and all other expenses, we can't afford childcare on top of that.... it makes more sense for me to stay at home'

Participant, Regional Consultation



Housing

- All women and girls need access to safe, secure, accessible and affordable housing. However, we know that due to the structural inequality faced by women across their lifecycle, women are at increased risk of homelessness and housing stress.
- Rural women are often a hidden face of homelessness, experiencing a lack of appropriate and specialist support services.

'We are increasingly seeing retirement ages women with little to no superannuation – this is the growing population in our region facing poverty'

Participant, Regional Consultation

Health, including sexual and reproductive health rights

- All women and girls need access to reliable, and culturally appropriate universal health services, including sexual and reproductive health services which provide them with the right to control their own bodies.
- Rural women and girls face particular barriers in accessing these vital services. Barriers include distance, lack of transport, affordability of services and lack of culturally appropriate services. For rural women with disability these barriers are exacerbated, as often the services and support required is found in urban areas that are inaccessible and already limited.

'For someone facing a physical or mental disability, access to appropriate support and services can be incredibly difficult in regional areas. Combined with limited transport options and costs it can be really difficult to receive the support and assistance you need.'

Participant, Regional Consultation

NCOSS is attending the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) in New York from 12-22 March 2017. CSW is an incredible space to network, share learnings and to ensure that the priorities and voices of our members here in NSW, are embedded in international frameworks and regulations. Together we can progress the rights of women and girls across nations.

We are proud to bring a [delegation of accomplished women](#), who represent the diversity of experiences in our state of NSW. They will be sharing blogs, videos and updates of what the team is up to while in New York, and you can find updates our social media channels and on the [NCOSS Women campaign page](#)

Thank you to our partner National Association of Community Legal Centres, and to our generous sponsors HESTA and Settlement Services International.