



ncoss
NSW Council of Social Service

Informing Australia's priorities at United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 63rd Session

We welcome the opportunity to inform Australia's priorities at the United Nations Commission on the State of Women 63rd Session (CSW63). As the peak body for the social services sector in NSW, NCOSS has previously sent a delegation of diverse women to CSW61 and CSW62 and is a strong supporter of Australia's involvement in the annual sessions.

Over the last few years NCOSS has undertaken grassroots consultation in over 24 communities across metropolitan and regional NSW and convened a range of advisory panels and working groups that draw on the lived experience of women and girls – including the NCOSS Seven Sisters Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Panel, CALD Women's Advisory Panel and Young Women's Advisory Panel. This submission is therefore informed by the expertise and experiences of our members, expert advisory groups, the broader social services sector and their clients.

The priority theme for CSW63, *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*, comes at a time when the picture of poverty both globally and in Australia remains highly gendered; unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work, disparities in pay, lack of access to economic resources and decision-making, gender-based violence and other social determinants mean women are still more likely than men to live in poverty.^{1,2} There has never been a more important time for Australia to take a strong stance on strengthening social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure to support women at risk of and experiencing poverty and inequality.

We therefore endorse the recommendations of the November 2018 Report of the UN Women Expert Group³ and highlight the key issues NCOSS believes should be priorities for Australia going into CSW63:

Intersectionality

In order to ensure no women and girls are left behind we need to recognise that many women experience multiple types of discrimination and that these intersect and compound. 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. Social protection systems and services need to be gender responsive and culturally appropriate to ensure they respond to the needs of women in all their diversity.

Economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment is crucial to reducing poverty and inequality and requires the creation of decent, quality work opportunities with fair pay, and an increase in decision-making power.⁴ All women and girls must have access to rights at work, the right to organise, and access to social protection systems without discrimination. This includes access to quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education

¹ UN Women (2018), Turning promises into action: Gender quality in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, accessed 10 January 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>

² Oxfam (2017), An economy that works for women: Achieving women's economic empowerment in an increasingly unequal world, accessed 10 January 2019, https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en.pdf

³ UN Women (2018), Report of the Expert Group, EGM/SPS/Report, November 2018, accessed 10 January 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/63/egm/63rd%20csw%20egm%20report%202018.pdf?la=en&vs=1850>

⁴ Oxfam (2017), An economy that works for women: Achieving women's economic empowerment in an increasingly unequal world, accessed 10 January 2019, https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en.pdf

and care, paid parental leave, adequate retirement income, and education throughout their life cycle. States must address unpaid care and gender norms, recognising the diversity of families, address the gender pay gap, address rising casualisation and insecure work for women, and implement progressive taxation systems.

Access to vital services in regional, rural and remote areas

All women and girls need access to universal, quality, affordable and culturally appropriate education, health, social 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. Women and girls in regional, rural and remote areas face particular barriers due to distance, lack of transport, affordability of services and lack of culturally appropriate services.

Reliable and affordable telecommunications and digital connectivity, and the funded infrastructure to support this, is therefore equally vital to support access, connection, opportunity and empowerment for all women and girls.

Safety

Gender-based, domestic and family violence deprives women of the rights and opportunities enjoyed by their male counterparts, and prevents them from participating in their communities as stakeholders and leaders. It also leaves them particularly vulnerable as they often bear the greater burden of poverty.

CSW Agreed Conclusions must retain strong language around gender-based violence to recognise that women and girls deserve the right to live safely and without fear in their communities. Key to this are policies and legal frameworks that do not create enabling environments for violence and discrimination, as well as improving access to vital services such as income support, housing and justice assistance that support women to leave situations of gender-based, domestic or family violence.

Housing

All women and girls need access to safe, secure, accessible and affordable housing. The compounding inequality faced by women across their lifecycle means that women are at increased risk of homelessness and housing stress, particularly in their older years. In Australia, older women are often the hidden face of homelessness, facing a lack of appropriate and specialist support services, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas.⁵

The CSW62 Agreed Conclusions did not include specific and meaningful language recognising the fundamental need for access to safe, secure, affordable housing or shelter as a basic human right and a key enabler to breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. We urge the Australian Government to push for this as a priority at CSW63.

Human rights instruments and institutions

Finally, we commend the Australian Government's leadership in advocating for women's, human rights and civil society organisation (CSO) participation in CSW. We call on the Government to continue this focus on human rights instruments and the vital role of CSOs in championing gender equality.

In light of visas denied to CSO representatives from various member states at CSW62, we also call on the Government to speak out against the shrinking civil society space at CSW, ensuring effective pathways for meaningful CSO engagement.

⁵ Institute for Social Science Research (2014), Older Women's Pathways out of Homelessness in Australia, University of Queensland, February 2014, accessed 11 January 2019, <https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FINAL-Feb-2014-Petersen-Parsell-Older-womens-pathways-out-of-homelessness.pdf>