

# CSW68 REPORT BACK & ANALYSIS



2024



**EQUALITY  
RIGHTS  
ALLIANCE**

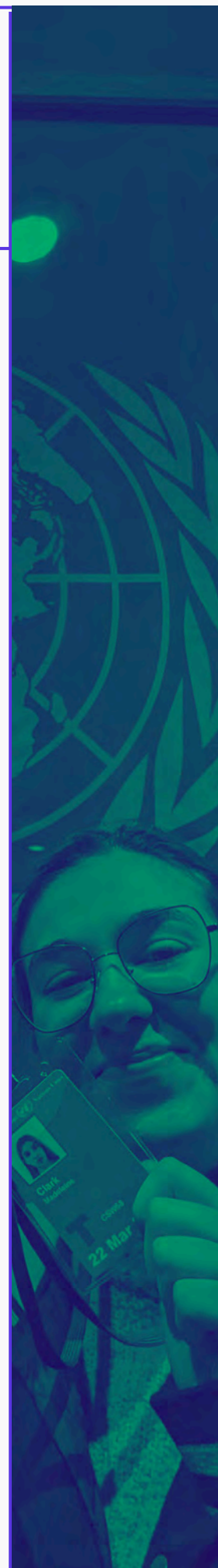
# ERA & CSW

Equality Rights Alliance is one of the six National Women's Alliances funded by the Federal Government through the Office for Women in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. ERA is a network of more than 70 civil society organisations working together to achieve gender equality and the full realisation of the human rights of all women and girls in Australia.

ERA brings the diverse voices of women to the Federal Government to build a culture of gender analysis in the development of government policy. ERA builds and facilitates spaces for women and people marginalized by gender to identify and discuss the barriers to gender equality, and then feeds that information to government through submissions, roundtables and direct advocacy.

CSW is the UN's only space dedicated to gender equality and its annual meeting is the world's largest gathering of feminist and other CSO representatives. ERA works with our five Alliance sisters on direct engagement with CSW.

Australia has a low level of engagement with the UN-based human rights system. CSOs working on issues of gender equality within Australia tend to have limited engagement with UN processes and do not tend to use human rights terminology to describe their work. This creates a risk that local CSOs will miss out on benefiting from international work on the human rights of women and girls and may result in Australian CSOs inadvertently recreating work already done elsewhere. It also contributes to a low level of human rights literacy in Australia generally, which in turn makes Australia vulnerable to rhetoric and advocacy which seeks to undermine



human rights generally and particularly the rights of women, girls and other people marginalized by gender.

Each year, ERA leads the Alliances in a seven-month project to provide training and support to women in Australia to attend CSW or to engage remotely from Australia. We provide opportunities to caucus and to connect with international advocacy with the intention of building stronger connections between domestic CSOs and international processes.

## CSO Engagement with CSW68

In 2024, interest in CSW among Australian NGOs was the highest it has been for at least 12 years. The group coordinated by ERA included 130 individuals, comprising representatives from 71 organisations and 16 unaligned experts or individuals. 14 of the participants were known to be under 30 years of age and the group also included a range of women with disabilities, Indigenous women, women of colour, women from rural and remote areas, non-binary people / people of diverse genders, women from migrant backgrounds and people of various sexualities. 27 individuals participated in ERA's supporting activities for first-time attendees at CSW.

In addition to CSOs and individual experts, for the first time this year ERA worked with a large delegation of business representatives from the Champions of Change Coalition and with Chief Executive Women.

Finally, ERA's team of Agreed Conclusions language experts was also the largest yet, with 42 individuals participating in ERA's work on the language negotiations and a further 8 individuals observing the language negotiations from Australia.

# ERA's CSW Aims

- 1 Increase the **capacity** of the Australian feminist activists to engage in and contribute to international processes.
- 2 Increase **awareness** of CSW and CSW **literacy** among Australian feminist activists
- 3 Increase **use of the Agreed Conclusions** as a domestic advocacy tool
- 4 Improve our **ability** and **capacity** to **monitor the domestic implementation** of the Agreed Conclusions
- 5 Improve the **sustainability** of CSW engagement by increasing the pool of activists and organisations with experience of CSW

**Do you feel prepared to take another staff-member from your organisation to CSW?**

*“Yes, because of ERA doing such a great job bringing me and my colleagues (who were also first timers) up to speed so quickly and efficiently.”*

- CSW68 participant feedback survey

# Actions: Prior to CSW

- Made direct approaches to organisations representing populations traditionally not well represented at CSW, such as Djirra and Sisters Inside.
- Maintained an **email list** of 130 individuals, to which 15 updates were provided between October 2023 and April 2024. List members were provided with resources, tips on participation, information about deadlines and requirements for participation and were kept apprised of the negotiations and other activities.
- Maintained **5 Whatsapp communication channels**:
  - General Language and negotiation group (41 participants)
  - Rapid response language and negotiation group (11 participants)
  - Attendees group (59 members)
  - First-timers group (27 members)
  - Support group for the NGO reps on the Australian Government delegation (4 members)
- Hosted and facilitated an **online workshop on the CSW priority theme** on 29 November 2023. 35 individuals from 23 organisations participated.



- Worked with the National Women’s Alliances to prepare a **submission** to the Australian Government on priorities for CSW68 in December 2023 based on the November workshop outcomes and subsequent input from email list participants.
- Held **two online training sessions** for CSW participants:
  - *Introduction to CSW* on 15 February 2024, attended by 22 individuals from 19 organisations; and
  - *Internationalising your advocacy* on 16 February 2024, attended by 23 individuals from 20 organisations
- Held an **online training and workshop session on the zero draft** on 8 February 2024, attended by 25 individuals from 20 organisations.
- Consulted on and drafted an Australian **markup of the zero draft** for the Office for Women in February.
- Assisted 6 individuals to **register for grounds passes** through ECOSOC accredited organizations, including liaising between the ECOSOC organisations and the individuals and participating in two briefings for the individuals on organizational priorities.
- **Participated in the Women’s Rights Caucus’ (WRC)** online preparations between October and February, including fortnightly online meetings of the language group, two thematic teach-ins and the preparation of a WRC mark-up of the zero draft.

### **Was there anything that surprised you?**

*“No, but only because the ERA preparatory sessions were so good at orienteering us to the whole experience as first timers.”*

- CSW68 participant feedback survey

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Australian CSO delegates celebrating the conclusion of CSW68 (Credit: ERA)

# Actions: During CSW

- Prepared for the Australian Government delegation:
  - a thematic commentary on the compilation draft;
  - a mark-up commentary on rev 1;
  - a briefing paper on language priorities regarding Comprehensive Sexuality Education; and
  - a briefing paper on the inclusion of language regarding Indigenous people.
- Hosted a meet and greet event for CSW CSO delegates in New York on 10 March and an evening social event on 15 March.
- Conducted an orientation tour for CSO delegates on 10 March.
- Attended the Welcome Function for Australian delegates at the Australian Mission to the UN on 10 March.
- Hosted 9 evening briefings for Australian CSO representatives to bring CSO representatives together to debrief, coordinate and to provide contact with the Australian Government delegation.
- Participated in the WRC and LGBTI Caucus, including attending 9 caucus meetings, facilitating one meeting and providing administrative support at a further two meetings.
- Participated in the language and advocacy groups of the WRC, including feeding key language suggestions to the





Australian Government delegation.

- Built active relationships with NGO representatives from the Netherlands and provided relevant language suggestions from the group to the Australian Government delegation, particularly regarding reform of international finance systems, sex and gender data, trafficking and sex work rights.
- ERA's Convenor, Helen Dalley-Fisher, moderated an Australian side event on 12 March, entitled *Using Australia's world leading gender data to accelerate equality across women's life course and close the gender pay gap*. This event was organised by Chief Executive Women in conjunction with Champions of Change, ERA, Deloitte and Settlement Services International.
- Helen provided a CSW briefing to the Champions of Change Coalition delegation with Cynthia Rothschild on 11 March.
- Helen was a panelist in the Champions of Change parallel event *Leadership and transparency to close the gender pay gap* on 11 March.
- Helen was also a panelist in the CEW parallel event *Accelerating gender equality: Gender data and public private partnerships in Australia* on 18 March.
- Coordinated the drafting of a joint letter to the Minister for Women detailing the concerns of 13 Australian NGOs about closing space for CSO participation following the decision to close CSW proceedings at 6pm each evening.

### **On the evening debriefs:**

"I could not attend all. But it was a really good practice as we could not attend all events. Hearing and learning from each other and from Helen and Maddie was so important. It helped to make the most of the event and access learnings from the past."

"The debriefs were very useful, particularly for first timers to understand day to day how the language negotiations were going and how we could best support the Australian government on this."

- CSW68 participant feedback survey

# Actions: After CSW

- Contributed to the WRC debrief process.
- Provided advocacy resources for Australian NGOs to incorporate language from the Agreed Conclusions in their domestic advocacy, including templates for internal and external communication.
- Held a two part debriefing workshop for Australian NGO representatives on 19 April 2024. Attended by 23 individuals representing 18 organisations, the workshop debriefed participants on the outcomes of CSW68 and then trained participants in applying the Agreed Conclusions to their domestic advocacy. The recording of the workshop has been accessed by 30 viewers to date.
- Participated in a debriefing session for the Champions of Change Coalition and presented at the SISEAP Conference on CSW and international engagement.

## Do you feel better prepared to attend future CSWs?

*“Yes, we had absolutely no idea at all about how CSW worked and what the most effective ways to participate and contribute would be. ERA covered off everything from personal safety to administration (form filling in) to attending events to participating in language negotiations. I can't thank them enough!”*

- CSW68 participant feedback survey



# CSW68

## Emergent Themes

The priority theme for CSW 68 was gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.

Frustrations about inequitable distribution of resources and power on a global scale simmered throughout the meeting. There was a robust and at times fraught conversation about conditionalities attached to aid / development funding and the use of loan structures in preference to grants, especially the World Bank's use of market-based and concessional loans in climate finance. The Global North / Global South divide, which has coloured the COP debates, was also strongly apparent here. The poverty theme provoked considerable comment about the effect sovereign debt has on availability of resources for domestic social services and gender transformative initiatives.

This discussion disrupted some of the traditional alliances in the negotiations. There was widespread admiration for the role being played by members of the Pacific Islands Forum in the negotiation room, especially regarding the links between women's poverty and climate crisis. However, we were shocked to hear a couple of States asserting that they do not feel such a link has yet been demonstrated.

Another emerging theme is the role of men and boys as allies and agents of



Helen moderating the CEW Side Event  
(Credit: Champions of Change Coalition)

change, along with other non-traditional partners. A sizable delegation from the Champions of Change Coalition and an active delegation from Chief Executive Women engaged strongly and constructively, in a positive contrast to some of the previous attempts to engage the corporate world at CSW.

Australia's Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher, was present for the first three days of CSW and made the case for a data and evidence led approach to policy for gender equality, backed by the release of Working for Women: A National Strategy for Gender Equality. Mary Wooldridge, CEO of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency was also strong on this theme, following the public release of organisational gender wage gap data in February. There was strong interest in Australia's proactive approach to gender data.

Ideally, the Agreed Conclusions should form a coherent articulation of the main drivers and effects of gendered poverty and the problems created by our existing financial structures. In reality, long-term points of contention (eg: CSE, national sovereignty etc) combined with highly charged discussion about broader geopolitical considerations to limit the ability of negotiators to articulate a coherent plan of action for addressing gendered poverty. Despite this lack of coherence, the Agreed Conclusions cover most of the key areas we would want to see recognised in any serious attempt to address gendered poverty and reform financial institutions.



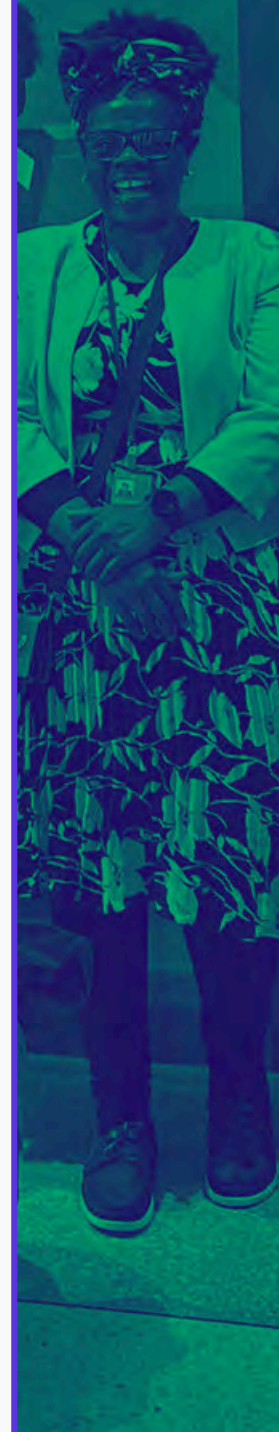
Australian CSO, business and Government delegates at CSW68 (Credit: Australian Government)

# UN Liquidity Crisis & CSO Engagement

The meaningful involvement of CSO organisations in CSW and other human rights processes at the UN is not an optional extra in work to achieve gender equality. CSO participation is a baseline criterion for the achievement of gender equality; the research clearly indicates that effective CSO mobilisation is the most critical element in achieving gender equality outcomes.[1] As noted above, the cry of ‘fund women’s organisations like you want them to succeed’ became a major theme at CSW68. But the failure to adequately resource feminist and other CSOs is only one of the barriers to effective CSO engagement in CSW.

The current liquidity crisis at the United Nations meant that the New York UN Building was closed from 6pm each evening during CSW. This restriction raised concerns that the capacity of CSO representatives to provide input into the negotiations would be reduced. The compressed time for negotiation meant there was significant reliance on small group discussions and one section of the negotiation was held online with negotiators participating remotely and therefore being unavailable to receive input from CSO activists. In practice, the Australian Government delegation largely addressed this issue by ensuring regular communication with ERA staff and other key NGO representatives and we thank the delegates for their efforts, particularly for their active focus on seeking substantive input on the text from CSO representatives. We note that the compressed negotiation time meant that the role of the NGO representatives on the Australian delegation became more critical, as Government representatives had limited time to liaise directly. We also note that the advantage provided by the

Substantive  
Commission



[1] See for example: Weldon, S. L., & Hunt, M. (2013). *Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women*. *Gender & Development*, 21(2), 231–247

Australian government delegation was not available to many international CSOs, resulting in several CSO organisations from other countries using the Australian CSOs as an entry point to the negotiation process.

We remain concerned that allowing insufficient time for the negotiations may result in reduced nuance in the outcomes, with the situations of the most marginalised women and those experiencing the most complex forms of intersecting discrimination more likely to be missing from the Agreed Conclusions. The liquidity crisis is occurring in the context of a broad push to block CSOs from participating in the Agreed Conclusions process and to make the Agreed Conclusions conveniently simple for States. We appreciate that the negotiation of the Agreed Conclusions is a difficult and contested process, and we acknowledge the difficulties inherent in reaching consensus on complex subjects within a limited timeframe. However, there is a point where simplification of the process is a disservice to the women and girls of the world and counterproductive to the pursuit of gender equality.

The push back on CSO participation took many forms at CSW68. As has been the case now for many years, CSO representatives were prohibited from entering the negotiation room to observe the negotiations. At one point, the seating outside the negotiation room was removed and security guards refused to allow CSO representative to sit on the floor, further physically distancing representatives from the negotiations. In another example, an Australian CSO representative was implicitly threatened with violence due to her sexuality by an official delegate from another State.

The accumulation of individual acts of aggression and restrictions on CSO access in the name of convenience or resourcing combine over time to erode any expectation among States that the negotiation of Agreed Conclusions should involve CSO input.



ERA Staff on the floor outside the negotiation room- the closest we can get to the discussion of our rights (Credit: ERA)



Australian CSO delegates conferring at CSW68 (Credit: ERA)

While the text of the Agreed Conclusions generally recognises the importance of the role played by women human rights defenders and feminist organisations at national level, it is increasingly rare to find any practical acknowledgement that the Commission has an obligation to directly involve CSOs in the negotiation process. Even the Australian commitment to involve CSOs has reduced over time. Australia previously included four CSO representatives on the Australian government delegation. This was cut to two representatives several years ago.

Despite this, we observed a real enthusiasm for the Australian NGO representatives in attendance, and many attendees expressed a desire to return to future CSWs to continue their advocacy.

### **Was there information you accessed in your Whatsapp group/s that you would not have had otherwise?**

*“Just having a safe space where we could share any and all questions was very helpful and reassuring. It is very much needed for everyone, but ESPECIALLY, for first timers to make sense of the mega space that is CSW.”*

*“Yes, heaps - we learned a lot about how the language negotiations were going and what specific information was needed, reaching out for help, learning about other Australian side and parallel events.”*

- CSW68 Participant Feedback Survey

# Recommendations

1

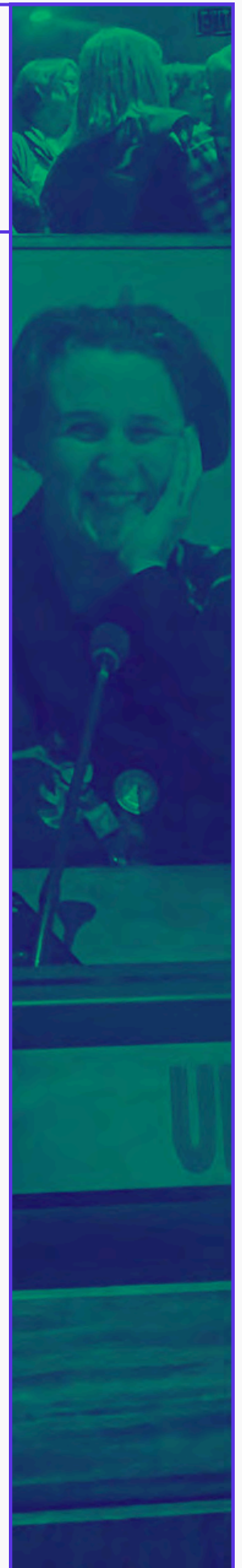
Australia should work with the National Women's Alliances to hold an annual information session and debrief for Australian NGOs which addresses how CSW will have an impact on Australia's approach to the priority theme in the Australian domestic context and what substantive steps will be taken to implement the Agreed Conclusion commitments.

2

Australia should increase the number of CSO representatives on the Australian Government delegation to three, to allow for two experienced participants to be joined by one new participant each year and to permit the group to include a range of people with experience of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

3

Australia should appoint the CSO representatives to the Australian delegation in October of the previous year, to allow the delegates to build relationships with the other CSO participants and to participate in CSO training and workshops prior to their first exposure to the Secretary General's report and the zero draft.





# Recommendations

4 Australia should review current contributions and financial support to the United Nations, with a view to ensuring contributions improve the financial sustainability of the UN.

5 ERA should review its process for recording side and parallel events by Australian CSO organisations to better reflect the range and scale of Australian CSO activities at CSW.

6 Australia should increase the number of CSO representatives on the Australian Government delegation to three, to allow for two experienced participants to be joined by one new participant each year and to permit the group to include a range of people with experience of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

*“ERA were a fantastic resource, and I can't thank them enough for their support, guidance and training content. Super important work.”*

- CSW68 participant feedback survey

