

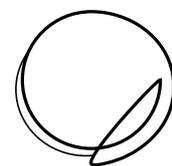
Stronger Together: Exploring Diverse Models of Civil Society and State Engagement in the CSW Cycle

A research into the different ways civil society works with national governments towards the UN Commission on the Status of Women, providing a roadmap for strengthening our collective impact on global policy.



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We are indebted to all individuals who generously contributed their expertise and time, anchoring this mapping in real-world experience. This includes over 50 participants who responded to our scoping questionnaire disseminated through global networks.

We thank the key individuals who participated in the in-depth semi-structured interviews; **over 30 civil society and government representatives** from seven countries—Argentina, Australia, Jordan, Nepal, the Netherlands, Nigeria, and Sweden—who shared their experiences regarding engagement modalities before, during, and after the CSW process.

It is our sincere hope that this research can be helpful for feminist movements and ally member states by providing them with strategic insights and actionable recommendations towards the common goal of progressing toward the achievement of gender equality.

Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by the WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform on behalf of the Our Voices Our Futures (OVOF) Consortium, provides a comprehensive mapping of diverse engagement models between civil society and national delegations around the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) processes. As legal restrictions and political anti-gender attacks continue to reduce the space for civil society engagement both nationally and internationally, documenting effective engagement strategies is fundamental to holding member states accountable to their international commitments and to strengthening global feminist advocacy. Using a qualitative, mixed-method approach grounded in feminist and decolonial principles, this report analysed case studies from Argentina, Australia, Jordan, the Netherlands, and Nigeria, supplemented by insights from Nepal and Sweden.

The report finds that political alignment and institutionalisation are the two primary variables accounting for differences in engagement and influence across countries. Highly institutionalised models, such as the Netherlands, and historically, Australia, benefit from stable funding and government-funded coordination that allows for the inclusion of civil society as full members of official delegations. Conversely, in contexts like Argentina after the recent change in government, where official channels have been dismantled, civil society has adopted an “outsider” strategy beyond the national government to pressure the state from the outside. In other countries, such as Nigeria and Jordan, civil society navigates a more “hybrid” or “strategically managed” landscape, utilizing formal institutional pathways for visibility while maintaining independent voices through shadow reporting on sensitive issues like SRHR or LGBTQI+ rights.

Ultimately, this research finds that there is no universal template for the meaningful engagement of civil society. What is rather needed is a configuration that fits the specific political context and available resources. Actionable recommendations for all actors emphasise that sustainable partnerships depend on the deliberate cultivation of trust; the resourced inclusion of civil society in official delegations, and the integration of civil society expertise throughout the entire annual CSW cycle.

1. Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Context and Rationale

The CSW and the Vital Role of Civil Society

Established in 1946 as a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) acts as the primary global intergovernmental forum exclusively dedicated to documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world and shaping global standards on gender equality.¹ The function of reviewing national and global progress towards the commitments outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) was added to the mandate when the BPfA was adopted in 1995.

The active engagement of civil society² is a “critical element” in the work of the Commission, playing a vital role in holding international and national leaders accountable for commitments made in the Platform for Action.

CSOs are not merely observers; they act as fundamental building blocks of democracy by “help[ing] international organisations and entities be more responsive to the ever-changing needs and priorities expressed by their beneficiaries or constituencies. This could help bolster trust in international organisations, [...] international participation can be seen as contributing to fostering trust and ownership of global processes by citizens and civil society.”³

Legal Frameworks and Enabling Conditions

Civil society's role in defending democracy and inclusion at the national level requires an enabling environment for building a constructive, trust based relationship between civil society and government: “the rule of law, adherence to fundamental democratic principles, political will, favourable legislation, clear and precise procedures, long-term support and resources for a sustainable civil society, [and, most importantly] shared spaces for dialogue and cooperation.”⁴

1 UN Women. “Commission on the Status of Women.” Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women>. Accessed 5 December 2025.

2 This publication employs the terms “non-governmental organisation” (NGO) and “civil society organisation” (CSO) interchangeably. Where registration status is relevant, such as receiving ECOSOC Consultative Status, it will be indicated in the text.

3 OECD. 2025. “Towards meaningful civil society participation at the international level: Success factors, opportunities and challenges,” OECD Working Papers on Public Governance No. 81. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/towards-meaningful-civil-society-participation-at-the-international-level_8ed04dc2-en.html. Accessed 8 December 2025.

4 Council of Europe. 2010. “Civil Participation in the Decision Making Process: The Code of Good Practice.” Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/code-of-good-practice-civil-participation-revised-301019-en/168098b0e2>. Accessed 6 December 2025.

The right of civil society to participate in United Nations (UN) processes is grounded in the UN's fundamental frameworks. ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 provides the legal basis for the consultative relationship between the UN and CSOs, acknowledging the breadth of CSO expertise and their capacity to support the work of the UN.⁵ Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) mandate that States Parties ensure women's right to participate in non-governmental organisations and represent their governments at the international level.⁶

In the most recent resolution on the "Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women" in 2022 (E/2022/4)⁷, member states are invited "to meaningfully involve civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders in preparatory processes for the work of the Commission" and to consider including them in their delegations. Member states elaborated on these commitments in the "Revitalization of the Commission on the Status of Women" resolution (E/RES/2026/2), which invites member states to involve civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the preparation and follow-up of the CSW, and to consider holding national level consultations.⁸

The Chair of the CSW and UN Women headquarters send a joint letter to every member state encouraging them to include civil society representatives in their delegations every year.

"We hope that ministerial-level leadership of your delegation and the inclusion of strong gender equality advocates from diverse civil society groups and youth will reflect your Government's strong commitment to accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as the 2030 Agenda's aspiration to 'leave no one behind'. We encourage all Governments to share information on inclusion of civil society representatives in their delegation with UN Women offices in their region or country," says the Bureau in their letter for the 67th session of CSW, and urges member states to include various stakeholders, including civil society in their side events as well."⁹

Despite these international standards, the quality of engagement of civil society with their respective national governments, especially towards the drafting of negotiation mandates and positions, remains uneven and often undocumented. A similar pattern is observed in the inclusion of civil society as full delegates within national delegations. While some countries have established robust institutionalised partnerships or multi-stakeholder councils, others rely on ad-hoc, tokenistic, or sporadic consultations. Civil society finds ways to function, and effect change even in restrictive or repressive environments. Documenting ways of engagement across a variety of political contexts becomes even more pressing,

5 ECOSOC. 1996. "Resolution 1996/31: Consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations." Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/442032?v=pdf>. Accessed 11 December 2025.

6 United Nations. 1979. "Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)." Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>. Accessed 11 December 2025.

7 ECOSOC. 2022. "Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women." <https://docs.un.org/en/E/res/2022/4>. Accessed 6 December 2025.

8 ECOSOC. 2025. "Revitalization of the Commission on the Status of Women." Available at <https://docs.un.org/en/E/RES/2026/2>. Accessed 17 December 2025.

9 A copy of the letter, from 2023, can be found in Annex III of this report.

as legal restrictions, funding cuts, and political anti-gender attacks against gender equality continue to actively reduce spaces for civil society nationally¹⁰, and also internationally in UN mechanisms¹¹, including the CSW.¹²

In the early 2000s, women NGO representatives could enter the rooms where CSW negotiations were held as observers and communicate directly with official delegations, but this practice was abruptly ended in subsequent years. We have witnessed with concern on numerous occasions how session chairs would halt proceedings by stating, “If there are any NGO members inside, they must leave.”¹³

The traditional understanding that more civil society engagement in multilateral processes automatically translates to more robust human rights frameworks is now complicated; we can no longer assume that every civil society group is working toward progressive goals. Today, some actors use the label of ‘civil society’ to push anti-gender, anti-democratic agendas. They are active in the UN, showing increasing degrees of professionalisation, effectively competitively mimicking feminist ways of advocating in multilateral spaces.¹⁴ Such actors are often part of the official delegations with restrictive and exclusionary positions.¹⁵ These anti-gender actors also contribute to the exclusion of progressive civil society from multilateral spaces through harassment, intimidation, and misusing procedural means. This makes it all the more important for governments seeking to advance gender equality standards to facilitate the meaningful engagement of progressive civil society in the national preparations for CSW.

Consequently, documenting effective engagement strategies is not just a technical exercise, or a good practices advocacy tool. It carries the potential to strengthen the engagement and advocacy of civil society at the multilateral spaces, continuing to hold member states accountable to their international commitments. It also carries the potential to enhance the cooperation between these civil society actors and their national governments in national level work. This research seeks to highlight several diverse good practices and show how civil society is still finding alternative engagement models in changing contexts.

10 A recent report analysing some of these attacks throughout the World is WO=MEN: “Our Voices Our Futures & Alliantie Politica’s ‘Rights at Risk’”: Paige Shipman. 2025. Rights at Risk. WO=MEN, OVOF and Alliantie Politica. <https://www.wo-men.nl/kb-bestanden/1765297557.pdf>. Accessed 17 December 2025.

A broader overview of reduction of civil society spaces and increasing threats was recently published by CIVICUS: Firmin et al. 2025. “State of Civil Society Report.” Available at: <https://publications.civicus.org/publications/2025-state-of-civil-society-report/>

11 Rana and Lipott. 2025. “Rundbrief 3/2025: Freiraumverlust Wieviel Zivilgesellschaft bleibt?” Available at: <https://forumue.de/rundbrief-3-2025-wechselkurstermin/> (in German) Accessed 17 December, 2025.

12 In response to these restrictions, WO=MEN, jointly with members and funders, organized the “CSW: ACCESS DENIED Campaign,” to call attention to the exclusion of defenders from meaningful participation in the CSW. More information about the Campaign is available at <https://womeninnewyork.blogspot.com/2025/03/access-denied-campaign.html>. Accessed 17 December 2025.

13 Acuner, S. KA-DER. 2017. “Birləsmis Mülletler Kadınin Statüsü Komisyonu Rehberi ve 60. Oturuma Dair Notlar” (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Guidebook and Notes on the 60th session). P. 16. <https://ka-der.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Birləsmis-Mülletler-Kadin-Statüsü-ve-Komisyonu-Rehberi.pdf>. Accessed 9 December 2025.

14 Cupać, J. and Ebetürk, I. 2022. Competitive mimicry: The socialization of antifeminist NGOs into the United Nations. *Global Constitutionalism*, 11(3), pp. 379–400. doi:10.1017/S2045381721000186.

15 Holmes. 2024. Feminist Responses to Norm-Spoiling at the United Nations. Available at: https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/ODI-FeministResponseNormSpoiling-Briefingnote_Final_Z2fwTg4.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2025.

Research Objectives

The core purpose of this research is to map diverse models of engagement of civil society with their national governments in the context of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), highlighting promising practices that can inform civil society and strengthen advocacy at the CSW and other multilateral spaces. Specifically, it aims to identify and analyse the enabling factors, specific challenges, and strategies that contribute to successful advocacy outcomes in different political contexts. Through a comparative analysis of five case studies, it offers recommendations to civil society and governments seeking to advance gender equality at the multilateral level.

Conceptual Framework: Defining Civil Society and Government Engagement

This report defines civil society engagement at the CSW as the diverse ways in which national governments and non-government actors interact to shape, align, and express positions on gender equality in this multilateral space.

This definition highlights the active influence of civil society, examining how feminist movements and civil society organisations (CSOs) shape and strengthen the work and impact of national delegations before, during, and after CSW.

2. Methodology and Research Design

Research Approach and Framework

This research employed a qualitative, mixed-method approach grounded in feminist and decolonial research principles. Methodologically, we prioritised a collaborative, non-extractive approach aiming to co-produce useful knowledge, which we hope serves as a strategic tool for civil society advocacy. This also includes the objective of challenging oppressive systems through strengthening the engagement of civil society from a variety of contexts in the international multilateral arena of gender equality. Consistent with decolonial feminist approaches, the research design centred the situated expertise of participants whose experiences inform the analysis. Understanding that there is no single “right way” to engage with national governments on CSW, the research design was structured to capture a diversity of global engagement models and the specific mechanisms that enable effective collaboration to strengthen collective advocacy efforts globally for CSOs and provide strategic insights for ally governments.

The study is informed by a feminist institutionalist perspective, which recognizes that engagement in global gender governance is structured not only by formal procedures but also by informal power relations. The analysis is guided by UN normative standards on inclusive participation (e.g., CEDAW Articles 7–8, ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31) and attends to the interaction between formal mandates for engagement and participation and the informal norms, networks, and gatekeeping dynamics that condition how civil society can engage with governments and multilateral actors.

Data Collection and Triangulation

Data was collected through three primary streams to ensure robust triangulation of findings:

Desk Research: A targeted review of existing literature, including CSO reports, academic articles, and official CSW documentation. This phase mapped known engagement models and established the initial longlist of potential case studies.

Scoping Questionnaire: A concise survey was disseminated through global feminist networks (e.g., Women’s Rights Caucus, Young Feminist Caucus, LGBTI Caucus, Women’s Major Group, AWIDCommunity, CEDAW4Change) in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic. With over 50 responses across these four languages, the questionnaire crowdsourced diverse examples of advocacy strategies and identified cross-cutting themes regarding engagement before, during, and after CSW.

Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were the source of primary data. The re-

search team conducted interviews with over 20 civil society representatives. Focus group interviews were preferred, when possible, to ensure the interaction of experiences and observations between participants. These interviews featured actors from the five primary case study countries, Argentina, Australia, Jordan, the Netherlands, and Nigeria. Sweden and Nepal, which served as additional examples of good practice, were also briefly noted.

To capture the governmental perspective, the team secured interviews with government officials who have direct experience with CSW processes. The composition of these government interviews included current representatives actively engaged with the CSW process and previous government representatives with historical experience. A semi-structured interview guide was used; applied with intentional flexibility to allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own way. Respondents were also given the option to contribute through written submissions or voice recordings.

Case Study Selection

Five detailed case studies were selected to represent promising practices from the initial longlist. The selection was driven by a set of primary criteria: demonstrated impact, potential for learning and adaptation, and the availability of key actors.

To ensure a holistic global view, portfolio criteria were further applied to ensure diversity in terms of geography, context (including both relatively supportive political environments and contexts with more restrictive civic space or anti-gender dynamics), and type of organisation or network.

In the end, five case studies were selected, namely Argentina, Australia, Jordan, the Netherlands and Nigeria. In addition, Sweden and Nepal were selected to showcase some of the particular characteristics of engagement in those countries. While this research does not claim that these cases are the strongest engagement modalities that exist, it represents a certain diversity in context, engagement, and approach.

Analytical Methods

The data was processed using thematic and comparative qualitative analysis. All interview transcripts and survey data were coded according to the three interlinked dimensions of the conceptual framework: (1) Institutional Architecture, (2) Advocacy and Partnership Strategies, and (3) Contextual and Political Factors. The five case studies were analysed horizontally to identify cross-cutting dynamics, such as how CSOs adapt “insider” versus “outsider” strategies¹⁶ depending on the openness of their political system.

Findings were triangulated across data sources to minimize bias. Draft case studies underwent a validation process with the respective CSOs to ensure accuracy.

16 An insider/outsider strategy is a dual-track advocacy approach where civil society organizations simultaneously influence policy through direct negotiation and formal engagement within institutional systems (insider) while applying external pressure through public mobilization, media campaigns, and grassroots activism (outsider).

3. Case Studies of Promising Practices

Argentina

Argentina represents an example of rapid and radical regression since the accession of the Milei administration. It shifted in under two years from a longstanding champion of gender equality, expanding the international normative field by introducing domestically developed norms such as “Care Society”¹⁷, to one of its staunchest opponents including to the term “gender”.¹⁸ This case documents a good practice of civil society engagement with the national government before 2023. It also illustrates resilience strategies in the face of sudden authoritarian backsliding and state repression, and alternative ways to influence the government.

Institutional Architecture for Engagement and Participation

Until the change of government in December 2023, a Women’s Caucus existed in the parliament, and a Women’s Advisory Council existed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity (which took over the tasks of the National Institute of Women in 2019) provided a dedicated institutional home for gender policy until it was dissolved in 2024.¹⁹ Engagement was characterised by a high degree of informality and trust for over 15 years. Activists had direct WhatsApp access to directors and ministers, facilitating rapid coordination. This underpinned the genuine appreciation of civil society involvement on the part of government officials.

“We [government and civil society] work together and it is important to have the NGO’s and social movements on your side because they contribute to push the agenda and facilitate your discussion inside the state and with your bureaucratic peers”.²⁰

This institutional architecture has been systematically dismantled since December 2023. The Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity was dissolved on the grounds that it was promoting an ideological agenda, and key programs were defunded.²¹ This has resulted in the severing of official channels of communication between the government and civil society. The below sections seek to document the earlier good practices of the “open door”²² era when there was a high degree of state-civil society collaboration, and the alternative

17 UN Women. 2023. “The Region’s Countries Agreed to Advance the Care Society to Achieve Gender Equality and a More Productive, Inclusive and Sustainable Future.” Available at:

18 Women Deliver. 2025. “CSW69 Political Declaration: A Hard-Fought Victory, But Gaps Remain.” Available at: <https://womendeliver.org/press/csw69-political-declaration-a-hard-fought-victory-but-gaps-remain/>. Accessed 12 December 2025.

19 The Ministry itself was established as a result of strong advocacy from the feminist movements. Group interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

20 Individual interview, II14, 01 December 2025.

21 EFE. 2024. Available at: Javier Milei cierra el Ministerio de Mujeres por “imponer una agenda ideológica” <https://www.deia.es/mundo/2024/06/08/javier-milei-cierra-ministerio-mujeres-8333761.html>. Accessed 13 December 2025 (in Spanish).

22 Group Interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

resilience strategies after 2023.

Engagement cycle

Until the end of 2023, engagement was not limited to the CSW calendar but was a year-round work cycle. Preparation for the next CSW began immediately after the previous one ended, involving daily dialogue and engagement with ministries. “So it was impossible for you to arrive at the CSW meeting unprepared because you were working [on it] every day.”²³

Civil society representatives were viewed as authorised voices whose technical expertise was integrated directly into official statements. The government worked jointly with civil society to have one common national position going into the CSW, prepared early enough to also be carried to the regional fora. “[A]s feminists we have to create an epistemological ecosystem where different perceptions, knowledge, experiences, visions and cultures need to be included [...]. [M]ore voices [allow us to] avoid the possibility to be[ing held] hostage by private interests”²⁴

A critical part of the cycle involved the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/CEPAL).²⁵ Civil society coordinated its priorities through the Argentina Network - Alliance for the Monitoring of International Agreements, a coalition of CSOs and networks from all over the country that work together on international processes. The inputs from the Alliance fed into the advocacy at the ECLAC regional meetings, where the different groups of countries set their negotiation positions towards CSW, such as the Santiago Group, Senás group, or the Montevideo group.

“In 2023 [...] the Argentine government was supportive of feminist policies related to sexual health, diversity, and gender-based violence, among other issues. [...] [T]he position of [Special Representative] of Feminist Foreign Policy was created, meaning there was a minister in charge of these issues at the international level. That year, Argentina also chaired the CSW negotiations. These conditions greatly facilitated the participation of civil society, both in the lead-up to and during the CSW in New York. [...] [W]e were part of the official delegation, which facilitated our participation in the discussions. That year, any organization that wished to do so could participate as an official delegation. We had preliminary meetings with officials, and in New York, we also met with the Argentine Embassy to the United Nations, which was facilitating the negotiations. [In addition,] we had contact, via WhatsApp and in person, with other officials in charge of the negotiations, which allowed us to influence and stay informed about the negotiations continuously.”²⁶

In the follow-up to the CSW, there were periodic meetings among diplomats, the Women’s Advisory Council and special representatives from the legislative and executive branch

23 Group interview, GI04, 17 November 2025.

24 Individual Interview II14, 01 December 2025.

25 The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), also known as CEPAL in Spanish, is a United Nations regional commission dedicated to fostering economic and social development, strengthening regional integration, and promoting sustainable growth across its member states. <https://www.cepal.org/en>.

26 Individual interview IIO4, 17 November 2025.

of government.²⁷ Civil society undertook all this work through either alternative funding sources or on the basis of voluntary work.

Civil society participation in the official delegation

Until 2023, Argentina stood out for having one of the largest and most diverse delegations, often numbering more than 70 people. The delegation frequently included historical feminist leaders who had transitioned into state roles, as well as independent activists.²⁸ This practice continued through different administrations, thanks to the strong advocacy of feminist movements. The list of civil society delegates was drafted by the feminist movement itself and signed off by the Foreign Ministry. The continuous dialogue and high level of trust between the ministry and the feminist activists allowed progressive civil society to keep anti-gender actors out of the official state delegation.²⁹ Civil society delegates had significant access, on occasion also being allowed to take Argentina's seat to speak on behalf of the country during negotiations.

The government and civil society would often co-organise events or support each other's efforts at the CSW.³⁰ The Argentine Mission to the UN in New York often blocked out rooms specifically for civil society to work and coordinate from during the two weeks of the conference.³¹

In 2024, this tradition was dismantled by the government. Although some civil society representatives were allowed into the official delegation in 2024, several key CSOs decided to not participate because of the current government's anti-rights stance. In 2025, no civil society organisations were included.

[In] 2024, we were invited to participate [...] However, due to our political stance, we decided not to join the delegation [...] some allied organizations did participate as a strategy to exert influence [but] the meeting with Argentina's representative to the United Nations was not successful.³²

Advocacy and Partnership Strategies

Faced with a blocked domestic channel for advocacy, Argentine civil society has adopted a transnational strategy, leveraging international alliances, such as the Women's Rights Caucus or aligned Latin American governments, and UN treaty bodies to pressure the Argentine state from the outside.

Advocacy was closely coordinated through networks like the Alliance for the Monitoring of

27 Individual interview, II14. 01 December 2025.

28 Individual interview, II14, 01 December 2025.

29 Group interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

30 An example to these side events: CEPAL. 2022. "El Compromiso de Buenos Aires propone una solución audaz para superar la crisis del desarrollo: la sociedad del Cuidado," <https://www.cepal.org/es/noticias/compromiso-buenos-aires-propone-solucion-audaz-superar-la-crisis-desarrollo-la-sociedad> Accessed on December 12, 2025.

31 Individual interview, II14. 01 December 2025.

32 Individual interview II04, 17 November 2025

International Agreements until 2023. Civil society priorities were set collectively in monthly meetings.³³ While constructive dissent was present in the civil society meetings, there was a collective policy of prioritising consensus to present a unified front. Work was divided based on expertise and capacity, with some organisations undertaking a policy advocacy role while others focused on grassroots mobilisation. Including smaller organisations was also a customary practice, even if, for example, larger organisations took the lead in drafting policy documents.

Civil society continues to be the repository of institutional memory, retaining the historical knowledge of past negotiations and technical language. They now use this expertise, further expanded by the purged technical expertise of the public servants who (re)joined civil society, to brief foreign governments and UN officials. They translate their resistance to practice through the production of critical shadow reports to international bodies.

Under the current repression of any work related to gender, activists are attempting to craft joint strategies with different movements such as pensioners, people living with disability, and diverse institutions like hospitals and universities in order to integrate issues such as gender-based violence with similar struggles toward building resistance.³⁴ Argentine feminists are now exploring bringing the voices of the more progressive subnational and local states to multilateral spaces.³⁵

Our strategy was to further unite Argentine CSOs and seek alliances with other CSOs in the region. We also aimed to stay informed and vigilant, particularly regarding security issues, and to raise awareness among delegations from other governments about the dire situation Argentina is currently experiencing in relation to [gender] issues.³⁶

Contextual and Political Factors

Prior to December 2023, Argentina was characterised by its permeability. It was a state where feminist movements had direct access to decision-makers, often described as “entering the ministry like one’s own home.”³⁷ As indicated by a respondent for this study: “Collective forms of feminism owe a lot to [Argentina’s] history of the struggle of human rights.”³⁸ “For 38 years now, we [have been] holding an annual national women’s meeting in Argentina. A few years ago, the name was changed to the Plurinational Meeting to incorporate the indigenous population of lesbian, transvestite, transgender, and bisexual women.”³⁹

Institutionalisation was very impactful in post-dictatorship Argentina with the push from the feminist movement. “Every mechanism was sustained by feminist movements, be-

33 Individual interview I104, 17 November 2025.

34 Group Interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

35 Group interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

36 Individual interview I104, 17 November 2025.

37 Group Interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

38 Individual Interview I114, 01 December 2025.

39 Group Interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

cause we were there, constantly monitoring, constantly pushing.”⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the current administration frames its foreign policy as a cultural battle. President Milei has denounced the UN as “a multi-tentacled leviathan” besotted with “the woke agenda’s collectivism and moral posturing.”⁴¹ The government now prohibits the use of terms like “gender perspective” and “diversity” in its public administration, creating a situation where diplomats must object to standard UN language that Argentina previously helped establish.⁴² Such decisions, along with the closure of the Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity, the systematic defunding of essential services, and the vilification of feminist activism, has created a context where formal engagement between civil society and the government on gender issues is nearly impossible.

The key factors that made the Argentine model work were:

Year-round continuous engagement between government and civil society, including on domestic issues, in regional fora, and around the CSW, meaning that the CSW was not an isolated event, rather a point in the circular timeline of engagement.

Mutual recognition of value, trust, and support between the respective strengths of government and civil society who worked together with a shared goal.

Strong alliance of the feminist movement with other human rights activists and advocates in the country, allowing for intersectional analysis and policy development. The explicit strategy of civil society to amplify the voices of marginalised communities further strengthened this.

After the administration change, **alternative strategies of resilience**, supported by pre-existing international alliances and a strong knowledge of the international human rights system allowed Argentine civil society to evolve to adopt an “outsider strategy”.

Australia

The Australian model of civil society engagement in the CSW can be characterised as an insider strategy, resulting in a firm integration of civil society representatives in the official government delegation and a high degree of trust between bureaucrats and advocates. It was historically anchored by one of six government-funded national women’s alliances, the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA). However, this model is no longer employed following changes in the government’s funding priorities and ERA’s subsequent decision to close down in 2024. The case of Australia illustrates how “insider” status can be leveraged to maintain progressive international positions even under conservative governments, while also highlighting the risks associated with relying on voluntary labour for coordination.

40 Group interview GI04, 17 November 2025.

41 Jelena Cupac and Martijn Moss. 2025. “Special Section introduction: threats and opportunities: the contestation of gender and sexuality in international organizations.” Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616742.2025.2513119#d1e182> Accessed 12 December 2025.

42 Equipop. 2025. “Looking back on CSW69: facing conservative governments and rising fascism, feminist diplomacy must lead the way.” Available at <https://equipop.org/en/csw69-conservative-governments-and-rising-fascism-feminist-diplomacies/>. Accessed 12 December 2025.

Institutional Architecture for Engagement and Participation

On the part of the government, Australian engagement is driven by a strong partnership between the Office for Women (part of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). For over a decade, the government funded the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA), a national network of women’s organisations, to coordinate civil society engagement, acting as a bridge between the broader sector and the government. ERA was the funded entity responsible for coordinating the sector, training civil society delegates, and managing logistics.

“ERA [brought] the diverse voices of women to the Federal Government to build a culture of gender analysis in the development of government policy. ERA build[t] and facilitate[d] spaces for women and people marginalized by gender to identify and discuss[ed] the barriers to gender equality, and then [fed] that information to the government through submissions, roundtables and direct advocacy.”⁴³

The recent changes to the funding agreement for National Women’s Alliances means international work is no longer covered, shifting the burden of coordination onto unfunded, voluntary labour from civil society organisations. Despite this, the Office for Women still values international level engagement and works towards aligning it with its national strategies like “Working for Women”⁴⁴ to achieve gender equality.

Engagement cycle

The preparation cycle typically begins in September or October when Australian CSOs working on the priority theme of the upcoming CSW are identified, and online consultations are convened to inform the government’s priorities. The full cycle for each CSW is typically shaped around a seven-month annual project. Between November and January, the ERA organised training sessions on UN language negotiations and internationalising domestic issues to prepare civil society advocates, including support to first-time attendees. In the decade when ERA was funded for this work, they supported the preparation of an annual civil society submission to the Australian Government on priorities for the upcoming CSW, through workshops and written inputs gathered from civil society.

In February, when the zero draft of the Agreed Conclusions is released, CSOs work collaboratively using an online platform to provide rapid feedback and language suggestions to the government, sometimes within 24-hour windows.⁴⁵ Before and during the CSW, CSOs have also jointly produced briefing papers on more specific themes to support the negotiations by the Australian delegation. Shortly before travelling to New York, a pre-departure briefing is held to connect the delegation and civil society attendees for logistical coordination and strategy alignment.

⁴³ Equality Rights Alliance. 2024. “CSW68 Report Back and Analysis.” <https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ERA-CSW68-Final-Report-Public-small.pdf>. Accessed 9 December 2025

⁴⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2024. “Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality.” Available at: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/working-women-strategy-gender-equality>. Accessed 09 December 2025.

⁴⁵ “Zero draft” refers to is the initial, non-negotiated version of a proposed document (such as a treaty or resolution) that serves as the official starting point for formal negotiations among member states.

During the CSW, ERA established WhatsApp groups for logistics, provided support to first-timers and the civil society representatives in the official delegation, language negotiation, and urgent responses.⁴⁶ At CSW 69, advocates still set up such communication channels, as volunteers. Daily debriefs were held involving the government delegation and civil society to exchange intelligence on negotiations. Before and during the CSW, ERA also played a role in connecting the Australian civil society to international advocacy actors, “with the intention of building stronger connections between domestic CSOs and international processes.”⁴⁷

After the CSW, civil society organises a debrief reflecting on the key themes discussed in the CSW, the calls to action, the agreed conclusions, and other reflections. In 2024, ERA also supported production of “advocacy resources for Australian NGOs to incorporate language from the Agreed Conclusions in their domestic advocacy.”⁴⁸



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Civil society participation in the official delegation

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet issues an open call for NGO delegates to join the official government delegation to CSW, disseminated through the National Women’s Alliances. The process is formalised, competitive, and structured around clear eligibility and performance expectations. Applicants may be individuals or representatives of organisations, with the government explicitly encouraging participation from diverse groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and persons with disabilities. Delegates are selected based on expertise in gender equality and the priority theme of the upcoming CSW, familiarity with UN mechanisms, and capacity to engage substantively with Beijing processes and the broader Agenda 2030. For example, an application form from the Australian government, which the candidates needed to fill, mentioned capacity to engage substantively with “the Beijing+20 review and broader post-2015 development agenda” discussions within the criteria.⁵⁰

46 At CSW69, advocates still set up such communication channels, as volunteers.

47 Equality Rights Alliance. 2024. “CSW68 Report Back and Analysis.” Available at: <https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ERA-CSW68-Final-Report-Public-small.pdf> . Accessed 9 December 2025.

48 *ibid*

49 Screenshot of the title slides of the CSW68 debrief prepared by ERA.

50 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2014. “Call for NGO Delegate Applications.” Available at: <https://awava.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FINAL-Selection-Documentation-NGO-Delegates.doc> . Accessed 09 December 2025.

Australian Delegation to the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Call for NGO Delegate Applications

Applications close 11:59pm 2 November 2014

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) is seeking applications from interested individuals and representatives of non-government organisations to be included on the official Australian Government delegation to the 59th session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59) to be held from 9-20 March 2015.

Whilst all applicants will be assessed based on their individual merits, in order to ensure a broad range of views are represented on the delegation, the Australian Government encourages both men and women from diverse backgrounds to apply including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disabilities.

CSW is the highest level international forum on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Commission meets annually in New York.

The priority theme for CSW59 is *reviewing progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.*

The review (Beijing+20) will also include the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, the first five-year assessment conducted after the adoption of the BPFA, which highlighted further actions and initiatives.

The session will also address current challenges that affect the implementation of the BPFA, as well as opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda.

Two civil society representatives are selected to attend the CSW as part of the official delegation each year. Once selected, NGO delegates assume clearly defined roles before, during, and after CSW. Pre-CSW, they are required to contribute to Australia's preparatory process; participate in at least one in-person briefing in Canberra; advise on negotiation language; mobilise their networks; and comply with communications protocols, including clearance for public statements or media engagement. During CSW, delegates operate as formal members of the government delegation: they provide expert advice; liaise with other NGOs; participate in formal and informal meetings; run daily briefings for Australian civil society, and fulfil administrative tasks as directed. Depending on expertise, delegates may also speak at Australian-sponsored side events. Post-CSW, they must participate in debriefs; submit a written report on outcomes; continue disseminating CSW conclusions through their networks and maintain agreed communication protocols. Recently, the government has moved toward overlapping appointments, where delegates serve two-year terms (one as a novice, one as a mentor) to ensure continuity and knowledge transfer.

The government covers travel and accommodation costs for these two civil society representatives who join the official delegation. Since salaries are generally not covered, participants often rely on the resources of their home organisations or unpaid labour, which limits the pool of representatives. Once selected, these delegates are fully part of the delegation. They sign confidentiality agreements which grants them access to sensitive negotiation rooms and the ability to sit alongside government negotiators. They act as a conduit, feeding intelligence from the broader civil society movement directly to government negotiators, such as flagging when specific country delegates are becoming obstructionist. While they may not always speak in official sessions, their influence on the text and strategy has been described as substantial.

Advocacy and Partnership Strategies

Australian civil society has traditionally employed a strategy of insider engagement, prioritising the development and maintenance of trusted relationships with public servants, the ministries, and mission staff in New York.

In this spirit, civil society organisations often view themselves as partners to the government rather than its adversary in multilateral spaces. This high-trust relationship allows CSOs access, and therefore the possibility to maximise impact by providing critical time-sensitive support to the government, such as drafting fact sheets overnight to support negotiators. This long-term model of partnership has demonstrated its resilience to political shifts, as permanent public servants (like career diplomats) do not change when administrations change. Advocates utilise informal mechanisms (such as personal connections and customary informal collaboration), where social interactions with Ministers and officials in New York help to break down barriers and educate political leaders on the value of engaging in international frameworks.

The Minister Effect: When the Minister for Women came to the CSW, even if their position on gender equality did not change, their understanding of Australia's role within the international community changed. They understood that international engagement had "benefits for Australia and perhaps wasn't the frightening waste of resources they thought it was"⁵¹

Contextual and Political Factors

The effectively two-party system in Australia creates a changing environment for CSW engagement and gender equality as such. Under conservative governments, such as between 2013 and 2022, the government maintained a bolder stance on gender equality at the international stage, while pursuing more conservative policies domestically. Even in that context of increased disagreement on priorities and policies between civil society and the government domestically, cooperation at the international level remained constructive and meaningful. This allowed civil society to work with the government at CSW to "hold the line" on gender equality and women's rights against global anti-gender attacks, even when domestic relations were strained.

"The fact that Australia has been funding work on the issue that we were trying to advance through the negotiations [was an enabling condition for collaboration], because we were resourced to conduct advocacy backed by the evidence we had generated, but also because it enabled the Government to see themselves as a partner in that advocacy."⁵²

Paradoxically, while the policy agenda improves domestically under more progressive governments (such as since 2022), funding cuts for international civil society coordination activities of national women's alliances significantly hampers the ability of Australian

51 Individual interview IIO3, 11 November 2025.

52 Group Interview GI01, 07 November 2025.

CSOs to engage. The high cost of travel from Australia to New York is a significant barrier. The recent defunding of ERA's international coordination role poses a major risk to the sustainability of this model, raising concerns that only well-resourced organizations will be able to participate, while smaller, diverse voices will be excluded.

The key factors that made the Australian model work were:

Mutual trust and long-term relationship building on the part of civil society, especially with permanent state personnel, ensuring continuity of access and influence despite administration changes.

The **inclusion** of civil society representatives in the official delegation resulting from the recognition of the valuable contributions of civil society to negotiation processes.

The **willingness** (and ability) of civil society advocates to participate in the time-intensive work around the CSW each year despite the lack of funding allocated to cover salary costs.

Jordan

Jordan is a context with an advanced institutional architecture for gender equality and formalised participation of civil society in the official delegation to the CSW. Civil society navigates this landscape strategically and it appears that the government values the image of a collaborative relationship with civil society. Jordan is included in this study as an example of how civil society can make the most of the institutional architecture while developing parallel ways of engaging internationally as national space is being increasingly reduced. The role of UN Women Jordan presents a good practice for multilateral initiatives that can support official government platforms.

"I look at Jordanian civil society organizations as a Jordanian with pride, seeing them this active, running from one meeting room to another during the CSW and coordinating their presence to make sure that they attend as many sessions as possible. [They] then bring back and share the information with each other. I think this is a very well-structured civil society engagement."⁵³

Institutional Architecture for Engagement and Participation

Jordan has a dual architecture for engagement with civil society around the CSW. The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) is a semi-governmental body established in 1992. The Commission is chaired by HRH Princess Basma.⁵⁴ JNCW is the technical secretariat for the CSW preparation, responsible for data collection, drafting national reviews, and coordinating the national delegation.⁵⁵ In 2025, a law was passed in Parliament making the JNCW fully financially and administratively independent, strengthening its position.⁵⁶ Being a semi-governmental body, it has historically served as a bridge between the government and civil society.

53 Individual interview I105, 19 November 2025.

54 Individual interview I105, 19 November 2025.

55 The Jordanian National Commission on Women Website. Accessible at <https://www.women.jo/en>. Accessed 13 December 2025.

56 Individual interview I105, 19 November 2025.

“[It was Security Council Resolution] 1325 that was the first vehicle to create this relation between [civil society and JNCW, helping in] building trust [...] and coordinating in working on specific legislative changes”⁵⁷

The Interministerial Committee for Women’s Empowerment (IMC-WE) was established in 2015 and is chaired by a senior cabinet minister (currently the Minister of Social Development). The committee was institutionalised as a permanent committee in 2020 of the Prime Minister’s office⁵⁸ ensuring that gender mainstreaming is not siloed.⁵⁹ The IMC-WE reviews and approves the national reports drafted by the JNCW. This structure has delivered significant legislative wins in the recent years, even as space for independent civil society in Jordan overall has experienced a reduction in the same time period.

UN Women Jordan convenes a civil society platform which meets regularly to coordinate inputs across a variety of issues related to women’s rights, including the CSW.⁶⁰ This body ensures diversity of representation, and is a space for dialogue with the government. The government itself recognises civil society as important partners in the country “contribut[ing] to national efforts to achieve gender equality and implement the recommendations of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action through many programmes and activities, particularly in the areas of capacity building, raising awareness and launching advocacy and lobbying campaigns.”⁶¹ While restrictions on civil society organising in Jordan remain,⁶² the consultations towards the CSW with the women’s machinery present a comparably good practice in government and civil society engagement.⁶³

Engagement cycle

Prior to each CSW, the JNCW leads a comprehensive drafting process for national progress reports which includes multistakeholder consultations involving civil society.⁶⁴ UN Women Jordan provides additional support in the consultation process on Jordan’s official statement for the CSW and also supports first time participants from the Jordanian government and civil society. Civil society reported a higher degree of influence on the national report from 2016 until 2020, after which the consultations have reportedly become more informative than participatory.⁶⁵

57 Individual interview II10, 21 November 2025.

58 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025.

59 “Adoption of Gender Mainstreaming Policy (JO0066)” - Open Government Partnership. 2022. Available at: <https://www.opengov-partnership.org/members/jordan/commitments/JO0066/>. Accessed 12 November 2025.

60 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025.

61 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. 2024. “Comprehensive National Review of the Progress Made in Implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action+30.” Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/b30_summary_jordan_final_0.pdf Accessed 13 December 2025.

62 Individual interview II06, 19 November 2025.

63 Individual interview 005, 19 November 2025.

64 While these consultations are helpful for the engagement of the CSOs with the government, one respondent noted that they don’t always end in an agreement on the positions as it was the case at CSW69. Individual interview II16, 11 December 2025.

65 Individual interview II10, 21 November 2025.

“While coordination mechanisms like JNCW and the Inter-Ministerial Committee provide platforms for engagement, many civil society organizations often struggle to see tangible outcomes from their participation. They are invited and consulted on policy discussions, yet many feel that their contributions do not translate into meaningful influence on decision-making.”⁶⁶

“I see the process [CSW engagement] becoming more governmental, not more inclusive. [I]t’s not about how many civil society [representatives] you bring to New York [but] about the voices.”⁶⁷

Jordan partakes in preparatory meetings hosted by the Arab League and plays a significant role in shaping the Arab League’s position at the CSW. Currently, the Jordanian national position to not actively reject the term “gender” remains an outlier in the region.⁶⁸

During the CSW, the government invites civil society organisations as panellists and speakers at officially co-sponsored events, creating space for their perspectives.⁶⁹

After the CSW, the JNCW, IMC-WE, and UN Women organise a joint debrief session for civil society to present the Agreed Conclusions and discuss how national plans and policy can be aligned with the outcomes. Civil society utilises this space to strategise around national level advocacy.⁷⁰ A broader engagement modality was introduced in the context of the Beijing+30 review during a two-day workshop by the JNWC on the role of civil society, human rights organisations, and national institutions in supporting the implementation of the national priorities for the upcoming five years.⁷¹

Civil society participation in the official delegation

Jordan includes one to two civil society delegates in the official delegation led by the Minister of Social Development, IMC-WE Chair, and the Secretary General (SG) of JNCW. Civil society delegates are selected by the government, based on the CSW Bureau and UN Women’s suggested criteria (i.e. gender equality advocates from civil society and women’s rights and youth groups, prioritizing those that work on critical human rights and gender equality issues including at grassroots levels).⁷² The government also makes the selection

66 ARDD. 2025. Walking on Eggshells: Pathways to Equality in Jordan: A Civil Society Perspective on the Beijing Declaration Commitments, p. 21. Available at: <https://ardd-jo.org/publication/walking-on-eggshells-pathways-to-equality-in-jordan/> . Accessed 14 December 2025.

67 Individual interview II10, 21 November 2025.

68 UN Women. 2022. “Arab States agree on common position ahead of global meeting on gender equality and climate change.” Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/stories/media-advisory/2022/02/arab-states-agree-on-common-position-ahead-of-global-meeting-on-gender-equality-and-climate-change> . Accessed 14 December 2025.

69 Individual interview II10, 21 November 2025. As an example: “Breaking the link between poverty and violence against women and girls: the role of gender mainstreaming in policymaking and in financing” Poster available at: https://unwlobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/csw/f7474c63-3a9f-4381-a7a5-57cbb8230f42_Concept%20Paper-CSW68%20Side%20Event%20Breaking%20the%20link%20between%20poverty%20and%20VAWG.pdf . Accessed 14 December 2025.

70 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025.

71 Fana News. 2025. “National Committee Holds Workshop on Advancing Beijing+30 Priorities in Jordan.” Available at: <https://www.fanews.com/language/en/national-committee-holds-workshop-on-advancing-beijing30-priorities-in-jordan/> . Accessed 14 December 2025.

72 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025. The criteria mentioned refers to the contents of the letter shared in the Annex III of this

based on thematic expertise, age diversity, and geographic spread. In the past five years, UN Women Jordan has funded the travel and accommodation costs of the selected civil society delegates for the first week of the CSW to ensure inclusivity.⁷³ Being in the official delegation allows the civil society representatives to be invited to more closed-door events, but as they usually do not stay for the second week, they do not engage in the negotiations.⁷⁴

“One of our demands is [to be] in the main building [during the CSW]. We are not coming here to hear each other as NGOs. We want the governments [to hear us], but they give us two minutes, not enough to share the problems with [...] the people who have the influence.”⁷⁵

Some civil society actors prefer to travel independently to the CSW rather than be part of the official delegation as diplomatic protocol may constrain the positions they are able to express at the CSW.⁷⁶ By engaging independently and through parallel events, civil society can also provide nuance to the official government position on Jordan’s progress towards gender equality. But very few Jordanian civil society organisations have ECOSOC accreditation, making them dependent on UN Women or international partners to get into the UN building if they are not part of the government delegation.⁷⁷

Advocacy and Partnership Strategies

CSOs navigate a restrictive environment by carefully framing their demands. Part of this is aligning advocacy with the Jordanian King’s triple modernisation agenda (Political, Economic, Public Sector), and framing gender equality as a tool for economic growth or political modernisation. When it comes to issues that the government does not engage in, civil society relies on producing shadow reports directly addressing UN bodies.

In practice, the arrangement is somewhat of a symbiotic relationship. The government often invites CSOs to so-called consultation meetings which in effect are used to validate government reports. In turn, with an awareness of this limitation, the CSOs utilise this access to push for incremental change.

Jordanian civil society plays a leading role in regional networks like the Arab Feminist NGO Network, “Roā’a”, coordinated by the Jordanian Women’s Union (JWU). The strategies applied at the regional level are determined by the topic at hand and aimed at influencing change across the region for shared concerns. This approach works well since the region shares similar contexts and government policies often influence one another throughout the Arab region.⁷⁸ They also collaborate with civil society organisations in various parts of

report. However, civil society organizations noted that they are not aware of what these criteria are (Individual interview II17, 15 December 2025).

73 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025. The CSOs can stay for the second week if they have other sources of funding for the extended stay in NY.

74 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025.

75 Individual interview II06, 19 November 2025.

76 Individual interview II06, 19 November 2025.

77 Individual interview II05, 19 November 2025.

78 Moreover, the group not only focuses on the theme of the CSW, but also how feminist civil society engages at the CSW, CSW’s power and (lack of) possible impact, and beyond with their most recent report on the 30th anniversary of the BPfA: “Feminist Agenda Beyond Colonial Structures: Reflections in the PostBeijing Era.” Available at: <https://jwu.org.jo/sites/default/files/2025-01/The%20Beijing%20>

the world, ranging from Africa to Europe.⁷⁹

“The majority of CSOs coordinate with government actors, but they should maintain their independent voices. The opportunity of participating in the CSW offers CSOs ample opportunity to learn from other CSOs who share common struggles and to learn how they’re handling it.”⁸⁰

Contextual and Political Factors

As part of the modernisation agenda, Jordan has enacted historic legal reforms to boost women’s formal representation. Recent reforms led to a record representation of women in the 2024 parliament (almost 20%), a metric leveraged by the government at the CSW to demonstrate progress.

At the same time, security imperatives increasingly restrict independent feminist organising with 90% of activists describing civic space as being reduced in 2021.⁸¹ Bureaucratic controls, a sweeping cybercrime law, and foreign funding restrictions create an environment of self-censorship to ensure organisational survival.

Despite this, engagement continues in a consistent manner. The consultation and engagement between civil society and the government in Jordan offers a different type of stability compared to other cases examined in this report, as the Royal Court’s patronage through the chairperson role of HRH Princess Basma, insulates this engagement and consultation from political volatility.

The key factors contributing to the effectiveness of engagement of Jordanian civil society are:

Formal pathways of engagement, which may be limited in terms of substantive impact, but provide opportunities for civil society to remain involved in the issue. This also facilitates networking and strategic advocacy domestically, as well as participation in the official delegation and opportunities to advocate internationally.

The strategic messaging of civil society actors, framing their demands in terminology aligned with existing national policy, delivering substantial legislative impact domestically. **International and regional engagement** with both foreign governments and regional and international civil society to amplify policy demands which do not find a place in domestic advocacy.

[%2B30%20-report-last%20version.pdf](#) . Last accessed 14 December 2025. Mentioned during the Individual interview II06, 19 November 2025.

79 Individual interview II06, 19 November 2025.

80 Individual interview II16, 11 December 2025.

81 Garlick and Jaber. 2021. “Impact of Shrinking Space on Women Organising in Jordan.” Kvinna till Kvinna. Available at: <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/IMPACT-OF-SHRINKING-CIVIC-SPACE-ON-FEMINISTS-ORGANISING-IN-JORDAN-1.pdf> . Accessed 14 December 2025.

Netherlands

The two main features stand out defining civil society engagement with the government around the CSW in the Netherlands: strong institutionalisation and the cooperative nature of the model. Described as a win-win arrangement by state officials and civil society representatives alike, it is characterised by the inclusion of one to two civil society representatives as full members of the official delegation, formal funding for CSO coordination, and a long-standing formalised relationship built on mutual trust. The case of the Netherlands is included in this review to illustrate how government-funded coordination can streamline advocacy and strengthen the government's negotiating position without compromising civil society independence.

Institutional Architecture for Engagement and Participation

Dutch engagement is anchored in a relatively permanent infrastructure that enables year-round consultation rather than sporadic input. On the part of the government, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (where the “emancipation department” in charge of gender and LGBTQI+ equality sits) leads the Netherlands' engagement at the CSW, in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science issues a call for proposals for a framework contract with a civil society consortium to organise the national CSW engagement process. This consortium is led by WO=MEN (Dutch Gender Platform) in partnership with Atria, with the current contract in effect until 2026. This arrangement ensures the government receives coherent, technically sound inputs instead of fragmented requests from different organisations. It also allows for diversity and cyclical capacity strengthening among the organisations participating in the process.

Engagement cycle

Civil society in the Netherlands meets throughout the year towards CSW, in CSO-only meetings, to develop the recommendations and to share updates, plans, and expertise. These meetings are mostly held online, to allow maximum participation also for people across the country. The preparation cycle for a specific CSW usually starts in September of the previous year. In recent years, WO=MEN in partnership with member organisations also organised CSO-only trainings on UN language, and negotiation skills and processes, usually in January just before the zero draft comes out.

There is an official kick-off meeting in autumn each year, led by WO=MEN, to discuss aligning national CSW priorities and plans for the coming year. During this meeting, the government informs of developments and updates from their side, for example in relation to the EU position and international dynamics during general assembly and committee meetings in New York. Civil society shares initial priorities and recommendations on the CSW priority theme.

In late January each year, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science organises a CSW NGO briefing meeting at the Ministry where government priorities are shared and the del-

egation is introduced to civil society. The meeting is jointly organised and moderated with WO=MEN. Atria presents the joint civil society recommendations and WO=MEN facilitates a series of pitches from civil society, ensuring diversity in topics and representation. In the drafting stage, CSOs are able to comment on the zero draft of the CSW Agreed Conclusions. This is where the coordination mechanism delivers its greatest operational value. WO=MEN consolidates all inputs into one document, which makes it much easier for government representatives to take the recommendations into consideration, given time and capacity constraints. Additionally, every five years, when the progress of the implementation of the BPfA takes place, CSOs can comment on the Dutch national position paper.

There is one formal briefing for Dutch civil society with the Minister at the beginning of the session during the CSW, which is jointly moderated by someone from the delegation and WO=MEN. Daily (hybrid) briefings between the delegation and civil society take place once the negotiations start. Previously held at the UN, these meetings have been relocated to the Mission in recent years. Additional informal exchanges take place just outside the negotiation rooms, giving civil society further possibilities for input as well as providing government representatives with the opportunity to tap into the in-depth knowledge of civil society representatives.

This is particularly relevant in the current context of increasingly organised opposition against gender equality. In this case, there are other ways the Dutch delegation has attempted to share more progressive voices and open spaces for civil society, including through side events in partnership with feminist organisations.

“Strong collaboration (between civil society and the government) is important because the opposition to women’s rights and gender equality from conservative organizations and countries is becoming increasingly fierce, better organized, and more personal.”⁸²

Following the CSW, WO=MEN organises a debriefing meeting between CSOs and government to review both the substantive outcomes of the negotiation and the overall cooperation process. This has allowed for a continuous fine tuning and evolution of the process towards a better cooperation and follow-up.

Civil society participation in the official delegation

Two non-governmental representatives join the official delegation each year: an NGO representative, selected through an open application and peer review process coordinated by WO=MEN, and a youth representative, elected through a national process run by the National Youth Council or selected by the youth-run organisation CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality. The first time an NGO representative was included in the official delegation was 2018. A youth representative has been part of the delegation since 2024 following many years of advocacy from feminists and youth in the Netherlands. For the NGO representatives, the main criteria is that they possess specific expertise on the topic of the CSW of that year

⁸² WO=MEN 2023. “Strategisch samenwerken bij de CSW68.” Available at: <https://womeninnewyork.blogspot.com/2023/11/strategisch-samenwerking-bij-de-csw68.html>. Accessed 04.12.2025. (Translated from Dutch original by the authors.)

since this is what brings the most value added to the government officials. The Ministry for Education, Culture and Science contracts the NGO representative and the youth representative is contracted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. While the selection is done by civil society and the youth council, the Ministries have final approval. WO=MEN offers capacity support to both delegates throughout the process. The Government of the Netherlands has also been advocating for more member states to include civil society in official delegations as they consider it beneficial to the negotiation process.

“As the first-ever NGO representative to join the Dutch government team, I had a unique opportunity to help make change; to participate in the negotiations and – most importantly – ensure that civil society perspectives would be taken into account. It was a role I did not take lightly, knowing the longstanding concerns of civil society groups on lack of inclusion, and in solidarity with the thousands of women’s rights advocates who had also travelled to New York.”⁸³

“Members of the government delegation repeatedly expressed their appreciation for the involvement of civil society. Thanks to our input, the Dutch delegation and relevant ministries worked hard during CSW65 to ensure the meaningful involvement and participation of civil society organizations and individual activists in the CSW. The Netherlands actively encouraged other UN member states to include an NGO representative in their negotiating delegations (#UNMuteUs) [...] In this way, the Netherlands is actively contributing to increasing the space for civil society organizations and individual activists at this international level, as a counterweight to the conservative pushback on gender equality and women’s rights.”⁸⁴

Both representatives have access to the negotiations room and official UN documents related to the negotiations. The government retains decision-making authority, but the representatives hold genuine influence. In 2018, the first ever NGO representative noted “I have high expectations, because I’m already seeing that many of my suggestions are being adopted by the Dutch government.”⁸⁵

Moreover, as the CSO representative changes each year, this brings a variety of expertise, in conjunction with the changing priority theme of the CSW each year. This also allows for capacity strengthening of various CSOs across the Dutch civil society ecosystem on CSW, allowing for a stronger understanding and ownership of the process. Lastly, this methodology also allows for each year’s CSO representatives to be a fresh eye and be critical of the process, as one of the interviewees put it; “you don’t become part of the furniture, as we say in Dutch.”⁸⁶

83 Barbara Van Paassen. 2021. “CSW65 and Covid-19: It’s time to have women at the table.” Available at: <https://afsee.atlanticfellows.lse.ac.uk/en-gb/blogs/csw65-and-covid-19-its-time-to-have-women-at-the-table> . Accessed 04.12.2025.

84 WO=MEN 2021. “Jaarverslag.” Available at: <https://www.wo-men.nl/bestanden/plannen%20en%20verslagen/WOMEN-jaarverslag-2021-def-gewaarmed-gecomprimeerd.pdf> . Accessed 05.12.2025. (Translated from Dutch original by the authors.)

85 Actionaid 2018. “Onze vrouw in New York.” Available at: <https://actionaid.nl/2018/03/02/vrouw-new-york/> . Accessed 04.12.2025. (Translated from Dutch original by the authors.)

86 Group interview GI02, 10 November 2025.

Advocacy and Partnership Strategies

Dutch civil society engagement with the government around CSW blends insider expertise with broader network mobilisation. The Dutch civil society always tries to connect advocacy messages and expertise between different UN processes. For example, they organise 'bridging' meetings (like between CPD / ICPD and CSW / Beijing) or share CSW lessons and insights on UN Language and negotiations with advocates going to UNFCCC COP.

The input provided by civil society relies on the longstanding institutional memory and convening power of CSOs working on gender equality. Frequent government turnover means CSOs often carry the historical memory of negotiations, including the evolution of sensitive language and past political red lines. Atria specifically acts as the historical institutional memory and archive space, allowing for a complementary and strong collaboration between the two civil society coordinators of this process.⁸⁷ WO=MEN functions as a convenor, linking pin, capacity builder, and strategic filter, ensuring proposals are realistic and aligned with UN drafting conventions and providing a consolidated input that is much easier for the government to incorporate. The youth representative brings data from school visits and surveys, giving negotiators concrete evidence to reinforce policy arguments and ensuring that the position of the youth representative is truly shaped by the needs of the youth in the Netherlands.

Civil society does not exclusively engage with the Dutch government. When there are advocacy points from civil society that the Dutch government cannot raise due to either national or EU position constraints, civil society engages with international networks such as the Women's Rights Caucus, the LGBTI Core Group, as well as other international connections and collaborations, to advocate towards other member states to advance language they consider a priority.

Contextual and Political Factors

Recent developments in the Netherlands have shown increased political support for anti-gender perspectives and deprioritisation of development cooperation and civil society space. While the Netherlands committed to feminist foreign policy just a few years ago, this was revoked in 2025. The EU common position, negotiated between countries prior to the CSW, defines the parameters of Dutch action in the CSW negotiations. CSOs express concern about future funding cuts and restrictions, which would greatly limit opportunities for civil society engagement in national and international advocacy spaces.

The key factors that make the Netherlands model work are:

Stable long-term funding for coordination, convening, communication, capacity building, and travel, which enables diverse CSO engagement and professional input.

Mutual trust between government and civil society, built through understanding of and

⁸⁷ This blog by WO=MEN also serves the purpose of ensuring access to historical information on negotiations and CSW engagement: <https://womeninnewyork.blogspot.com/>. Accessed 26 December 2025.

respect for each other's roles, relative transparency, shared access to official documents, and consistent communication.

Independence and clear accountability through which civil society representatives are selected by other CSOs and accountable to their constituencies.

Continuous review and improvement, supported by formal evaluations that have, for instance, pushed national consultations earlier to accommodate the EU position drafting timeline. There are numerous resources produced regularly by civil society, before, during and after CSW facilitating the spread of information and strengthening national capacity on the process and the outcomes.

Nigeria

Nigeria is an example of hybrid engagement. The state actively promotes the image of “one Nigeria” at the CSW and includes civil society representatives in the official delegation. Simultaneously, a vibrant civil society operates on the margins or outside of this architecture to advocate with the government and international actors for progressive rights agendas rejected by official state policy, such as SRHR or LGBTQI+ rights.⁸⁸ Anti-gender groups are very active precisely on these issues in Nigeria.⁸⁹ This case illustrates how civil society navigates a landscape defined by high visibility but limited policy influence, in the context of active opposition from anti-gender actors. The relative importance of Nigeria within the Africa Group⁹⁰ and the G77⁹¹ at the CSWs makes the conservative stance of the national government impactful and highlights the relevance of strategically engaging even in a context of ideological dissonance.⁹²

Institutional Architecture for Engagement and Participation

The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development serves as the central coordinating body for CSW engagement, although the government has been working on mainstreaming gender issues by having a gender desk in almost all the ministries, which civil society organisations generally engage with throughout the year.⁹³

The institutionalisation of the engagement of Nigerian civil society at the CSW is well illustrated by the efforts to project unity through dress code: in recent years, a national uniform has been worn by all Nigerians in the official delegation, government and civil society members alike, during key events at the CSW, aiming to signal a single, cohesive national position.⁹⁴

88 Individual interview II07, 19 December 2025.

89 Individual interviews, II07, 19 December 2025, and individual interview, II15, 04 December 2025.

90 Africa Group is the largest of the five United Nations regional groups with all 54 African Member States. It serves as a primary bloc for coordinating common positions on global policy and managing the nomination of candidates from the continent for elective seats within UN bodies.

91 The Group of 77 (G77) is the largest intergovernmental organization of developing nations at the United Nations, established to promote its members' collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on major international development issues.

92 Uchechukwu Ngwaba. 2021. “Nigeria's Role in Shaping Pan-African Ideals at the National, Sub-regional, Regional, Continental and Global Levels.” Available at: <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/analysis/nigerias-role-shaping-pan-african-ideals-national-sub-regional-regional#:~:text=I%20also%20suggest%20that%20Nigeria's%20leadership%20role,continent%20and%20one%20of%20its%20largest%20economies>. Accessed 12 December 2025.

93 Individual interview, II07, 19 December 2025.

94 Individual interview, II11, 22 November 2025.

“We come as one country united by a common purpose and we remain Nigeria.”⁹⁵

The policy of presenting a cohesion as the official Nigerian delegation may mean that there is an expectation that civil society adhere to the official national position when representing the official government delegation. At the same time, being on the delegation does not restrict the freedom of expression. “[Being on the delegation] does not preclude or reduce whatever they want to do. Nobody gags there, nobody says you can’t do what you want to do. [Some civil society actors] also get their CSO registration [in addition to the] national government delegation registration. So, they usually have a dual registration.”⁹⁶

The government officially encourages civil society to ask for the federal government’s logo for their parallel event posters, “[s]o they always have our logo because we endorse whatever they are doing.”⁹⁷ Civil society also organises parallel events around issues that are not supported by official government policy, such as sex work and the right to abortion. They do not seek government support for these events.⁹⁸

Engagement cycle

In November or December, the government convenes large-scale preparatory meetings, bringing together federal ministries (e.g. Health, Education), state-level commissioners, and civil society. Those organisations working on the priority theme of the upcoming CSW are invited first and foremost. During these meetings, participants discuss the actions the different actors have undertaken related to the priority theme, what good practices can be shared at the CSW, and what should be focus areas that year.⁹⁹

In preparing the national report to the CSW towards reviews of implementation of BPfA, the Nigerian government seeks input from civil society, and the support of UN Women. However, in terms of uptake of their inputs, some feminist groups find their specific inputs on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) diluted in the final documentation of the consultations, which has led them to prepare separate shadow reports on these topics.¹⁰⁰

The Ministry for Women sends memos to the 36 states asking them to nominate three representatives per state.¹⁰¹ If those three seats are not filled by public servants, non-governmental delegates may also be nominated.¹⁰² Civil society respondents report that these slots are frequently filled by political appointees instead of technical experts from civil society.

95 Individual interview, II11, 22 November 2025.

96 Individual interview II11, 22 November 2025.

97 Individual interview, II11, 22 November 2025.

98 “NGO CSW NY CSW67 Parallel Event Programme.” 2023. Available at <https://www.ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NGO-CSW67-Forum-Program.xlsx-Agenda.pdf>. Accessed 12 December 2025.

99 Individual interview, II12, 24 November 2025.

100 The shadow report on SRHR was published in 2025, and presented at a parallel event during CSW69, which government representatives also attended. Individual interview, II15, 04 December 2025.

101 Individual interview, II11, 22 November 2025.

102 Individual interview, II12, 24 November 2025.

During the CSW, the delegation holds daily morning briefings at the Nigerian House (Mission) in New York. A government representative updates the delegation on negotiations, and the group coordinates the events of the day. While civil society is invited into these daily briefings, they are not allowed in the negotiation rooms, which are regarded as state-only spaces.¹⁰³

A massive WhatsApp platform (with ~500 participants), managed by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, brings together Nigerian delegates to the CSW from different ministries, departments and agencies, and civil society. It serves as a real-time information hub and remains active throughout the year. It is used to share side event schedules, daily briefings, and other logistical updates, as well as related events throughout the year. This communication creates a high degree of transparency.

After the CSW, a debriefing meeting is held to discuss the Agreed Conclusions and possible implementation actions at the national level.¹⁰⁴ This debriefing is largely inclusive, including government representatives across ministries, and even civil society actors who were not able to attend the CSW. This allows for wider dissemination of the outcomes.¹⁰⁵ The government decides on a few points from the outcome documents of the CSW, to follow up in the national context as priorities.¹⁰⁶ Reports from these debriefing meetings are sent to the Federal Executive Council, which is responsible for the implementation.¹⁰⁷

Civil society participation in the official delegation

Nigerian civil society is included in the national delegation, though the infrastructure does not enable the engagement of small and underfunded organisations. To be part of the national delegation, CSOs are required to demonstrate a “national spread” (presence in at least 12 states), which the government believes will allow for stronger dissemination and mainstreaming of CSW outcomes to the national level.¹⁰⁸ This also results in the privileging of larger, well-resourced networks over smaller grassroots groups.

There is an intentional effort from the government’s side to include a diverse array of civil society representatives in the delegation, including disability rights activists, women entrepreneurs, and men who are working on gender equality issues.¹⁰⁹ The Minister of Women Affairs, H. Imaan Sulaiman Ibrahim, highlighted the “[r]ecognition of Nigeria’s inclusive delegation model as a global best practice” in her speech at the CSW69 debrief meeting held in April 2025.¹¹⁰

The government provides institutional backing (i.e. visa and accreditation support and

103 Individual interview II11, 22 November 2025.

104 Group interview, GI03, 11 November 2025.

105 Individual interview II11, 22 November 2025.

106 Individual interview, II11, 22 November 2025.

107 Individual interview, II12, 24 November 2025.

108 Individual interview II11, 22 November 2025.

109 Individual interview II11, 22 November 2025.

110 Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation. 2025. “It’s Women O’Clock in Nigeria — Minister Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim Calls for Action at Post-CSW69 National Debrief Closing.” Available at: <https://fmino.gov.ng/its-women-oclock-in-nigeria-minister-imaan-sulaiman-ibrahim-calls-for-action-at-post-csw69-national-debrief-closing/>. Accessed 11 December 2025.

badges) but no funding to support civil society engagement in the delegation.¹¹¹ Civil society often seek international grants or financial support from embassies of countries in the global north represented in Abuja to fund their participation at the CSW.

The institutional backing is significant in the context of global visa injustice; respondents have noted the importance of being in the national delegation for securing a visa from the USA for their travel to the CSW. After the appointment, “then [civil society representatives are] assisted by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs to get visas and permissions and all of those things to travel.”¹¹²

Advocacy and Partnership Strategies

In the context of Nigeria, civil society positions often differ significantly from the national position. There are certain segments of civil society (for instance, those focusing on education or economic empowerment) who generally have an easier time accessing the government compared to organisations advocating for the right to abortion or working on LGBTIQ+ rights.¹¹³ To navigate this challenge, organisations maintain strong links among each other, although not in a structured or formalised coalition. This allows them to bring in the data and policy needs of communities represented by organisations who tend to be dismissed by the government as their political stance goes against national policy. Even organisations with access reported that they deliberately used language consistent with national priorities and policies, while steering clear of terms like “intersectionality” that might hinder their advocacy with the government. In the words of one of the respondents: “there [are a] million ways to the same [destination]”¹¹⁴

“I mean there are members of the government that we already have easy contact with. [...] [T]hey’re very happy to talk to you offline. You can easily just text them and say, “Oh, hi auntie [...] is something going on? How can we contribute?””¹¹⁵

Contextual and Political Factors

The political landscape in Nigeria is defined by a strong presence of anti-gender actors. The government officially aligns with the African Group, which argues for national sovereignty and the protection of family values over an understanding of gender as socially constructed.¹¹⁶ This context makes advocacy on the right to abortion and LGBTIQ+ rights highly sensitive and risky. The lack of government funding for CSO participation is also a significant barrier. It forces CSOs to compete for limited international funds, leaving grassroots women and rural activists largely unrepresented in New York.

111 Individual interview II12, 24 November 2025.

112 Individual interview II12, 24 November 2025.

113 Although interviews indicated that organizations who advocate for the right to abortion may still be included in the official delegation due to their other work areas, LGBTIQ+ activists have more limited access.

114 Individual interview II12, 24 November 2025.

115 Individual interview II11, 22 November 2025.

116 SWP Berlin. 2024. “The Global Struggle for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.” Available at <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/the-global-struggle-for-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights#:~:text=The%20group%20opposes%20certain%20aspects%20of%20SRHR,and%20policies%20that%20aim%20for%20gender%20inclusivity>. Accessed 12 December 2025.

The key factors that make the Nigerian model of engagement work are:

Broad engagement and the state's commitment to include diverse segments of the government, as well as a broad array of civil society organisations as part of the unified presence of Nigeria at the CSW.

The structured follow-up mechanism in Nigeria is helpful in localising the outcomes of the CSWs and monitoring progress. The inclusive debriefing meeting held by the government, with discussions about follow-up and implementation, priorities of Nigeria from the outcome documents of that year and sharing of reports with relevant implementing state institutions are important good practices.

Strategic advocacy and terminological compromise by advocates to increase the probability of inclusion of the policy needs of marginalised communities and an intersectional perspective which may otherwise be rejected if advocated outright.

Parallel engagement by civil society, who make the most of the institutional pathway for engagement with the government on CSW, while simultaneously continuing to be critical of official government policy and advocate for universal access to human rights in shadow reports and civil society only events.

4. Analytical Findings: Three Interlinked Dimensions

Meaningful engagement can be understood through a set of concrete contextual, design, and outcome features that shape access, influence, and accountability within CSW processes across the five cases. These include the predictability of consultation opportunities across the annual cycle: instances where civil society inputs can be traced against government positions or draft texts and access to negotiation drafts and background documents. It also includes structured briefings between government delegations and civil society during negotiations; the presence of delegated liaison or coordination roles that enable real-time exchange, and post-CSW review mechanisms that allow for reflection on both outcomes and the process.

Engagement models should be assessed in terms of governance design and institutional practice. This comparative analysis does not seek to rank models or prescribe a single “correct” approach. Instead, it highlights how different configurations respond to distinct political, institutional, and resource conditions. All cases examined exhibit both strengths and constraints, and the value of each model lies in its fit with context, rather than in its replicability as a universal template. The following section unpacks how these features interact across cases through two structural variables and a set of design and outcome dimensions.

Across the five cases examined in this study, two variables, i.e. political alignment and institutionalisation, can account for the most obvious differences in patterns of engagement, levels of access, and degrees of influence. These structural variables are further shaped by a set of design dimensions (i.e., the formal and informal rules which organise engagement and participation): bridge¹¹⁷ ownership; resource architecture; delegation rules; informal engagement channels, and outcome-oriented dimensions. These are also defined by how the design features operate in practice and what forms of influence or adaptation they produce: civil society’s direct access to negotiations; outward-facing narrative constraints, and post-CSW review loops further determine the extent to which engagement translates into influence. Finally, context and resilience is a third important dimension: strategies and responses to anti-rights pressure illustrate how engagement architectures adapt under stress. This suggests the existence of parallel pathways and strong solidarity within the civil society networks, which are integral features of engagement rather than a sign of failed engagement models.

¹¹⁷ “Bridge” is used here to refer to the structured point of contact where civil society and government meet, exchange information, and influence each other.

Civil Society Participation and Influence

Structuring Variables

Political alignment

Institutionalisation

Design Dimensions

Bridge ownership

Resource architecture

Delegation rules

Context and Resilience

Informal engagement channels

Direct access to negotiations

Narrative constraints

Post-CSW review loops

Engagement and Outcome Dimensions

Anti-rights pressure strategies

Parallel pathways

Network solidarity

Architecture adaptation

Structural variables: Alignment

In the subsequent analysis, political alignment is used to describe the extent to which government and civil society actors share, tolerate, or strategically accommodate common normative positions and policy objectives. Beyond ideological agreement, this encompasses considerations such as whether civil society is recognised as a legitimate interlocutor, whether core concepts (such as gender equality, women's rights, or sexual and reproductive health and rights) are treated as acceptable or negotiable within official positions, and whether civil society engagement is perceived by the government as supportive of its international objectives or as a challenge.

High level of political alignment can include shared agendas and the co-construction of advocacy positions.

Intermediate level of political alignment is characterised by strategic framing and context-sensitive engagement.

Low level of political alignment manifests in adversarial dynamics, where government and civil society pursue opposing advocacy strategies, or even contest each other's legitimacy.

Structural variables: Institutionalisation

Institutionalisation refers to the extent to which civil society engagement in national CSW processes is embedded in formalised structures, procedures, and resourcing arrangements. It does not rely primarily on political goodwill or personal access to individual of-

office-holders. A higher level of institutionalisation is typically associated with the existence of designated coordinating platforms or entities; formal consultation mandates; predictable engagement cycles, and the allocation of resources to support coordination and engagement. The cases examined in this study demonstrate that institutionalisation operates across multiple dimensions and does not in itself guarantee continuity. Where procedural arrangements are not accompanied by sustained resourcing, engagement may erode through capacity loss or reliance on unpaid labour, even in the absence of explicit political opposition.

Country	Political Alignment (Norms & Demands)	Engagement Modalities (Institutionalization)
Netherlands	Relatively aligned	Highly institutionalised
Australia	Relatively aligned	Historically strongly embedded and institutionalised (Specifically during ERA period)
Jordan	Alignment is strategically managed	Highly institutionalised
Nigeria	More mixed alignment	Partially institutionalised
Argentina (Pre-2023)	Highest alignment	Relatively un-institutionalised
Argentina (Post-2023)	Adversarial (Alignment declined sharply)	Relatively un-institutionalised

Design Dimensions

Ownership of bridge

The type of engagement bridge (where the agenda for civil society is set), and who owns it is a question of power.

The cases illustrate three different structures. The Netherlands and, until 2024, Australia represent examples of a civil society owned coordination bridge, in which responsibility for convening, synthesising inputs, and managing internal accountability rests primarily with civil society actors. At their strongest, such bridges can generate coherent and technically distilled inputs for government while maintaining robust internal processes for representation, accountability, and pluralism of views. Nigeria (and to an extent Jordan through the national women's machinery) offers an example of a state-owned bridge where government institutions control convening power, set the parameters of consultation, and retain discretion over which civil society actors are invited and which advocacy priorities are emphasised. In this model, the functions to distil inputs, coordination, and selection lie largely

with the state. Argentina is an example of a bridge reliant on relationships. Reliant on informal access, trust, and close personal networks between civil society and state actors, such arrangements are typically low-cost, flexible, and capable of delivering high impact in politically favourable conditions. However, they are structurally fragile: their effectiveness depends on sustained political goodwill, and they offer little protection against abrupt shifts in political leadership or priorities.

Resource architecture

Resource architecture shapes who can participate in CSW processes, operating as a de facto selection mechanism across all five cases. In contexts where coordination and engagement are supported—at least partially—through dedicated funding, i.e. the Netherlands and historically in Australia, civil society engagement is broader and more diverse. By contrast, in Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, Jordan, the state provides accreditation, political backing, and in some cases visa facilitation, but little or no financial support, resulting in engagement patterns that favour larger, better-resourced organisations with access to international funding streams. In Jordan, UN Women has taken on the role of supporting civil society engagement in the CSW by covering costs, expanding the field of actors who are able to attend and engage. Civil society, however, does not only exist or function when supported by the state. Following the dismantling of previously state-supported engagement after 2023, Argentine civil society engagement did not disappear but shifted into alternative modes, including shadow reporting, subnational mobilisation, and transnational advocacy. In all cases, what civil society actors share is engagement continuous over time, enabling the accumulation of institutional memory and sustained policy influence.

Consolidation

The degree to which civil society inputs are consolidated before they reach the government is highest in contexts where there is strong institutionalisation and civil society is the owner of the bridge and where there is funding for this work. Examples of this include the Netherlands and, until 2024, Australia. These models also provide the easiest pathways to tracking the uptake of recommendations and determine the receptiveness of the government to civil society demands. Models with lower consolidation, such as Jordan and Nigeria, demonstrate a broader scope of consultation but the uptake is harder to trace as there is no single civil society input to compare against the national position. Argentina sits in between these two models, in that even though there is no formal consolidation of the input of civil society, there is a clear preparatory process where civil society aligns on the broad framework of their demands, also linking it to regional advocacy. For all models an important question is which safeguards exist to keep smaller or politically more challenging priorities visible.

Delegation composition

Across the cases, the formal rules governing the composition of official delegations' function as important inclusion and exclusion mechanisms, determining whose knowledge,

voices, and interests are represented at the CSW. In the Netherlands, delegation membership is filtered primarily through thematic expertise on the CSW priority theme, with civil society and youth representatives selected through sector-led processes, albeit with final ministerial sign-off. Australia employs a highly formalised and competitive model, with detailed eligibility criteria, explicit role expectations, confidentiality requirements, and overlapping two-year terms designed to ensure continuity and knowledge transfer, alongside an explicit commitment to diversity. Nigeria's approach emphasises geographic representation and state-level nomination, though the lack of funding and requirement for delegates to represent organisations which are active across 12 states federally privileges large, established organisations able to self-fund participation. In Jordan, while selection criteria follow the suggestion of the CSW Bureau and UN Women, the process is not transparent, and final decisions rest with the government, with UN Women occasionally mitigating resource barriers by funding participation for part of the conference.

Communication channels

Informal communication channels, and WhatsApp specifically, appear across all five cases, but play different institutional roles depending on context. In Argentina prior to 2023, direct access to ministers and senior officials via informal channels functioned as a high-trust influence mechanism, enabling rapid coordination, real-time feedback, and substantive impact on state positions. In Nigeria, by contrast, rather than serving as a space to shape negotiation language directly, the ministry-managed WhatsApp group operates primarily as a logistical tool and means of transparency, facilitating large-scale information sharing, mobilisation, and coordination across a very broad delegation. In Australia, informal channels historically served a strategic function, supporting rapid knowledge transfer, negotiation response, and coordination between civil society and officials, yet now they only continue through volunteer-run structures following funding cuts. The Netherlands presents a more formalised model in which informality (such as the Whatsapp/Signal groups) supplements rather than substitutes institutionalised briefings and mission-based engagement. The impact of informal structures, whether it strengthens engagement or makes it more delicate, depends on what it complements or replaces within the formal engagement architecture.

The following dimensions capture how these engagement arrangements operate in practice and translate into influence.

Outcome Oriented Dimensions

Direct access to negotiations

The ability for civil society to have direct access to negotiations themselves is a strong indicator of influence. The Netherlands, Australia, and Argentina prior to 2023 represent different models in which civil society actors had direct access to negotiation rooms and documents, real-time intelligence on the state of negotiations, and opportunities for ongoing direct engagement with government negotiators, including on specific drafting choic-

es and language. In contrast, in Nigeria and Jordan, civil society engagement is structurally one step removed from decision-making. While daily briefings and cooperation around side or parallel events are common, access to negotiation rooms is restricted to government representatives. These cases illustrate that inclusion in an official delegation does not translate into direct influence on the Agreed Conclusions, unless it is accompanied by access to information and mechanisms for real-time feedback. At the same time, influence does not inherently require civil society presence in the negotiation room. However, across the cases examined in this study, meaningful real-time engagement and access to negotiation dynamics tend to coincide with permission to enter negotiation spaces.

Where funding is provided for delegations, but access to negotiation rooms is not allowed, the funding often only covers the first week of the CSW. In practice, this timing enables civil society presence during high-level national events, when ministers and capital-based officials are in New York. Such arrangements tend to support networking, learning, and national-level advocacy more than directly influencing negotiated outcomes as the negotiations on the outcome document typically intensify in the second week. Across these models, the analysis indicates that even where engagement is formally open or institutionally embedded, funding arrangements, including their duration and scope, as well as salary coverage, have a strong impact on which actors can sustain engagement, stay in New York, and exercise influence over time.

Diplomatic constraints and messaging translation

Governments tend to set limits on what can be said and how issues are framed in UN negotiations. Across all cases, civil society is accustomed to (re)phrasing its priorities, while retaining their essence, to highlight them in their direct interactions with their government. Strong cooperation among NGOs helps ensure that the concerns of more marginalised groups and contested topics are included, even when they cannot be raised directly. In Jordan, for example, engagement at the CSW is increasingly presented in terms of economic empowerment and modernisation, while political rights and more controversial equality issues are approached with caution. Nigeria has similar red lines—especially on abortion and LGBTQI+ rights— but NGOs find room to engage in areas like education, health, and economic participation.

The “one Nigeria” image at the CSW signals cohesion and a unified national position for government and civil society alike. At the same time, parts of Nigerian civil society also engage more autonomously through parallel processes which enables advocacy on issues that fall outside official policy red lines.

Context and resilience

Resilience strategies are an integral component of how civil society navigates changing political conditions. Argentina after 2023 provides the most explicit illustration: following the collapse of the national engagement bridge, civil society shifted toward international pressure through treaty bodies and allied governments; strengthened subnational engagement; built alliances with sister movements, and intensified documentation through

shadow reporting. Jordan reflects a softer version of this dynamic, where parallel international engagement increases as domestic space narrows. Nigeria illustrates sustained dual-track engagement for issues that fall outside official policy red lines. Across these contexts, civil society maintains engagement with the state where possible, while simultaneously cultivating alternative pathways to sustain and strengthen advocacy. Dual-track strategies are not limited to moments of overt backlash; they represent a broader adaptive response to constrained or selective engagement environments.

Opposition to gender equality and related rights strongly shapes how governments involve civil society. In the Netherlands, civil society–government coordination is explicitly framed as a strategic response to increasingly organised opposition at the multilateral level, positioning civil society as a source of intelligence and reinforcement for government negotiators. Argentina demonstrates the inverse dynamic: the rise of an openly anti-gender administration led to the rapid dismantling of participatory machinery and the reframing of civil society as a political threat rather than a partner.

Where governments are willing or able to absorb the domestic political cost of defending gender equality, civil society is more readily engaged as an ally in multilateral processes. Conversely, where anti-rights opposition is strong and politically mobilised, governments tend to manage civil society engagement more cautiously, even where formal engagement structures exist.

5. Actionable Recommendations

Recommendations for Governments and National Delegations

The research demonstrates that governments seeking to strengthen both the coherence and effectiveness of their negotiating positions at CSW may benefit from the following approaches to engaging civil society across preparation, participation, and follow-up phases.

1. Co-develop clear frameworks for government-civil society collaboration around CSW together with civil society. Design these frameworks flexibly for continuity across administrative and political cycles.

Two models that have demonstrated success across a variety of cases are to:

- Empower and adequately resource a strong, independent, institutionalised national machinery on gender equality to function as a bridge for civil society engagement and to coordinate the inputs.
- Establish and fund a civil society network or coalition tasked with collecting, consolidating, and distilling civil society input to inform the national position. Ensure that funding is sufficiently long-term to allow the development of CSW process expertise.

These models, not mutually exclusive, illustrate different ways of structuring engagement depending on national context.

Therefore, it is advisable to:

2. Ensure adequate and sustainable resourcing for whichever framework best fits the country context, recognising that under-resourced coordination arrangements are likely to exclude smaller or less established organisations.
3. Maintain year-round engagement to support continuity, institutional memory, and timely integration of civil society expertise into national, regional, and multilateral preparatory stages.

Specifically:

- Involve civil society early in the timeline to maximise impact. Delayed involvement precludes engagement in critical national, regional, and governmental preparatory stages, diminishing the strategic value and efficacy of their contribution during the CSW session.

- Ensure accessibility by hosting online consultations to inform the national position to facilitate the engagement of smaller organisations, or those from remote regions.
- Use digital communication platforms (e.g. Whatsapp, Signal) for real-time information sharing, before, during and after CSW, as a highly effective, low-cost practice that facilitates transparency and keeps the delegation members connected.
- Formalise follow-up mechanisms for the localisation and implementation of the results of the Agreed Conclusions.

4. Include civil society representatives in official delegations.

- Publish clear, merit-based criteria for selecting CSO delegates to help build trust and preempt accusations of favouritism.
- Prioritise a civil society mechanism for selecting CSO delegates with government sign-off.
- Ensure the delegation includes technical experts with specific knowledge on the priority theme, as well as process experts with historical knowledge of the CSW and experience with such negotiations.
- Establish an engagement architecture that accommodates differing opinions, with the common goal of progress on gender equality.
- Fund civil society participation in the national delegation instead of relying on voluntary labour.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Networks

Civil society organisations seeking to maximise their influence and sustainability within CSW processes may consider the following approaches to engage with governments and multilateral actors:

1. Invest in coordinated and collective advocacy targeting government counterparts. Experience across the cases shows that consolidated submissions, such as jointly marked-up drafts or unified priority positions, are more likely to be taken up by governments rather than numerous separate inputs.
2. Produce your own data, analysis, and (shadow) reports. Sustaining the capacity for independent monitoring is crucial, particularly in contexts where official data is limited, selective, or contested. International and regional civil society networks, and academic researchers can serve as important sources of comparative evidence and peer learning, strengthening advocacy positions domestically and internationally.

3. Develop diverse engagement strategies with and beyond the CSW government delegations. Building relationships with a wide range of actors, such as different ministries, diplomats, legislators, subnational authorities, and advisory bodies, creates multiple channels for influence and helps maintain continuity even if access to a main institution becomes limited. Adapting advocacy approaches, messengers, and messages to different audiences is key to staying effective in changing political contexts.

4. Invest in broad-based alliances and cross-movement solidarity. Collaboration with organisations working on similar issues can strengthen intersectional analysis and increase political reach. Broad coalitions can help move forward politically sensitive issues by framing them through widely accepted priorities like violence prevention or public health.

5. Strengthen regional and transnational engagement as complementary pathways. Regional mechanisms and cross-border coalitions often remain accessible even when national-level engagement becomes limited or blocked. Investing in regional coordination enhances collective leverage, enables peer pressure among member states, and supports continuity of advocacy across political cycles.

6. Reference established international standards, which allows civil society to anchor their national advocacy priorities in globally recognised rights, providing a powerful tool for influencing government positions during CSW negotiations.

7. Explore diverse resourcing strategies to sustain engagement. Given uneven national funding arrangements, civil society organisations may need to pursue complementary support through international organisations, foreign embassies, or regional partners to enable sustained engagement.

Recommendations for All Actors

1. Models that include civil society in the delegation require clear protocols on confidentiality, access, and role definition. Without this clarity, inclusion risks being symbolic rather than influential, undermining trust on both sides and limiting the value of participation.

2. Sustainable partnership depends on the deliberate cultivation of trust between civil society and government actors. A shared understanding of political constraints, negotiating mandates, and red lines enables more effective information exchange and increases the likelihood of civil society inputs being substantively integrated.

3. Prioritise engagement with substantive negotiation processes and follow-up on agreed commitments. While side events can raise awareness and support visibility and networking, meaningful impact during the CSW process is most effectively ensured through sustained interaction with policy formulation, negotiation dynamics, follow up of Agreed Conclusions at national level.

4. In some political contexts, where civil society engagement into governmental processes

may not be an established practice yet, multilateral organisations, such as UN Women, may be able to support increased cooperation between civil society and the government.

5. Leveraging relationships with allied member states provides alternative pathways for influence when national channels are constrained. Equally, government openness to cross-border civil society engagement can support coalition-building around shared thematic priorities and strengthen multilateral coordination.

6. Annexes and References

I. List of Abbreviations

BPfA: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

CBD: Convention on Biodiversity

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

COP: Conference of the Parties

CPD: UN Commission on Population and Development

CSO: Civil Society Organization

CSW: UN Commission on the Status of Women

DFAT: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)

ECLAC/CEPAL: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council

ERA: Equality Rights Alliance (Australia)

EU: European Union

GBV: Gender Based Violence

G77: Group of 77

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

IFIs: International Financial Institutions

IMC-WE: Interministerial Committee for Women's Empowerment (Jordan)

ICPD: International Conference on Population and Development

ISRRRC: International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Caucus

JNCW: Jordanian National Commission for Women (Jordan)

JWU: Jordanian Women's Union

LGBTQI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex plus

MGoS: Major Groups and Other Stakeholders

MINPROFF: Ministry of Women's Empowerment and The Family (Cameroon)

MoWCSC: Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OVOF: Our Voices, Our Futures Consortium

PM&C: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia)

SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

UN: United Nations

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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III. Joint letter from Chair of CSW and UN Women



Chairperson
Commission on the Status of Women



9 February 2023

Excellency,

The upcoming sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67), taking place at UN Headquarters in New York from 6-17 March 2023, will discuss as its priority theme 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls'. As the preeminent global policy making body on gender equality, the Commission has a history of strong participation by civil society and social justice actors.

The Economic and Social Council encourages all States to consider including representatives of non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors in their delegations to the Commission (resolution 2015/6, paragraph 21). Further, in the same resolution, the Council decided to strengthen existing opportunities for non-governmental organizations to contribute to the work of the Commission.

We therefore call on your Government to consider including in your delegation gender equality advocates from civil society and women's rights and youth groups, prioritizing those that work on critical human rights and gender equality issues including at grassroots levels. For the priority theme of the session, civil society and in particular young people have been developing a unique expertise in benefits and challenges associated with digital innovation and technological change, and it therefore is crucial that they have a role to play in the discussions at the CSW and in contributing to the outcomes.

We hope that ministerial-level leadership of your delegation and the inclusion of strong gender equality advocates from diverse civil society groups and youth will reflect your Government's strong commitment to accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as the 2030 Agenda's aspiration to "leave no one behind". We encourage all Governments to share information on inclusion of civil society representatives in their delegation with UN Women offices in their region or country.

We take this opportunity to highlight that the Commission will hold – for the first time - an interactive dialogue with youth representatives on the priority theme, in accordance with its Methods of Work. Given the importance of youth engagement, UN Women will convene a "Youth Forum" during the session. The expectations and recommendations from this forum should enrich the Commission's own deliberations.

As Governments are thinking of organizing their own side events, we urge to include and involve multi-stakeholder actors as much as possible, in support also of the Secretary-General's drive towards a more engaged, enhanced multilateralism, and in solidarity with young people and civil society going forward.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mathu Joyini
Chair
Commission on the Status of Women

Sima Bahous
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director
UN Women