



**Australian
Human Rights
Commission**

8 May 2026

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Submitted via online portal

Dear Committee,

Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's (CEDAW) draft 'General Recommendation No.41 on Dismantling Gender Stereotypes and the Unequal Power Relations that Sustain them' (GR41).

The Commission strongly supports CEDAW's efforts to address the far-reaching consequences of gendered stereotypes through its GR41.

Education

The Commission welcomes the recognition that education is a critical tool to challenge stereotypes, from pre-school to university. If we want a culture of safety and respect, we need to invest in comprehensive and inclusive relationships and consent education from early childhood, so our children grow up learning empathy, emotional awareness and respect. This requires states parties to commit ongoing funding for consistent, inclusive and evidence-based education addressing respectful relationships, consent and sexual and reproductive health. States parties should also ensure mechanisms to monitor implementation and assess effectiveness of the education.

Shared care

The Commission welcomes reference to gendered expectations around care and household responsibilities. Attitudes, stereotypes and gender roles are evident in the way we think about care, with caring responsibilities being one of the biggest drivers of inequality. To create a society that sees caregiving as a shared responsibility, we must move away from rigid ideas that men are the breadwinners and women are the caregivers, and acknowledge that being both a worker and a carer is the reality for most people.

Work

The Commission welcomes the acknowledgement that gender stereotypes negatively impact women's experiences in employment. As recognised by CEDAW, wage inequality is driven in part by persistent stereotypes that undervalue women's skills and limit perceptions of their capacity to perform certain roles. Research from Jobs and Skills Australia highlights the extent of occupational segregation, with only one in five workers employed in occupations with roughly equal representation of men and women.¹ Additionally, data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency shows that women earn 78 cents to the dollar of every man.² The gap is even wider for First Nations women, who earn 65 cents to every dollar earned by men.³

Stereotypes also impact the experiences of women and gender diverse people in the workplace, particularly through workplace sexual harassment. The fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces found that one in three women experience workplace sexual harassment.⁴ For First Nations women, women with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people and women from culturally and racially marginalised backgrounds, this figure rises to one in two women.⁵ The Commission also heard from its *Speaking from Experience* project that perpetrators often use the targeted blending of racist and sexist stereotypes in

¹ Jobs and Skills Australia, *New Perspectives to Old Problems: Gendered Jobs, Work and Pay* (August 2025).

² Workplace Gender Equality Agency, [Gender pay gap data](#) (2025).

³ Jobs and Skills Australia, *New Perspectives to Old Problems: Gendered Jobs, Work and Pay* (August 2025).

⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission, [Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces](#) (2022).

⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission, [Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces](#) (2022).

how they perpetrate workplace sexual harassment, and how this can often be dismissed as “just a joke” or “a cultural misunderstanding”.⁶ This dismissal is also often steeped in stereotypes, such as Australia having a culture of being unserious, so nothing said should “be taken seriously”.

Intersectional approach

The Commission welcomes the intersectional approach taken by the Committee, recognising the unique ways gender stereotypes impact different communities. In particular, the Commission welcomes the explicit recognition of the experiences of transgender women and women with variations in sex characteristics. However, in doing so, the Commission highlights the binary nature of the stereotypes outlined in G41, and the need to explicitly recognise how gender diverse communities experience significant harm due to their refusal to conform to these stereotypes.

Around the world, we are seeing gender diversity being used as a weapon for ideological and political purposes. This is particularly unjust when it targets a group that already faces higher rates of violence and makes up less than 1% of the population. Trans and gender diverse people remind us that when we move beyond rigid stereotypes, we create space for all people to live authentically and share roles and responsibilities without limits.

The Commission notes that although GR41 effectively highlights the particular needs of diverse communities, those experiences are not reflected throughout the entirety of GR41. Instead, intersectional analysis is limited to a few specific paragraphs. The Commission recommends implementing an intersectional analysis throughout GR41. For example, the way in which gender and racial stereotypes impact culturally and racially marginalised and Indigenous women in the justice system should be reflected in the final recommendations.

Engaging men and boys

The Commission welcomes the Committee’s commitment to promoting engagement with men and boys in dismantling gender stereotypes. While this engagement is essential, the Commission notes GR41 should more explicitly

⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Speaking from Experience: What needs to change to address workplace sexual harassment* (2025).

recognise that gender stereotypes also negatively impact men and boys, and CEDAW must call on states parties to address the harm rigid gendered stereotypes inflicted on all people in its recommendations. Strict ideas of masculinity and femininity limit opportunities for everyone. They shape how we think we are expected to behave, what roles we're allowed to take on, and how freely we can express who we are. In recent years, we have seen a shift in how gender norms are absorbed by young people, both online and in real life. Recognising this, calling it out, and involving men and boys in the conversation is a vital first step in creating solutions.

Judicial and law enforcement

The Commission welcomes the acknowledgement of the prevalence of gendered stereotypes in the justice system. Last year, the Australian Law Reform Commission handed down a landmark national review *Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice Responses to Sexual Violence*, which found 9 out of 10 women who have experienced sexual violence do not report to the police.⁷ Some of the barriers to engagement with the justice system highlighted in the report include: the justice system does not allow for safe, informed and supported engagement for victim-survivors; when people do engage with the justice system, they are often met with myths and misconceptions about sexual violence, experience ill treatment and are often re-traumatised; and the system that we have does not allow for justice options that meet the diverse justice needs of victim-survivors.⁸

Language

The Commission recommends the use of the word 'experience' rather than 'suffer' at paragraphs 4, 16, 31 and 48 of GR41, in line with a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach to advocacy related to gendered violence.

⁷ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice System Responses to Sexual Violence* (2025).

⁸ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice System Responses to Sexual Violence* (2025).

Noting the above, the Commission is supportive of GR41, and encourages the adoption of this document. The Commission is happy to provide further assistance to CEDAW in its consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely

Dr Anna Cody

Sex Discrimination Commissioner

Australian Human Rights Commission

E: sexdiscriminationcommissioner@humanrights.gov.au