

New survey reveals complexities in women's representation on International Women's Day; Progress for some, setbacks for others

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQIA+ womxn see 14% increase in representation, while CALD and immigrant womxn report declining inclusion at 11% and 7%*
- *67% of womxn from marginalised groups and 85% of straight, white, and able-bodied women excluded from speaking opportunities at events*

AUSTRALIA – February 19, 2025 – The 2025 *More Voices, More Representation on International Women's Day* campaign, conducted by Pureprofile, surveyed 1,017 womxn nationwide including trans, gender-diverse, and non-binary people, and found significant disparities in womxn's representation across events, media, and professional panels. The findings highlight the complex and evolving challenges womxn face in securing meaningful representation across International Women's Day (IWD) celebrations in Australia.

While womxn from minoritised, racialised and underserved communities reported a 5% increase in representation at International Women's Day celebrations, their experiences vary significantly across different marginalised groups. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander womxn along with LGBTQIA+ womxn, saw a notable 14% increase in representation in the past 12 months. In contrast, CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) womxn and immigrant womxn from non-English-speaking backgrounds reported growing exclusion, with representation for these groups declining by 11% and 7%, respectively.

Out of the 1,017 respondents (of which 9.5% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander), more than 1 in 2 (54%) reported not seeing any change in representation of their respective demographics in the past 12 months, 16% said they feel less represented now and 15% have seen an increase in representation. These findings underscore the complex and evolving challenges womxn face in gaining representation across professional spaces.

The campaign is backed by 37 Australian advocates and organisations including Tasneem Chopra OAM, Briar Harte, Winner Disability Inclusion Change Maker of the Year 2024 and Writer of Mostly Unlearning, Women of Colour Australia, Prabha Nandagopal from Elevate Consulting Partners, Lisa Sarago from AI Indigenous Innovations, Michelle Lim, UTS Business School, The Sussan Group, Pureprofile and many others joining forces to help create an International Women's Day that has greater intersectional representation to ensure *all* womxn are recognised,

celebrated and represented, and that more intersectional voices are given access to platforms for IWD and beyond.

Representation drives inclusion: Why visibility matters

The top reasons womxn felt included and represented at previous IWD events include seeing womxn's achievements highlighted (48.7%), hearing about initiatives focused on empowering womxn (43.8%), seeing womxn who looked or sounded like them (38.2%), and witnessing the acknowledgment of womxn from underrepresented communities (38.2%).

26% of womxn with physical or mental disabilities felt more represented, which is the equal highest group alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while only 9% of immigrant non-English speakers reported feeling more represented. Additionally, 16% of womxn with physical or mental disabilities felt less represented at previous IWD events.

For respondents who felt less represented, the main reasons included not relating to the issues or achievements discussed at events (32%), the womxn speaking not looking or sounding like them (31.7%), and the absence of initiatives focused on empowering womxn (31.7%).

Tiff Ng, Founder of The Social Story said "Many organisations still focus too heavily on the diversity and not the inclusion of people from diverse backgrounds. This report not only highlights the inequities of CALD womxn in colour in positions of power, but the profound effect their authentic inclusion has for the wider community. Organisations need to commit to creating environments to not only see but hear from womxn with different experiences and can proficiently speak on intersectional issues that are currently ignored. For DEI initiatives to truly take us further, the importance of intersectional voices cannot be overlooked".

Speaking opportunities and fair pay remain key challenges

The survey also brings to light how speaking opportunities remain a significant challenge for womxn, with 74% reporting they have never been invited to speak at events. The sense of exclusion is particularly pronounced among non-diverse women, 85% of whom are overlooked, compared to 67% of womxn from diverse backgrounds.

The majority of womxn, regardless of their diversity status, are not compensated for speaking opportunities, highlighting a systemic failure in both representation and fair pay. Diverse womxn are more likely to be compensated for their speaking

engagements, with 41% reporting payment, compared to just 23% of straight, white and able-bodied women.

Representation in political leadership and influence on voting decisions

When asked about the importance of political representation, 80% of womxn agree that political leaders should reflect the diversity of the population and 52% believe that diversity directly impacts their voting decisions. While womxn with intersecting identities view increased diversity as crucial for progress, some non-diverse womxn feel that current representation efforts are sufficient and feel excluded from the growing emphasis on diversity. This highlights the nuanced and often divided perspectives on the role of diversity in shaping political leadership.

Looking ahead and making IWD more representative

To make IWD more representative in the future, 54% of respondents are advocating for greater attention to intersectional issues and 46% are calling for more diversity in representation. Additionally, 41% of diverse womxn emphasised the need for fair payment for participation, compared to just 25% of non-diverse womxn.

Rachel Yang, Partner, Giant Leap said, “Intersectional representation for womxn in 2025 demands stronger, braver leadership —both corporate and political— that doesn’t back down in the face of DEI backlash. With the More Voices 2025 survey indicating that 80% of womxn believe political leaders should reflect the population, the call for inclusivity is clear.

“Leaders must clearly communicate the purpose and impact of DEI efforts, making it evident that inclusivity is a driver of progress, not a threat. It requires both a top-down and bottom-up approach that brings everyone along while addressing internal biases that wrongly attribute organisational failures to DEI. True representation is about standing firm in the belief that diversity isn’t just the right thing to do—it’s essential for resilience, innovation, and sustainable success, driving productivity and shared prosperity for Australia”.

For more information about the *More Voices, More Representation* survey and campaign, click [here](#).

To find diverse voices for your next event, click [here](#).

Methodology

The 2025 "More Voices More Representation" survey, conducted by Pureprofile on behalf of Vu Consulting in October 2024, surveyed 1,017 Australian womxn from diverse backgrounds to reflect the demographic composition of Australia's

workforce. Quotas were based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), public research, and organisations focused on diverse communities.

The survey represented key groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander womxn, Black womxn, Womxn of Colour, immigrants, CALD womxn, womxn with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ or gender-diverse womxn, ensuring the findings captured the varied experiences of Australian womxn.

Supporting quotes from partners

Niti Nadarajah, Founder, Coaching by Niti

“As we see increasing backlash and resistance towards diversity, equity and inclusion programs, it becomes even more critical to hear the lived stories and perspectives of women from diverse backgrounds and/or who identify as having intersectional identities. Open and transparent communication about the systemic reasons driving DEI efforts, and a robust change management plan to drive awareness, adoption and effective execution of DEI programs, have never been as important. And that starts with listening to those who are most impacted by lack of representation”.

Professor Nareen Young, Associate Dean (Indigenous Leadership & Engagement) at UTS Business School

“The diverse mainstream of Australia’s women simply haven’t been included in International Women’s Day celebrations for a long time. If the origins of IWD didn’t recognise the intersections of ethnicity and class I don’t know what it did, and we are taking it back. IWD is about all of us”.

Solai Valliappan, Investor, Adviser, Board Director

“This year will highlight those leaders who have been just performative in their words /actions and those who are meaningfully fostering inclusive environments. It will be these leaders who recognise intersectionality who will continue to see the benefits of success (time and money)”.

Grace Young, Chief Innovation Officer, Wattwatchers

“Attacks on minority groups are often seen as distant problems, affecting 'other people' far away from 'us'. This perspective ignores the interconnected nature of social discrimination. Intersectional representation is crucial, especially on occasions like International Women’s Day, because it reveals that policy decisions and their consequences directly impact individuals within our own circles—people who are

not abstract strangers but neighbours, colleagues, and friends. When discriminatory policies and rhetoric go unchallenged, they create a broader environment that gradually normalises harmful conduct. This slippery slope of marginalisation, seen vividly in Trump's America, extends beyond its initial targets, emboldening misogyny and other forms of discrimination that ultimately impact us all. Recognising these issues are not remote or theoretical, but deeply personal and local, is key to fostering empathy and mobilising communities to proactively challenge systemic discrimination”.

Min-Shi Michelle Lim, AAPC Director, Organisational Culture, Ethics, and Intersectional DEI Specialist

“The increasing DEI backlash in the USA underscores the urgent need for stronger leadership accountability at the Executive Committee (ExCo) and Board levels, along with clear communication about its value, the why, and the very real, tangible risks of pulling back on DEI. Intersectional representation in 2025 must go beyond surface-level gestures to address deeply embedded structural inequities. Leaders have a responsibility to articulate why DEI matters - and they must do so by highlighting its proven impact on innovation, diverse decision-making, and long-term organisational success. However, achieving meaningful representation requires courage.

Leaders must not only prioritise DEI initiatives but also confront the very workplace cultures that perpetuate dangerous biases - biases that unfairly blame DEI for unrelated issues such as poor governance or risk management failures. DEI is not the scapegoat—it's the solution. True progress will depend on a top-down commitment to systemic change, paired with an ability to bring everyone along on the journey. This means centring diverse lived experiences, being transparent about impact, and empowering diverse women to shape policies and initiatives”.

Tasneem Chopra OAM, CEO of The Culture Lens, Cross-cultural Consultant, Diversity Equity & Inclusion trainer, Board Director

“Organisations have an opportunity to proactively lead with inclusive rigor that values diversity by not diminishing it. In the face of wilful contempt for inclusion, those with power and conscience fight back by acknowledging intersectional inclusion, platforming it, resourcing it and stepping into the role of genuine allyship. Not just leaning in.

Through equitable HR policies in recruitment, retention and promotion, co-designed by those most impacted by DEI measures, change can occur that grows employee wellbeing, business efficiency - and company profitability.

Ironically, this fear of wokeness and cancel culture, has been out-cancelled by those being held to account, who felt they had the most to lose”.

Lisa Sarago, CEO and Co-Founder of Land on Heart and Land on Heart Foundation, Director of AI Indigenous Innovations, Founder of Tiddas in Tech

“It’s so important for our younger generations to see representation of all women during IWD – so that they know that their values, beliefs and experiences matter. Seeing a diverse range of female leaders’ voices elevated during IWD ensures that all women are represented and heard. All of our lived experiences are different and unique, and we cannot address the inequities and inequalities for all women if we do not have voices from all women”.

List of partners of the More Voices, More Representation campaign

- UTS Business School
- The Sussan Group
- Pureprofile
- Vu Consulting
- Tasneem Chopra OAM, The Culture Lens
- Women of Colour Australia
- The Social Story
- Gloria Yuen
- Lisa Sarago, Land on Heart Foundation
- Briar Harte, Mostly Unlearning
- Michelle Lim
- Neha Madhok, Neha Madhok Consulting
- Niti Nadarajah, Coaching by Niti
- Ruhee Meghani, Allied Collective
- Prabha Nandagopal, Elevate Consulting Partners
- Friska Wirya, Fresh By Friska
- Welcome Merchant
- Zen Tea Lounge Foundation
- The Water Well Project
- Jerusha Mather
- Yasmin Poole
- Giant Leap
- Grass Skirt Project
- SSI
- Racial Justice Centre
- Grace Young, Wattwatchers
- Koon Lai, Career Hack with Koon
- Susannah Thai, Greenlight Worldwide

- Women NSW
- ASRC
- Lida Ghan, Ghan Fashion
- The Cultural Intelligence Project
- Dimitria Groutsis
- Joy Adan
- NSW Council for Civil Liberties
- Chantal Moussad
- Solai Valliappan