



19 March 2018

### **International Women's Day 2018**

#### **Response to Government and Opposition policy priorities**

*National Press Club Address by the Minister for Women, the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer  
Release of ALP's Setting the Agenda: A National Strategy for Gender Equality*

The Harmony Alliance welcomes the ongoing bipartisan focus on promoting gender equality through the release of key policy agenda on International Women's Day 2018. On 6 and 7 March, in the lead up to International Women's Day, both the Minister for Women, the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP, and the Shadow Minister for Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, gave addresses at the National Press Club. The Minister took the opportunity to outline key priorities for her new portfolio, while Ms Plibersek released a draft of the ALP's *Setting the Agenda: A National Strategy for Gender Equality*. The Harmony Alliance supports commitments made by the Minister and Shadow Minister to reduce family, domestic and sexual violence, to improve women's economic security and to boost women's access to leadership and representation, which are priorities in line with the Alliance's own work.

The Harmony Alliance reiterates its commitment to working with the Government and the Opposition to improve experiences and outcomes for women in Australia from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including women seeking asylum. We call on all policy makers to ensure that an intersectional lens continues to be applied right through to implementation. In particular, we ask that strong consideration is given to:

#### **Gathering Data**

- (1) Funding independent research on issues pertaining to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- (2) Ensuring that data publications produced by the ABS can be disaggregated on the basis of self-identified cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as country of birth, in order to facilitate informed policymaking.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Access to Justice**

- (3) Improving the accessibility of the Australian court system to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

#### **Health, wellbeing and safety**

- (4) Targeting the needs of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their children in the Fourth Action Plan (2019-22) of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22* through substantive recommendations across all relevant priority areas and funds for implementation.
- (5) Incorporating the needs of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in national health policies and processes, including in the National Women's Health Policy.

#### **Employment and economic participation**

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<sup>1</sup> In adherence to responsible data collection standards. See <https://responsibledata.io/> for more information.



- (6) Partnering with the corporate sector to create industry standards across the public and private sector for pro-diversity work places to improve the hiring, retention and promotion of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- (7) Reviewing processes for the recognition of foreign qualifications and skills in Australia.
- (8) Reviewing the effectiveness of Jobactive in assisting women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to find meaningful and secure employment.
- (9) Consulting women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the review and development of early childhood education and care policies, to ensure the diverse needs of new Australians are met.
- (10) Formalising and expanding an annual Women's Budget Statement to consider the impact of budget policies on women with multiple forms of diversity, including women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **Leadership**

- (11) Building the capacity of young women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to advocate effectively on issues concerning them.
- (12) Leading by example, by extending affirmative action targets to promote other forms of diversity within parliament, particularly focussing on women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### Background

#### **Gathering Data**

- (1) Existing data about women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds has tended to be limited to specific geographic locations or cultural identities.<sup>2</sup> Tailored research is required to develop a statistically valid sample of the experiences of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds which will facilitate informed policymaking in an increasingly diverse Australian Society.
- (2) Currently data publications by the ABS are not regularly disaggregated by cultural, linguistic or ethnic backgrounds, or country of birth. The Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG) should be used by all federally funded departments when conducting research and these disaggregated results should be made publicly available in both tables and reports as consistently as practicably possible and appropriate.

#### **Access to Justice**

- (3) Courts are alienating and intimidating environments for the majority of people. This experience is often exacerbated for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, who may have little familiarity with the court system, poor English, and have lived through traumatic experiences. The Judicial Council on Cultural Diversity's *National Framework to improve accessibility to Australian courts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and migrant and refugee women*, authorised by the Council of Chief Justices, outlines key areas requiring action in order to improve access to justice for these constituencies. Courts should be supported to implement these recommendations, including to provide improved tailored information resources for these constituencies and training for all judicial officers and court staff in cultural competency, domestic violence and working with interpreters.

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<sup>2</sup> Vaughan et al. *The ASPIRE Project: Research report* (Sydney: ANROWS, 2016), 10.



### Health, wellbeing and safety

- (4) Culturally and linguistically diverse women often experience domestic and family violence differently and are more likely to face barriers to accessing support services. Additional barriers to seeking help include, but are not limited to: the inherent isolation of living in a new country away from established networks; community pressures and expectations; higher levels of financial dependence on perpetrators or community; lack of knowledge of rights and available services; language barriers; fear of shame and isolation from the community; and fear of deportation and removal of children or perpetrator.<sup>3,4</sup> Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also at risk of experiencing different types of domestic and family violence such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and dowry-related violence.<sup>5</sup> These differing experiences of victims and survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds mean that mainstream responses are often not appropriate or adequate. In order to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight to end violence against women and their children, the Fourth Action Plan must commit to developing appropriate responses for women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, both within mainstream and specialised services.
- (5) Migration and ethnicity-related factors, as well as refugee experience, are important social determinants of health. Women represent the single most significant vulnerable group in the migration program. The recent Building a New Life in Australia Report showed that of the humanitarian migrants surveyed, women were significantly more likely than men to report poorer levels of health, and were more likely to be at risk of serious mental health problems and to experience symptoms of PTSD.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, improving health and health literacy of women has a direct positive impact on family care and community health more broadly. Healthier women are more likely to influence the health-promoting choices of family members. Targeting the health outcomes of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds with consideration of their cultural and linguistic differences, stands to improve the effectiveness of preventative health measures and to reduce the use of acute health services.

### Employment and economic participation

- (6) Research shows that diversity in the workplace improves performance. McKinsey & Company concludes that gender diverse companies are 15 per cent more likely to perform better than their peers, jumping to 35 per cent for ethnically diverse

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<sup>3</sup>Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA). *Submission into the Public Consultation on Visa Simplification: Transforming Australia's Visa System*. (Canberra, 2017), available online at: <https://www.border.gov.au/Visasupport/Documents/visa-simplification-submissions/australian-women-against-violence-alliance.pdf#search=awava>.

<sup>4</sup>Vaughan, C., Davis, E., Murdolo, A., Chen, J., Murray, L., Quiazon, R., Block, K., & Warr, D.. *Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia. The SPIRE Project: Research report* (Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 2016), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services [DSS]). *Hearing her Voice: report from the kitchen table conversations with culturally and linguistically diverse women on violence against women and their children* (Canberra, 2015), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services [DSS]). *Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants – Findings from the first three waves* (Canberra, 2017). P33 -34



companies.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as seen above, workforce participation rates of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds continues to fall well below the rest of Australia, sitting at 47.3 per cent, compared to 59.2 per cent of all women, 69.5 percent for culturally and linguistically diverse men and 70.4 per cent for all men.<sup>8,9</sup> This data highlights the double discrimination (conscious or not) that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds women continue to face. In recent years, there has been significant focus on the need to improve the hiring, retention and promotion of women by both the public and private sectors; however, cultural diversity is yet to receive the same attention. Many of these programs could be effectively expanded to promote broader diversity in the workplace, including anonymous CV hiring processes, target setting, flexible work practices and compulsory unconscious bias training for all managers.

- (7) Employment is a key indicator of successful migrant settlement, and recognition of pre-arrival skills and qualifications is an important step in securing ongoing and satisfactory employment.<sup>10,11</sup> Yet, the formal recognition of qualification and skills in Australia remains a complex and burdensome process, unaffordable to many.<sup>12</sup> The Building a New Life in Australia Report showed that by Wave Three, of the 156 respondents who had sought to have their technical or tertiary qualifications assessed, only 30 (19.2 per cent) had received full recognition and 20 (12.8 per cent) had received partial recognition.<sup>13</sup> Of those who had not sought recognition, one of the most commonly cited barriers was not knowing how. Reviewing the Australians Qualification Framework in order to improve consistency across industries and States and Territories and to increase user accessibility and affordability stands to increase the number of migrants fully utilising their skills and qualifications, thereby boosting their economic contribution and improving settlement outcomes.
- (8) A recent report by Fairfield Multicultural Interagency and Refugee Council of Australia highlighted that Jobactive is ill equipped to meet the needs of refugees and migrants.<sup>14</sup> Its one-size-fits-all approach does not take into consideration the additional barriers faced, including conflicting demands on time posed by setting up a new household, caring for family members and learning English. As the Joint Standing Committee on Migration concluded, forcing vulnerable people to choose between learning English, critical for settlement outcomes and job sustainability, and immediate employment is “an inefficient use of government resources”.<sup>15</sup> Female humanitarian entrants face these barriers more acutely, with the BNLA report finding that they are 12 percent less

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<sup>7</sup> Hunt, V., Layton D., & Prince, S.. *Diversity Matters* (McKinsey & Company, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 92

<sup>9</sup> PM&C. *Towards 2025* (2017), 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> OECD/European Union (EU), *Indicators of Immigrant Immigration 2015: Settling in 2015* (Paris, 2015), 107.

<sup>11</sup> Settlement Council Of Australia (SCOA). *Unlocking Potential – foundations of economic engagement for migrants from a refugee background* (Canberra, 2017), available online at: <http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SCoA-Background-Paper-on-Employment.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Migration. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian: report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes* (Canberra, 2017), 83-85.

<sup>13</sup> DSS. *BNLA* (2017), 33 -34.

<sup>14</sup> Fairfield Multicultural Interagency and Refugee Council of Australia. *Not Working: experiences of refugees and migrants with Jobactive* (2017), available online at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Jobactive.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 92.



likely to be employed than their male counterparts.<sup>16</sup> Government data confirms that this trend expands beyond humanitarian entrants, with the workforce participation rates of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds sitting at 47.3 per cent, compared to 69.5 per cent for culturally and linguistically diverse men and 59.2 per cent of all women in Australia.<sup>17</sup> Ensuring migrants and refugees and, in particular, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, receive tailored assistance when seeking to enter the Australian workforce stands to improve employment and retention rates.

(9) It is well recognised that access to affordable childcare is a key facilitator of women's employment, and this is no exception for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.<sup>18</sup> Without access to childcare, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds often prioritise the settlement needs of children over their own, delaying learning English and seeking employment.<sup>19,20</sup> On the other hand, childcare stands to accelerate integration of both children and parents, by providing a link into the Australian community. Accessing childcare, however, is likely to come with additional barriers for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, such as negotiating cultural or familial expectations of gender roles in raising children, finding culturally appropriate care, and accessing facilities that are suitable in terms of both location and cost. Further research into these barriers is required; engaging women of migrant and refugee background in the development of early childhood education and care policies will help to identify key solutions and incentives for accessing childcare support.

(10) A Women's Budget Statement is a critical tool for assessing where the burden of budget decisions falls, based on gender considerations. However, the multiple diversities of women strongly affect how they are impacted by policy decisions, and therefore intersectional considerations are necessary to improve the Statement's accuracy and relevance.

### Leadership

(11) Twenty-five per cent of young people in Australia are from a refugee or migrant background; yet, they often face particular barriers to representation and leadership opportunities. A national capacity building program for young migrant and refugee women would help to empower this next generation of leaders and enable them to project their own voice. This program should offer training modules on effective advocacy, a mentoring component, as well as the opportunity to interact with decision makers.<sup>21</sup>

(12) The introduction by both major parties of targets for equal representation of men and women demonstrates the importance both place on accelerating the road to equal representation. Gender, however, is not the only diversity in need of a boost in our

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<sup>16</sup> DSS, *BNLA* (2017), 28.

<sup>17</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet [PM&C]). *Towards 2025: A Strategy to Boost Australian Women's Workforce Participation* (Canberra, 2017), 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation, Australia, July 2012 to June 2013* (Canberra, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 27.

<sup>20</sup> DSS, *BNLA* (2017), 25.

<sup>21</sup> This program could be based on Oxfam's *Straight Talk* program, which works with Indigenous Australian Women or Plan International's *Youth Activist Series*.



# HARMONY ALLIANCE

MIGRANT & REFUGEE WOMEN FOR CHANGE

parliament. In particular, women from non-English speaking backgrounds are underrepresented at the national decision-making level, constituting just 2.7 per cent of the federal parliament (in comparison to the 21 per cent of Australians who speak a language other than English at home).<sup>22,23</sup>

For more information or to discuss the contents of this submission further, please contact the Harmony Alliance Secretariat:

Ph: +61 (2) 6162 0361

Email: [secretariat@harmonyalliance.org.au](mailto:secretariat@harmonyalliance.org.au)

The Harmony Alliance is one of the six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government to promote the views of all Australian women, to ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Our purpose is to provide a national inclusive and informed voice on the multiplicity of issues impacting on experiences and outcomes of migrant and refugee women, and to enable opportunities for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to directly engage in driving positive change.

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<sup>22</sup> The Guardian. *Are you reflected in the new parliament?* (2016), available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/ng-interactive/2016/aug/31/are-you-reflected-in-the-new-parliament-diversity-survey-of-australian-politics>

<sup>23</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census, 2016.