



28 September 2018
Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive.

The Harmony Alliance is one of 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. The Harmony Alliance's 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.

The Alliance welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committees regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive.

We recommend that the Education and Employment Committees:

- **Note** the shortcomings of the current jobactive model in meeting the needs of job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and in particular, of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds;
- **Recommend** jobactive provide specialised support services for job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, as well as culturally competent mainstream services;
- **Recommend** the jobactive model reviews how the success of employment services is measured, to ensure results reflect quality over quantity.

Failing to meet the needs of job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The one-size-fits-all approach of the current jobactive model is ill-equipped to overcome the additional barriers faced by many migrants and refugees, including conflicting demands on time posed by setting up a new household, navigating a new job market and learning English.¹ In order to access employment services, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may have to overcome additional barriers, including caring responsibilities, entrenched gender roles and the tendency for women to prioritise their families' settlement over their own.^{2;3} A recent report by Refugee Council Australia and Fairfield Multicultural Interagency highlights that under the current jobactive system, providers often miscategorise the support needs of migrant and refugee job seekers with little opportunity for reassessment, leaving them with insufficient support.⁴ The Joint Standing Committee on Migration noted that forcing vulnerable people to choose between learning English, critical for

¹ 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>

² Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 27.

³ DSS, *BNLA* (2017), 25.

⁴ FMI and RCOA. *Not Working* (2017), p 9.



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settlement outcomes and job sustainability, and immediate employment is “an inefficient use of government resources”.⁵ In keeping with this, Harmony Alliance’s own research with women from migrant and refugee backgrounds has found that a high proportion of those who have used Centrelink or an employment agency to search for work in the last twelve months were dissatisfied with the services. Problems noted by users included experiences of discrimination based on ethnic or cultural backgrounds, insufficient understanding by staff when dealing with non-citizens, and insufficient assistance provided for writing applications or building networks.

Specialist services paired with competent mainstream services

Providing tailored support to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, both within specialist and mainstream services, will promote more sustainable job outcomes in the long run. This support should offer an understanding of the particular barriers faced, as well as flexibility in assisting the job seeker to balance commitments and navigate barriers. Support should be pitched at an appropriate level for newly arrived migrants, including outlining the basic processes of job-seeking in Australia and helping to build local networks, references and experience. Providing information on workplace expectations and culture in Australia is also an important service not only to help migrants and refugees find jobs, but to keep them. Employment services stand to play a useful role in supporting workers with family responsibilities to identify flexible workplaces and appropriate caring arrangements.

Measurement of success

Current measures for assessing and rewarding the effectiveness of jobactive providers have not successfully delivered quality outcomes for complex cases, including humanitarian entrants.⁶ Reforming incentives or assessments for employment service providers is crucial to ensuring quality service provision is prioritised over quantity, with the aim of secure suitable and sustainable jobs. Monitoring and evaluation processes should also ensure that job providers are rewarded for providing flexible and tailored services, including compliance management. Taking the time to ensure clients are properly job ready, receive ongoing support during placements, and secure work that is suitable for them (including flexible or part-time arrangements), will help to ensure quality and sustainable outcomes from employment services.

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

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⁵ Joint Standing Committee. No one teaches you how to become an Australian (2017), 92.

⁶ FMI and RCOA. *Not Working* (2017), p 11.