



August 2018

Future Employment Services Consultation
Active Labour Market Assistance Branch
Department of Jobs and Small Business
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Submission to the Future Employment Services Consultation

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 Future Employment Services Consultation. In light of the next generation of employment services discussion paper, we welcome the Employment Services Expert Advisory Panel's intention to put users at the centre of future employment services, including a focus on tailored service delivery, as well as moving to a strength-based assessment of job seeker's situations.

We recommend that the Panel's report to Government:

- **Highlight** the need for specialised support services for job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, as well as culturally competent mainstream services;
- **Note** the need for continued provision of face-to-face support to those for whom online services will be an additional barrier to accessing employment services;
- **Recommend** that employment services provide support to migrants and refugees seeking to have overseas qualifications recognised;
- **Recommend** revising how the success of employment services is measured, to ensure results reflect quality over quantity.

Background

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 companies.¹ Yet, despite growing evidence of the benefits of employing women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, this cohort continues to lag behind their peers. The unemployment rate for women who have migrated to Australia sits at 6.3 per cent compared with 5.4 per cent for all Australian women and migrant men, jumping to 6.7 per cent for women who speak a language other than English at home.² This highlights the

¹ Hunt, V., Layton D., & Prince, S.. *Diversity Matters* (McKinsey & Company, 2015).

² ABS 2016 Census, for people aged between 20 and 74 years old.



additional barriers that women from migrant and refugee backgrounds face in seeking to enter the workforce, and the need for tailored support services to assist this cohort to secure ongoing employment.

Specialist services paired with competent mainstream services

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.³ Its one-size-fits-all approach does not take into consideration the additional barriers faced at the time of first settlement, such as conflicting demands on time posed by setting up a new household and learning English. 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.^{4,5} Employment services must therefore provide **tailored support** to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, offering an understanding of the particular barriers faced, and providing flexibility in assisting the job seeker to balance commitments and navigate barriers. In turn, this will promote more sustainable job outcomes in the long run.

Employment services have a useful role to play in **building local networks, references and experience** for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Local networks can be critical to gaining employment. Many jobs are only advertised through word of mouth and candidate selection often relies heavily on recommendations from existing networks or locally recognised organisations or education institutions. Employers are generally more likely to consider employing someone who has local experience and references. Without an established network of family, social and professional contacts it can therefore be hard to break into the employment scene. Women may find it more difficult to build local networks and experience than their male counterparts, depending on their levels of English proficiency, caring responsibilities and independence.

It is well recognised that **access to childcare** is a key facilitator of women's employment, and this is no exception for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.⁶ 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.^{7,8} 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. Employment services stand to play a useful role in supporting workers with family responsibilities to identify flexible workplaces and appropriate caring arrangements.

Offering support **pitched at an appropriate level** for newly arrived migrants is also a critical need that employment services can fulfil. Common job-seeking processes in Australia may not be familiar to many migrants, and assistance with basic tasks such as developing a well-structured resume,

³ 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>

⁴ Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 27.

⁵ DSS, BNLA (2017), 25.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation, Australia, July 2012 to June 2013* (Canberra, 2017).

⁷ Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 27.

⁸ DSS, BNLA (2017), 25.



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responding to selection criteria and knowing how to answer behavioural questions in interviews is vital. 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.

Online services

The proposed move to a greater use of online services presents potential barriers to, among others, those that have limited access to online capable devices, limited access to internet data and low levels of English literacy. It is important that in designing such a system, alternative face-to-face options continue to be provided to those for whom online services are not suitable. Refugee Council Australia and Fairfield Multicultural Interagency highlight that under the current job active system, providers often miscategorise the support needs of migrant and refugee job seekers, with little opportunity for reassessment.⁹ Introducing a user-focussed assessment of needs, which allowed users to request additional support if needed and provided regular intervals for voluntary reassessment, would help to ensure clients are not left isolated for extended periods as a result of increased online support services.

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Recognition of pre-arrival skills and qualifications is an important step in securing ongoing and satisfactory employment for many migrants and refugees.^{10,11} Yet, the formal recognition of qualification and skills in Australia remains a complex and burdensome process, unaffordable to many.¹² 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.¹³ Of those who had not sought recognition, one of the most commonly cited barriers was not knowing how. If employment services were to assist migrant and refugee job seekers to navigate such processes, they could both attract businesses looking for qualified candidates and motivate migrant and refugee job seekers. The provision of subsidies for those seeking to have qualifications recognised or undertaking relevant bridging courses could further incentivise engagement in employment services for both business and job seeker.

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.¹⁴ Reforming incentives or assessments for employment service providers will be crucial to ensuring quality service provision is prioritised over quantity. 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.

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

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

¹¹ 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>

¹² 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.

¹³ DSS. *BNLA* (2017), 33 -34.

¹⁴ FMI and RCOA. *Not Working* (2017), p 11.