



# HARMONY ALLIANCE

MIGRANT & REFUGEE WOMEN FOR CHANGE

## **Submission to the Review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants**

Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants.

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. We are a member-driven organisation, representing over one hundred individual and organisational members. 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.

Our submission seeks to address, from a refugee women-centred perspective, two of the Review's areas of interest:

1. What works well in Australia's settlement service provision, and where is there room for improvement?
2. What factors have the greatest positive and negative impacts on refugee employment outcomes?

### **Gender focus in settlement**

Refugee women, while experiencing a range of vulnerabilities and complexities, are the game-changers in their families and communities and play a critical role in community development and empowerment. The settlement process is a valuable touch point and opportunity to engage refugee women and provide a focus on the role of women and women's leadership in community cohesion. In this regard, the strategies employed by settlement service providers in the initial stages of refugee women's settlement journey are critical for achieving positive and lasting outcomes for the women, and consequently their families and communities. Refugee women's leadership capacity can also play a significant role in the empowerment of a broader range of women settling via other migration pathways.

Settlement strategies should include a women-focused design and delivery of systems literacy. Women's capacity to independently and confidently navigate systems—including legal, financial and health systems—is a significant barrier, or potential enabler, for recently settled refugee women, and a critical factor in enabling their independence throughout their life.

Cultural and gender complexities should be considered when tailoring approaches to meet the needs, and bridge the systems literacy gap, of refugee women. Refugee women may experience greater vulnerability due to societal stigmatisation or gender dynamics in the community. Including consideration of cultural and linguistic differences will improve settlement outcomes for the community as well as the effectiveness and performance of settlement services more broadly.

## Refugee women's employment barriers and enablers

With regard to employment outcomes of refugee women, we recommend that the Review considers:

- the need for tailored and inclusive employment support
- the process of qualification and skills recognition
- the benefits of targeting entrepreneurship programs
- the importance of relevant employability skills programs for refugee women
- the eligibility to access the Adult Migration English Program (AMEP) and
- the affordability and accessibility of childcare for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Government employment services provided by Jobactive are ill-equipped to meet the needs of refugee women. Their 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, refugee women 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.<sup>1:2</sup> Employment services must therefore provide tailored support to refugee women, offering an understanding of the particular barriers faced, and providing flexibility in assisting the women-job seekers to balance commitments and navigate barriers.

Seeking recognition of international qualifications and skills in Australia is a complicated process. Requirements differ across states and industries, adding to confusion. The Harmony Alliance's 2018 Migrant and Refugee Women's Voices Survey found that 23 per cent of respondents described the process as somewhat hard and 40 per cent described it as very hard.<sup>3</sup> Such difficulties create barriers to entering the workforce and could lead to de-skilling of refugee women. A one-stop-shop to provide user-centred support to navigate the various systems would greatly increase the accessibility of skills and qualification recognition processes.

Entrepreneurship of refugee women should be recognised as an important avenue for enhancing refugee women's economic participation outcomes. Entrepreneurship support programs should be integrated into settlement services and provide a specific focus on women wanting to start their own business or enterprise (e.g. SSI's Ignite program).

Vocational education should support refugee women to develop a better understanding of Australian labour markets and job-seeking processes, while offering pathways to gain local work experience and build professional networks. Consideration should also be given to volunteering and community participation as important links to integration and skills development (including language and work readiness).

The timeframes placed around accessing the AMEP pose particular barriers to women. Under current rules, migrants have to register for the AMEP within 6 months of arrival, commence studies within a year, and complete classes within five years. Women often delay learning English in order to support their partners and children in settling into a new country, and thereby miss out on this key opportunity.<sup>4</sup> An extension in timeframes for accessing the AMEP would increase the opportunities for refugee women to participate in this program and, as a result, provide links to important information and systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Standing Committee. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian* (2017), 27.

<sup>2</sup> DSS, *BNLA* (2017), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Harmony Alliance, *Migrant and Refugee Women's Voices: Survey Report* (November 2018) 29.

<sup>4</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).

Having adequate access to childcare is key to enabling women to enter and remain in the workforce. Women provide 58 per cent of unpaid childcare and 60 per cent of unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, with men performing 42 per cent and 40 per cent respectively.<sup>5,6</sup> Women are therefore affected by the cost and availability of childcare when making decisions regarding employment. The important role of childcare in integrating new arrivals into the community should also not be understated. Access to childcare connects new arrivals to the community and allows women to make new connections. However, accessing childcare is likely to come with additional barriers for refugee women, such as negotiating cultural or familial expectations of gender roles in raising children, finding culturally appropriate and nurturing care, and accessing facilities that are suitable in terms of both location and cost. Further research into these barriers is required; engaging refugee women in the development of early childhood education and care policies will help to identify effective solutions and incentives for accessing childcare support.

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<sup>5</sup> ABS, *Census 2016*, 'Unpaid Childcare (CHCAREP)', Sex Profile, viewed 13 June 2018.

<sup>6</sup> ABS, *Census 2016*, 'Unpaid Assistance to a Person with a Disability (UNCAREP)', Sex Profile, viewed 13 June 2018.