

## Election Priorities

Australia is a thriving multicultural society. Migration has been instrumental to Australia's growth, with 49 per cent of Australians either born overseas or with at least one parent born overseas. All levels of our society have benefitted from the skills and diversity that migrants bring to Australia.

This, however, hasn't translated into equality and inclusion for migrants and our descendants. Discrimination in systems, rhetoric and attitudes prevents people from migrant backgrounds from contributing and participating fully in Australian life. Women in particular face multiple and intersecting barriers, as a result of bias and discrimination based on their gender in addition to their cultural or linguistic background.

By not facilitating equal inclusion of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, Australia is both missing out on valuable contributions to society, and also leaving women and our families vulnerable to short term shocks that could leave them further dependent on assistance in the long-run.

In the lead up to the 2019 Federal Election, the Harmony Alliance is calling on all parties to adopt policy platforms that promote the equal participation of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australian economic, social, cultural, civil and political life.

### 1. Enable women from migrant and refugee backgrounds experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence to seek and receive help.

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience greater barriers to accessing support services for family, domestic or sexual violence, including: limited eligibility; isolation; community pressures; financial dependence; lack of knowledge of rights and available services; language barriers; fear of deportation; and fear of removal of children or perpetrator.

#### Expand eligibility to access to violence services

Visa status affects eligibility to access state, territory and commonwealth government-funded services and payments. This includes support in situations of domestic, family and sexual violence, and leaves many victims/survivors with no income or financially dependent on the perpetrator.

Women with no income have limited pathways to re-establish independence. Crisis support services, which are already overburdened, are regularly forced to choose

between turning away women on temporary visas with no income, who have no other options, or providing prolonged assistance that will reduce the service's ability to provide assistance to others seeking help.

This leaves many women on temporary visas experiencing violence with the unenviable decision of staying with the perpetrator or immediately returning to a home country where we may receive limited support, and potentially be blamed and shunned.

#### Stop the migration program from facilitating violence against women

Perpetrators use the threat of deportation to control victims and to prevent them from reporting violence.

Family Violence Provisions under the Migration Act 1958 are available to allow some on the path to permanent residency to continue their application after a relationship breakdown if this is due to family violence. However, the list of eligible visa categories

and the definition of family violence under this provision are narrow, and leave many victims/survivors in dependent and precarious relationships as a result of our migration program.

There is an urgent need for an extension in eligibility for these provisions, as well as for the introduction of a temporary visa to allow anyone in Australia experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence, adequate time to make plans to leave a dangerous situation.

Discretionary enforcement of the code of conduct, for those on bridging visas, and the character test, for all migrants, also discourages victims/survivors from reporting violence, and should be standardised.

### Fund specialist services

Specialist services operating at the juncture of multicultural and gender expertise are critical to ensuring victims/survivors are provided with tailored support that is culturally competent, trauma informed and gender sensitive.

Many women from migrant and refugee backgrounds are unable or unwilling to attend mainstream organisations due to a lack of trust or familiarity, or community pressures.

Building tailored skillsets in mainstream service providers is important; however, it

cannot adequately fill the role of specialist multicultural or ethno-specific family violence organisations.

### Tackle dowry abuse

Dowry abuse is a devastating form of family violence, which refers to any act of harassment or violence related to the giving or receiving of dowry.<sup>1</sup> A recent inquiry by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee into the “Practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia”, recognised the need for reforms to protections and legal recourse available to victims/survivors of dowry abuse. This included legislative changes to the definition of Family Violence and to the Family Violence Provisions under the Migration Act 1958. The Harmony Alliance supports the recommendations of the Committee and calls for their implementation as soon as possible.

### Benchmark:

*Current data collection regarding domestic, family and sexual violence is not sufficiently disaggregated to measure the impact of barriers such as migration, visible minority or LOTE status on prevalence.*

*We call on all parties to commit to collecting relevant disaggregated data regarding violence against women.*

## 2. Improve the employment outcomes of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds continue to lag behind our peers in labour force participation and

unemployment rates, and are underrepresented in management

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Good Practices in Legislation on 'Harmful Practices' against Women*, (2009).

positions. This, despite the fact that women from migrant and refugee backgrounds have valuable skills to offer the workforce, including, but not limited to: alternate world-views and thinking; access to wider networks; and cultural and linguistic competency. Executive teams that include people of diverse cultures and genders have been shown to significantly outperform in profitability and value creation.<sup>2</sup>

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds face dual barriers to employment, based on both cultural and gender norms. These include, but are not limited to: unconscious bias and discrimination; language and educational barriers; caring responsibilities; visa restrictions; gender and cultural expectations.

### Improve employment services

Government-funded employment services, currently provided by Jobactive, are not meeting the needs of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Employment services must be able to provide tailored and flexible support; their focus should be developmental, rather than punitive. Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds should be offered meaningful support to navigate the distinct barriers faced, such as: understanding a new job market; navigating qualifications recognition processes; learning English; balancing individual and family's settlement needs; and boosting confidence.

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<sup>2</sup> McKinsey&Company, *Delivering through diversity*, (2018).

<sup>3</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).

### Support women to learn English

Fluency in spoken and written English are critical skills for gaining employment in Australia.

The Adult Migration English Program (AMEP), a government initiative, provides free English lessons to new migrants. The timeframes placed around accessing AMEP, however, 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 our partners and children in settling into a new country, and miss out on this key opportunity.<sup>3</sup> An extension in timeframes for accessing the AMEP is needed to increase opportunities for women to participate in this program.

### Provide affordable and appropriate childcare for all.

Access to childcare is key to enabling women to enter and remain in the workforce. Women provide 58 per cent of unpaid childcare in Australia, meaning we are particularly affected by the cost and availability of quality childcare when making decisions regarding employment.<sup>4,5</sup>

Childcare also plays an important role in helping newly arrived migrants to integrate into the community, allowing access to broader networks and information.

Providing more culturally nurturing childcare and expanding eligibility for childcare subsidies stand to improve women from

<sup>4</sup> ABS, *Census 2016*, 'Unpaid Childcare (CHCAREP)', Sex Profile, viewed 13 June 2018.

<sup>5</sup> ABS, *Census 2016*, 'Unpaid Assistance to a Person with a Disability (UNCAREP)', Sex Profile, viewed 13 June 2018.

migrant and refugee backgrounds' ability to engage in the workforce and community.

### Help people navigate the qualifications recognition process

Seeking recognition of international qualifications in Australia is a complicated and costly process. This locks valuable skilled employees out of the market and de-skills women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Requirements differ across states and industries. The Harmony Alliance's 2018 Migrant and Refugee Women's Voices Survey found that 40 per cent of respondents described the process as very hard and 23 per cent of respondents described it as somewhat hard. Adding to confusion, English language requirements of Australian universities may not match up with industry specifications.

Where costs are too high for both partners to seek recognition of their qualifications, wives

are more likely to step aside to allow their husbands to work, due to entrenched gender roles.

A one-stop-shop to provide user-centred support in navigating the various systems would greatly increase the accessibility of skills and qualification recognition processes.

#### **Benchmark:**

*The unemployment rate for women who have migrated to Australia sits at 6.3 per cent and at 6.7 per cent for women who speak a language other than English at home, compared to 5.4 per cent for all Australian women and 5.65 per cent for all Australian men.<sup>6</sup>*

*The labour force participation rate of women who have migrated to Australia is 66.95 per cent compared to 68.53 per cent of all Australian women and 78.6 per cent of all Australian men.<sup>7</sup>*

### 3. Support women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to access and navigate the Australian healthcare system, in order to achieve equal health outcomes.

Migration and gender are important social determinants of health.

Migrants and refugees face particular barriers to accessing health services, including limited knowledge of the health system, limited trust in health service providers, and language and cultural differences.

Women may experience greater vulnerability due to societal stigmatisation of various women's health-related topics. In particular, women seeking asylum and those from

refugee or refugee-like backgrounds are at increased risk of poorer health and wellbeing due to both pre-migration experiences, including exposure to trauma, and post-settlement experiences.

Australia's health system is consumer driven. It relies on individuals to advocate for their own needs, and assumes a high level of patient understanding and confidence in so doing. It is further complicated by interactions between private and public systems, and

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<sup>6</sup> Data taken from ABS 2016 Census for people aged between 20 and 74 years old.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

variable eligibility for non-citizens to access Medicare and private health insurance.

### Improve access to information

Providing women with the knowledge we need to understand health prevention and to navigate systems will improve health outcomes for both ourselves and our families.

Mental health concerns may be highly stigmatised in certain communities, and challenging misconceptions is critical to promoting better health.

Information about health and health systems should be provided at key touch points. The presentation of this information should be designed with the expertise of community, to ensure it is delivered for maximum benefit.

### Ensure access to interpreters

We know that language barriers are significant impediments to accessing health care for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. An inability to communicate effectively with a healthcare professional can prevent an individual from providing and receiving important information required for treatment.

The availability and appropriate use of interpreting services at no cost to the individual, provided by NAATI-certified interpreters, is a minimum requirement in order to overcome these barriers. Healthcare workers must be confident in identifying the need for and in engaging an interpreter.

### Fix gaps in the funding system

Short term access costs can present significant barriers to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds seeking medical assistance. A lack of preventative care or early intervention can lead to much greater expenses for the health care system in the longer term.

Currently, it is difficult for new arrivals to establish eligibility for Medicare or private health insurance based on differing visa conditions unfamiliar to many health care and insurance providers.

The Harmony Alliance's 2018 *Migrant and Refugee Women's Voices Survey Report* found that 44 per cent of respondents had private health insurance compared to 57 per cent of Australians generally. A correlation was observed between those without private health insurance and those extremely worried about the physical and mental health of themselves and their families.

This poses a potential burden on the public health system, and highlights the need to identify and remedy gaps in health cover eligibility, incentives and implementation for migrants.

### Benchmark:

*In 2016, women born overseas were 9 per cent less likely to attend antenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy than women born in Australia.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Health 2016 (2016)

#### 4. Improve opportunities for leadership and representation of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australian public life.

Meaningful inclusion of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australian life requires representation of our voices and faces at all levels of society. Without a meaningful presence in influential institutions such as the media, politics and business, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds cannot be expected to have an equal say in society. In return, public discourse will be enhanced by expanding the diversity of views and experiences included.

##### Focus on youth

It is important to empower young women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to cultivate us as Australia's future leaders.

A quarter of young people in Australia are from a refugee or migrant background; yet, without being able to see themselves reflected in the public landscape of Australia, it is more difficult for them to dream of becoming future leaders. It is, therefore, critical to foster the belief of young women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that we belong in the public face of Australian business, media and politics, and to provide them with relevant development opportunities.

##### Promote diversity in parliament and business

Following the 2016 federal election, women from non-English speaking backgrounds accounted for just 2.7 per cent of the

Australian Parliament, compared to the 21 per cent of women across Australia who speak a language other than English at home.<sup>9,10</sup>

As of June 2018, women made up just 30 per cent of ASX 100 boards, while only 5 per cent of all ASX 100 CEO's were from a non-European background, compared to the more than 20 per cent of Australians who come from non-European backgrounds.<sup>11; 12</sup>

These figures highlight the significant underrepresentation of culturally diverse women within leadership positions in parliament and business in Australia.

In order to bridge this gap, tailored policies and disaggregated measures of progress are needed. Many policies already championed by government and the private sector to improve gender diversity could be effectively expanded to promote broader diversity in the workplace, including anonymous CV hiring processes, target setting, flexible work practices and unconscious bias training for all managers.

##### Benchmark:

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<sup>9</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>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census, 2016 – women in this instance refers to 'females' as identified in the Census.*

<sup>11</sup> Australian Institute of Company Directors, *30% by 2018: Gender diversity progress report*, Volume 12, (March-May 2018), p.11.

<sup>12</sup> Cooper, Groutis and Whitwell, *Beyond the Pale – Cultural Diversity on ASX 100 Boards*, (University of Sydney, 2018), p.5.

## 5. Provide equal access to justice for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Justice is an important pillar for upholding democracy and protecting human rights. All people living in Australia should be supported to access justice in our country.

The justice system is a particularly alienating and intimidating institution for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, who may have little understanding of Australia's processes, a distrust of institutions, low levels of English, and lived through traumatic experiences.

### Support justice institutions to be more accessible to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Courts and police should be supported to improve the experience of accessing justice for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

This could include: providing tailored information for communities; training for all staff in cultural competency, domestic violence and working with interpreters; hiring liaison officers; and employing officers from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

### Ensure access to affordable and independent legal services, irrespective of visa status

Access to legal services is critical for guaranteeing human rights protections, and should be available to all living in our country. In particular, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may require legal advice in order to navigate the migration implications of leaving a violent relationship.

Affordable legal services, which offer culturally competent and trauma sensitive support, are a minimum requirement for providing meaningful access to justice.

For more information or to discuss the contents of these election priorities further, please contact:

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The Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change is one of six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government to promote the views of all Australian women, to ensure our 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.