



September 2019
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Inquiry into the adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia

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 Inquiry into the adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia. In this submission, we respond to the terms of reference of the inquiry, in particular d, f, i, and j.

We recommend that the Committees on Community Affairs:

- **Note** that the additional barriers faced by women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in attaining employment should be taken into account when designing income support packages for future
- **Note** that there are significant economic costs associated with the inadequate and inaccessible Newstart payments for migrant and refugee women
- **Recommend** that the Newstart allowance be increased to reflect the specific needs of migrant and refugee women particularly during their early settlement phase
- **Recommend** that the eligibility for income support and other social security payments be expanded to include women on substantive temporary visas experiencing family violence

Background

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.¹ This highlights the additional barriers that women from migrant and refugee backgrounds face in seeking to enter the workforce, and the need for adequate income support and other social security payments to assist this cohort to secure ongoing employment. Below, we provide specific responses to the relevant terms of reference of the inquiry.

d. the appropriateness of current arrangements for supporting those experiencing insecure employment, inconsistent employment and precarious hours in the workforce;

According to the ABS 2016 census data, migrant and refugee women are overrepresented in insecure, inconsistent, and precarious employment situations. There is a high rate of women with no income or with low income within this cohort. These women also have additional caring burdens at home. Due to working long and inconsistent hours along with caring responsibilities for their children, partners, and sometimes whole families of in-laws, they are time poor and unable to find

¹ ABS 2016 Census, for people aged between 20 and 74 years old.



HARMONY ALLIANCE

MIGRANT & REFUGEE WOMEN FOR CHANGE

ongoing employment. They need appropriate income support to be able to find employment suitable to their skills and compatible with their caring duties.

f. the impact of the current approach to setting income support payments on older unemployed workers, families, single parents, people with disability, jobseekers, students, First Nations peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in regional and remote areas, and any others affected by the process;

The current approach to setting income support payments does not take into account additional barriers faced by migrant and refugee women due to their experiences of migration, demands of resettlement including but not limited to learning a new language, familiarising themselves with the new job market and application procedures, having to get their overseas qualifications recognised, and often a disregard of their overseas work experience by employers. Moreover, newly arrived migrant women, in their early settlement phase, have to serve waiting periods before they can access income support and other social security payments. This affects their ability to find suitable work to support themselves and their families and establish financial independence in situations of family violence.

The current approach also excludes a significant number of women, particularly those on lengthy bridging visas, temporary partner and dependent visas, who are ineligible for any social security payments including Newstart. These women often spend a significant number of years on temporary visas, either unemployed or in precarious employment conditions, with no income support available to them. They are also highly vulnerable to family and domestic violence and have no means of establishing economic and financial independence in such situations.

i. the economic cost of long-term unemployment, underemployment, poverty, inequality and inadequate income support payments;

The economic costs of migrant and refugee women's (including those on temporary visas) unemployment, underemployment, poverty, and inequality are huge. These women are likely to turn to informal and exploitative labour contributing to an unregistered tax evading economy. Working in precarious conditions also affects their health and well-being negatively which eventually costs the Australian healthcare system. Migrant and refugee women (and their dependents), especially those who are ineligible for social security payments, turn to private specialist services in situations of family violence. With little or no capacity to regain independence due to lack of income support, they become a burden on the already stretched out service providers.

j. the economic benefits – including job creation, locally and nationally – of increasing and improving income support payments and supports, and decreasing poverty and inequality;

The benefits of supporting migrant and refugee women to find ongoing employment and formally contribute to the economy would be significant. According to the ABS census data 2016, a large number of migrant and refugee women who are unemployed are skilled and have formal qualifications including tertiary degrees. If adequately supported, these women are highly likely to boost the Australian economy through their work. Other economic benefits include discouraging the existence of exploitative informal economies, better health outcomes for migrant and refugee women, and increased capacity of the non-governmental service providers to cater to those in need.

Contact Information:

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