

# National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality: Consultation – Migrant and Refugee Women– Meeting Summary

28 November 2022

*The government is developing a new* [*National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality)*. The National Strategy will guide whole of community action to help make Australia one of the best countries in the world for equality between women and men.*

*Consultation with diverse stakeholders is key to developing a strategy that speaks to the experiences and ambitions of women and girls around Australia. The first phase of consultation took place in late 2022 and summaries of these discussions are shared to support further consultation and input into the development of the National Strategy.*

*This note summarises a consultation meeting held on [date] focused on [TOPIC], which included representatives from advocacy groups, not-for-profit organisations, non-government organisations, and community service organisations. The consultation drew on a* [*discussion paper*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/Roundtable-Discussion-Paper_Migrants-and-Refugees.docx) *prepared by the Office for Women. This summary note reflects the discussion amongst the participants. These are not the views of Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.*

### Summary of key points raised by participants

1. Education communicating what gender equality means in Australia’s context for migrants and refugees.
2. Migrants and refugees need support on arrival, beyond the humanitarian settlement program. This has been communicated by numerous stakeholders.
3. Cultural specific providers are needed. Mainstream organisations and employment services are having difficulty meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse women.
4. School education and information on gender equality and diversity and inclusion is key to generating change in the families of migrant and refugee women.
5. We need to work with men, and have appropriate men’s programs that are not based on a western lens.

### Discussion at this roundtable focused on five questions.

### What are the drivers of gender inequality for migrant and refugee women, including temporary visa holders? How might these be addressed?

Visa status has a significant impact on migrant and refugee women. When women are controlled by the primary visa holder (usually a man), their autonomy over their finances and life choices is limited. They are prone to domestic and family violence risks, as well as risks to trafficking. Women on temporary visas are prevented from settling into a life in Australia and accessing health care. English language skills are a key barrier. Women on working holiday visas also cannot access support services which contributes to their vulnerability, including risks of exploitation by employers.

Participants noted there is a lack of support and induction for newly arrived migrant women. Education and support materials are needed on general Australian culture and society, how workplaces function, and how to access social services. Migrant women cannot access the child care subsidy, which makes child care inaccessible. This is different to those who arrive on a humanitarian visa, who have access to a formal settlement program that includes English language classes.

International students can experience extreme social isolation. This cohort, particularly students from developing countries, need to better understand their rights resulting from their visa and the cultural expectation that they should be treated equally.

Participants discussed the lack of value placed on the care workforce, noting this is highly feminised and reliant on a migrant workforce. Migrant women working in the care sector often work isolating late shifts, which can limit opportunities to discuss if their wages or conditions are fair relative to others. Migrant women can also experience racism from the patients.

### What are the barriers to achieving greater gender equality for migrant and refugee women, at a systems/institutional level, at the community level and within the individual/family level?

Limited access to good guidance can limit workforce participation for visa holders. For example, migrant women may not raise workforce complaints as they are on a work visa dependent on the employer.

English language proficiency creates difficulties in applying for services. Participants recommended more support for migrant and refugee women to find meaningful work have a career path.

Migrant and refugee women face cultural, structural and institutional challenges to achieving greater gender equality. These include accessing transportation, systemic racism and discrimination (especially in regional Australia), and the lack of recognition of their prior skills.

### What are some concrete policy options that Government should consider to enable better outcomes for migrant and refugee women, such as access to services, increased labour force participation and within the migration system?

A safe pathway needs to be created for women, particularly women of colour, to report discrimination within the workplace. Participants suggested having a race expert in the workplace, similar to the Occupational Health and Safety representative in the workplace. A lower threshold may be required for bringing racism or discrimination cases to the Fair Work Commission as racism and discrimination can be subtle, indirect, or broadly misunderstood.

Government should consider replacing employer visa sponsorship with state or industry sponsorship to support women who experience workplace bullying or discrimination by managers or leadership to safely navigate these complaints.

Policies that improve the collection of intersectional data are needed. Current gender equality data reported to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) lacks intersectional data.

Greater supports and education are needed for international students and their families.

Government should provide consistent access to English language courses and interpretation services for newly arrived migrants and refugees during their initial years in Australia. Consider also running migrant women’s groups that help women build their knowledge and networks. These groups can help build their knowledge, skills and networks to integrate into Australian society. Immigrant and refugee homework programs for students from families with low English proficiency can also support settlement in Australia.

Review the Skilled Occupation List and ensure consistency across years. Migrant populations invest in a training stream only for that skill to be removed from the list and their training becomes a sunk cost.

Diversity and inclusion training across industry and government also needs to be complemented with the implementation of related workforce strategies to encourage recruitment and retention. Government can provide direction on best practice.

Participants discussed the need for school programs on diversity and inclusion.

Appropriate interventions with men are also key in working towards gender equality.

### What are the strengths and sensitivities that should be considered in policy development for migrant women?

A strength of multicultural communities is the way networks are formed to support to each other. This should be acknowledged and built upon.

Migrant women are making extensive contributions to the Australian economy through unpaid work. This includes aged care, mutual aid networks, and family day care networks. This work needs to be recognised and paid.

### What will success look like and how can it be measured and evaluated?

Participants noted that success looks different to different stakeholders, and difficulties in measuring human experiences. For example, at the individual level, success could be speaking English and having social connections. Others may view a migrant woman working in a factory as success, but not if the migrant woman is an engineer from outside Australia.

Participants discussed that measuring success through formal mechanisms may not be possible because these mechanisms do not always include intersectional data (such as WGEA). Measuring success at the community level should be considered.