Migrant and refugee women

# Phase One Consultation: National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

# Introduction

Gender equality is at the heart of the Australian Government’s vision for a better future, and the Government is committed to strengthening Australia’s leadership on gender equality.

The Government will develop a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (the Strategy) to drive this ambition.

## What will the Strategy do?

The 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. It is an important mechanism to elevate and prioritise actions that will achieve gender equality.

The Strategy will complement other efforts across Government to achieve gender equality, including:

* the [*National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32*](https://www.dss.gov.au/women-programs-services-reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032) (National Plan)
* the Government’s response to the Australian Human Rights Commission’s [Respect@Work Report](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020)
* the[*National Women’s Health Strategy 2020–2030*](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-womens-health-strategy-2020-2030)

It will also support the work of similar state and territory plans.

## How will the Strategy be developed?

The Government will deliver the Strategy by mid-2023.

The Office for Women will develop the Strategy in consultation with women and girls around Australia, with a focus on ensuring that diverse voices are heard and included.

The Government has also established the Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce (the Taskforce) to provide independent advice to Government, ensuring women are at the centre of policy and decision-making. The Taskforce will be a leading contributor to the Strategy, and as part of this will engage broadly with the Australian community to elevate and honour the voices of women in the Strategy.

The six [National Women’s Alliances](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/grants-and-funding/national-womens-alliances) will also play a key role in informing the development of the Strategy.

# Consultation

Consultations will reach people with lived experience of gender inequality, living with disability, First Nations people, people who are LGBTQIA+, migrant and refugee women, those living in regional and remote areas and people from all backgrounds and classes.

The consultation will be undertaken in **two stages.**

Starting in November 2022, the Office for Women will lead targeted national consultations to inform the early development of the Strategy. These will take place across Australia and include discussions with a range of stakeholders including gender experts, academics, economists, women’s alliances, the community sector, unions and business.

In early 2023, broader community consultations will provide an opportunity for people to share their views of how we achieve gender equality and how this should be reflected in the Strategy.

The Strategy will draw from a comprehensive evidence base, and reflect public commentary, recent consultations and submissions to government. It will draw from contemporary research and reports, including those prepared for the [Jobs and Skills Summit and resulting Employment White Paper](https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/jobs-summit)

Further information on consultation will be provided on the Office for Women’s [webpage](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality).

For further information or to express interest in being included in consultation, please contact: [OFWengagement@pmc.gov.au](mailto:OFWengagement@pmc.gov.au).

# Current situation

(Note: The research and evidence outlined in this paper are not intended to be comprehensive, instead it is used to facilitate consultation.)

## Safety of migrant and refugee women

* A 2021 Safety and Security Survey of migrant and refugee women by Monash University found 33 per cent had experienced some form of domestic and family violence (DFV)[[1]](#footnote-2):
  + Of the migrant and refugee women who had experienced DFV, 40 per cent were temporary visa holders and 28 per cent had a permanent visa.
  + The 2021 Safety and Security Survey found 27 per cent of married respondents stated they did not give full consent to the marriage.
* Temporary visa holders report proportionately higher levels of family and domestic violence, including controlling behaviours.
* Migrant and refugee women’s experiences of violence have some distinct contributors that relate to other intersecting forms of inequality and discrimination, and may also include culturally specific norms about gender and relationships.[[2]](#footnote-3)
  + Migrant and refugee women experience racism, sexism and other specific forms of discrimination which drives increased levels of violence against women from these groups – violence that is both gendered and racialised.[[3]](#footnote-4)
  + Recent national surveys reveal that the COVID-19 pandemic saw a rise in racism and discrimination towards migrant and refugee communities. [[4]](#footnote-5)
* Migrant and refugee women are less likely to report violence and exploitation due to a range of intersecting factors, such as lack of access to culturally sensitive services in-language, cultural or religious beliefs about gender roles and behaviours (particularly within marriage), trauma and inadequate support from previous experiences of assault and violence, financial insecurity and fears that reporting violence will risk their visa.[[5]](#footnote-6)
  + Migrant and refugee women have a deficit of trust in police and cultural stigma generated by engaging police which impedes their access to justice systems.[[6]](#footnote-7)
  + International students and working holiday visa holders experience additional barriers to reporting and accessing support. This includes risk of visa cancellation and deportation if visa conditions (such as course attendance or employment) are not met. Temporary visa migrants also experience restricted access to social services, such as Medicare, social security payments and social housing.

## Employment for migrant and refugee women

* Migrant and refugee women are 7 per cent less likely to be employed than those born in Australia.[[7]](#footnote-8)
  + The unemployment rate for women who have migrated to Australia has 6.29 per cent compared to 5.40 per cent for all Australian women and migrant men.[[8]](#footnote-9)
* Migrant and refugee women have a significantly lower rate of workforce participation compared to migrant and refugee men (47.3 per cent and 69.5 per cent respectively).
  + Adult migrant women (who migrated after the age of 15) are less likely to be in the labour force than males (28 per cent not in the labour force, compared with 13 per cent of male adult migrants).[[9]](#footnote-10)
  + Migrant and refugee women face particular challenges relating to the formal recognition of overseas education, qualifications and skills and the need for access to childcare support.
* Migrant and refugee women are overrepresented in non-professional care occupations, including child carers, personal care assistants, and aged and disability carers.
* Only 47 per cent of migrant women without a qualification were employed in 2018-19, compared to 71 per cent of migrant males without a qualification.

## Health for migrant and refugee women

* Migrant and refugee women experience poorer health outcomes compared with Australian-born women.
* Migrant and refugee women are also less likely to access sexual health care, terminations and antenatal care.
* Migrant and refugee women are more likely to face additional challenges during the maternity period compared to Australian-born women.[[10]](#footnote-11) Migrant and refugee women are at a greater risk of suffering poorer child and maternal health outcomes, including mental health.[[11]](#footnote-12)

# Drivers of gender inequality

Research and stakeholder feedback to date suggests, but are not limited to, the following drivers of gender inequality for migrant and refugee women:

* To achieve equality and respect for all women, gender inequality cannot be seen as separate from other forms of discrimination and disadvantage that women face.[[12]](#footnote-13)
* Migrant and refugee women can face a range of challenges such as navigating complex and sometimes competing cultural expectations.
* The legal system, health and social services, public transport, jobs and training in Australia are complex and unfamiliar, and may not be available in-language or be culturally safe.[[13]](#footnote-14)
  + Australia’s system and services, including health and mental health services are often not easily accessible to migrant and refugee women.
  + They may also have limited trust of health services due to experiences in their home country, and possess lower health literacy. Lack of accessible and culturally safe services may result in miscommunication, misdiagnosis, and lack of appropriate follow-up.[[14]](#footnote-15)
* Migrant and refugee women are over-represented in low paid and insecure work, including the critical care economy, facing intersecting barriers to employment such as employer recognition of overseas skills and experiences, language barriers, and social exclusion.[[15]](#footnote-16)

# Discussion

We ask that you contribute your views on:

1. What are the drivers of gender inequality for migrant and refugee women, including temporary visa holders? How might these be addressed?
2. What are the barriers to achieve greater gender equality for migrant and refugee women, at a systems/institutional level, at the community level and within the individual/family level?
   1. What barriers prevent migrant and refugee women’s full participation and utilisation of their skills and experience in the Australian labour market?
   2. What impact does access to government services (e.g. Medicare, social security payments, childcare subsidy) have on:
3. Migrant and refugee women’s choices to participate in paid employment?
4. Prospective migrants deciding if they would consider moving to Australia?
5. 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?
   1. What are the strengths and sensitivities for migrant and refugee women that should be considered when developing policy options?
6. What will success look like and how can it be measured and evaluated?

We are mindful of the need to ensure the rich variety of lived experiences of people in Australia are captured during this consultation process. This includes hearing from those who:

* are living with disability;
* are First Nations people;
* are people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community;
* are migrants or refugees;
* are living in regional and remote areas;
* are of different ages and life stages, education levels, migration status, and/or socio-economic background;
* have experience of trauma; as well as
* all other factors that may impact people’s experience of gender equality or inequality.

1. Segrave M, Wickes R and Keel C (2021) *Migrant and Refugee Women in Australia: The Safety and Security Survey,* Monash University. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Department of Social Services (2022), [*National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2022/national_plan_accessible_version_for_website.pdf)*,* Australian Government, Canberra. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Department of Social Services (2022), [*National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2022/national_plan_accessible_version_for_website.pdf)*,* Australian Government, Canberra. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Markus AB (2021), *Mapping social cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, ACJC Monash

   University. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration (2022) [*National Domestic and Family Violence bench book*,](https://dfvbenchbook.aija.org.au/vulnerable-groups/people-from-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-backgrounds/) AIJA. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Harmony Alliance (2021), *Situational Analysis: Migrant and refuee womne’s experiences of policing and good practice in police responses.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Department of Premier and Cabinet (2016), *Safe and Strong: A Victorian gender equality strategy*, Victorian Government, Melbourne. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Harmony Alliance (2021) [*Submission to the Review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act (WGEA)*.](https://harmonyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Harmony-Alliance-submission-Review-of-the-Workplace-Gender-Equality-Act-2012.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018-19), *Qualifications and work,* ABS, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/qualifications-and-work/latest-release#qualifications-of-adult-migrants>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Billet H, Vazquez Corona M and Bohren MA (2020) ‘Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds perceptions and experiences of the continuum of maternity care in Australia: A qualitative evidence synthesis,’ *Women and Birth*, 35 (2022) 327-339. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Billet H, Vazquez Corona M and Bohren MA (2020) ‘Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds perceptions and experiences of the continuum of maternity care in Australia: A qualitative evidence synthesis,’ *Women and Birth*, 35 (2022) 327-339. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Our Watch (2018) [*Practice Guidance: Equality and respect for all women: an intersectional approach*](../PG_Equality-and-respect-for-all-women_UpdatedFeb2019.pdf%20(ourwatch.org.au))*.* Workplace Equality and Respect, Victorian Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. De Maio J, Silbert M, Stathopoulos M, Rioseco P, Jenkinson R and Edwards B (2017) *Empowering migrant and refugee women: Supporting and empowering women beyond five-year post-settlement*. (Research Report No. 38). Australian Institute of Family Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Australian Health Review (2018) *Health professionals' views on health literacy issues for culturally and linguistically diverse women in maternity care,* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29081348/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2022) *Gender equality and intersecting forms of diversity.* [Gender equality and intersecting forms of diversity | WGEA](https://www.wgea.gov.au/gender-equality-and-diversity) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)