



WOMEN'S VOICES

GUIDING OUR FUTURE

A report on the Victorian Multicultural Commission
forums for women

THE VICTORIAN MULTICULTURAL COMMISSION

The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) was established under the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, and consists of 12 commissioners, comprising a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, a Youth Commissioner, a representative of a community organisation and eight other members.

The VMC is the voice of Victoria's multicultural communities and is the main link between them and the government. Community consultations are a vital aspect of the VMC's work, facilitating the active engagement of people from Victoria's diverse communities and providing independent, community informed, advice to the Victorian Government.

In bringing together multicultural women, the VMC opened opportunities from the grassroots for women to discuss the cross-cultural challenges they face and share their experiences and ideas.

Multicultural Principles

The trend towards multiculturalism has been a trend towards the greater accommodation of ethnocultural diversity, inspired by the rise of a human rights culture.¹ The advent of human rights reframed ideas about ethnic and racial equality that contested prior held ideas about a hierarchy of peoples.

The link between equality and racial discrimination was made explicit in the 1965 United Nations (UN) *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, which was ratified in Australia, as a legislative expression of a new commitment to multiculturalism, in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth).²

Multiculturalism can also be understood as a process of building civil relations, serving as an effective vehicle for creating and consolidating relations of liberal-democratic citizenship.³

Multiculturalism operates within the framework of liberal-democratic constitutional order. It offers citizens a confidence that however issues of multiculturalism are settled, their own basic civil and political rights will be respected.⁴

The framework also operates within the context of rights and responsibilities, where exercising our own rights responsibly means respecting that other citizens enjoy similar rights.

The role of the VMC within this framework includes determining the needs of Victoria's diverse communities as well as upholding harmonious community relations between all of Victoria's diverse multicultural communities.⁵

About the VMC Forums for Women

The VMC carried out eight regional forums with women from April to June 2015 at Sunshine, Bendigo, Central Melbourne, Broadmeadows, Preston, Frankston, Narre Warren, and Geelong. These consultations were part of a broader program of engagement that also included ten community forums with young people and three with service providers; a total of twenty one forums in all.⁶

The forums for multicultural women were all conducted in workshop format, with interpreters on hand to facilitate conversations. The same format and discussion questions were used at all forums for women, enabling a consistency of information as well as providing opportunities for all women to participate.

Women need to have a more influential voice than they do now. One way of accomplishing this is to encourage women to speak for themselves and articulate their values and priorities, from the grassroots to the national level.⁷ The VMC forums for multicultural women presented just such an opportunity.

1 Kymlicka, 2007.

2 Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015.

3 Kymlicka, 2007.

4 Ibid.

5 *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* (s.4), The Principles of Multiculturalism. Outlined at Appendix B.

6 See previous reports: *Engaging Our Youth Our Future* (2016), and *Meeting Community Needs* (2016) available at: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/regional-advisory-councils/rac-publications>

7 Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2008.

Reporting on VMC Forums

Earlier reports are available, providing analysis of findings and recommendations following the VMC forums for young people and service providers.

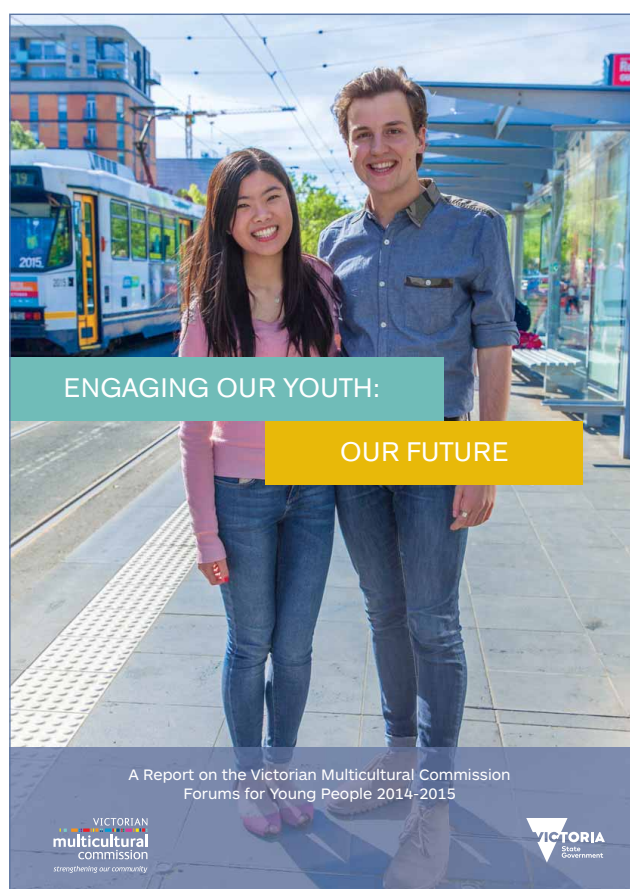
The *Engaging Our Youth Our Future* report relates to the ten community forums with young people, and the *Meeting Community Needs* report to the three community forums held with service providers, in 2015. Both reports are available online at the VMC website.⁸

Due to extensive work in other areas of the Victorian Government with a primary focus on women this current women's report has not sought to make any recommendations. It is offered as the voices of women from multicultural backgrounds.

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence 2016 made extensive recommendations which the State Government is committed to delivering through the 10-year plan, *Ending Family Violence. Victoria's Plan for Change*.⁹

The *Safe and Strong, Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy 2016*, sets out a framework for enduring and sustained action over time to foster changes in attitudes and behaviour required to reduce violence against women and deliver gender equality.

The VMC contributed to both of these Victorian Government initiatives with policy advice and consultation support to include the voice of multicultural women.



⁸ Youth report at: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/EngagingOurYouthOurFuture.pdf>

Service provider report at: http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/VMC_SP-2015-Report_July2016_FINAL_LINKED.pdf

⁹ This report is available online at: <http://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence.html>

FOREWORD



I am pleased to introduce the Victorian Multicultural Commission's report *Women's Voices Guiding Our Future*. The report presents the findings of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) community forums with multicultural women.

The forums for multicultural women covered four key topics that contribute to social cohesion, identified through the VMC's Regional Advisory Council meetings, previous VMC research and community consultations. Discussion topics included: Employment; Discrimination and Bias; Leadership and Advocacy; and Access to Services.

The success of the VMC's 'Women's Voices Guiding Our Future' forums related to the VMC's ability to engage with groups of multicultural women, providing them with the opportunity to share their experiences and ideas. What I hope to see following the publication of this report is an approach to highlighting better practice in serving women from our diverse communities.

The VMC very much appreciates the time that all of these women took from their busy lives to contribute to the forums and provide valuable feedback to the Victorian Government. Engaging directly with local communities has enabled the VMC to identify the key issues which impact women in our multicultural communities. It has also enabled the VMC to advise the Victorian Government, based on the evidence, regarding improvements to promote inclusive and accessible services for all Victorians.

I look forward, along with all VMC Commissioners, to continuing engagement with women from diverse backgrounds and to advocating on their behalf to ensure they have access to the opportunities and supports to promote their active contribution and participation in Victoria's vibrant multicultural state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Helen Kapalos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'H' and 'K'.

Helen Kapalos

Chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women account for half of the world's population. Their viewpoints and experiences need to be considered to create better solutions and more comprehensive public policies overall.¹

The theme for the VMC multicultural women's forums was Women's Voices Guiding Our Future. This report sets out the findings of these community consultations which the VMC conducted with women from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds during April and June 2015.

Firm strategies that seek to empower women and to further the cause of gender equality are taking place at all levels of the community, in Victoria and nationally.² The United Nations (UN) Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (also known as UN Women), works at an international level for the empowerment of women.

The VMC is the voice of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and is the main link between them and the government. Regular engagement with our multicultural communities informs the VMC's statutory reporting obligations as well as the provision of advice to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.³ Engaging regularly with our multicultural communities also informs the VMC's research program, including topical and emerging issues.

UN Gender Equality Principles:

To empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community.

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

¹ International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2012.

² The Royal Commission into Family Violence (Vic, 2015); A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy: Safe and Strong 2016; Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

³ Community consultations are a statutory function of the VMC in accordance with the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 (the Act), s.8.

2. KEY MESSAGES

Key messages are presented below under discussion theme topics. Each discussion topic consisted of brief question 'prompts' to guide participants. Initial questions sought to draw out the particular challenges women face, and concluded with women's ideas on how to address those challenges.

Discrimination and Bias

Participants shared their experiences of discrimination and bias, and the circumstances in which they took place. The more visible aspects of cultural difference such as having a different accent, style of dress, difficulty with English and ethnic names arose.

In groups, women discussed their ideas about ways to reduce discrimination. They suggested education, building relationships and equal representation including:

- Raising awareness through education about rights and responsibilities, and building respect for one another.
- Seeking opportunities through joint events and community get-togethers as a means to bring diverse communities together and foster social cohesion in neighbourhoods.
- Promoting equal representation in multicultural communities as a key measure of integration. It is important that multicultural women see themselves reflected in the life of the community and its leadership.

Leadership and Advocacy

Supporting the leadership aspirations of multicultural women was an important aspect of forum discussions. Discussions centred on gender equity and the particular skills that women can bring to leadership.

Participants talked about what gender equity 'looked like' to them. They raised issues such as stereotyping as a barrier to achieving gender equity, and unequal access to opportunities in employment.

The women also offered ideas to support their voice in the community. Key messages related to the need for programs, networks, role models and rights, including:

- Building capacity through programs to create confident and capable female leaders now and into the future.
- Making the benefits of networking more accessible to multicultural women.
- Promoting role models, especially in their ability to impact and inspire others.
- Helping multicultural women to understand their rights under Australia law to achieve greater equality in their homes and communities.

Young African men at Morwell told the VMC that women (their mothers), "are the most hard working" but that "employers do not know this because they do not understand the culture".

Engaging Our Youth Our Future, 2016.

Employment

The challenges in relation to employment were raised by multicultural women in terms of barriers to participation. Acknowledging that all women can face barriers regardless of background, such as age, disability, family caring duties, and returning to fewer hours following maternity leave, participants raised additional barriers, particular to multicultural women.

These included language difficulty, the cultural expectations of male partners of a women's role, access to childcare, and a lack of local work experience.

To address these challenges participants suggested career development and other means to improve labour market participation, including:

- Providing additional supports to improve job prospects, such as resume and interview tuition, technology tuition, affordable and culturally appropriate childcare, and work experience programs.

- More secure work opportunities as opposed to contract work, job services with interpreters, and employers held to account for fair and open hiring processes.

“I feel I have to justify why I’m here. I’m here legally.”

Participant, Sunshine, 2015.

Access to Services

Participants related the ways in which they knew about support services. The importance of being connected to the local community was a resounding theme, that through connection to community they were able to be informed. Additional means of knowing about a particular service included the referral and outreach services of organisations.

There was a definite preference for verbal communication and finding information through the internet was not particularly prevalent.

Key messages about access to support services include:

- The value of the local community as the most accessible and available resource to find support and information about services.
- Settlement service providers are a good source of referral for newly arrived groups. Caseworkers become trusted sources of information and referral.
- Outreach is a good way to link people into the community.
- Online messaging is difficult for multicultural women to access. It creates a barrier because the internet is not readily available to them and or they are unfamiliar with the technology.

In groups, participants then suggested ways to improve access to services for multicultural women. Their ideas related to better communication, the use of outreach staff, greater cultural awareness and the centralisation of related services.

The key messages multicultural women provided in relation to improving access to services include:

- Wider use of interpreters, translated materials and the use of local ethnic radio to reach people and provide accessible information.
- The user choice model is not always appropriate, especially for new and emerging communities. Some service providers have already taken action by employing outreach staff as multicultural liaison officers.

- Provide culturally appropriate services that use interpreters, bicultural and bilingual workers to build positive relationships with communities.
- The trend towards integrating services within a ‘hub’ as a ‘one-stop-shop’ for a number of related services was raised as a good solution to improving access to services for multicultural women.

“Branches of government should provide incentives to services to become culturally aware.”

Participant, Melbourne CBD, 2015

3. BACKGROUND

Engaging communities in informing policy decision making is an important aspect of developing policy across all levels of government in Victoria, nationally and internationally.⁴ Within communities of women, listening to multicultural women is important in developing socially inclusive policy and program outcomes.

The empowerment of women and progressing gender equality are also important factors in promoting women's well-being.⁵

Incorporating women's voices to include their experiences is important therefore, to facilitate systemic change.

The Role of Women

Women are economic actors, whether they work in the private realm (unpaid domestic workforce) or in the public realm (part of the paid workforce). Mothers of young children are in the paid workforce and overall, each cohort of women has more attachment to the paid workforce than her mother did.⁶ As economic actors, they contribute to the economy whether their labour is remunerated or not.

VMC Forums for Women Topics

The topics discussed at the VMC Women's Forums broadly addressed women's abilities to participate as economic actors, and in particular captured the views of multicultural women.

In round table discussions women tackled four key discussion themes as follows:

Discrimination and Bias

- Experiences of discrimination; and
- Ideas about ways to reduce discrimination and promote inclusion.

Employment

- Challenges in finding paid work; and
- Aspirations for future employment.

Leadership and Advocacy

- Gender equity; and
- Promoting women's voices.

Access to Services

- Finding appropriate services; and
- Ideas for culturally responsive service delivery.⁷

Women attending the forums came from a variety of ethnocultural backgrounds:

Asian, Assyrian, Arabic, Afghani, Bosnian, Chilean, Chinese, Colombian, Cypriot, Ecuadorian, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Fijian, Filipino, German, Greek, Hungarian, Indian, Iraqi, Irish, Italian, Kenyan, Laotian, Lebanese, Mauritian, New Zealander, Pakistani, Persian, Polish, Romanian, Samoan, Scottish, Spanish, Sri Lankan, Somali, South African, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

4 Reddel & Woolcock, 2004.

5 The Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2015.

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016.

7 The full list of discussion questions is included at Appendix A.

4. DISCRIMINATION AND BIAS

Migrants have transformed the face of Australia since the advent of European settlement. For those who choose to call Australia home, multicultural policy recognises that they have the right, within the law, to practise and share in their cultural traditions and languages free from discrimination.⁸

Over a quarter (28.2%) of Australia's estimated resident population was born overseas (6.7 million people).⁹

While independence and participation is encouraged, settlement and integration can be challenging, particularly for arrivals from non-English speaking backgrounds.

A high proportion of skilled migrants (45%), for example, have no pre-arrival links in Australia. Of all the migrant streams (other than Family Reunion), humanitarian entrants are more likely to have links in Australia before arriving.¹⁰

Multicultural Policy

Multiculturalism involves a two-way process of change that consists of adaptation by both Australian born and migrants. Evidence of this is provided by two propositions:

- (a) that 'we should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this country' (66% agree); and
- (b) that 'people who come to Australia should change their behaviour to be more like Australians' (60% agree).¹¹

Australia's multicultural policy and the legal framework that supports it, acknowledges that social exclusion can significantly reduce the opportunities and benefits that migration can

bring to a country. It also recognises the myriad of economic and civic contributions migrants have made to Australia.¹²

Being inclusive of all migrant groups builds social inclusion and helps to create a cohesive society. This is recognised in the principles of multiculturalism as stated in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*. Principals s.4(3)(d) and (f) state that all individuals in Victoria:

- are equally entitled to access opportunities and participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the State; and
- should be united in a shared commitment to Australia and to community service.¹³

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Due to greater conflict in the Middle East, particularly Syria, Iraq, and Africa (Somalia, South Sudan) in recent years, more people have been displaced by violent conflict across the world than at any other time in the last fifty years.¹⁴ In 2015-16 Australia accepted a total of 189,770 migrants, including 17,555 humanitarian entrants and 1,552 Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise visa entrants.¹⁵

Migrants choose to leave their home country. Asylum seekers and refugees, on the other hand, flee their country for their own safety. Thus there is similarity in the situations of asylum seekers and refugees. However, these similar situations are often misrepresented, and the numbers conflated in political discourse and the media.

Australia has international obligations to protect the human rights of all asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in Australia, regardless of how or where they arrive and whether they arrive with or without a visa.¹⁶

⁸ *Racial Discrimination Act 2011* (Cth); *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic); and *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

⁹ As at 30 June 2015, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016.

¹⁰ Australian Survey Research Group Pty Ltd, 2011.

¹¹ Markus, 2016.

¹² Scanlon Foundation, 2016.

¹³ For a full list of the Principles of Multiculturalism under the Act, see Appendix B.

¹⁴ Scanlon Foundation, 2016.

¹⁵ Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2015-16 at a glance, Statistical information for 2015-16. Retrieved 12 December 2016: <http://www.border.gov.au/about/reports>

¹⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), What are Australia's human rights obligations in relation to asylum seekers and refugees? Retrieved 12 December 2015: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide>

In a paper outlining trends in asylum applications to 38 industrialised countries (1989-2013), the authors found that the number of spontaneous applications (or onshore applications) in Australia amounted to just two percent of the 38-country total, over the period.¹⁷

When compared to other global regions the number of applications received in Australia and New Zealand is relatively small. The overwhelming majority claimed asylum in Europe. More than half of all applications in Europe were received by Germany (28%), the UK (12%) and France (11%).¹⁸

Rights and Responsibilities

Immigration has potential benefits for everyone – for migrants and for the receiving society. Migrants strengthen the labour force at all levels, and bring new ideas and methods which can boost creativity and innovation.¹⁹

Human rights legislation protects all Australians, by means of federal and state laws, policies and practice, as well as through the common law (court decisions) and culture.²⁰

Human rights and responsibilities, are important safeguards, and our capacity to exercise them are important aspects of civil and multicultural society.

In Victoria it is unlawful to discriminate against someone because of a personal characteristic, such as age, gender, race, carer and parental status, marital status, disability, physical features and political beliefs.

Discrimination is also unlawful when it occurs in an area of public life, such as clubs, schools and shops, or in the workplace.²¹

Women's View

In roundtable discussions women were asked about their experiences of discrimination, including circumstances, and their suggestions for reducing discrimination and bias.

Multicultural women from new and emerging communities attended at Bendigo, Narre Warren and Melbourne CBD. Many from these newly arrived groups were not yet fluent in English. It was reported that, due to the language barrier, derogatory verbal comments did not seem to affect them greatly. They are however, able to pick up on the tone and the way in which comments are delivered. It was reported consistently that Muslim women faced the greatest verbal abuse in public due to the wearing of a headscarf, making them more visible.

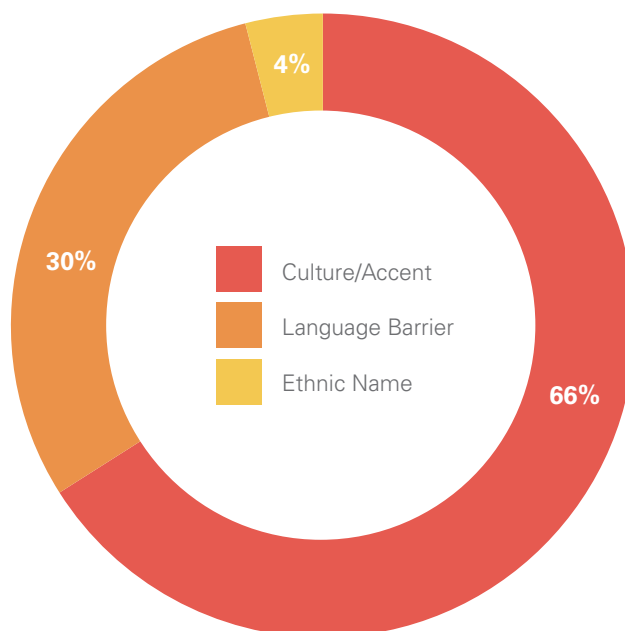
Key Themes

DISCRIMINATION

Women's life experience is different to that of men because they have different assumed roles and responsibilities. In spite of gains in formalised equality, inequalities persist.

The experience of difference and inequality is also more stark for women from multicultural groups.²² A woman or a girl may be doubly or triply discriminated against according to the colour of her skin, language, place of origin, ancestry, marital status, same sex partner status, sexual orientation, age, disability, citizenship, family status or religion.²³

Discrimination – Experiences



¹⁷ Hatton & Moloney, 2015.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ European Commission, 2014.

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015.

²¹ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), 2016. Retrieved 12 December 2016: <http://www.humanrightscormission.vic.gov.au/index.php/discrimination>

²² VEOHRC, 2016.

²³ City of Ottawa, 2016.

Participants discussed the ways in which they experienced discrimination and bias. Three key messages emerged from these discussions:

Culture/Accent (66%), Language Barrier (30%) and Ethnic Name (4%) was mentioned as a barrier.

The VMC heard about participants' experiences of discrimination and bias, and the circumstances in which these took place.

CULTURE/ACCENT

Migrants who hold different norms, beliefs, and symbols can be seen as threatening to the cultural identity of local residents, symbolised by differences in religion, language and appearance.²⁴ Positive attitudes are fostered however, through impersonal exposure to other cultural groups in public space which can create a feeling of public familiarity.

Prejudice is reduced when intercultural contacts are personal, informal, conducted on the basis of equal status, in pursuit of common goals without competition, and supported by the authorities.²⁵ It is through active participation that migrants generally acquire a sense of belonging.

Migrants' active participation also contributes to the social development of the broader Victorian community. It is an activity where the associated norms of reciprocity have value and assist in building social capital.²⁶

Social capital is built through both informal and formal networks. Research demonstrates that carework is disproportionately shouldered by women of lower socioeconomic status.²⁷ However, carework can also be considered as a form of civic engagement. Thus, through their carework, lower-income women are more likely to engage in informal social networks.²⁸

Social trust is a measurable consequence of social capital which, in itself is one of the building blocks of social cohesion.

Discrimination and bias therefore, is most damaging to social cohesion in terms of affecting an individuals' sense of belonging, attachment to the group, willingness to participate and to share outcomes.²⁹

Women shared their experiences of discrimination due to cultural differences including:

"After working in Australia 16 years I don't feel respected."

"When someone has an accent people's attitude changes. They disengage, or speak loudly as if the person is hard of hearing."

"If you have an accent it doesn't matter what skills you have."

"Sometimes shopkeepers act differently."

"Verbal attacks on public transport, particularly women wearing hijab."

"Verbal abuse and physical harassment in public places."

"Racist jokes are hurtful."

"People are picked on for the way they dress."

"Gender alone is enough to be discriminated against."

LANGUAGE BARRIER

English language skills and education are key factors for employment and social integration.³⁰ Without English, it is hard for people to access important services and to become independent.³¹ Adequate levels of proficiency in English are necessary to aid integration, including employment.

For mothers with school age children, English language skills help to build social capital in engaging with other mothers at the school gates, or with teachers about their child's progress.

The Australian Government provides the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) which helps new arrivals learn basic English skills. AMEP provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition and is available to migrants from the family, skilled and humanitarian visa streams.

24 Zorlu, 2016.

25 Ibid.

26 Putnam, 2001.

27 Wemlinger & Kropf, 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 Markus, 2016.

30 Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (Canada), 2016.

31 Commonwealth of Australia, 2016.

AMEP also provides free child care for children under school age while their parents attend an AMEP class, facilitating mothers' attendance.

Evaluation of AMEP however, finds that the benchmark of functional English is insufficient for participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) beyond the Certificate I/II level, and higher education, and considered by some stakeholders and AMEP participants as insufficient to gain employment.³²

Multicultural women described the language barrier as follows:

"For people with no English it is very hard, especially the elderly."

"Even with some English a strong accent can be a language barrier."

"More translated materials are needed which provide information about services."

"There are not enough interpreters and resources available."

"People have a right to an interpreter."

"In the main front line customer services at government organisations are from dominant Anglo culture."

"Government agency (i.e. Centrelink) staff are not well equipped to interact with multicultural customers."

"Some translated materials fail to bridge the cultural gap and lack cultural understanding."

ETHNIC NAMES

Women told the VMC that they are discriminated against based on their ethnic names. This aspect of discrimination and bias has been reported to the VMC many times, and affects male and female migrants of all ages.³³ Participants stated that there are particular presumptions and assumptions that come with such bias.

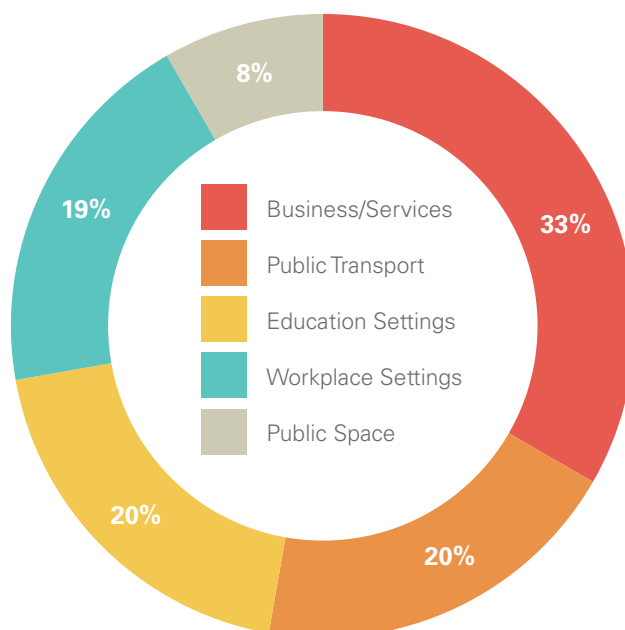
In particular the women stated that an ethnic family name is often a barrier to being considered at the job application stage.

Women from a wide variety of backgrounds face discrimination and bias in the labour market. A bias against ethnic family names is an additional bias facing women from diverse backgrounds.

Circumstances of Discrimination

Participants described the circumstances in which discrimination took place. This included verbal attacks on public transport and in public places.

Discrimination – Circumstances



Multicultural women described undue surveillance and what they described as 'targeted abuse' in retail and business settings where they felt humiliated. This might be in terms of being spoken to harshly or loudly, and drawing undue attention as a result.

Discrimination was also evident in workplaces and education settings, such as poor workplace culture where disparaging comments or racist jokes were tolerated.

"I find that people that discriminate... they don't live outside Australia. They lack experience of other cultures."

Participant, Sunshine, 2015

When incidents took place in public, participants explained that these instances caused them to feel unsafe and fearful. They were also unclear about how to deal with such an incident, telling the VMC that usually they would seek comfort and support from family and friends. No one mentioned an instance of bystander intervention when another person in the workplace or a member of the public might step in to offer support.

³² Acil Allen Consulting, 2015.

³³ See earlier *VMC Reports Engaging Our Youth Our Future* (2016), and *Meeting Community Needs* (2016) available at the VMC website: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/regional-advisory-councils/rac-publications>

REDUCING DISCRIMINATION

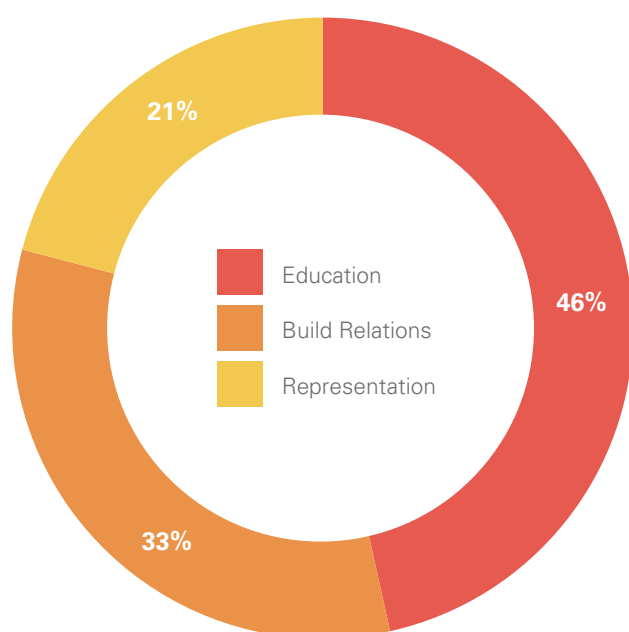
Participants suggested three key measures that they felt would be useful in counteracting discrimination and bias. Education was seen as most important, with building relations and equal representation also important.

Education was considered as the means to foster both the building of relationships and representation.

“Focus on the achievements of people from ethnic backgrounds. Show how they have contributed.”

Participant, Melbourne CBD, 2015

Reducing Discrimination



Education

This measure focused on raising awareness about rights and responsibilities, and building respect for one another. Participants suggested:

“Education leads to capacity building and empowerment.”

“Educate children from the early years about respect for others, including diverse cultures and faiths.”

“Discrimination is also a public safety issue – learn to support others safely through a bystander approach.”

“People need to understand the negative impact of discrimination on the health and wellbeing of people subjected to it.”

“Spread information about equal opportunity through local Council newsletters, local press and media to begin to change attitudes.”

“Hold workshops with the assistance of interpreters so that people from diverse backgrounds can participate; people can learn together.”

“Use events such as Cultural Harmony Week in March to educate people about other cultures and promote tolerance and harmony.”

“Include training and information packs for employers to be gender aware and culturally responsive.”

Building Relations

Building relationships through joint events and community get-togethers was seen as a means to bring diverse communities together and foster social cohesion in neighbourhoods. Participants suggested:

“Everyone needs to take responsibility to reduce discrimination.”

“Create opportunities for people to come together in local neighbourhoods to break down barriers and foster community spirit.”

“Connect people through school communities.”

“Welcome new parents and help them to participate in the life of the school community.”

“Women seek safe and secure spaces where they can belong.”

“Social events in the workplace can provide an opportunity to promote intercultural understanding.”

“Social interactions also provide opportunities for casual learning of English.”

Representation

Representation is a key measure of integration where people see themselves reflected in leaders within the community. Participants shared ideas around role models, peer support and other means to bring about more visible representation.

ROLE MODELS

“Women from diverse cultural backgrounds need aspirational role models in high profile jobs, leadership roles and political positions (i.e. Councillor, Member of Parliament).”

PEER SUPPORT

“Provide mentoring and peer support to inspire and empower women from diverse cultural backgrounds to reach for leadership roles.”

CHILD CARE NEEDS

“Include childcare and a family friendly environment to break barriers that restricts women’s participation.”

INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICE

“Non-government organisations and government departments/services ought to be setting an example to the wider community through inclusive hiring practices.”

MORE FEMALE INTERPRETERS

“Create accessible interpreter training programs (i.e. provide childcare or after hours) for women to better represent the female perspective and as a support to women from diverse cultural backgrounds.”

5. EMPLOYMENT

Finding gainful employment is an important step for migrants. Whether women arrive as the partner of a skilled migrant, as a humanitarian entrant, or as a migrant worker in their own right, there are important stages in the settlement process in which women are more closely engaged as wives and mothers.

Setting up the house and caring for the family post-arrival means that often women's careers and employment status may be considered secondary to men.³⁴

This is supported by the research which suggests that women from recently arrived and refugee communities are less likely to be working than men from these communities.³⁵

They are also likely to face vulnerability and exploitation in accessing labour markets. Recently arrived and refugee women are vulnerable to exploitation in the labour market due to the coalescence and intersection of multiple forces including gender, race and recently arrived and or refugee status.³⁶

These forces impact on the ability of recently arrived and refugee women to enforce minimum working conditions. A recent AMES study concluded that women were 'much less likely to be in the labour force compared to men'.³⁷

Also, those women who were in paid work were almost twice as likely as men to be earning less than \$15 per hour despite working permanent and full time positions as often as men.³⁸

Education is critical to women's economic security.³⁹ Notwithstanding differing levels of education, a gender pay gap exists in almost all sectors of the economy.

According to the Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) a full-time equivalent (FTE) gender pay gap of 23.1% is evident across all employees at a base salary level. When taking into account total remuneration including

superannuation, overtime, bonus payments and other discretionary pay, the gap increases to 27.5%.

This compares to a gender pay gap for full-time employees of 19% on base salary rising to 23.9 % on total remuneration.⁴⁰

As an untapped human resource however, there is evidence to suggest that the welfare gains of immigration are substantial for destination countries like Australia. Migration not only increases labour supply but has a positive impact on employment, production and gross domestic product (GDP).⁴¹

Migration Policy

Australia's migration policy framework consists of the Migration Program, Temporary Entry visas and the Humanitarian Program.

The majority of migrants (all streams) are concentrated in the prime working age group. The elderly are under-represented in the migrant intake thus, contrary to public opinion, migrants generate only a limited increase in government payments.

Migration provides savings across the population in expenditures on education, transfer payments and government network infrastructure. The greatest economic gains emanate from international students and the skilled migrant intake.

The strength of Australia's migration program enables the accommodation of family and humanitarian migration while still maintaining significant overall economic gains.

The policy emphasis on students and skilled migrants means that many migrants bring higher education and skill levels and higher labour force participation rates than existing Australian residents. This leads to, not only economic benefits directly for migrants, but also for the population as a whole.⁴²

34 Refugee Council of Australia, 2010.

35 Hemingway, 2016.

36 Satterthwaite, 2005.

37 O'Dwyer & Mulders, 2015.

38 Ibid.

39 Hess, Gunn-Wright, & Williams, 2012.

40 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016.

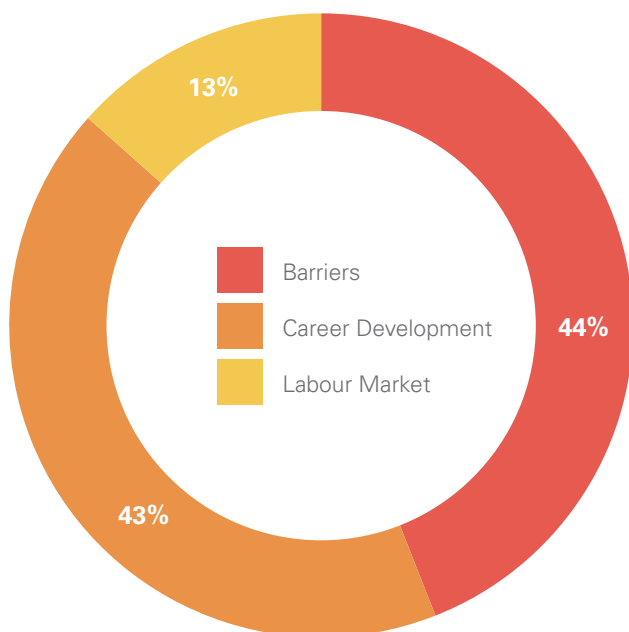
41 Sijapati, March, 2015.

42 Migration Council of Australia, 2015.

Women's Views

In roundtable discussions multicultural women, in groups discussed the challenges they encounter in seeking paid work. Having identified some of the challenges discussions progressed to solutions and their future aspirations.

Employment Discussion



Key Themes

EMPLOYMENT

The VMC heard about the challenges in terms of the barriers that women from non-English speaking backgrounds face in seeking entry to the Australian labour market.

The key messages that arose included barriers to participation in labour markets (44%) and career development needs (43%).

Attachment to the labour market (13%) was an issue that emerged as participants discussed the issues they face once employed.

These key messages are supported by the findings of the WEstjustice Employment Law Project which reported on its interactions with over 200 clients from 30 different countries. Their clients were mostly newly arrived and of refugee background, but also included international students, asylum seekers and subclass 457/working holiday visa holders.

No high income earners were reported from the cohort. The majority of clients (77%) spoke a language other than English at home, and had lived in Australia (60%) for less than five years.⁴³

Gaining a foothold in the labour market is important for all migrants. For those facing added difficulty (e.g. English language proficiency) it is an important pathway out of disadvantage.

The type of work is also an important catalyst for successful settlement. For example, people who obtain full-time work are more likely to be able to move out of disadvantage than those in casual or part-time work.⁴⁴ However, women in newly arrived communities are often restricted to casual and or part-time work to fit in with family caring responsibilities.

Often some additional assistance is required to help migrants break through some of the barriers they face. A policy reform in Finland introducing 'integration plans' to assist unemployed migrants made such a difference. Redesigning an existing scheme as an active labour market program (ALMP), the plans consisted of individualised sequences of ALMP that a caseworker tailored as appropriate to each jobseeker.

Evaluation results demonstrated that this restructuring of the program strongly increased participants' earnings and reduced their social welfare benefits.⁴⁵

Researchers attributed the success of this policy reform to more efficient use of existing resources, as no additional funding was provided.⁴⁶

AMES Australia, working with the Commonwealth Department of Employment through the jobactive initiative, offers a free service to eligible migrants and refugees. An Employment Consultant is engaged to assist with a training package to help individuals to reach career goals.⁴⁷

BARRIERS

Barriers related to the particular challenges women from diverse backgrounds face in finding gainful employment. Career Development emerged from discussions as a gap in terms of support to access gainful employment, and Labour Market related to participants' experiences once employed and the operation of gender bias.

43 Hemingway, 2016.

44 Cunningham, Orsmond, & Price, 2014.

45 Sarvimäki & Hämäläinen, 2014.

46 Ibid.

47 This is a restricted program. See eligibility criteria at: [https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/employment/Eligibility%20for%20JSA\(1\).pdf](https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/employment/Eligibility%20for%20JSA(1).pdf)

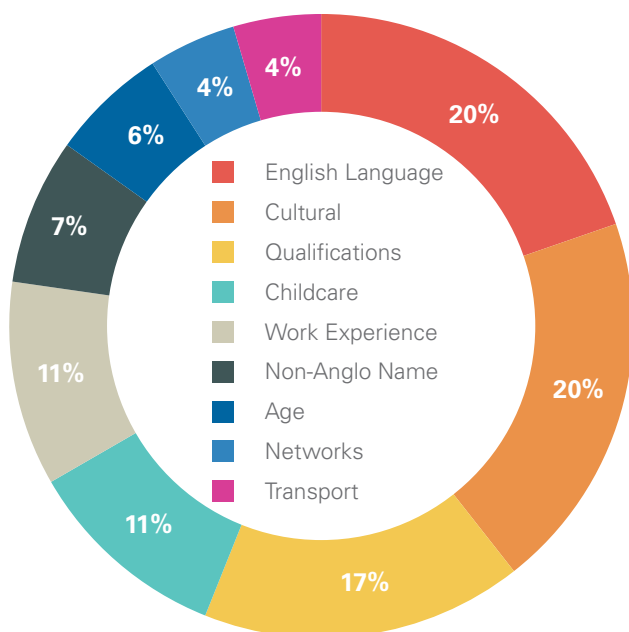
Some barriers to gainful employment impact all women, regardless of background, such as:

- age discrimination;
- disability;
- family caring duties; and
- returning to fewer hours following maternity leave.

There are additional barriers however, that affect women from multicultural backgrounds disproportionately. These were raised by multicultural women at the VMC forums as follows:

- English language capability (20%),
- cultural (male partner expectations on cultural role of women, 20%),
- qualifications (lack of or not recognised in Australia, 17%),
- access to childcare (cost and culturally appropriate, 11%),
- Work experience (lack of local, 11%),
- non-Anglo name (7%),
- age (6%),
- networks (lack of local, 4%), and
- transport (ability to get to and from work, 4%).

Employment – Barriers



Multicultural women shared their experience of barriers when accessing labour markets:

“There is no incentive for employers to hire migrant and refugee women.”

“Employers are unaware of the value of the skill level and commitment of women from multicultural backgrounds.”

“Educational opportunities are difficult to access (i.e. tuition fees, travel cost, etc.)”

“Cultural barriers and perceptions act as a barrier, such as Muslim woman attending interview in a headscarf.”

“Hiring bias, such as discrimination toward ethnic names on resumes.”

“Lack of Australian work experience acts as a barrier.”

“Exploitation, i.e. visa status and eligible number of hours (International students for example). Visa holder may also be uninformed on work rights in Australia.”

“Overseas qualification is not recognised in Australia and women are often unable to work in their chosen profession.”

“Traditional gender roles and parental expectations for traditional career pathways, restrict young women in particular.”

“A female employee was required to go overseas on a work-related matter. However, her husband told her he would divorce her if she did.”

Participant, Melbourne CBD, 2015.

Gender Bias

Other biases operating within the labour market include:

The gender pay gap – the national gender pay gap is currently 16.2% and has hovered between 15% and 19% for the past two decades.⁴⁸

- This is related to women being concentrated in occupations that are associated with femininity and undervalued in the labour market.⁴⁹
- It is also related to recruitment and promotion practices that favour men.⁵⁰
- Women are also more likely to undertake the majority of domestic duties within households and this can further limit career opportunities in ways that are less likely to affect men.⁵¹

48 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Average Weekly Full-Time Earnings data (cat. No. 6302.0), May 2016.

49 Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013.

50 Australian Government, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016.

51 Maushart, 2011.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career development was discussed as an enabler to create greater diversity in the workforce.

Women provided suggestions that they felt would be helpful to their labour market participation aspirations including:

"Coordinated assistance and support to overcome entry barriers to the labour market."

"Resume and interview tuition within the Australian context."

"Mentoring programs."

"Community based education sessions, including technology and computer tuition."

"Work experience, internships and volunteering opportunities."

"Networking opportunities for migrant women who lack vital connections."

"Information about workplace culture in Australia."

"Assistance in having overseas qualifications recognised in Australia."

"Support to navigate further/ higher education opportunities."

"Local events for women that bring them together with employers to break down barriers."

ACCESSING LABOUR MARKETS

Barriers to accessing labour markets and career development needs clearly dominated discussions, however there was some further discussion in relation to experiences once employed and in the labour market (13%).

Multicultural women had a number of suggestions to better facilitate their participation including:

"Job services with interpreter services."

"Local employment opportunities, close to home."

"Work around school hours."

"More job sharing opportunities."

"More work-from-home opportunities."

"Equal pay for equal work."

"Access to further training in the workplace."

"More secure work opportunities – not limited term contracts."

"Employer's held to account in offering fair opportunities and assessing all applicants in a fair process."

6. LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Policymakers, researchers and advocates need reliable information about women and the issues that affect their lives in order to advance policies and programs that promote gender equity.⁵²

All women, regardless of background, geography, ethnicity, citizenship, economic status, disability or education, need to be included in order for public policies and programs to meet the needs of the broader population.⁵³

The VMC forums for women fulfilled a number of purposes, including to:

- educate women from diverse backgrounds about how their interests can be addressed in public policy;
- bring their concerns forward for public discussion and debate;
- inform decision-makers about options to address multicultural women's needs more specifically; and
- contribute locally-informed data.

Supporting the leadership aspirations of women from diverse backgrounds was an important aspect of forum discussions. The conversation starter involved discussion on gender equity and the particular skills that women can bring to leadership.⁵⁴

This included consideration of potential cultural barriers and gender stereotypes that can impact negatively on women's leadership aspirations.

One aspect that can affect women's ability to participate more broadly is as a direct result of their role as carers. The availability and cost of childcare for example, can restrict participation in the workforce and other activities for mothers of young children.

Women are also predominant providers of informal care for family members and friends, including children

with special needs, frail older people and people with disabilities, mental illness, chronic condition or terminal illness. In Australia in 2015, more than two thirds of primary carers were women (68.1%).⁵⁵

Although such informal care activities are critical to the reproduction of the economy, they are not usually taken into account for macroeconomic statistics.⁵⁶ Traditional care models, with women as primary care givers, can also reinforce gender inequalities. They also do not take into account the different abilities required in caring that are transferable in terms of leadership capabilities.

Women's activities provide them with a framework of knowledge that is qualitatively different to masculinist knowledge.⁵⁷ The experiential knowledge, intuitive abilities and emotional complexities involved are aspects of caring that are also useful leadership qualities.⁵⁸

Thus, women's capacity to lead may not be recognised. Part of the work to capacitate women to become leaders therefore, involves recognising these qualities and providing opportunities. It is also in supporting women who already have leadership roles to increase their levels of influence and expand their networks so they can help others.⁵⁹

Gender Equity

The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) made it against the law to discriminate against someone on the basis of gender, sexuality, marital status, family responsibilities or because they are pregnant.

The Act ratified Australia's international human rights obligations under the UN Convention on the *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, and has played an important role in changing community attitudes and helping advance gender equality in this country.⁶⁰

52 International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2012.

53 Ibid.

54 Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Retrieved 5 January 2017: <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-gender-equality#sthash.Ywq91Jsi.dpuf>

55 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015.

56 Brodolini, 2011.

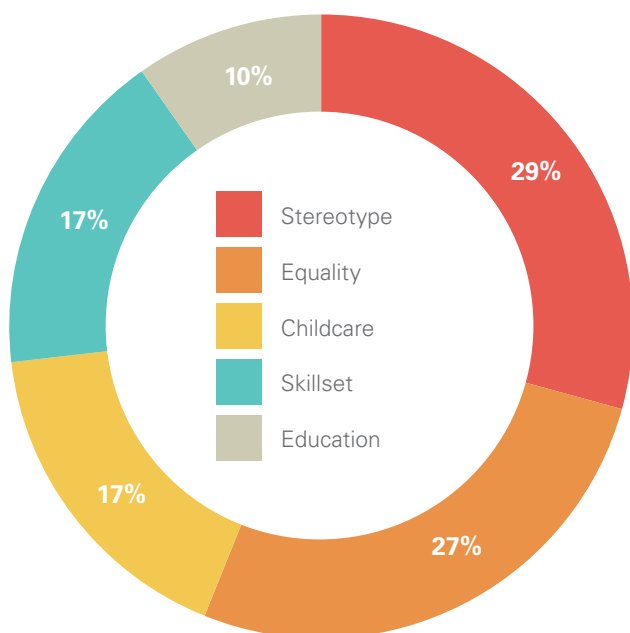
57 Porter, 1998.

58 Ibid.

59 International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2012.

60 Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015.

Gender Equity



VMC forum participants discussed what gender equity 'looked like' to them. The key messages that emerged from discussions included Stereotyping (29%), Equality (27%), Childcare (17%), Skillset (17%), and Education (10%).

"Gender equity is not to feel less than men and to have the same earnings as men."

Participant, Narre Warren, 2015.

Key Messages

STEREOTYPE

Stereotyping was discussed as a barrier to achieving gender equity. Participants felt that traditional roles were imported and imparted within the domestic realm. Women shared the following insights about stereotyping:

"Gender inequity starts at home when women can be made less confident."

"Gender roles are learned at home first."

"There is a belief system in the community that impacts upon acceptance of gender equity or women as leaders, i.e. sports clubs."

"Traditional stereotypes – male breadwinner, childbearing woman – how do we abolish these?"

"We grow into these societal stereotypes – women raised to be nurturing."

"Women 'serve'".

"Mistaken perceptions of the value of 'women's work' (undervalued)."

"Women are further disadvantaged at retirement."

"Cultural norms: in some ethnocultural homes the woman needs the 'permission' of her husband to speak."

Two specific instances of stereotyping that prolong inequitable gender relations were cited regarding the private and public realms.

At Frankston participants shared anecdotal evidence of Sudanese women gaining childcare qualifications that enabled them to participate in the workforce. The VMC was advised that husbands however, had difficulty in adjusting to this role change and that it had an impact on relations within the family. Participants advised that help is needed for whole families.

At Narre Warren participants discussed a similar family circumstance in relation to Centrelink. In this instance the husband left for Afghanistan but did not transfer payments meaning that his wife and children were left without an income. Participants advised there would be domestic repercussions if the wife was to go to Centrelink independently.



EQUALITY

Multicultural women discussed the ways in which they considered gender equity can lead to gender equality.

"Equal Access to career opportunities and to be encouraged and supported to pursue those."

"Formal equality – rights to employment and equal pay with affordable and accessible childcare."

"Reduce barriers to equality, including gender and ethnocultural discrimination."

"Provide leadership opportunities."

"Equal representation everywhere."

"Women are needed in key decision-making roles (to bring about more equitable outcomes)."

"Share the domestic workload across the board – demonstrates equal value and instructs new generation."

"It's about respect for women."

CHILDCARE

Accessible and affordable childcare was discussed as both a barrier and an enabler to women's participation and the pursuance of greater gender equity.

"Women are often penalised for having children."

"Work career compromised for women who are mothers."

"Maternity leave impacts upon career aspirations for women more than for men."

"Childcare in the workplace."

SKILLSET

Gender equity was also discussed in terms of the different skillset that women bring to situations including negotiations and leadership.

"Women are grassroots leaders."

"Our negotiation values are different, bringing different negotiating skills to the table as leaders."

"Empower women to showcase their values through opportunities in the workforce."

"Value the contribution of women including unpaid domestic labour and caring duties."

"Gender equity is about valuing work of all kinds – a housewife does have a monetary value (even when not recognised in macroeconomic statistics)."

"Value the different perspective that women can bring."

EDUCATION

For multicultural women at the VMC forums education was considered as both a private and public good.

"Access to education is important for women at all life stages including learning and development opportunities in the workplace."

"Women need flexible learning opportunities with available childcare."

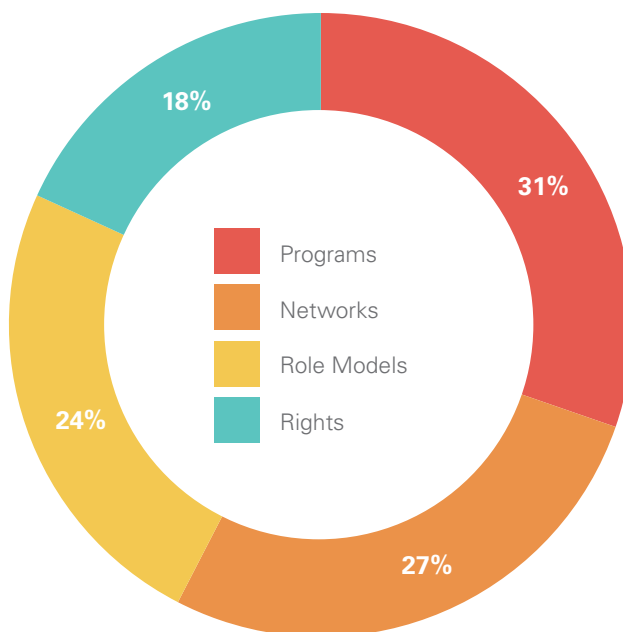
"Some families may not see the value in education for girls, even when the girls themselves want to pursue higher education."

Hearing Women's Voices

Discussions about leadership and advocacy concluded with participants discussing their ideas and suggestions to ensure that multicultural women not only have a voice in the community, but that their voices are heard.

The four key messages that emerged from discussions were related to the supports that multicultural women require in order to have their voices heard. These were Programs (31%), Networks (27%), Role Models (24%) and Rights (18%).

Hearing Women's Voices



PROGRAMS

'Programs' demonstrated the need to build capacity and the assistance required to create confident and capable female leaders now and into the future.

"Start in schools by developing a culture of respect and equality."

"Target young girls and provide leadership training programs at school."

"Teach young women basic life skills through motivational mentoring including financial independence and leadership skills."

"Empower women and encourage them to speak out confidently through leadership programs for multicultural women."

"Provide specific funding for women's support groups; build capacity."

"More women representatives in the political system."

"Provide programs that instruct local women on the processes of standing for Local, State or Federal government."

"Use International Women's Day (8 March) to publicise the value of women at all levels in the local community. Use the day to honour women."

NETWORKS

Making the benefits of networking more accessible to multicultural women was discussed as a means to better link people in to services and the local community more broadly.

"Facilitate networking for women in local communities through local non-government organisations, maternal and Child Health Centres and local libraries."

"Empower women by providing information on health promotion including mental health. Use existing networks to spread this information."

"Host regular network meetings to help to break down barriers between diverse cultural groups and promote harmony."

"Local government diversity officers could hold regular community network meetings with service providers and schools. This could be replicated with women representing local diverse communities."

"Invite guest speakers (i.e. Centrelink, community health service, community legal centre) to aid a two way flow of information and feed systemic change."

ROLE MODELS

The practical value of role models was explored especially in their ability to impact and inspire others.

"Make gender equality issues in diverse communities 'our' problem at a national level."

"Facilitate women's leadership aspirations. Leadership transforms lives, family relationships and has a positive impact on the community."

"Seek out and nurture women role models, such as community group leaders."

"Develop mentoring opportunities that assist women in their daily lives and can provide representation at institutions, such as Centrelink."

RIGHTS

Participants suggested that being more familiar with the laws in Australia would help multicultural women to achieve greater equality in their homes and communities.

"Make it explicit what Australian law says and why it is different to cultural traditions."

"Laws can help to bring about cultural change."

"Make men and women aware of women's rights, the rights which protect women."

"Provide education on the laws regarding gender discrimination. Then women will know what is available to them and help them to speak up."

"Programs that build confidence and self-esteem will help women to understand their rights and communicate their roles."

7. ACCESS TO SERVICES

Personal, community and structural barriers can all pose challenges to women from diverse backgrounds in seeking access to support services. Women told the VMC that communication was an issue. This included language difficulties as well as a lack of knowledge about what is available.

Some families can remain socially isolated for example, even when they have resided in Australia for a long period of time due to barriers in seeking help.⁶¹

A joint study of newly arrived groups by the Australian Catholic University and the University of Adelaide (2015), found a crucial gap in information sharing. The study recommended better communication and networking between the service sectors, churches and cultural communities to improve working relationships, and the sharing of information about the needs of the population.

The study also found that the majority of service users were self-referrals (71%).⁶² However, bearing in mind self-reported challenges in accessing services, the report recommended more appropriate referrals to facilitate access to the supports families are entitled to, rather than expecting people to navigate the systems by themselves.

Being able to participate in the present is ultimately productive for individuals, families and the community in the future.⁶³ Therefore, the importance of facilitating access to support services is vitally important in terms of successful settlement.

Women's View

The VMC forum found that participants supported the view that access to services is still in need of improvement.

Multicultural women shared their experiences of similar challenges including language difficulties, cultural norms about help-seeking, and a general lack of knowledge about services.

For example, a group of Karen women at the Bendigo forum were caring for elderly relatives and unaware of the respite or home cleaning services offered as part of the Home and Community Care (HACC) package available to them through the local government authority.

At the Narre Warren forum the availability of interpreters was cited as a challenge; being able to access an interpreter when one is needed. Participants were of the view that the greater availability of female interpreters would assist multicultural women and promote greater participation.

Challenges in Accessing Support Services

Participants discussed the ways in which they find out about support services. Four key messages emerged from the discussion demonstrating the importance of being connected to the local community.

The dominant key theme was Community (46%) – for the majority of participants it was through their connection with community that they found out about support services.

The second and third key messages of Referral (24%) and Outreach (22%) were related because they involved hearing about services from a provider; whether through referral or outreach.

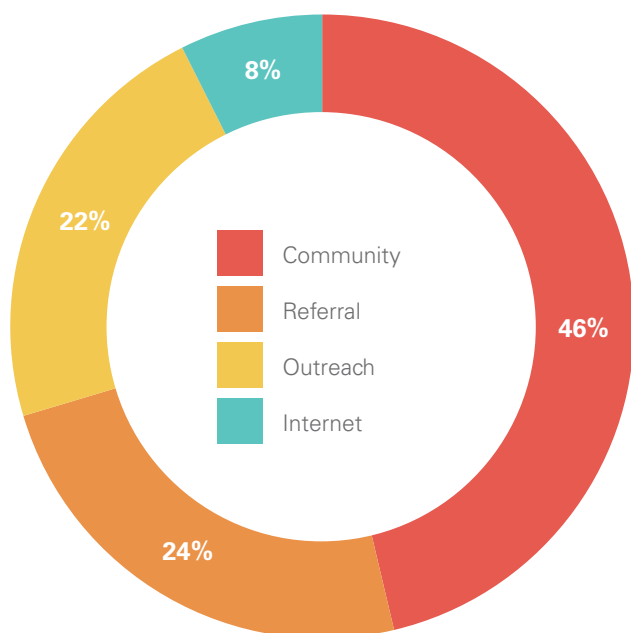
The key theme of Internet (8%) arose as both an assistance to finding out about services, and as a barrier. For participants who are familiar with technology and have English language skills the internet was cited as helpful to finding services that are available. However, for women with language difficulties, large families and restricted budgets accessing information through the internet was not so freely available.

61 Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University and Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of Adelaide, 2015.

62 Ibid.

63 Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003.

Services Available



Key Messages

COMMUNITY

The local community was viewed as the most accessible and available resource to find support and information about services for multicultural women.

"More resourcing is needed to fund specific women's groups for multicultural communities. These groups would provide networking opportunities and women could learn about services."

"Religious leaders could help their faith communities by sharing information about services."

"Networks within faith communities could help one another."

"Places like Centrelink and medical centres could share information about other services in waiting areas."

"Sites in local neighbourhoods such as libraries, neighbourhood houses, community hubs, Maternal and Child Health Services, and community centres could have information to hand."

"Local ethnic media could provide information on all kinds of services in the local community."

"Women's groups and planned activity groups in the local community provide safe entry points for women from diverse cultural backgrounds."

"The Women's Friendship Café has groups all over Victoria. They provide support to women who are newly arrived."

REFERRAL

Getting the message out there is important. At the Bendigo forum participants advised that Bendigo Community Health Service provide monthly information sessions about services available in the community.

"Settlement Service Providers are a good source of referral for newly arrived groups. Caseworkers become trusted sources of information and referral."

"Ethnic Communities Councils provide support services to assist people in the community from ethnocultural backgrounds."

"Some settlement services and ethnic communities councils provide mentors or sponsors to assist people."

"Community Health Centres are another terrific resource and source of support in the community. People are referred to them and they also refer people on."

"Any service that engages with newly arrived people can share information about other services."

"Local Councils are a great source of information for new residents."

OUTREACH

Outreach related to service workers going out into the community to actively spread information about services provided. Multicultural women told the VMC that:

"Local events in the community including sporting events are a good way to reach people."

"Centrelink has outreach workers who provide information sessions in the community."

"People who are primary carers need people to go to them and provide them with information about the services available to them. HACC workers are ideally situated to bring information back to their organisation about community needs."

"Outreach workers could go to local faith communities to spread the word."

"Outreach is a good way to link carers into the community."

"Bicultural/bilingual workers are needed to reach some multicultural communities."

INTERNET

Increasingly services (government and non-government) are communicating through online portals, with forms and information readily available in English and sometimes other languages. For some people in the community however this creates a barrier because the internet is not readily available to them and or they are unfamiliar with the technology.

“In the past there were more substantial services for settlement.”

Participant, Geelong, 2015.

The VMC has heard through other consultation forums and regional advisory councils that the elderly and multicultural communities more generally face particular difficulties accessing information online. For people facing language difficulties filling in a form that is in English, whether online or hard copy, can be particularly challenging. For those people being able to access face-to-face assistance is essential.

While some forum participants suggested “Searching on the internet using Google” because they were familiar with this method, others advised that “Council websites for example, are a useful source of information but can be difficult to navigate”.

At Narre Warren participants discussed the difficulties faced by single mothers from multicultural communities who have large families (at least 4-5 children). The cost of technology greater than a mobile phone is prohibitive on limited incomes that are stretched to feed, clothe and house larger families.

There are further difficulties in accessing publicly available systems, such as at the local library, “when you have young children and no local family members to assist with childcare.”

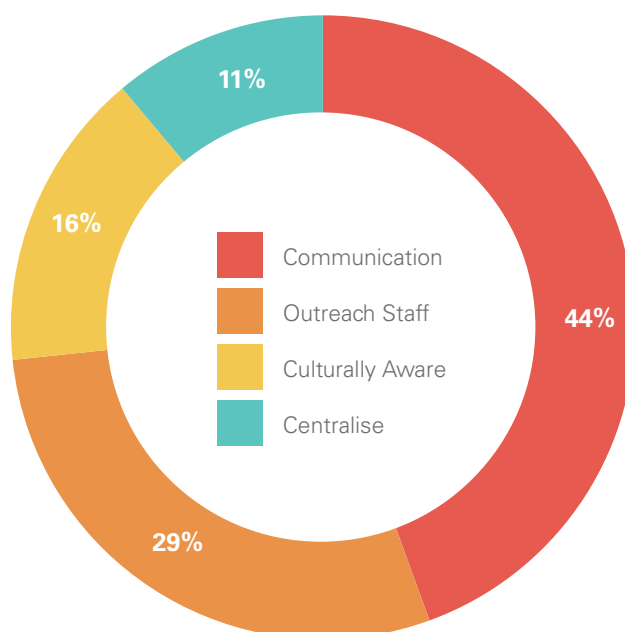
A further limitation of the internet was cited at Geelong where participants suggested that “information can get out of date fast” and “needs to be updated”.

Improving Access to Support Services

In the second part of the forum participants discussed ways to improve access to services.

The key messages emerging from this discussion included Communication (44%), Outreach Staff (29%), Culturally Aware (16%) and Centralise (11%).

Improving Access to Services



COMMUNICATION

Solving the communication issue dominated the discussions with suggestions for interpreters, translated materials and the use of local ethnic radio to reach people and provide accessible information.

“Generalist services still need interpreters – lack of awareness that this is discrimination. Deters access when you cannot access in your own language.”

Participant Broadmeadows, 2015.

“Having printed material in different languages.”

“Different methods of communication – storyboards, local ethnic media especially radio and so on.”

“Employ bilingual staff to help build rapport.”

“The language difficulty is problematic when organisation does not provide an interpreter.”

“There can be confidentiality issues (real and perceived) with interpreters from the same community.”

“Sometimes the budget for interpreter services is low.”

“Provide mainstream workers with training in using interpreter services.”

“Provide multilingual information on websites and include video in community languages.”

“People are disadvantaged by a lack of English language skills.”

OUTREACH STAFF

Expecting people to act in their own capacity as agents and access services through a user choice model is not always appropriate, especially for new and emerging communities. Some service providers have already taken action by employing outreach staff as multicultural liaison officers.

To raise awareness it is necessary to go out to some communities in the first instance so that they are aware of the services available to them. Participants confirmed this need at Sunshine, Melbourne CBD, Broadmeadows, and Narre Warren.

"Break the barrier and reach out. Some generalist services do outreach work with specific communities. For example, Centrelink and Victoria Police have Multicultural Liaison Officers."

"Network with the different communities through outreach work."

"Work with the community and faith leaders to build their capacity and knowledge base."

"Provide guest speakers at English classes to access groups."

"Outreach by going to workplaces and in community settings."

"Outreach workers can assist in completion of paper work such as private rental application, employment applications."

CULTURAL AWARENESS

This key message arose through discussions that highlighted the lack of cultural awareness in organisations and the need for responses that are culturally appropriate and inclusive of all cultures.

"Build good relationships with communities. Provide culturally appropriate services that use community languages and bicultural workers."

"Branches of government should provide incentives to services to become culturally aware."

"Make cultural competence training compulsory."

"Bilingual workers can also offer peer support."

CENTRALISE

The trend towards integrating services within a 'hub' as a 'one-stop-shop' for a number of related services was raised as a good solution to improving access to services for multicultural women.

In this vein hosting inclusive community events was raised as a means to bring services means to bring services and people together in a non-threatening way that breaks down barriers.

"Interactive community events that bring together services in one place. For example, Kensington community centre where the Somali community share food with Victoria Police officers."

"Funding for capacity building that facilitates the coming together of different cultures and groups."

"A central hub can also provide information about all sorts of services."

"A centralised hub provides better access to agencies and support services."

On Improving Access

In its publication Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, No. 3, 2008, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) suggests that service accessibility and delivery for CALD families can be enhanced by pursuing partnerships.

Partner with other CALD-focused centres or organisations in the local community to receive:

- support through networks;
- advice and consultation on appropriate service delivery;
- clear referral pathways for CALD families;
- language services;
- cultural awareness training; and
- provision of more holistic support for CALD families by building the CALD capacity of the service outlet; that is, the service outlet will be better able to respond to the needs of their CALD families because of the collective knowledge, experience and support of a culturally diverse and competent workforce.

Sawrikar & Katz, 2008.

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APPENDIX 1

VMC Multicultural Womens Forums 2015. Discussion Questions

Core questions	Additional prompts to ask/explore
Employment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges have you or others in your community had in trying to find work? • What aspirations do you have for work in the future, and what support do you need to help you get there? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any experiences of discrimination (pre or during employment)? • Language & cultural barriers/lack of formal qualifications or qualifications not recognised • Where can/do you search for work? (contacts/ networks, online, friends, services) • Who could help you? (individuals, networks, families, mentors)
Discrimination & Bias	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What experiences of discrimination have you or your family experienced or witnessed? • What do you think can be done to stop or reduce acts of discrimination and bias? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circumstances such as shopping, services (Drs, hospitals, schools), by police, public space, etc. • How did it make you feel? • Can the government/media/ social media play a role in the solution? How?
Leadership and Advocacy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “gender equity” look like to you? • What can be done to ensure that women’s voices are heard and their issues are understood? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. female leadership skills valued, solutions-oriented, natural multi-taskers, etc • How do gender stereotypes and cultural barriers affect women’s leadership aspirations? • Do community leaders represent the views of women?
Access to Services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you find out about the types of services available to you? • How would you improve access to services for women from diverse communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do location and operating hours meet your needs? If not how can these be improved? • Is the service provided in a culturally appropriate manner? • Is language or understanding a barrier? • Do you think access can be improved? How?

APPENDIX 2

Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 – Sect 4

PRINCIPLES OF MULTICULTURALISM

1. The Parliament recognises that the people of Victoria are united in their shared commitment to:
 - (a) a democratic framework governed by the rule of law; and
 - (b) Victoria and Australia and to the people, interests and future of Victoria and Australia.
2. The Parliament further recognises that all Victorians come from diverse backgrounds and values the richness that such diversity brings to the Victorian community.
3. The Parliament supports the rights and responsibilities of citizenship to which subsection (1) refers and promotes the diversity to which subsection (2) refers by recognising the following principles of multiculturalism:
 - (a) all individuals in Victoria are entitled to mutual respect and understanding regardless of their diverse backgrounds;
 - (b) all individuals and institutions in Victoria should promote and preserve diversity within the context of shared laws, values, aspirations and responsibilities;
 - (c) all individuals in Victoria (regardless of background) have shown that they can work together to build a positive and progressive future and this co-operation is to be encouraged so as to enhance Victoria as a great place in which to live;
 - (d) all individuals in Victoria are equally entitled to access opportunities and participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the State;
 - (e) all individuals in Victoria have a responsibility to abide by the State's laws and respect the democratic processes under which those laws are made;
 - (f) all individuals in Victoria should be united in a shared commitment to Australia and to community service;
 - (g) all individuals and institutions should recognise Victoria's diversity as an asset and a valuable resource benefiting Australia.
4. The Parliament further recognises that Victoria's diversity should be reflected in a whole of government approach to policy development, implementation and evaluation.
5. It is the intention of the Parliament that this Act is to be administered and interpreted having regard to the principles of multiculturalism set out in subsection (3).

