

Gender Equality

What Matters to Multicultural Women

Discussion Paper



The Voice of Multicultural Victoria

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the voice of multicultural Victoria. As the peak policy advocacy body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria. Since 1974 we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

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Foreword

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the voice of multicultural Victoria, representing over 235 grassroots ethnic organisations and individuals. ECCV is committed to strive for gender equity, specifically for culturally and linguistically diverse women in Victoria.

ECCV is fully aware that family violence is the result of inequity between men and women in the workforce, in education and in opportunities all together, hence ECCV is committed to bridging the gap between genders.

To this end ECCV, on the most basic level, acts as an example, by ensuring that there is an equal representation of genders on the Board of the ECCV.

The establishment and existence of the Women's Policy Advisory Committee attests to the importance that ECCV places on the role of women in the culturally diverse community. In this committee, representatives of many other ethnic organisations, members of the ECCV and others, come together to share ideas for improving the position of women in Victorian culturally diverse communities.

In its communications, ECCV strives to represent both genders as participants and contributors to events and activities that relate to the culturally diverse community and also monitors the media for equal and fair representation of culturally diverse people.

As an advocacy and research organisation, ECCV devotes much of its resources to furthering the role of women – for example it made a submission to the Royal Commission of Family Violence which contained 14 recommendations to improve the position of culturally diverse women. ECCV was the conduit for the involvement of culturally diverse women helping the Victorian Ministry shape its first Gender Equality Strategy.

All in all the ECCV aims to lead the ethnic community in striving for gender equity in all areas.



Eddie Micallef
Chairperson



Dr Helen Light AM
Conveners – Women's Policy Advisory Committee



Cr Kris Pavlidis

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Executive Summary

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the voice of multicultural Victoria and the peak policy advocacy body for eight regional ethnic community councils and up to 235 members including ethnic and multicultural organisations across Victoria. For over 40 years, we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

ECCV has a strong history in advocating for the rights of multicultural communities on a broad range of issues relating to health, civic and workforce participation and social cohesion.¹ ECCV also has a strong role in informing industry practice and influencing Government and relevant stakeholders on a range of issues concerning equitable access and inclusive framework development. For example, ECCV was a member of the Consumer Affairs Victoria Renting Advisory Committee and contributed to the development of resources on renting for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities² and is the co-convenor of the Commission for Children and Young People's CALD Strategic Partnership Advisory Committee.

The discussion paper, *Gender Equality – What Matters to Multicultural Women*, builds on a range of activities conducted by ECCV including submissions to the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence Report³ and ECCV's Submission to the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy⁴. ECCV is pleased to contribute this discussion paper to the ongoing development of the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy.

ECCV worked with the Victorian Government in its commitment to extensively consult with the Victorian public on the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy. ECCV held three multicultural consultation sessions and is pleased the Department of Premier and Cabinet staff attended. Most notable was the participation of the late Hon. Fiona Richardson in ECCV's Women's Policy Advisory Committee meeting, a sub-committee of the ECCV Board, in October 2016. These consultations resulted in strong messages about what matters to multicultural women in Victoria.

The discourse on gender equality for culturally and linguistically diverse women often links some of the traditional roles and customary norms of culturally diverse women as barriers to gender equality. A whole of community response which empowers women, assists men to be allies and community leaders as champions is necessary across communities.

ECCV's consultations have identified that true gender equality for multicultural women in Australian society can only be achieved when the intercultural lens is overlaid with the social, systemic and structural barriers which hinder equity of access to resources and participation. Hence, achieving gender equality for culturally diverse women must first address the different needs of multicultural women and consider the adjustments that need to be made to ensure equal participation in social, civic and economic life.

¹ ECCV, [Submission to the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy](#), March 2016; ECCV, [The Electoral Matters Committee's Inquiry into Electronic Voting](#), July 2016; ECCV, [Submission to the Victorian Inquiry into the Labour Hire Industry and Insecure Work](#), November 2015 and ECCV, [Submission to the Review of Victoria's Charter of Human Rights](#), June 2015.

² Consumer Affairs Victoria, [Understanding Renting/Dari](#), July 2016

³ ECCV, [Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence Report](#), April 2016

⁴ ECCV, [Victorian Gender Equality Strategy](#), March 2016

Recommendations

ECCV is pleased to present the following recommendations:

1. Include positive images of culturally diverse Victorians in government engagement strategies including media campaigns and set a new norm which is reflective of the 46% of Victorians who are either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.
2. Involve female community leaders in co-designing the solutions to achieve equitable access to universal services and systems for ethnic women and girls acknowledging diversity within cultural groups.
3. Increase targeted initiatives to improve service responsiveness of universal services to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse women and girls.
4. Support grass roots initiatives to be delivered by trained culturally diverse community members as they understand the approaches which work and have the trust of their community to implement the initiatives.
5. Government procurement policy should stipulate quotas for culturally and linguistically diverse workforce targets for all government funded programs, encouraging the employment of bicultural workers particularly in initiatives targeting culturally diverse communities.
6. Implement a requirement for government funded organisations to report on their gender and diversity balance in work roles, including senior roles, as an accountability measure.
7. **A)** Assistance for new and emerging culturally diverse communities to approach companies, through their corporate social responsibility agenda, to sponsor mentorship programs that will provide employment pathways.
B) Government to develop and set best practice guidelines for internship and apprenticeship targets across industries.
8. Develop and support work readiness programs which address the cultural needs of ethnic women to support their entry into work.
9. Establish initiatives to engage the corporate sector in work experience for adult migrants/refugees to practice English outside of the home environment.
10. Accommodate for life experiences of children from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds and develop and deliver bridging programs which support individuals to stay engaged within the education system extending into higher education.
11. Support capacity building programs to ensure ethnic providers with little exposure and experience in the Australian taxation and regulatory environments are compliant with changing regulations to run affordable multicultural childcare schemes such as Family Day Care and remain sustainable.

12. Government to invest in delivering community education programs targeted at culturally diverse communities within the community so they can access services directed to them.

For Example:

- English language classes which cater to the needs of new migrants tailored to their needs, including beyond the current 510 hours.
- Information on their rights, local laws and opportunities for civic participation.

13. Increase funding for local neighbourhood houses and friendship cafés to support culturally diverse women as safe places to meet and learn. For example Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre provides such a space.

Introduction

In March 2016, ECCV put forward a submission to the Victorian Government both commending the Gender Equality Strategy (the Strategy) initiative and highlighting the need for vigorous consultation with the multicultural community.⁵

The Government's announcement to commence the community consultation process in August 2016, prompted ECCV to engage with the Department of Premier and Cabinet's (DPC) Office of Women and Prevention of Family Violence in discussions on how ECCV could contribute to the Strategy's consultation process. The outcome was ECCV input into the government lead consultation process. In addition, ECCV facilitated a further three gender equality forums to bring together the Office of Women and culturally and linguistically diverse women to hear the concerns and aspirations of multicultural women.

The result of these consultations was a detailed qualitative forum report, *ECCV's Response to the Victorian Government's consultation process on the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, delivered to the Government in October 2016.⁶

ECCV has continued to consult with women and young people in new and emerging communities since the launch of the Government's gender equality strategy to gain their ongoing insight and input on the issues that matter to culturally and linguistically diverse women and their children.

This paper discusses:

1. Gender equality and family violence
2. Gender equality through an intercultural lens – what multicultural women said
3. Points to consider

Overview of Policy Context

Global

Gender equality and gender equity are often used interchangeably however, the two are different. Gender equality is about providing the same opportunities and access to resources for women as for men. Gender equity is about achieving equitable outcomes, or *how* equality is achieved based on the different needs of men and women.⁷ For example, consider adjustments that need to be made to ensure equal participation in the workforce.

⁵ ECCV Submission to the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy, March 2016 http://eccv.org.au/library/2016-03-07_SUB_DPC_Gender_Equality_Strategy_FINAL.pdf

⁶ ECCV Response to the Victorian Government Consultation Gender Equality Strategy, October 2016, http://eccv.org.au/library/ECCV_Response_to_Vic_Govt_Consultation_Gender_Equality_Strategy_Oct_2016_FINAL.pdf

⁷ World Health Organisation, *Gender, Equity and Human Rights*, <http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/> viewed 29/8/17

Gender equality is widely accepted as a human rights issue.⁸ In an interview for McKinsey and Company in November 2015, United Nations Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka stated:

“Gender equality is very important both as a human-rights imperative and also as a means for economic development. Women’s rights are human rights. All of the violations of women’s rights that we are familiar with are actually violations of human rights

... If you talk about gender-based violence, if you talk about inequality in pay, if you talk about women’s underrepresentation in decision making, all of those are fundamental rights that are just as important to women as they are to men. When women’s economic rights and economic participation are hindered, women become poor citizens.”

Further, gender equality is measurable. The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index measures gender-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities in countries to gauge the relative access to these by women compared to men.⁹ The index does not seek to measure the actual levels of available resources and opportunities in those countries.¹⁰ In 2016, Australia ranked 46 overall out of 144 countries participating in this analysis.¹¹

Australian Government

The Commonwealth is committed to gender equality and is informed on policy coordination to strengthen women’s economic security, safety and status through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Office for Women.¹²

A renewed focus into gender equality followed the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia in March 2014. The report on the inquiry acknowledged that gender inequality was among the broad and complex range of factors which contribute to violence against women and girls.¹³

⁸ At the United Nations, a push for true gender equality, Interview transcript, <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/at-the-united-nations-a-push-for-true-gender-equality> viewed 21/8/17

⁹ World Economic Forum, *Measuring the Global Gender Gap*, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/measuring-the-global-gender-gap/> viewed 21/8/17

¹⁰ *Ibid* 9

¹¹ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016 – Performance by Region and Country*, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/performance-by-region-and-country/> viewed 21/8/17

¹² Australian Government Department of Social Services, *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, August 2014, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2014/national_plan1.pdf, page 4, viewed 16/8/17

¹³ Parliament of Australia, Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration, *Domestic Violence in Australia Report*, August 2015,

The report also acknowledged that culturally and linguistically diverse, non-English speaking and new and emerging migrant communities are among the vulnerable groups of women to experience domestic violence and, who 'also face significant difficulties, including a lack of support networks, language barriers, socio-economic disadvantage, and lack of knowledge of their rights and Australia's laws'.¹⁴

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022* (National Plan) is the Australian Government's platform to 'achieve a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children' and the instrument to address gender equality.¹⁵ Specific initiatives targeted at culturally and linguistically diverse communities to reduce violence against women are outlined in the supporting action plans of the National Plan.

One of the initiatives of the *Second Action Plan 2013-2016 – Moving Ahead, Of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, included 'promoting gender equality across a range of spheres, including women's economic independence and leadership'.¹⁶

Gender equality continues to be a strong theme in prevention of family violence in the *Third Action Plan 2016 – 2019* in the prevention and early intervention phase with initiatives for community to co – design those initiatives.¹⁷

Victorian Government

In 2016, the Victorian Government announced a bold initiative to develop Australia's first ever gender equality strategy. The strategy, *Safe and Strong – A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* (the Strategy), is aligned with the Royal Commission's Inquiry into Family Violence finding that, gender inequality is a key contributing factor of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls.¹⁸

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Domestic_Violence/Report/b03, viewed 21/8/17

¹⁴ Parliament of Australia, Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration, *Domestic Violence in Australia Report*, August 2015,

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Domestic_Violence/Report/c04 viewed 22/8/17

¹⁵ Ibid 12

¹⁶ Australian Government Department of Social Services, *Second Action Plan 2013-2016 – Moving Ahead, Of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2014/dss012_14_book_tagged_reduced.pdf, page 18 viewed 22/8/17

¹⁷ Australian Government Department of Social Services, *Third Action Plan 2016-2019 Of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2016/third_action_plan.pdf, page 12 viewed 22/8/17

¹⁸ Victorian State Government, *Safe and Strong, A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy – Preventing Violence Against Women Through Gender Equality*, http://www.vic.gov.au/system/user_files/Documents/women/161108_Victorian_Gender_Equality_Strategy_ONLINE.pdf

The Strategy proposes to be a road map for gender equality across all aspects of life from home, to school, community, work, media and sport. The Strategy also aims to address all facets of disadvantage that women face including: Aboriginality, new arrivals, living in rural and regional Victoria or have a disability.¹⁹

At ECCV's Women's Policy Advisory Committee meeting in October 2016, DPC Office of Women and Prevention of Family Violence staff stated that the Strategy will be a living document which will affect change across the Victorian community and positively impact on the life of every woman and girl.

Gender Equality and Family Violence

Since 2012, ECCV has continuously consulted with culturally diverse communities and the organisations which support them about family violence, specifically violence against women and their children. While family violence is a complex issue affecting all communities across Victoria, the challenges faced by women and children of multicultural backgrounds obtaining help for family violence are further compounded by their English language proficiency, lack of knowledge of the law, social isolation, migration status, social and cultural misconceptions and misunderstanding family violence.^{20,21}

Further to this, there is the added layer of traditional and cultural norms for culturally diverse women experiencing family violence, particularly for newer migrants, the issues of dowry related violence, forced marriage and child marriage add complexity.²²

The Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) was established in February 2015.²³ Since then, the RCFV handed down 227 recommendations, 19 of which specifically relate to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Victorian government has accepted all 227 recommendations and these are imbedded in the Victorian Government's ten year *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change. The Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017-2020* invests \$1.91 billion in family violence services and reform, and also articulates related investment in housing, Victoria Police and Maternal and Child Health Services.²⁴

The RCFV recommendations are linked to the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy with the underlying premise that gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls.^{25,26}

¹⁹ Ibid 18

²⁰ ECCV, [Submission to the Foundation on Violence against Women and their children National Consultation](#), September 2013

²¹ ECCV, [Women Surviving Violence – Cultural Competence in Critical Services](#), 2013

²² InTouch, Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence, <http://www.intouch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/inTouch-Submission-Royal-Commission-into-Family-Violence.pdf>, 2015, page 15

²³ <http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Summary.pdf>, page 1, viewed 22/8/17

²⁴ The Victorian Government, *The Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017-2020*, https://www.vic.gov.au/system/user_files/Documents/fv/Family%20Violence%20Rolling%20Action%20Plan%202017-2020.pdf

²⁵ The Royal Commission into Family Violence – *Summary and Recommendations*, March 2016, <http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Summary.pdf> page 2

Whilst there is no data to suggest the family violence is more endemic or profound in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the *2013 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) – Attitudes to violence against women among people born in non-main English speaking countries (N-MESC)*, found that among N-MESC respondents, there was a poorer understanding of particular dynamics and gendered patterns of violence against women.²⁷ This supports the premise that family violence is experienced differently in diverse communities and that different approaches are needed in different communities.²⁸

ECCV consultations identified that there is a gap in the cultural competence in the current community education and primary prevention programs targeted to multicultural communities. This is likely to impact on efficacy of these programs. Similarly, concern has been raised by community members in ECCV consultations of cultural homogenisation. This is a barrier to community groups reporting instances of, and seeking help in cases of, family violence due to stereotyping or shaming particular ethnic community groups.

ECCV emphasises that there is a strong role for the multicultural community in informing the design of family violence primary prevention programs and urge consultation with culturally diverse communities, and the organisations which support them, to ensure culturally appropriate and effective program development and delivery.

Between February and May of 2017, ECCV participated in a consultation process with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission in the development of *Guideline: Family Violence Services and Accommodation – Complying with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010*²⁹. This guideline is a good step towards addressing the gap in cultural competency in providing services and accommodation for women and their children experiencing family violence. ECCV proposes that this tool is only one example of what is required. Far more substantial resources are required to ensure equitable and timely access to support services for culturally and linguistically diverse women.

In August 2017, ECCV participated in a workshop with the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) Centre for Innovative Justice - Mapping the Roles and Responsibilities of Perpetrator Interventions. ECCV strongly advocated for government to increase efforts to reach out to smaller front line organisations that are not resourced to contribute to this type of consultation process. This includes request for the consultation process to map the feeder services and informal networks that multicultural community members turn to when formal structures are not accessible or culturally responsive, such as smaller religious organisations, community groups and community leaders.

²⁶ The Victorian Government, *Safe and Strong, A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, December 2016, http://www.vic.gov.au/system/user_files/Documents/women/161108_Victorian_Gender_Equality_Strategy_ONLINE.pdf, page ii

²⁷ VicHealth, *2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS), Attitudes to violence against women among people born in non-main English speaking countries*, September 2014

²⁸ Cohealth submission to RCFV, <https://www.cohealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/cohealth-Royal-Commission-into-Family-Violence-Submission-2015.pdf>, page 11, May 2015 viewed 16/8/17

²⁹ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Guideline: Family Violence Services and Accommodation – Complying with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, <https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/home/our-resources-and-publications/ea-practice-guidelines/item/1577-guideline-family-violence-services-and-accommodation-complying-with-the-equal-opportunity-act-2010>, June 2017, viewed 9/9/17

ECCV is continuously advocating for family violence initiatives to be inclusive of groups that are less visible to the family violence service system, particularly vulnerable cohorts including women affected by visa category restrictions. Awareness of how visa categories impact on access for family violence support services is low in the community. ECCV consultation with student visa holders in November 2016 found a lack of community awareness of family violence services which are available to them and their rights to access these services.³⁰ There is room for targeted awareness raising for culturally diverse women on student, spousal, work and refugee visa categories.

Health service providers in ECCV's consultations spoke of cases of culturally diverse women who are restricted by their husband and/or extended family from accessing the community and not allowed out to participate in community events.³¹ This particularly affects some refugee women and makes them vulnerable to abuse which may go undetected and reported. Health service providers spoke of creative programs that they employed to reach these vulnerable women including home visits among other strategies.

It is clear that family violence programs need to be inclusive of men as allies to ensure a strong community-wide response to the issue of multicultural gender equality. This involves addressing traditional gendered norms and educating culturally diverse men to give women room to participate in community life. It also requires prevention programs to work with cultural and religious leaders to be champions in the gender equality space.

³⁰ ECCV One to One Interview with Community Advocate, November 2016

³¹ ECCV Provider Consultations on Fairer, Safer Housing with Multicultural Service Providers, August 2016

Gender Equality Through an Intercultural Lens – What Multicultural Women Said

Consultation Methodology

ECCV worked with the Victorian Government in its commitment to extensively consult with the Victorian public on its Gender Equality Strategy [the Strategy]. ECCV held three multicultural consultation sessions from August through October 2016 with over 100 participants. Participants included members of culturally and linguistically diverse, new and emerging, and established ethnic communities and the service providers who support them.

The involvement of so many culturally diverse organisations at these ECCV consultations indicates a high awareness of gender equality issues in Victoria’s multicultural communities. It also highlights the importance that culturally diverse communities place on contributing to the government’s consultation process and the overall importance of the Strategy to culturally diverse Victorians.

ECCV was pleased to have had the late Hon. Fiona Richardson and Department of Premier and Cabinet staff participation in ECCV’s Women’s Policy Advisory Committee meeting, a sub-committee of the ECCV Board, in October 2016.

These consultations resulted in strong messages about what matters to multicultural women in Victoria which are discussed below.

It is important to note that at some of the consultation sessions, men participated in support of, and to advocate for, consideration of issues facing women and girls in their cultural community groups. Men have a key role to play in any strategies formulated as part of this process as champions and participants in realising the goals of gender equality.

Consultation Findings

The consultations revealed social, systemic and structural barriers which impact on culturally and linguistically diverse women’s ability to access opportunities and resources. Key barriers to social, economic and civic participation included:

1. Racism and Discrimination
 - a) Community safety and harmony
 - b) The role of the media
2. Too much of a homogenous approach to cultural diversity
 - a) Cultural identity and belonging
 - b) Homogenisation of cultural groups
3. Lack of tailored pathways to formal employment
 - a) Volunteerism
 - b) Vulnerable women and economic stability
 - c) Capacity building and professionalism of the bicultural workforce

4. Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications
5. Better education support to stem youth disengagement
6. Lack of access to affordable childcare
7. The right to mothering – woman’s choice to be the primary carer of her children

Racism and Discrimination

Community Harmony and Safety

The Scanlon Foundation’s *Mapping Social Cohesion Report* found that the majority of Australians (83%-86% in the 2013-2016 surveys points) feel that ‘multiculturalism has been good for Australia’. Though this is the case, it is important to note that there are signs of increased pessimism, negativity towards Muslims and an increase in the proportion of people experiencing discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, ethnicity or religion.³²

A strong theme that came from ECCV community interviews was the impact of racism and discrimination on the ability of women and girls to access the same opportunities to education, employment, social and civic participation. The compounding factor for culturally and linguistically diverse women and girls is their vulnerability, in particular, women and girls who look different whether it is their cultural attire or skin colour.

‘My daughters don’t feel safe going out at night on the train because they are scared for wearing their headscarves.’

- ECCV Gender Equality Consultations
September 2016

This expression of fear of having their personal space violated, reports of girls’ headscarves being pulled at, echoes the findings of hostility toward Muslims and other minority groups in ECCV’s Social Cohesion Policy Brief *On the Road with Australian Muslim Mothers*³³. Our consultation found that many local residents, in particular Australian Muslim mothers and daughters, are distressed by high levels of discrimination towards them. This includes hostile behaviours where they live, in parks and shopping centres and on roads with vehicles, including physical attacks and verbal abuse.

Similarly, women in ECCV’s consultations expressed fear for their daughters and stated that they would not let their children work or study after dark as they felt that the hostility increased at those times. The impact of this type of racism restricts women and girls participation in education and employment opportunities.

³² Markus, A, *Mapping Social Cohesion – The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2016*, the Scanlon Foundation, <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-Mapping-Social-Cohesion-Report-FINAL-with-covers.pdf> page 2. Viewed 2/12/16.

³³ ECCV Social Cohesion Policy Snapshot *On the Road with Australian Muslim Mothers*, August 2015.

The Role of Media

The role of the media in perpetuating profiling of racial groups, the negative portrayal of young African people, people of Muslim faith and the lack of positive images of culturally diverse people in the media, contributes to negative stereotyping of ethnic Victorians. Racial vilification affects the reputation of young ethnic community members with impact on their feeling of safety, opportunities for employment and social participation.

'...when there is a crime committed why do they say that a Sudanese man in Dandenong committed the crime, why not just say that a man in Dandenong committed the crime. When they say it like that, it makes people think all Sudanese people are violent or criminals.'

- ECCV Gender Equality Consultations
September 2016

Misconceptions and generalisations through false identification and misleading media reports feeds a perception that all members of a particular faith or cultural group are the same and this puts ethnic women and girls at risk. Similarly, the lack of positive images and role models of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in mainstream media and in leadership roles reinforces the negative messaging.

It is important to overlay gender equality with a cultural lens, particularly in the case of visible minorities. The lack of representation of positive role models in the media including television, news and radio, leadership positions in the workplace and in public life, serves to further reinforce perception that there is no place for visible minorities in positions of power and influence.

ECCV consultation with multicultural youth found that they could not relate to mainstream media including television and print media as they did not see anyone that looked like themselves on screen or in print.³⁴

'I can't be who I can't see.'

- Participant, UNAA Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls
September 2016

Women in ECCV consultations also spoke about not being able to get a job because they wear a headscarf.

'they said you can't wear a headscarf in a dental clinic because it is unhygienic.'

- ECCV Gender Equality Consultations
October 2016

³⁴ ECCV Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Strengthening_Multiculturalism/Multiculturalism, May 2017

Public awareness and perceptions of qualities and traits of particular cultural groups impact on their ability to participate in everyday life. Discrimination born out of a lack of knowledge can be addressed through awareness raising campaigns which portrays the positive contributions of culturally diverse people in modern day Australian society. The Victorian Government's *Victorian. And proud of it.*³⁵ campaign is a good example of raising community awareness. More can be done of this nature to improve representation of Australia's true diversity in media to set a new norm.

Community attitudes matter and it is important to provide education which starts with a well-articulated government position that supports inclusion and welcomes diversity.

Recommendation 1:

Include positive images of culturally diverse Victorians in government engagement strategies including media campaigns and set a new norm which is reflective of the 46% of Victorians who are either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.

Too Much of a Homogenous Approach to Cultural Diversity

An overwhelming message heard at ECCV's consultations was that the Strategy must consider differences within culturally diverse groups. Even within faith groups, there are differences. Interviewees in ECCV consultations state that some Somali Muslim women have different practices to some Turkish Muslim women. This illustrates the importance of identity and that identity is not uniform across cultural and religious groups. These nuances impact on the uptake and success of initiatives offered by service providers affecting the impact of any initiatives rolled out through the Strategy.

The homogenisation of cultural groups is problematic when women are accessing support and crisis services. The fear of tarnishing or bringing shame to their cultural community group, or being perceived by service providers as *'all members from a cultural group are exactly the same'* impedes culturally diverse women's confidence in accessing support services.

'There are service providers who build programs and expect community to just fall into line with their services and then are confused when no one comes to use them.'

- Women's Policy Advisory Committee meeting feedback
June 2017

Further, the needs of new and emerging communities are strongly related to their settlement needs. Access to information to successfully navigate the service system and participate in civic life, education and employment.

'A newly arrived refugee women came to the maternal and child health service. We asked her how she was going and she said that she couldn't afford food. When we spoke with her

³⁵ The Victorian Government, *Victorian. And proud of it.*, <https://proud.vic.gov.au/> viewed 5/9/17

more, it turned out that she did not understand how the Newstart Allowance worked. This resulted in her payment being suspended for six weeks impacting on her livelihood and, potentially, the health of her baby.'

- ECCV Gender Equality Consultations
August 2016

The above is an example of gaps in universal services and systems. The issues of language barrier and lack of knowledge of the service systems, awareness of rights and unfamiliarity of local laws play a significant role in equitable access to services and resources which culminate on the health and wellbeing of culturally and linguistically diverse women and their children.

To achieve equity, an acknowledgement of differences in needs among ethnic communities is required and necessitates different approaches.

Similarly, the lack of opportunities for young women to participate in further education due to visa classification restrictions, such as in Pasifika Islander communities, limits culturally and linguistically diverse women and girls. This results in early disengagement from secondary education with little incentive or opportunity for families to encourage school attendance, instead opting for their girl child to be carers of younger siblings whilst parents work.³⁶

The gap can be bridged through a combination of targeted strategies to improve service system responsiveness and dedicated consumer education initiatives. A co-design process inclusive of communities to facilitate improved service access is imperative.

The gap is currently being bridged, through the assistance of informal community networks. There are grass roots female community leaders who currently work closely with their communities on issues such as family violence, employment, service access and capacity building. They have knowledge and established trusting relationships and knowledge which can assist in shortening the design and implementation process of gender equality programs and initiatives.

The consultations also revealed ideas on how to more effectively address issues of racism, community education and capacity building. For example, a group of young African women in Melbourne's south east have designed the African Women's Project which is a social media campaign that addresses a range of topics including family violence, parenting and professional development.

The solutions exist within the ethnic communities, particularly the approaches that would be effective in a particular cultural context.

³⁶ Participant feedback, Centre for Multicultural Youth, South East Youth Services Forum – The Le Mana (Empower) Pasifika Project Launch, August 2017

Recommendation 2:

Involve female community leaders in co-designing the solutions to achieve equitable access to universal services and systems for ethnic women and girls acknowledging diversity within cultural groups.

Recommendation 3:

Increase targeted initiatives to improve service responsiveness of universal services to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse women and girls.

Recommendation 4:

Support grass roots initiatives to be delivered by trained culturally diverse community members as they understand the approaches which work and have the trust of their community to implement the initiatives.

Lack of Tailored Pathways to Formal Employment

Volunteerism

ECCV consultation participants spoke at length about the unpaid and unrecognised efforts contributed by ethnic community leaders. Volunteerism was necessary and a valuable contribution to Victorian society and this is how many of the large not for profit organisations originally developed.

Consultation participants stated that it is important to recognise that the motivations for volunteering for established older communities and new and emerging culturally diverse communities are significantly different. New and emerging communities are in general energetic and enthusiastically contributing in a volunteer capacity in the hope of gaining employment. Higher rates of volunteerism by culturally diverse women and girls, however, do not always lead to meaningful or regular employment.

'I've been volunteering for 15 years and still no job, and what about her; she's been doing this for 20 years.'

- Participant, ECCV Women's Policy Advisory Committee
October 2016

The issue of burn out and self-sacrifice was a concern for community members who had been participating in consultations, advocacy efforts and supporting community members at a cost to themselves.

The key driver for volunteerism in community organisations was for gainful employment, discussion shifted to creating pathways for employment for culturally diverse girl members.

'...just give the girls a chance, like volunteer at the organisation, and then it's up to them to prove themselves. That's how two of our girls got jobs at the New Hope Foundation.'

- Participant, ECCV Women's Policy Advisory Committee
October 2016

Capacity Building and Professionalisation of the Bicultural Workforce

The move from consulting in a volunteer capacity to the provision of a sitting fee was also discussed. Whilst it is important and absolutely necessary to consult with culturally diverse communities on program development, community members felt that this sometimes happened in a tokenistic way. Some were offered a token sitting fee only to find their intellectual property or those of their community groups appropriated. There was great frustration that such information was used by some of these very organisations to further themselves with little benefit to their community. ECCV has found this same concern expressed across many grass roots groups who are mostly unsuccessful in competing for government grants at the expense of larger mainstream organisations.

Participants at the consultations spoke about the cost of time for some organisations which did not have grass roots connections to learn about the culturally diverse communities they are supposed to support before they can start implementing funded projects. This results in less of the funding making a real difference within local hard to reach communities. Community leaders spoke about how they could make a great impact with very few resources and were keen to have these resources made available to them. Grants could be targeted at building capacity of smaller organisations rather than an attempt to build cultural competency of larger organisations.

There was also a call for funding the coordination of volunteering in community groups and for a shift away from volunteer consultation or sitting fees towards the professionalisation of a bicultural workforce. Valuing the knowledge and expertise of ethnic community members and being respectful of this should translate into employment opportunities with skill development. A best practice example was provided by Whittlesea Council which supports a volunteer mentorship program which offers support and training for volunteers to transition into paid employment.

Recommendation 5:

Government procurement policy should stipulate quotas for culturally and linguistically diverse workforce targets for all government funded programs, encouraging the employment of bicultural workers particularly in initiatives targeting culturally diverse communities.

Recommendation 6:

Implement a requirement for government funded organisations to report on their gender and diversity balance in work roles, including senior roles, as an accountability measure.

There is also a role for industry in supporting pathways to employment through mechanisms such as internships and mentoring programs. Consultation participants spoke about programs run in the private sector including the National Australia Bank (NAB) and Jesuit Social Services' African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP).³⁷ This program provides six months of paid corporate experience to skilled African Australians. ECCV consultation participant enrolled in this program said that over 230 staff from African background have been employed through this program.

³⁷ National Australia Bank, *African Australian Inclusion Program*, <https://www.nab.com.au/about-us/careers/trainee-programs/african-australian-inclusion-program>; viewed May 2017

Southern Cross Care, an aged care provider, similarly recognised the contributions of their volunteers. A consultation participant noted a case where a female migrant volunteer was supported through an employment pathway with Southern Cross Care from volunteer to Personal Care Attendant to now completing her Master's in Business Administration Course over an eight year period.

There is opportunity for government to incentivise this kind of initiative and support pathways to employment for migrant and refugee women and girls.

Recommendation 7:

- a) Assistance for new and emerging culturally diverse communities to approach companies, through their corporate social responsibility agenda, to sponsor mentorship programs that will provide employment pathways.
- b) Government to develop and set best practice guidelines for internship and apprenticeship targets across industries.

Work Readiness

Consultation participants also spoke about the need for bridging programs to support migrant women to be work ready, for example, resume writing, interview skills, career counselling and work readiness training.

Fitted for Work was an initiative that was raised as another best practice example of program that delivered results. Another issue enthusiastically discussed as a need in the community was for programs to be tailored and delivered by mentors who understand the cultural norms of ethnic women and the business environment to give them their best chance of finding work.

One woman spoke about the hijab being a barrier to work and how they would be interested in working out a 'work uniform' in collaboration with their employer.

Similarly the impact of unconscious bias affecting employability of visible minorities is well documented. The Victorian Government's *Recruit Smarter* initiative both acknowledges this issue and serves to address it.³⁸

Recommendation 8:

Develop and support work readiness programs which address the cultural needs of ethnic women to support their entry into work.

³⁸ The Victorian Government, *Recruit Smarter*, <http://www.vic.gov.au/recruit-smarter.html>

Lack of Recognition of Overseas Qualifications

Consultation participants said that there were two very broad cohorts of refugees and migrants in this space, those that had access to education prior to their arrival in Australia and those that did not. Interestingly, both cohorts ended up in the same employment sphere. That is, they both were more likely to work in the care, service and hospitality industries.

The barriers faced are related to English language skills, access to English language classes and vocational and educational training. This has ‘downstream’ impacts on the children of migrants and refugees where they also had similar limitations in job opportunities due to their limited English language proficiency.

A component of recognition of overseas qualification is the ability to demonstrate International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Band 6 level in English language proficiency. The IELTS test is expensive and has multiple components including reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Migrant women consulted by ECCV felt there was a bias in the IELTS. They believe that their accent negatively impacted on their test outcome forcing them to resit multiple times. This finding confirms evidence presented at the *UNAA Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls Forum 2016*.³⁹

Further, migrant women in these consultations also stated that they lacked opportunity to practice English language skills to the level required in the workplace.

Recommendation 9:

Establish initiatives to engage the corporate sector in work experience for adult migrants/refugees to practice English outside of the home environment.

A significant barrier for migrant women is the issue of qualifications being unrecognised in Australia and not being able to find jobs in the industry of their education and training. These women face the cost of requalifying, additional time delay in progressing in their career, child care needs at a time when they are also trying to meet the demands of establishing their life in a new country.

There was a call in the consultations for a register to be developed which stated recognised qualifications. Whilst ECCV is aware that the Government has some initiatives for recognising overseas qualifications, consultation attendees were not aware of them. There is opportunity to improve awareness raising regarding pathways and processes for migrants to have their qualifications recognised.

Better Education Support to Stem Youth Disengagement

The situation is more dire for women and children who did not have exposure to formal education in their countries of origin.

³⁹ Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls Report, UNAA Victoria, 2016, page 20.

<http://unaavictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/UNAA-Economic-Empowerment-of-Women-and-Girls-Forum-Report-1.pdf> viewed 5/9/17

Research shows that integration issues are “more pronounced among offspring of poorly educated migrants”⁴⁰ and that given the opportunity, humanitarian migrants will readily take up additional education opportunities and that these initiatives support ‘upward cross – generational mobility’ among refugee – humanitarian groups.⁴¹

Children of refugee backgrounds may have limited access to English learning schools prior to entering into mainstream school. This may be as brief as six months to two years. In the Victorian mainstream education system, children are placed according to age group. This is problematic for children who are older for whom the transition is too fast for them to adequately catch up in their language and literacy skills and this impacts on the VCE performance outcomes and opportunity for further education.

In some cases, youth may have trouble settling into the schooling regime for a range of other reasons. The experiences of war, torture and trauma have profound impacts on their ability to stay engaged within the education system. Where these children are from female headed households (sole parents), there may be added complications.

‘...in my culture the father is the head of the household...if the child’s father goes to fight for their country or killed and the mother has to go the camps with the children and the children feel like their mother can’t protect them, they lose respect for their mother. They also lost their head of their house. It’s like they lose their way back to their culture and their heritage.’

- Sudanese Community Leader
Commission for Children and Young People CALD SPAC meeting, December 2016

Consultation participants spoke of initiatives which support children to stay in school. For example, homework support programs run within ethnic communities to support these children funded through the Federal Government Department of Social Services Humanitarian Settlement Grants Program (SGP). Unfortunately, these programs only support children within five years of their settlement after which time they are ineligible and children are forced out of this support structure. Opportunities such as the SGP need to be supported and expanded to include support for multiple generations, particularly for culturally diverse communities where schooling and education of children is primarily the responsibility of the mother.

Recommendation 10:

Accommodate for life experiences of children from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds and develop and deliver bridging programs which support individuals to stay engaged within the education system extending into higher education.

⁴⁰ OECD (2016), *Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251236-en> page 12

⁴¹ The Hugo Report, 2006, <https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/research/economic-social-civic-contributions-about-the-research2011.pdf> page 143

Lack of Access to Affordable Childcare

A significant barrier to work reported by participants during ECCV's consultations was the perception that working costs money in terms of childcare and travel. Affordable childcare was raised time and time again as a key enabler for women to participate in the workforce.

Family Day Care programs was highlighted as an affordable option, though feedback from ethnic community members was that the increase in bureaucracy and increase in compliance requirements made it difficult for Family Day Care providers to continue to operate. Members of the African community stated that the tax changes, increase in regulation, Medicare, Centrelink and public housing compliance requirements also put them at risk, forcing some providers to discontinue their business operations.

Recommendation 11:

Support capacity building programs to ensure ethnic providers with little exposure and experience in the Australian taxation and regulatory environments are compliant with changing regulations to run affordable multicultural childcare schemes such as Family Day Care and remain sustainable.

Vulnerable Women and Economic Stability

ECCV gender equality consultation participants highlighted that women working in the cash economy or in the casualised work are a risk group. These women are exploited in family businesses or businesses within their own communities with no superannuation or access to health and safety services.

A health service provider spoke about a case where a woman working for a community member's deli had cut herself on a machine. The owner of the business drove her to the hospital and instructed her to tell the emergency department that she had cut herself at home with a knife.

Lack of education, training, knowledge of local laws, English fluency and financial and social vulnerability lead migrant women into these scenarios where they are easily taken advantage of.

Women, in their efforts to ensure financial stability, will also take up casual work where there are little protections, little continuity of income, and therefore, difficulty in planning for the family's future. The consultations found that there was little difference whether the woman is a skilled migrant or an illiterate person who's been living in a refugee camp for extended periods, waiting to be resettled. The impact was the same; they were affected by depression and a feeling of having to start all over again.

There is no lack of appetite for work among ethnic women or ability to earn their money and acquire financial independence to affect their self-determination. What is missing are opportunities which include: structural, systemic and regulatory redesign; education and training; capacity building and corporate and social intervention.

The Right to Mothering – a woman’s choice to be the primary carer of her children

A strong message that came across in ECCV’s consultations was that of the right for a woman to exercise her choice to be a mother and homemaker and that this is not a lesser role than her participation in the paid economy.

The consultations found that women put themselves secondary to their families’ needs. Particularly, refugee women invariably had responsibility for the family, especially in female – headed households with no male support. The issue is compounded for women in instances where children are having difficulty settling into school, whether it be because the children are being ‘mainstreamed’ due to insufficient language schools to cope with the influx of refugees, or due to their migration journey. Children do take their problems home to their mother. Typically these families are larger, and if a mother has multiple children who are all experiencing settlement issues, then her access to education and employment, including English language classes, becomes a secondary priority to her children’s safety and health.

‘African women compromise themselves for their kids.’

- ECCV Gender Equality Consultation
September 2017

Another finding in the consultations is that in some cultures, financial participation is a foreign concept; women are firstly wives and mothers.

These cultural norms may also become cultural barriers for women to participate in the workforce as husbands see it inappropriate if women are interacting with other men. This situation can be a cause for violence against women – compromising their mental and physical health. In these instances, women have to ask permission from their husband to work.

An African male participant in ECCV’s gender equality consultations spoke about the need to educate girls on their potential, to finish her education and fulfil her goals before starting a family. This was said to be particularly pertinent for women and girls living in the outer suburbs who may be sheltered within their communities where the messages about cultural norms are stronger.

The key was that women needed safe places to gather, opportunities to educate themselves and become aware of services available to support them.

One suggestion was for education programs to be community based and accessible to women where they are to address the lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities in new migrant communities impacting on health, financial independence and ability to participate in civic life. For example, programs run by neighbourhood houses go a significant way to providing a place for women to overcome social isolation and to be exposed to educational and skill development opportunities. This includes Well Springs for Women and The Women’s Friendship Cafes.

Recommendation 12:

Government to invest in delivering community education programs targeted at culturally diverse communities within the community so they can access services directed to them.

For Example:

- English language classes which cater to the needs of new migrants tailored to their needs, including beyond the current 510 hours.
- Information on their rights, local laws and opportunities for civic participation.

The issue of meeting places for women and girls to participate in social and recreational activities such as sport was raised many times over across generations. Older women spoke about the lack of meeting places and the high cost of renting meeting places. Younger women and girls spoke about groups as many as one hundred girls who want to participate in female only sports in the City of Monash who need venues to gather in.

Recommendation 13:

Increase funding for local neighbourhood houses and friendship cafés to support culturally diverse women as safe places to meet and learn. For example Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre provides such a space.

Points to Consider

The issues explored in this discussion paper present issues which require further exploration. Special consideration and detailed work needs to address:

- Women from new and emerging communities should be empowered to find their own solutions
- Women from new and emerging communities need support to build on their strategies for reclaiming their families and children
- Targeted grants funding for women to help their communities around:
 - Young women with innovative digital media projects
 - Work readiness programs for women in new and emerging communities
 - Financial literacy

- Resourcing for multicultural liaison officers as part of the Victorian Government response to family violence in culturally diverse families.
- Resourcing for multicultural prevention and outreach officers to work closely with the Specialist Family Violence Courts in the areas of Ballarat, Frankston, Shepparton, Moorabbin, and Heidelberg with a view to raising awareness of family violence court processes in culturally diverse communities.
- Targeted Victorian Government media communication to culturally diverse families, women, girls and children to ensure that these groups understand the key messages the Government is conveying in relation to gender equality.

Conclusion

There has been a great deal of interest on the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy consultation process from the multicultural community. A key feature is that the Strategy has been promised to be a living document with priorities which will move and shift as they become relevant in the implementation process. ECCV hopes that some of the recommendations we have put forward, with input from ethnic community members and the services that support them, may be considered for immediate implementation, and others which are medium term opportunities, will inform the Government's next iteration of the gender equality implementation plan.

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