



# Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia Inc.

## **ECCWA Response to the Harmony Alliance's Intersectionality discussion paper**

Dear Dr Sana Ashraf

Harmony Alliance Secretariat

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### **1. About the Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA) Inc.**

ECCWA is Western Australia's peak Non-profit / non-government community based ethnic umbrella organisation. ECCWA takes an active interest in all aspects of multiculturalism, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) affairs and acts on behalf of all ethnic communities in Western Australia (WA). ECCWA has been providing advocacy supports to multicultural communities for 45 years and is a member of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA).

Through the Ethnic Advocacy and Support Team (EAST), ECCWA provides specialised advocacy support for individuals who are unable to access government funded services.

ECCWA's objectives are to:

- Ensure that its policy positions contribute to government's policy making;
- Promote and safeguard the interests of CaLD communities in WA;
- Disseminate WA government information to the Ethnic Communities. For more information about ECCWA, please refer to our Website at: [www.eccwa.org.au](http://www.eccwa.org.au)



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## **ECCWA's responses to the discussion Questions**

### **What are the key identity markers (and intersections thereof) that shape the experiences of migrant and refugee women in Australia?**

Intersecting markers that shape the experiences of refugee and migrant women in Australia may be ethnicity, disability, race, religious diversity, poverty, lack of recognition of prior qualifications, loss of social status and poverty.

### **• Are there any personal stories and case studies our members would like to share to demonstrate the lived experience of intersectional disadvantage and vulnerability as a migrant or refugee woman in Australia?**

According to the ABS 2016 census, 33 per cent of Australians are from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) background; that's one in three people; another 16% have one or both parents born in another country; speak more than 300 languages (not including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's languages) and 20 per cent of people with disability are from CaLD backgrounds. CaLD people are not a homogenous group and are not all the same. There is diversity within diversity.

Despite this, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds and those with disability are not adequately represented in higher levels of employment in public and private sectors in Australia; also not represented in fashion, film and television industries, media and so on. Although women from migrant and refugee background are occasionally acknowledged and supported by the feminists to advocate for equality, women with disability especially those from CaLD background are often excluded from the feminist movements.

ECCWA's Policy and Advocacy Officer, being an Australian woman with disability from a CaLD background, has directly and indirectly experienced disadvantage when looking for employment and also in the education system through university. She would attend many job interviews but if the interviewers did not know her personally and did not know how she worked, they would not employ her, even when she had the required skills, abilities and work-experience for the position.

As most men from a CaLD background can access English classes, get a job and work, women often stay home to take care of their children. Introduction of the written citizenship test has prevented so many women who had no formal education and are illiterate even in their own languages to become Australian citizens. The Federal government has cut or significantly reduced the interpreter funding of non-government communitybased agencies that support refugee and migrant women causing further institutionalised systemic barriers based on their sex and cultural diversity.



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- **Which areas of policy and practice are most relevant and conducive to achieving intersectional responses to migrant and refugee women's distinct situations?**

Ensuring equity in parliamentary legislation, government policies and practices in health, education, employment, housing, welfare, and so on may help with achieving responses for intersectionality for migrant and refugee women in Australia. Creating an Australian Human Rights Act and Strengthening the existing discrimination legislation like the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, Race Discrimination Act 1975, Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and Australia's Multicultural Policy, may provide better equitable opportunities for women from refugee and migrant background to meaningfully participate in the economic, political, cultural and all aspects of community life in Australia. Equity could be achieved by developing a substantive Equality Policy Framework and requiring all government departments to adhere to it. Substantive Equality Policy Framework dictates that treating people who are disadvantaged as equal with everyone else may further disadvantage them. People's needs should be met first to bring them to the same level as everyone else, for example, if a woman from a non-English speaking background goes to the Centrelink and is given the same form in English as everyone else without an interpreter or translating the form in the language of the person, this would prevent or delay the person's access to the supports and services causing further disadvantage. Another example might include organising an event in a building with stairs, without a lift and inviting guests to attend including guests with disability who are wheelchair users and can't access the stairs. Government departments that are required to adhere to the substantive Equality Policy Framework would have to ensure that they engage interpreters and or translate their print material in the languages of their consumers, organise meetings in accessible buildings to enable participation of all their guests when delivering services to the people from non-English speaking backgrounds and those with a disability. Each government department's implementation of the Substantive Equality policy framework must be regularly monitored, continuous improvement ensured, evaluated and the results should be reported in their annual reports. The Western Australian government has such a policy framework which could be used as an example, however unfortunately, it is not monitored, it's continuous improvement is not measured and is not evaluated.

- **How can we best tailor our language (e.g. the use of term 'vulnerability') in our Framework and wider communication with stakeholders and decision-makers?**

The word 'vulnerability' should not apply to women from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those with disability who are not isolated, marginalised and are able to exercise their rights. their diversity doesn't always make them vulnerable. Assuming all women from diverse backgrounds as vulnerable may disadvantage them. On the other hand, women who are isolated and marginalised due to their cultural diversity including disability, may be more vulnerable' to be involved in family and domestic Violence (FDV), and may experience discrimination when accessing supports and



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services. The word “vulnerable” should only be used if the women’s race, disability, religion, cultural diversity is acting as a barrier for her to equally access the supports, services and reduce their chances of being meaningfully included in the community life.

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Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia.