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Committee Secretary

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Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from diverse cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

We thank the Finance and Public Administration References Committee for this opportunity to provide input into the Gender Segregation in the Workplace and its Impact on Women's Economic Equality Inquiry.

Key Messages

The existence of industry-based gender segregation is well established. Industries such as construction, mining and transport are dominated by men whilst industries such as food service, education and training, health care and retail are staffed by an overwhelmingly female workforce. Due to the nature of these industries, women are frequently poorly paid, inherently less secure and provided far fewer opportunities for advancement.

It is further well established that women entering male dominated industries face significant obstacles to career progression and report negative experiences which discourage them from remaining in those industries. This creates pressure that results in women moving to industries traditionally associated with gender roles.

The impact of these factors is exacerbated for CALD women because of cultural stereotypes and an unwillingness, or lack of awareness, amongst employers about flexibility in accommodating religious, linguistic and cultural practices. It should be noted that these types

of barriers are not gender specific and can also have negative impacts on men from CALD backgrounds.

Summary of recommendations

FECCA calls on the Parliament to take positive steps to address the effects of the factors impeding the economic advancement of CALD women through adoption and promotion of the following measures:

- **Promote positive messages empowering young females, including those from CALD backgrounds, to view industries traditionally dominated or perceived to be appropriate for men as industries open to them and as industries in which they can succeed.**
- **Assist employers in understanding how to better accommodate CALD women within their workforces.**
- **Improve access to mentors, provide culturally appropriate health and sanitary facilities, provide training opportunities and encourage participatory processes that involve CALD men and women in respective industries.**
- **Provide appropriate pathways for career advancement so that CALD women are better reflected in senior levels in all industries but especially in workforces dominated by women.**
- **Ensure cultural and faith-based requirements are accommodated in all workplaces including the wearing of religious headdress, provision of halal, kosher and vegetarian meals in staff dining areas and appropriate times for religious observances.**
- **Ensure access to adequate childcare facilities, that workplaces are breastfeeding friendly, and providing family friendly flexibility in working hours.**
- **Ensure adequate redress, through complaints mechanisms, is available to CALD women who experience discriminatory workplaces.**
- **Ensure the imposition of adequate sanctions for employers found engaging in discriminatory practices.**

Nature and extent of industrial and occupational gender segregation

Research conducted by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency found that industries such as construction, mining and transport were male dominated compared to health care and social assistance, education and training and retail where a large majority of the workforce consisted of women.¹ For example, the aged care workforce is predominantly female, and increasingly multicultural.² It is estimated that 23 per cent of direct care workers in residential aged care and 16 per cent of direct care workers working in the community, speak a language other than English.³ The number of multicultural women in the aged care workforce is under-reported as data in relation to employees in positions other than registered nurses, enrolled nurses, and personal care attendants are not collected. Although there is an increasing demand for workforce in the aged care and disability related care sectors, the stereotyping perceptions about care roles discourage CALD men from entering this space.

¹ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gender Composition of the Workforce: by Industry*, April 2014.

² Aged and Community Services Australia, *The Aged Care Workforce in Australia, Position Paper*, February 2015.

³ D King, K Mavromaras, et al, *The aged care workforce 2012 final report*, 2012

People from CALD backgrounds, and particularly women, face multiple disadvantages in many aspects of life including economic participation. It was reported that 51 per cent of low paid employees (earning below, at, or just above the minimum wage) were women compared with 47 per cent of the total workforce.⁴ Women from CALD backgrounds are overrepresented in insecure and low paid employment fields which include industries such as accommodation, food services, and cleaning. They are more likely to be employed on a casual basis and to be at a disadvantage negotiating terms of employment.⁵ Women from CALD backgrounds, and women generally, are under-represented at senior positions even in workforces dominated by women. Men working in female dominated industries are often rewarded for 'exemplary masculinity' with higher paying and senior positions.

Men were much less likely (27 per cent) to experience discrimination related to parental leave and returning to work after child birth compared to women (49 per cent).⁶ In many cultures, women bare the primary responsibility of child care, and as a result face additional barriers in returning to work after parental leave, or re-entering workforce after taking time off employment to care for children. Women generally are more likely to be negatively impacted by career gaps caused by family responsibilities and this is compounded by a range of other factors for women of CALD backgrounds.

These women may also face social isolation and prejudice from their own communities for returning to work leaving children in childcare facilities. Challenging and changing the workplace attitudes towards parental leave and cultural expectations in relation to family responsibilities and gender roles is essential in encouraging and improving economic participation of women from CALD backgrounds.

It is also important to note that not all women from CALD backgrounds are economically disadvantaged due to cultural and religious practices and expectations. Despite barriers faced by migrant women in entering Australian workforce due to cultural and religious practices, discrimination, subsequent to migration, some women have increased their power and economic resources compared to men.⁷ Numerous organisations Government and private sector organisations are adopting inclusive policies to accommodate the cultural needs of people from diverse backgrounds such as banks incorporating hijab as part of the uniform,⁸ the Guide to Religion and Belief in the Australian Defence Force which addresses issues in relation to uniforms, diet, fasting and worship.⁹

Factors driving industrial and occupational gender segregation

Discrimination in employment, in promotion and in access to training opportunities, lack of access to adequate child care facilities, difficulties in obtaining recognition of overseas qualifications and difficulties in access to legal protection and redress were identified as

⁴ L Nels, P Nicholson and T Wheatley, *Employees earning below the federal minimum wage: review of data, characteristics and potential explanatory factors* Minimum Wages and Research Branch, Fair Work Australia, 2012.

⁵ See further: FECCA, productivity Commission's Workplace Relations Inquiry submission, accessible at: <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FECCA-Submission-to-Workplace-Relations-Framework-Inquiry-March-2015.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See generally: Melvin Ember, Carol Ember and Ian Skoggard, *Encyclopaedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World*, 2004.

⁸ Financial Review, CBA, Optus make fashion statement with corporate hijab, accessible at: <http://www.afr.com/news/cba-optus-make-fashion-statement-with-corporate-hijab-20160726-ggealu#ixzz4YFy0xWjl>

⁹ Australian Defence Force, Guide to Religion and Belief in the Australian Defence Force, accessible at: http://content.defencejobs.gov.au/pdf/triservice/Guide_to_Religion_and_Belief_in_the_ADF.pdf

barriers faced by migrant women in Australia.¹⁰ These women often opt for employment opportunities that are not reflective of their level of education and qualifications.

Women in male-male dominated occupations experience negative psychological experiences, such as gender discrimination and stereotyping, feeling of bias and under-utilisation and, poor-integration and advancement.¹¹ These factors generally cause women's movement from male dominated to female dominated occupations.¹²

The economic implications of gender segregation are directly linked to economic inequality faced by women, especially older women and women with disabilities from CALD backgrounds who face compounded barriers. As per the Australian Bureau of Statistics, men with disability (51 per cent) were more likely to be employed than women with disability (44 per cent).¹³ Therefore, measures must be adopted to change the attitude of the employers towards women from multicultural backgrounds with diverse needs.

Due to barriers faced in finding employment, especially women from new and emerging communities, engage in the entry level and low paid jobs and become the main income earner of the family. These changes challenge the cultural family dynamics where men were the breadwinner and women were in charge of caring for the children and elderly family members. This can give rise to a multitude of other problems such as family breakdown, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse and social isolation.¹⁴ There can also be a fear of loss of culture as women are traditionally seen as the transmitters of culture within families and communities. When women are engaged in paid employment, their availability to perform cultural transmission work is reduced and families must seek alternative sources such as CALD centred playgroups, weekend language schools, and religious community events and groups.

It is imperative that a meaningful and ongoing dialogue is developed through engagement of communities to change the attitudes gender roles and perceptions through education, advocacy and the promotion of industries based on the growing demand for workforce and the removal of associated gender stereotypes. Women and their families from CALD backgrounds must feel supported in their shifting economic and community responsibilities.

Whilst certain cultural norms, family expectations and cultural practices may limit the capacity of multicultural women from entering male dominated sectors, limited access to culturally appropriate and female friendly sanitary and health facilities, lack of flexibility in terms of accommodating different faith or culture based requirements such as wearing head covers over the uniforms, access to vegetarian, kosher or halal meals may also become barriers for women to enter male dominated sectors such as construction, mining and transport. It is equally important to address all these barriers and not to relegate the responsibility for change to either community change or industry response.

Remedies to address gender segregation

Challenging and changing the attitudes of individuals about industries considered to be more suitable for men or women is imperative in resolving the gender segregation issues. Education about these roles can begin at school level. For example, the British campaign

¹⁰ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Migrant Women and the Law: Barriers to Access and Equity*, p. 76.

¹¹ P. Martin and A Barnard, The experience of women in male dominated occupations: A constructivist grounded theory inquiry, *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 2013.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ABS, Disability and Work, 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, March Quarter 2012.

¹⁴ See further: Melvin Ember, Carol Ember and Ian Skoggard, *Encyclopaedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World*, 2004.

*'Inspiring the future: Redraw the Balance'*¹⁵ aimed to change attitudes of young children through an interactive process as gender stereotypes are defined between 5 and 7 years of age. A similar programme or a model can be adopted through Australian school system to educate children and their parents.

Breaking down existing barriers for women to enter male dominated industries including addressing concerns around discrimination based on gender, gender identity, cultural background, etc. will increase economic participation of all women including those from a CALD background. However, additional supports must be provided to women who are further marginalised based on their age, disabilities and CALD background. Improving access to mentors, training opportunities, participatory processes that involve both men and women in the respective industry are some of the remedies that can be adopted to facilitate and increase participation of women in male dominated industries.

Adopting pragmatic and effective measures to close the gender pay gap¹⁶ and increasing financial incentives, more employment flexibility and other supports will encourage and attract women to participate more in senior management roles and in occupations that are considered to be more appropriate for men. Making workplaces more family friendly with a focus on flexible working hours, access and affordability of childcare, the provision of facilities and time for breastfeeding mothers, and improvement to paternal parenting leave arrangements. Measures to enable perceived 'feminised' industries and workforces to be better remunerated and for women in all sectors to more frequently achieve senior positions.

FECCA recommends developing data collection mechanisms that capture factors including cultural, linguistic and religious background will provide a substantial evidence base that will inform future policies and target areas for investment.

¹⁵ Inspiring the future: Redraw the Balance accessible at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8VZVP5csA>

¹⁶ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *What is the Gender Pay Gap?* Accessible at:

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/addressing-pay-equity/what-gender-pay-gap>