

15 December 2022

Dear Skilled Migration Review team,

Furthering Gender Equality in Australia through Skilled Migration

The Champions of Change Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this comprehensive review of Australia's migration system. This submission highlights the importance of ensuring that Australia's future skilled migration system is crafted to be gender-transformative—intentionally embedding and advancing gender equality, and in doing so, contributing to future national prosperity.

The Terms of Reference for the review note the need to create a simple, efficient migration system, among other objectives, that can effectively:

- Enrich the economy, with a focus on productivity growth;
- Complement Australia's education and training systems and the skills of Australians;
- Compete globally for highly skilled migrants, including by improving clients' experience of the immigration process; and
- Provide clear pathways to permanent residence and citizenship and reduce the exploitation of migrant workers.

Productivity growth is created through innovation¹, and a well-documented driver of innovation is workforce diversity². Taking a gender-transformative approach to the development of the future-focused strategy for skilled migration will assist the Australian Government to achieve these objectives while advancing gender equality for future generations.

At present, a number of sectors of Australia's economy remain heavily gender segregated. These sectors include growth industries in which skilled migration will be required to remediate existing and increasing workforce and skills gaps. These industries include health care and social assistance, education and training, mining and construction³.

At the same time, some of Australia's most in-demand professions have a significant under-representation of women, including engineering and information communication and technology. In 2022, only 32% of Design, Engineering, Science and Transport Professionals and 26% of Information Communication and Technology Professionals were women⁴.

Taking a gender-transformative approach to the Government's skilled migration intake presents an opportunity to disrupt gender segregations, increase the diversity of workforces, drive innovation in tackling environmental and technological challenges while reducing Australia's gender pay gap, all of which reflect broader policy objectives of the Australian government⁵.

Available data indicates that migrant women, including skilled migrant women, generally experience higher unemployment and lower earnings relative to their skills and qualifications⁶. This includes skilled migrant women in professions in high demand, for example STEM-qualified women who were born overseas and arrived recently in Australia experience much higher unemployment rates (14.1%) compared to their male counterparts (7.6%) and STEM-qualified women who were born in Australia (3.3%)⁷. More granular research shows that overseas-born female engineers have almost three times the

¹ P2, <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/May%202018/document/extra/australia-2030-prosperity-through-innovation-summary.pdf>

² <https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation>

³ Table 4, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-segregation-in-australias-workforce#gender-seg-industry>

⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed-quarterly/latest-release> 6291.0.55.001 - EQ07a - Employed persons by Age, Occupation sub-major group of main job (ANZSCO) and Sex

⁵ Hon Ed Husic MP, Minister for Industry and Science; [Paving a pathway for a diverse science and tech workforce](#)

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics [Characteristics of recent migrants](#)

⁷ P207, [Australia's STEM Workforce](#), published by the Office of the Chief Scientist

unemployment rate of Australian-born female engineers⁸. Acknowledging the multifaceted drivers of these outcomes, these data point to the need for more tailored settlement support as one of the critical levers to increasing employment outcomes for migrant women.

Other gender related considerations the review team may wish to consider include the impact of caring responsibilities on women applicants. Temporary and short-term visa categories may be inaccessible for women with such responsibilities, who are unable to travel without stability and certainty for their dependents. These caring responsibilities can be deeply culturally embedded, inconsistently applied across genders, and antithetical to women's geographic mobility. To ensure Australia is attracting the most talented women from across the globe, longer-term visas need to be extended to skilled women with caring responsibilities to incentivise migration and mitigate the disruption that it may cause to their families.

A final, and essential consideration for the review team is consideration of how perpetrators of domestic, family and sexual violence and sexual exploitation may be able to use and manipulate the skilled migration system to dominate and control women. Globally, women are far more vulnerable to some forms of human trafficking, including sexual servitude and forced marriage. The Australian Federal Police recognise that Australia is a destination country for victims of human trafficking⁹.

In the development of the new national strategy for skilled migration, we suggest the review team complement existing data on migrant women trafficked to Australia or trapped in unsafe working conditions, with significant input from experts in women's safety, particularly from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Incorporating diverse voices and experiences from inception throughout policy and process development will better identify and ameliorate the risks that exist for women within this system.

The Australian Government has committed to advancing gender equality and women's safety as a national priority. In making this commitment, the Government noted that gender equality brings with it opportunities for women and men to thrive, making our economy stronger, more inclusive and more sustainable. The Government has stated that improving gender equality is critical to Australia's economic prosperity and resilience, and this review has a role to play in bringing these outcomes to fruition for all workers, regardless of their country of birth.

Your consideration of these matters is greatly appreciated. I look forward to reviewing the new, gender-transformative skilled migration strategy. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any further information on the matters I have raised, or if you would like to arrange a meeting to discuss.

Regards



Annika Freyer
Chief Executive Officer
Champions of Change Coalition

⁸ P7, *Barriers to employment for migrant engineers*, published by Engineers Australia October 2021

⁹ AFP *Human Trafficking*; and ILO, Walk Free and UN Migration *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*