

Fourth Forum on Minority Issues

Item V: Minority women and effective participation in economic, social and cultural life

Statement by Australia

30 November 2011

The Australian Government takes a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to supporting women, and we would like to share some of the measures that we have implemented to ensure the rights of minority women.

Australia believes that access to government services is critical in helping to ensure effective participation in economic, social and cultural life for women, particularly women from minority backgrounds. In Australia's Multicultural Policy, the Government made a commitment to strengthening the existing access and equity strategy, which endeavours to ensure that government programs and services are responsive to all Australians, irrespective of their cultural and linguistic background. This includes the delivery of health, education, training and employment services to migrant women.

Every two years, the Government publishes an *Access and Equity in Government Services Report*. The Report includes examples of initiatives undertaken by government departments and agencies, including programs that encourage the social, economic and educational participation of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. 'Women' was a theme area for the 2006-08 Access and Equity Report.

Further, Australia has implemented a number of programs to address the rights of minority women, and to ensure their effective participation in all aspects of Australian life.

The Indigenous Women's Program (IWP) provides small grants to eligible organisations across Australia that work to enhance the leadership skills of Indigenous women in a range of areas such as pathways to educational and employment opportunities, parenting skills and local governance. The IWP aims to:

support more Indigenous women to undertake leadership, representative and management roles, increase Indigenous women's awareness of, access to, and role in local priority setting and Government funding activities, address issues identified by Indigenous women as priorities in their communities strengthen women's networks and organisations, and support Indigenous women's cultural traditions.

Australia also recognises that refugee women may experience particular challenges and require targeted support and assistance. Australia has developed a number of programs

and services that specifically target women. For example, Australia has settlement programs which aim to connect new arrivals, including women and their families, with the wider Australian community and mainstream government services so that they are able to establish a support network and participate in Australian society.

Other immigration programs include the Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO), which provides a forum for discussion on the rights of women and children in Australia, sexual harassment and domestic violence. The program provides practical advice and the opportunity to ask questions about travel to and life in Australia. It is delivered overseas before refugees begin their journey.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides women with basic skills necessary to deal with everyday social situations and some work situations, including English classes to eligible adult migrants who do not have functional English. Over 60% of AMEP clients are women. AMEP also invites speakers from various agencies to provide information on issues such as relationships, law and order, and social security benefits. To ensure that suitable childcare is no barrier to learning English, the AMEP also provides free childcare to under school age children while their parents are studying in the AMEP.

Australia also funds a number of settlement services through the Settlement Grants Program, which aims to help refugees and migrants become self-reliant, contribute to the national economy, and acquire crucial skills and knowledge about life in Australia. Some of these settlement services include provision of culturally sensitive information sessions/workshops on women's health issues to enhance understanding of the Australian health

system, the role of Medicare, provision of information and referral to counselling services for torture and trauma, support services/assistance available as well as preventative health.

