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INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN IN NEED
(IWIn)

ABN: 41735292462
www.iwinact.org

To
Minister Julie Bishop
Minister For Foreign Affairs, Australian Government
Canberra, ACT

Date: 27 February 2017

Reference: Initiatives for Women in Need (IWIn) submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:
Foreign Policy White Paper 2017

Honourable Minister Bishop

On behalf of Initiatives for Women in Need (IWIn), I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Commonwealth Government's Foreign Policy White Paper 2017.

Initiatives for Women in Need (IWIn) is an Indo-Australian non-profit organisation based in the Australian Capital Territory, working to empower socially and economically disadvantaged and vulnerable women and children, particularly coming from South Asian migrant communities in Australia. IWIn also supports activities to elevate the socio-economic status of underprivileged women and children in developing countries, particularly in India.

Our submission highlights the strength of the Australia-India strategic partnership and emphasises how this partnership can be bolstered by creating an Australia that encourages female migrant contributions to Australian society and promotes migrant safety and wellbeing. It discusses the importance of female skilled migration, in particular, and the need to recognise their contributions and support them within the Australian labour force to realise their full potential to benefit the greater Australian community.

It also discusses the complexities surrounding violence against women and their children in migrant and culturally and linguistically diverse populations in Australia, recognising that these issues can have a range of physical and mental health, financial, and social impacts on individuals and communities that can hinder them from achieving their full potential in the Australian society. We acknowledge and support the joint efforts of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments in addressing some of these issues through the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

We appreciate your time and your consideration of our submission.
Thank you.

Kind regards,

M Hari

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**Initiatives for Women in Need (IWiN) Submission to
the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government:
Foreign Policy White Paper
(February 2017)**

Submitted Online

27 February 2017

To

whitepaper@dfat.gov.au

IWiN is grateful to Ms Suhasini Sumithra, Shayan Shabestari, Jyotsna Jyoti and Manaswini Iyengar for their invaluable input and assistance with the preparation of this submission. IWiN also acknowledges the support provided by the IWiN Committee Members.

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Initiatives for Women in Need (IWIn) Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Foreign Policy White Paper (February 2017)

Asia's rising influence and the future of multiculturalism in Australia

It is widely accepted that Asia exerts an enormous influence globally and in Australia. Asia is home to two of the world's most populated countries (China and India) and contains two-thirds of the world's people. In 2015-16, 11 of Australia's 15 export markets (both for goods and services) were in the Asia region, with China being Australia's top two-way goods and services trade partner (approximately \$150 billion) followed by the United States (approximately \$69 billion) and Japan (approximately \$60 billion). By comparison, two-way goods and services trade between Australia and India was approximately \$19 billion, making India Australia's tenth largest trading partner in 2015-16.¹

While India's share of Australia's two-way trade market is lower than other Asian countries, India's potential to maintain its role as a leading global economic power, will have powerful economic and strategic implications for Australia in the future. In 2012, India became the world's third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. The World Bank forecasts that India's GDP will grow at 7.9 per cent in 2017 and 2018, making it the fastest growing major economy.²

The growth in Australia's Indian population in recent years is also critically important to the Australia-India strategic partnership and sustaining economic and political linkages between the two countries. Since 2005, net migration has exceeded the natural increase component of population growth in Australia, with India and China largely influencing this trend. In 2015-16, India was the largest source country of migrants to Australia at 21.2 per cent (up from 18.4 per cent in 2014-15), with China following at 15.3 per cent and the United Kingdom at 10 per cent. Indian-born Australians are now the fourth largest migrant community in Australia.³ Of people migrating to Australia in 2015-16, 67.6 per cent entered as skilled migrants and 32.3 per cent on family visa streams.⁴ India is Australia's largest source of skilled migrants and the second largest source of international students, with 53,568 Indians having studied in Australia in 2015 (an increase of 15.7 per cent from 2014).⁵

The strength of people-to-people links between Australia and its Asian neighbours, including India, relies on creating and promoting an environment that supports and empowers migrants to be contributing members of Australian society. This includes ensuring that the skills and contributions of migrants, particularly female migrants, are recognised and encouraged, and that there are effective strategies and interventions available to assist migrants whose safety and wellbeing may be compromised.

¹ Australia's trade in goods and services 2015-16. *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*. Accessed 26 February 2017.

<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/trade-investment/australias-trade-in-goods-and-services/Pages/australias-trade-in-goods-and-services-2015-16.aspx#partners>

² India Country Brief. *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*. Accessed 26 February 2017. <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/india/Pages/india-country-brief.aspx>

³ 2015-16 Migration Programme Report. *Department of Immigration and Border Protection*. Accessed 26 February 2017. <https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/2015-16-migration-programme-report.pdf>

⁴ Australia's Migration Programme – permanent migration outcomes 2014-15. *Department of Immigration and Border Protection*. Accessed 26 February 2017. <https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/permanent-migration-2014-15.pdf>

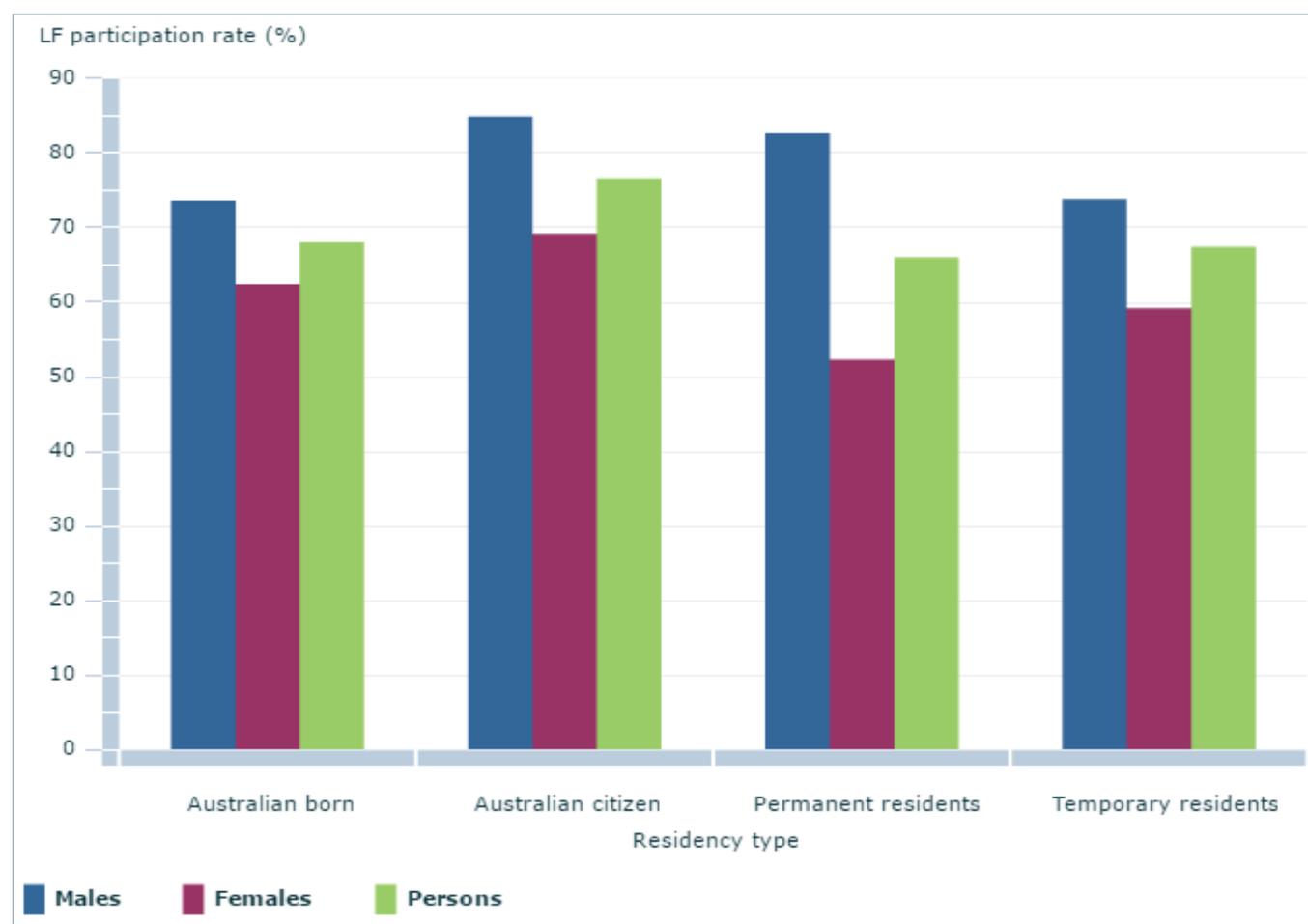
⁵ India Country Brief. *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*. Accessed 26 February 2017. <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/india/Pages/india-country-brief.aspx>



Supporting skilled migrants in Australia

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) overseas migration data highlights that unemployment for recent migrants was 7.0 per cent in 2013 compared to 5.4 per cent for people born in Australia. Of those recent migrants who were successful in obtaining work after arriving in Australia, 34 per cent reported difficulties in doing so. Fifteen per cent reported that employers did not recognise their overseas qualifications and 61 per cent reported that they were not considered for employment due to their lack of Australian work experience and/or Australian references.⁶

For female migrants, unemployment rates are higher. As per the below chart, overall female migrants were disproportionately represented in the labour force, compared to male migrants across all visa types in 2013.⁷



Source: Cat 6250.0 – Characteristics of Recent Migrants, Australia, Nov 2013. Australian Bureau of Statistics.

⁶ Cat 6250.0 – Characteristics of Recent Migrants, Australia, Nov 2013. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Accessed 26 February 2017. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6250.0Main%20Features2Nov%202013>

⁷ Ibid.

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Labour force participation rates for male migrants with tertiary qualifications was higher (at 80 per cent) compared to female migrants with the same qualifications (54 per cent).⁸ Historically, female migrants have been regarded as lacking in 'human capital' or marketable skills or qualifications, and because of the urgency of their financial needs, they have often been a cheap, flexible and dispensable source of labour and concentrated in a narrow range of poorly paid and low status occupations with little job security. Today, while a large proportion of female migrants are entering Australia as skilled migrants, structural and attitudinal racism and sexism at both the societal and familial level continue to prevail and prevent them from achieving their full potential within Australian society.⁹

Once in the workforce, skilled female migrants need to be adequately supported to rise as leaders within their profession. While women represent half of our society, they continue to be underrepresented in management positions. The statistics are worse for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women. CALD women's participation at the grassroots level is not documented, even if they represent a significant number of volunteers in schools, community and learning centres, and locally-based organisations. Delays in recognising overseas qualifications and skills also disadvantages highly qualified CALD women who would otherwise be occupying leadership and decision-making positions. Quite often highly qualified and experienced migrant female professionals need to enter the Australian workforce at an entry level or at a substantially junior level at work due to non-recognition of their expertise gained overseas. This practice by the Australian employers consequently stops these women from contributing effectively to the Australian economy as per their abilities as they face the "invisible glass ceiling" and also often gives rise to mental health issues within the section of migrant female professionals.

Furthermore, attitudes towards CALD women who show the capacity to lead and engage in mainstream issues are not always positive, and misconceptions and ignorance about the educational qualifications of CALD women and their country of origin's educational standards can hinder employers from promoting them. These misconceptions and attitudes can contribute to increased harassment, bullying and accidents at work. CALD women are already particularly vulnerable if they are not as proficient in English, and/or lack awareness of their workplace rights and entitlements. They may also be fearful of jeopardising their employment by reporting workplace incidents.¹⁰

Systemic improvements need to be made to ensure that women from CALD backgrounds without Australian qualifications receive timely recognition of prior learning, work experiences and accreditation of their skills. In addition to considering the overseas expertise of female migrants, this includes providing bridging courses, with Government funded FEE-HELP style loans, to enable overseas trained professionals to meet the standards for recognition by Australian professional organisations. Resources should also be provided to professional bodies, which regulate the practice of the professions, to aid in the recognition of skills gained overseas.¹¹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Alcorso, Caroline. *Newly arrived immigrant women in the work force: A report for the Office of Multicultural Affairs*. Wollongong Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, 1989. pp 10-24. Accessed 26 February 2017.

http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/alcorso_1.pdf

¹⁰ *Women's Policy Statement 2012: Supporting Australian Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Backgrounds*. Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. Accessed 26 February 2017.

<http://www.fecca.org.au/images/stories/pdfs/fecca%20womens%20policy%202012.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

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Further investigation into the impact of the Australian Fair Pay Commission on the wages and conditions of women from CALD backgrounds should be conducted, and minimum wage levels introduced to allow them to participate fully in Australian society. It should also be mandatory for employers (particularly businesses in the private sector) to provide new employees with a simplified package of information outlining employee workplace rights and for this information to be provided to new migrants when they arrive in Australia.¹²

Promoting the safety and wellbeing of migrants and CALD Australians

Promoting the safety and wellbeing of migrants and CALD Australians is not limited to preventing family, domestic and sexual violence in their communities. Racially motivated violence is a concern with incidents such as the tragic killing of bus driver Manmeet Alisher, in Brisbane in 2016, which drew media attention. However, there is strong evidence to indicate that despite the efforts of all governments to date, to combat family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, more needs to be done. KPMG estimated the economic cost of violence against women and their children in 2015-16 to be between \$22 billion and \$26 billion, and costs associated with 'pain, suffering and mortality' accounted for nearly 44 per cent of the total economic burden. For every woman whose experience of violence is prevented in a particular year, \$1,581 in production-related costs can be avoided. This equates to \$61 million in reduced costs if the levels of violence were to be reduced by just 10 per cent by 2020-21.¹³ On average, at least one woman is killed each week at the hands of a partner or former partner in Australia.¹⁴ With approximately one in four Australians born overseas and 46 per cent having parents born overseas, it is important to contextualise and understand the implications of family, domestic and sexual violence for CALD communities in Australia.¹⁵

Since 2013, IWiN has organised various community awareness sessions in Canberra on domestic violence issues persisting in South Asian migrant communities. IWiN also took up a strong policy advocacy role in order to make the greater Australian community and the policymakers aware of the inadequacy of the current programs and services to reduce domestic violence incidences in CALD communities. In fact, IWiN presented a policy framework in the 2015 National Domestic Violence Conference (Canberra, 7-9 December) to evaluate the current domestic violence programs and services in place, with a particular focus on the domestic violence issues faced by the South Asian migrant women.¹⁶

According to *Hearing her voice: report from the kitchen table conversations with culturally and linguistically diverse women on violence against women and their children* (2015), CALD women share many of the same

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *The cost of violence against women and their children*. KPMG. March 2009. Accessed 26 February 2017.

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/vawc_economic_report.pdf

Production costs include the costs of short- and long-term productivity losses associated with domestic violence. Short-term productivity losses include temporary absenteeism from paid and unpaid work and employer administrative costs, while long-term losses reflect a permanent loss of the worker (homicide and premature death).

¹⁴ Homicide in Australia: 2010-11 to 2011-12. Monitoring report no. 23. Australian Institute of Criminology. Accessed 26 February 2017. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/mr/21-40/mr23.html>

¹⁵ Cat. 4102.0 Australian Social Trends, April 2013. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Accessed 26 February 2017.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30April+2013>

¹⁶ *Effectiveness of the current service provisions for domestic violence in ACT: A focus on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities*, IWiN Paper presented by Madhumita Iyengar at [the 2015 Stop Domestic Violence Conference](#), 7-9 December, 2015, Canberra

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issues and experiences as Australian women in relation to family, domestic and sexual violence. However, CALD women's experiences of violence can be further exacerbated by factors including cultural biases, norms and attitudes; fear of being ostracised and social isolation; power imbalances; the existence of multiple perpetrators (common in joint families where in-laws may exert control over their children's spouses); financial and/or visa dependence; language barriers; and fear of losing children and family.¹⁷ The same has been reported in the 2015 IWIn presentation as well.

In many Asian collectivist cultures, the preservation of the family and community is often valued over the safety and needs of individuals. This means that maintaining family privacy and 'keeping the family together' become barriers to women ending a violent relationship. If a woman chooses to leave her partner or exert her financial independence by seeking employment, there may be a lack of support from the community and her spouse as they may feel that it is the role of the man to be 'in charge of the finances' and the woman. The woman may feel compelled to stay with her partner for fear of being ostracised, becoming socially isolated by her community, bringing shame upon her family and even losing access to her children.¹⁸

In certain cultures, family, domestic and sexual violence may also be 'normalised' or not considered a crime within a relationship or marriage.¹⁹ Men may also believe that they gain the right to exert control over their spouses once they are married. According to a 2013 UN Report, 55 per cent of Indian women perceived violence as a normal part of their marriage, and 77 per cent of Indian men felt that their masculinity was undermined if their spouses did not listen to them.²⁰

It is important to note, however, that citing 'culture' as a factor in CALD women's experience of family violence can lead to stereotyping and a 'failure to recognise the existence of diversity of views and beliefs about family violence between and within cultures'.²¹ It also fails to consider other situational factors that are not necessarily culturally driven. For example, in the context of migrants fleeing from war and civil strife, studies have shown that endemic exposure to violence can cause violence to become normalised from the perspective of the perpetrator and the victim.²²

According to a recent report by AMES Australia and VicHealth, CALD communities require tailored approaches and need to be given priority in efforts to prevent violence against women and their children.²³ In some cultures and languages, there is no direct translation or agreed definition of domestic violence or sexual violence within a marriage, which makes communicating these issues mores challenging. Furthermore, CALD women may be geographically isolated from support services, or prevented from attending them because their spouses, families and communities do not permit them to travel on their own.

¹⁷ *Hearing her voice: Report from the kitchen table conversations with culturally and linguistically diverse women and their children.* Australian Department of Social Services, 2015. Accessed 26 February 2017. http://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/cald_womens_safety_report.pdf

¹⁸ Ibid and IWIn 2015 Paper

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ IWIn 2015 Paper

²¹ *Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence Final Report.* March 2016. Accessed 26 February 2017. <http://files.rcfv.com.au/Reports/Final/RCFV-All-Volumes.pdf>

²² *Not Now, Not Ever.* Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, February 2015.

²³ *Violence against women in CALD communities: Understandings and actions to prevent violence against women in CALD Communities.* AMES Australia. Accessed 26 February 2017. <https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/20832%20AMES%20Actions%20Report%20Web.pdf>

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Some may not be as familiar with the English language, hindering them from obtaining information about their rights in Australia, and appropriate support services.²⁴

To respond to these issues, it is important that the Government works more effectively with non-government organisations and community organisations to support its migrant assets. This includes:

- Developing a multi-pronged approach, in consultation with CALD communities, for communicating key messages about, identifying and responding to family violence and gender inequality;
- Leveraging Australian Embassies as an authoritative voice to promote awareness of and simplified resources on migrant, workplace and human rights and Australian laws with respect to family, domestic and sexual violence;
- Providing mandatory cultural awareness training and English language courses for new migrants;
- Engaging with community and religious leaders to build their confidence to support members of their communities to prevent and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence;
- Upskilling frontline service providers, general practitioners and allied health professionals to more proactively and appropriately identify and refer migrants to support services;
- Leveraging universities as an entry point for supporting migrant students and young Indians born in Australia;
- Providing financial, literacy and other related services (i.e., driving lessons) to empower women;
- Connecting women who have escaped violence to services that address multiple factors such as employment, social isolation, health, finances and education so that they can transition back into society easily;
- Developing workplace policies that address cultural bias and discrimination and target the glass ceiling within the CALD context;
- Resolving immigration status and eligibility criteria so that women on dependent partner visa do not lose access to support services and social security if they leave their relationship;
- Delivering education and messaging about complex forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation being an illegal practice with no medical benefits and producing community-driven anti-violence campaigns and messaging; and
- Engaging and educating CALD men to inspire behavioural change.

Conclusion

The potential is great for Australia to tap into its migrant population and the skills and knowledge they bring from their home countries. However, as discussed in this submission, for this potential to be fully realised, skilled migrants need to be adequately supported by the Australian Government to realise their full potential. This includes recognising the qualifications and experiences of skilled migrants gained overseas, particularly female skilled migrants, and taking action to ensure their safety and emotional wellbeing.

²⁴ *Hearing her voice: Report from the kitchen table conversations with culturally and linguistically diverse women and their children.* Australian Department of Social Services, 2015. Accessed 26 February 2017. http://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/cald_womens_safety_report.pdf

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IWiN urges the Australian Government to consider initiating a committee with female representatives from CALD communities, including the migrant Indian community, to understand the issues of skilled female migrants and accordingly develop a foreign policy to effectively utilise their invaluable skills for enhancing the growth and productivity of the Australian economy.

IWiN will be happy to participate in the suggested committee as well as to assist further if the Department requires any further information.

Yours sincerely

M Hari

Dr Madhumita IYENGAR

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