



GENDER LENS ON THE 2024 BUDGET

Key policy in discussion **Migrant and refugee women leadership, representation and decision-making**

Portfolio and or agency **Cross-portfolio**

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Key Portfolio Issues

- In the [Women's Budget Statement](#) the Government recognises the importance of embedding an intersectional lens to policy and program development, and as such recognises the limited data available and the impact this can have on sound decision-making. The Statement provides a commitment to ensure data is available to help inform better outcomes for everyone in Australia.
- The Government recognises there is an important gap in the representation of migrant and refugee women – as well as First Nations Women and women with disabilities – in decision-making roles to achieve gender equality in Australia. The Government will introduce a new legislative requirement for businesses with 500 or more employees to commit to gender equality targets through reporting to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. However, there is no relevant investment in the Budget to boost migrant and refugee women's representation in leadership roles.
- The Budget highlighted the empowerment of migrant and refugee women through an investment of \$15.0 million over three years from 2024-25 for information and education activities and an investment of \$3.8 million over four years from 2024-25 to continue conversational English language classes in Community Hubs. While these investments will engage and positively impact migrant and refugee women, it is important to note that they do not specifically target women.
- The Women's Budget Statement recognises that migrant and refugee women are overrepresented in paid care work which is undervalued, low paid and insecure. It also recognises that workforce participation for migrant and refugee women is significantly lower than for migrant and refugee men and Australian-born women.

The National Foundation for Australian Women is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations. NFAW is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres.

Budget Measures

Migration System Reforms

Payments (\$m)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Department of Home Affairs	-	8.5	8.3	..	-
Australian Taxation Office	-	1.5	-	-	-
Department of the Treasury	-	*	*	*	*
Total — Payments	-	10.0	8.3	..	-

Related receipts (\$m)

Australian Taxation Office	-	*	*	*	*
Department of Home Affairs	-	- 45.0	-40.0	-35.0	-35.0
Total - Receipts	-	- 45.0	-40.0	-35.0	-35.0

Source: [2024-25 Budget Paper No 2, Table: Migration System Reforms, p. 136.](#)

“The Government will provide \$18.3 million over four years from 2024-25 to further reform Australia’s migration system to drive greater economic prosperity and restore its integrity. Funding includes:

- \$15.0 million over three years from 2024-25 for information and education activities to provide migrant workers with accurate and appropriate information about workplace safeguards, protections and compliance measures related to migration laws.”

Gender implications of this budget measure

Despite this budget measure being included in the Women’s Budget Statement, it clearly lacks any gender lens and it has been designed as a measure to reform Australia’s migration system and prevent broader migrant workplace exploitation. The Women’s Budget Statement adequately captures some of the workforce composition characterising migrant and refugee women in Australia such as insecure work or lower employment participation, however, tackling employment barriers, exploitation and overrepresentation in paid and unpaid care work for migrant and refugee women in Australia would require more ambitious and targeted measures focusing on:

- Bias and discrimination across the intersection of gender, ethnicity, religion and migration status, including unconscious biases and discrimination during hiring and promotion processes.
- Assistance to learn professional spoken and written English to gain employment in Australia.

- Assistance through specialised workforce providers to assist with familiarity and knowledge of Australia’s job market.
- High cost, difficult bureaucracy and slow processes for qualifications and skills recognition and professional accreditation.

Reforms to Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services

Payments (\$m)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Services Australia	0.3	..	-	-	-
Department of Home Affairs	-	35.4	37.1	23.0	23.5
Department of Health and Aged Care	-	0.4	0.6	0.7	..
Total — Payments	0.3	35.8	37.7	23.7	23.5

Source: 2024-25 Budget Paper No 2, Table: Reforms to Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, p. 138.

“The Government will provide \$120.9 million over five years from 2023-24 to improve the sustainability of settlement services and promote better economic and social outcomes for refugees and migrants. Funding includes:

- \$3.8 million over four years from 2024-25 to continue conversational English classes in Community Hubs”

Gender implications of this budget measure

The National Community Hubs Program (NCHP) is a great resource to support migrant and refugee communities who have limited connections to services and networks in Australia. In 2024, [Deloitte evaluated the social return on investment on the NCHP](#) and revealed that it supported over 14,000 families across 100 different hubs in 2023.

The NCHP is an exceptional initiative to support English skills and has innumerable positive impacts on employment outcomes, increasing the confidence of participants and overall social cohesion. It is estimated that in 2023 the NCHP provided \$65.7 million in social benefits to Australia. It is important to note that the program receives an important in-kind contribution of \$10.4 million and that volunteers are an essential part of it.

While migrant and refugee women have engaged and benefited from this program, it is important to note that the Budget has only covered English classes which does not ensure the continuation of the NCHP.

Recommendations

NFAW calls for:

- Evaluation of the needs of the National Communities Hubs Program and the provision of adequate and ongoing funding.
- The inclusion of specific measures in future budgets to boost migrant and refugee women’s economic participation, leadership and representation such as the creation of specialist service providers.