

Impact of global financial crisis: many immigrant and refugee women are the hidden unemployed

The Network of Immigrant and Refugee Women of Australia Inc, (NIRWA), the national body which represents the issues of immigrant and refugee women in Australia welcomes The Australian Institute Report on the “Impact of the recession on women”, which is being launched today.

“The report validates what we find in working with immigrant and refugee women who constitute a large number of the hidden unemployed. If they were employed many of them usually work in hospitality, cleaning, clothing and community care, and in other precarious work conditions, which are affected most by the global financial crisis” said Vivi Germanos-Koutsounadis, chair of NIRWA.

“The report demonstrates clearly that the hidden impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), affects all women, however, recently arrived immigrant and refugee women, especially those who come on temporary work visas such as 457 and skilled migrants were reported as deeply affected. Those who come through the family migration scheme find difficulties in finding jobs because of lack of opportunities such as free English classes, as 500 hours provided by the government is totally inadequate, support to find employment and access to training. The newly-arrived through the general skilled category face financial hardship as they are not eligible for any social security benefits or other assistance for two years.

In a recent workshop, “Employment and Education: Why Immigrant and Refugee Women Can Inspire”, organised by NIRWA, the participants expressed that isolation is a major barrier to employment and training of CALD women in rural and regional areas. The participants also spoke of lack of information on employment opportunities, English language classes, recognition of overseas qualifications and cultural factors such as appearance and dress, poor level of access to information on affordable, culturally and linguistically appropriate child care and benefits from Centrelink as barriers to finding paid jobs. The women also raised the issues of lack of information on training courses available, support for students, relevance of courses to getting employment and cost preclude many women from education and employment. The workshop was held in Berri, South Australia, on 29th May, 2009, and was funded by the Federal Office for Women through its Women Development and Leadership Grants program.

“Immigrant and Refugee women in precarious employment as outworkers in clothing industry, cleaning and small isolated low pay workplaces are vulnerable and the first to loose their jobs, as they do not have complete information about their entitlements, no full understanding of their rights and work conditions, have no protection, isolated and are potential victims of exploitation and violence” said Ms Germanos-Koutsounadis.

Many of immigrant and refugee women are the hidden unemployed and the under – employed. As they are not part of the statistics, they cannot negotiate the system, they are not being reached by the stimulus related programs and miss out on financial and other benefits to overcome the financial crisis.

NIRWA endorses the call from the four National Women’s Alliances to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to review the government response to the GFC to include the needs of all women including those of Immigrant and Refugee Women, and then make changes to recognize and redress the issues for women identified in report of The Australia Institute.

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