From the side stream into the mainstream: women and migration in Australia

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The White Australia Policy was still operating; Australians still required to identify as British subjects; Indigenous Australians were not counted in the official national census; and Migrants were expected to behave like the white Australian-born people.
Australia’s changing demographic

**1961 Census**
- Overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic
- Some European countries were beginning to rate among the top 10 countries of birth.

**2001 Census**
- Asian countries now among the top 10 countries of birth.
- Largest increases were people arriving from Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Bangladesh and Iraq.
Australia’s changing attitude toward women

- Women working in the federal public service had to resign when they married – this changed in 1966.
- Equal pay was approved ‘in principle’ in 1969.
- Jobs were openly labelled ‘Men only’ or ‘Women only’ until 1972.
- The Sex Discrimination Act was passed only in 1984.
While the workforce is still very gendered, it is changing.

- More women still in clerical, sales and service workers;
- 22% of the professional workforce are women and this figure is growing.

- Migrant women are part of that change.
Challenges of migration

- Finding: a place to live, schools for your children, and employment.

- Understanding your new country and importantly, making new friends.

- It can also mean learning a new language or learning to handle post-traumatic stress resulting from pre-arrival experiences.
Measuring progress

The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia shows that over 90% of new migrants are satisfied or very satisfied with their lives in Australia.

A 2002 study of second generation people showed that most children speak English well by the time they start school – regardless of how well their parents speak English.
Australia ranks high in a 2006 OECD comparative review of migrants students’ performance at high school.

- Australia’s managed migration plays a role.
- Of equal or greater influence is the way migrant students are taught.
What does this mean for women migrants in Australia?

The government has taken a similar perspective – long term support, with defined objectives to assist migrant women reach their full potential.

- Settlement programmes for refugee and humanitarian migrants.
- Immigration visa regulations to respond to domestic violence issues.
- Cultural diversity projects engaging the entire Australian society, including women.
Australia’s support for women migrants

Federal Government

Community groups

State/territory governments
Australia’s Humanitarian Programme

- In 2005-06 this programme will provide 13,000 permanent residency visas.
- In the last five years, it has helped to provide refuge to more than 25,000 women.
- In 2005-06 the regional focus is Africa, followed by the Middle East and South West Asia.
- Most women who arrive in Australia through this programme have less than 5 years of schooling and low levels of English and low levels of literacy in their first language.
Settlement programmes for humanitarian entrants

- Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO)
- Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)
- Settlement Grants Programme (SGP)
- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)
- Family Relationships Services to Humanitarian Entrants (FRSHE)
Migration and special circumstances

- Domestic Violence Provisions of Australia’s Migration Programme - Guidelines for allowing people to remain eligible for permanent residence after the breakdown of their relationship due to domestic violence.

- ‘Women at Risk’ visa sub-category – 10.5% of all Refugee category visas are notionally allocated to this sub-category.
It's not just about the migrants

- Moving to a new country is only half of the migration experience.

- How the host society receives, or fails to receive the migrant is the other half.

- Australia’s cultural diversity programmes focus on a ‘whole of community’ perspective and the things we share.
Engaging with women in migrant communities

- Community Liaison Officer network
- Living in Harmony
- Strength in Diversity Local Government Award
- National Action Plan
Women have played, and will continue to play an important role in ensuring that their voice is heard on issues that matter – including security.

Australian Muslim women play an important role.

Women across the country, both Muslim and non-Muslim are coming together to develop a shared feeling of belonging, and an appreciation of the democratic values which provide Australia with its freedom and safety.
In many ways, Australia is very different from the country I came to in 1965.

- There are greater opportunities for women, including migrant women.
- The migration process itself considers women both as partners and as individuals, sometimes needing additional assistance.
- There are greater opportunities today for all women.