

POD Project Bulletin Issue 5

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Building capacity for advocacy: The POD National Forum

Forum attendance

The Points of Departure National Forum was held in Melbourne on the 8th of April 2009. The Forum followed hot on the heels of the FECCA International Women's Day conference held in Perth in March 2009, thus emphasising the urgency to advance the social inclusion agenda. The purpose of the Forum was to allow stakeholders in immigrant and refugee women's well-being to deliberate on issues raised in a discussion paper on issues affecting immigrant and refugee women. Stakeholders had had the opportunity to read and comment on the paper, and so were converging to further discuss the issues raised, to provide insights from their day to day work, and to suggest the key social inclusion indicators to be included in the Advocacy Toolkit. Forty-two participants, including 9 MCWH staff and 2 keynote speakers, attended the Forum. All States were represented. A full list of participants will be made available in due course.

Proceedings

The Forum was officially opened by the Federal Minister for the Status of Women, Hon. Tanya Plibersek. In her opening remarks, Hon. Plibersek emphasized the need to continue supporting immigrant and refugee populations in spite of the difficult economic times. She outlined some of the efforts of government in addressing the issues affecting immigrant and refugee groups including the abolition of temporary protection visas (TPVs), but also noted that a lot remains to be done, especially for immigrant and refugee women.

The Minister's sentiments were echoed in the speeches of the keynote speakers, Professor Hurriyet Babacan from Victoria University, and Dr. Millsom Henry-Waring from The University of Melbourne. Hurriyet spoke passionately about the myriad of challenges affecting immigrant and refugee women, and provided useful statistics to support the under-

representation and low participation of women in different social spheres.

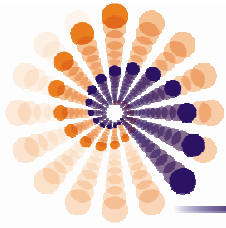
Millsom spoke about 'visibility' and 'belonging'. She provided a rich academic context for understanding immigrant and refugee women's issues. In her speech, she posed the question: *'How do you belong when you are visible, and especially when visibility is embedded in the context of otherness?'* – indeed food for thought for anyone interested in the social inclusion of 'visible' groups. The keynote speakers' presentations will be made available on the organization's website, which is currently under construction.

The Videoconference

Members of the expert advisory committee (EAC) who were present at the Forum, had the opportunity to meet briefly the following day to discuss the previous day's deliberations, and to chat the way forward. This was to be followed by a videoconference for stakeholders who could not attend the Forum in Melbourne, in order to allow them the opportunity to make their contributions to the discussions. Altogether, 27 participants from NSW, ACT, QLD, WA, SA and NT, participated in the videoconference. Although Tasmania did not take part, it was well represented at the Forum in Melbourne. Discussions were chaired from the Melbourne site.

Whither POD?

We continue to receive feedback on key issues affecting immigrant and refugee women. This feedback, together with insights from the Forum and videoconference, will be synthesized into position papers for national action and advocacy. The process of developing an Advocacy Toolkit consisting of the position papers and other material has already commenced.



Points of Departure

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the Hon. Tanya Plibersek for making yourself available on this occasion. Many thanks to all participants and speakers; to Gabrielle Fakhri, Cultural consultant, trainer and facilitator, for chairing the sessions; and to the City of Yarra, for sponsoring the event.

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Multicultural Centre for Women's Health is an immigrant and refugee women's organization committed to improving the health and wellbeing of immigrant and refugee women across Australia.