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Cabinet paper – proactive release

**Building back better for women: Improving women’s wellbeing and
employment outcomes in response to COVID-19**

Date of release: 22 February 2022

Cabinet Paper - details

Date: 27 October 2021

Title: Building back better for women: Improving women’s wellbeing and
employment outcomes in response to COVID-19

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In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Women

Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

Building back better for women: Improving women's wellbeing and employment outcomes in response to COVID-19**Proposal**

1 This paper provides Cabinet with:

1.1 Part One: the development of a Women's Employment Action Plan;

1.2 Part Two: a report on the social impacts of COVID-19 on women in the portfolios of health, housing, education, social development, and elimination of family violence and sexual violence; and

1.3 Part Three: recommendation to develop a National Action Plan for Women.

Relation to government priorities

2 In August 2019, Cabinet agreed to the All-of-Government Employment Strategy. [CAB-19-MIN-0375 refers]. The Strategy presents the Government's vision for improving labour market outcomes, and provides a framework for a series of six Employment Action Plans. The Women's Employment Action Plan was added as the seventh plan in April 2021.

3 The Women's Employment Action Plan is aligned with the WAI 2700 Māna Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry that investigates claims alleging prejudice to wāhine Māori arising from Crown breaches of Te Tiriti, and which looks into the damage to wāhine Māori's customary roles and relationships with whenua, whakapapa, whānau and whairawa.

4 Women's economic resilience is an important factor in reducing child poverty and intergenerational disadvantage within families and whānau. Improving employment outcomes is one of the three priority areas in the Government's work to break the cycle of child poverty. A number of key cross-government strategies have been developed to promote economic success and wellbeing for all New Zealanders, including poverty reduction and reducing homelessness. The Plan aligns with the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 Outcomes 1 (Education) and 2 (Employment and Economic Security).

Executive Summary**Part One: The development of a Women's Employment Action Plan**

5 Women have different experiences in the labour market than men, which can put women at an economic disadvantage and vulnerable to labour market changes. Challenges and barriers for women intersect with other characteristics such as ethnicity, age and disability, requiring tailored responses and services to bring about improvements. Improving women's employment outcomes can generate lifetime and intergenerational benefits, for women, their children, their family, whānau, hapū, and iwi as well as for society.

6 The Women's Employment Action Plan (the Plan) is focused on addressing the structural changes and supports needed in the labour market to allow women to achieve their potential. It is intended to address the disproportionately negative economic and social impacts that women face as a result of economic shocks such as COVID-19.

- 7 The Plan has been developed with input from the National Advisory Council for the Employment of Women (NACEW) and its partner organisations, focus groups of wāhine Māori and Pacific women, and government agencies leading the other six Employment Action Plans, as well as agencies that deliver employment and education related services.
- 8 The Plan proposes the following themes as measures of success: women are financially secure, the labour market is inclusive, and women are supported to meet their paid and unpaid work commitments. It outlines current actions, including some which could be expanded, and identifies new areas for development.
- 9 NACEW, with support from the Ministry for Women, will lead targeted engagement with women from November 2021, focusing on women who currently experience poor labour market outcomes (e.g. wāhine Māori, Pacific women, disabled women, women from ethnic and migrant communities, younger and older women, LGBTQIA+, and mothers, especially sole mothers). Following engagement, actions will be confirmed and costing will be provided in collaboration with other agencies. A final draft Plan will be presented to the Social Wellbeing Committee in March 2022. Once the Plan is finalised, a framework for monitoring progress will be developed with other Employment Action Plan agencies.
- 10 Demographic data is critical to the development of the Plan, as well as understanding the effectiveness of women’s employment and education participation rates. Although gendered data is being collected across Education, Employment and Training (EET) and other employment initiatives, women’s participation rates for combined EET initiatives for March and June 2021 has remained largely static. We need to continue to strengthen gender data collection and reporting on women’s participation across the EET initiatives, and more generally across existing and new employment programmes.

Part Two: Report back on the social impacts of COVID-19 on women

- 11 This paper provides reports from the Ministries of Health, Housing and Urban Development, Education, and Social Development, and the Joint Venture for Family Violence and Sexual Violence on the social impacts of COVID-19 on women, and what steps agencies have taken to address these impacts. Agencies have acknowledged that there are gaps in information about the specific impacts of COVID-19 on women.

Part Three: Recommendation to develop a National Action plan

- 12 A National Action Plan for Women provides an opportunity to develop an over-arching ‘policy umbrella’ for existing sectoral specific strategies and plans such as the Women’s Employment Action Plan, recognises the diverse experiences of women in Aotearoa, and helps meet governments international obligations, for example, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Background

- 13 On 12 April 2021, Cabinet invited the Minister for Women to report back to the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee (SWC) in October 2021, with updates on the development of a Women’s Employment Action Plan, the collection of gender data across employment and training initiatives, actions to address the social wellbeing impacts of COVID-19, and advice on whether a National Action Plan for Women should be developed [CAB-21-MIN-0113 refers].

Part One: The Women's Employment Action Plan

Despite overall improvements in the labour market, a particular focus on women's employment is still needed

- 14 Women's increased labour market participation has long been a driver of economic growth in New Zealand, and closing the gap between male and female employment rates would boost New Zealand's GDP by an estimated 10%.¹ An overview of the current state of women's employment is provided in Appendix One.
- 15 The official gender pay gap in the June 2021 quarter was 9.1%. This is compared to the 2020 gender pay gap of 9.5% (in 2019 it was 9.3% and in 2017 it was 9.7%). While progress to close the gender gap has been made, it is only marginally improving year on year, and this improvement is not shared equally across all women. Large ethnic pay gaps exist in New Zealand. This means more pronounced pay gaps for wāhine Māori and Pacific women due to the combined effects of gender and ethnicity; for example, Pacific women have a 20% pay gap and the gender pay gap for disabled women compared to all men is 19%.
- 16 Progress has also been made in the public service gender pay gap² during this period. In 2020 the gender pay gap was 9.6%, down from 10.5% in 2019. This is the lowest gender pay gap in the public service since measurement began in 2000, when the gap was at 16.6%. However the compounding effects of gender, ethnicity and disability continue to remain a challenge.
- 17 There have been a number of improvements for women's employment, particularly around their educational attainment, labour force participation, and the support available for women to engage in the workforce. Over the last thirty years, women's participation in the labour force has increased from 54.3% to 70.3% (1991-2021).³ However, progress has not been equitable and has varied according to their social and ethnic status. Wāhine Māori are a group of women who have been particularly disadvantaged. Support for women to reconcile paid work with unpaid responsibilities has also continued to improve over time. Government initiatives include: expanding paid parental leave for primary carers, childcare support, expanding the Training Incentive Allowance, access to flexible work arrangements, and the Equal Pay Amendment Act 2020.
- 18 Women have different experiences in the labour market than men, which can put women at an economic disadvantage. Women:
- 18.1 are more likely to be underutilised in the labour market and are concentrated in lower skilled, lower paid and/or part-time or casual work, are often seeking more working hours, or working non-standard hours;
 - 18.2 are involved in insecure or limited employment conditions, making them more vulnerable to job losses;
 - 18.3 earn than men, even when they have the same qualifications⁴;

¹ Borkin, P., Closing the Gender Pay Gap: Plenty of Economic Upside, Goldman Sachs, 2011.

² Note that Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission has used average (mean) pay since 2000. This differs to Stats NZ's approach of using median pay when reporting the gender pay gap for the entire workforce Using the same methodology, the public service pay gap for 2020 was 5.8 percent.

³ Labour force participation rate, Household Labour Force Survey, Statistics NZ

⁴ <https://women.govt.nz/gpg/field-study>

- 18.4 are more likely than men to have experienced discrimination, harassment, and/or bullying at work; and
- 18.5 undertake a disproportionate share of caring and family responsibilities, which reduces their capacity to adapt to labour market requirements and changes. Access to childcare remains a significant barrier to employment for women.

The Women’s Employment Action Plan (the Plan) provides a roadmap for future support for women’s employment outcomes

- 19 Preparing for the future and building a sustainable economy requires New Zealand’s COVID-19 recovery to be inclusive and to provide opportunities for everyone to thrive. This means addressing the systems, structures, and barriers that prevent women from participating their full potential in the labour market, as well as recognising the intersectional differences among women in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 20 Improving women’s employment outcomes can generate lifetime and intergenerational benefits – for women, their children, their family, whānau, hapū, and iwi. The benefits of lifting women’s workforce participation can include increased social, health and wellbeing benefits, protection from violence, increased retirement savings and long-term financial security. It is also important to consider women’s employment in light of the megatrends changing the nature of work. These include globalisation, technological advances and digitisation, climate change, and demographic shifts arising from an ageing population, immigration, migration and rural-urban migrations.
- 21 The Plan will address cross-system issues which particularly affect women’s ability to participate successfully in the labour market and to achieve economic resilience. It will need to include the diverse experiences of all women. Interventions will seek to alleviate the immediate effects of COVID-19, but also focus on building resilience for women from economic shocks in the future. The impacts of labour market shocks are more pronounced for women, as demonstrated by the 2009 Global Financial Crisis and trending in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.
- 22 The Plan will bring together current work across government and identify possible new areas for action that may emerge through engagement, to support women’s employment.
[REDACTED]
- 23 The Plan will contain a mix of medium and longer-term initiatives that focus on actions to improve the employment pathways for women who are marginalised in the labour market, and will look at how to reduce the motherhood penalty⁵ on women trying to balance unpaid work responsibilities with paid work - areas such as childcare, the gender pay gap (pay equity and fair pay), gender-based occupational segregation, and working arrangements.
- 24 The Plan will use the following themes as measures of success:
Women are financially secure
 - 24.1 Women and their family and whānau are economically secure, with greater resilience and wellbeing. Economic shocks have less impact, especially on women

⁵ described as the negative effects of becoming a mother on wages and employment

marginalised in the labour market, and for a shorter time period. Women are fairly remunerated for the work they do.

The labour market is inclusive

24.2 All women can access sustainable, quality employment and have choices about their training and work that suit the needs of them and their family and whānau. Gender roles or stereotypes do not limit the employment pathways women choose or negatively impact their experiences of work and career progression. Women have access to finance and mentoring to support their business and career aspirations.

Women are supported to meet their paid and unpaid work commitments (without incurring penalties)

24.3 Barriers that discourage women from participating and thriving in work are removed, including supporting greater sharing of caring responsibilities between partners in the home. Inequalities in the labour market are reduced such as the impact of the motherhood penalty and employment gaps resulting from times out of the workforce. It is particularly important to focus on different cultural expectations about caring for whānau and family, particularly for Māori and Pacific.

Focusing on women who experience poor labour market outcomes is integral to developing solutions

25 The Plan will provide actions to improve the employment pathways for women who are marginalised in the labour market. There are significant barriers to labour market participation and employment for particular women, especially wāhine Māori, Pacific women, disabled women, women from ethnic and migrant communities, younger and older women, LGBTQIA+, and mothers, especially sole mothers (refer Appendix Two ; women who experience poor labour market outcomes).

26 Improving economic outcomes for this group of women is likely to generate the greatest wellbeing benefits for them, their children, family and whānau. It is also important to have equitable outcomes for wāhine Māori under Te Tiriti. Improving economic outcomes is likely to generate the best economic return for the economy (better utilisation of women's skills and talents) and the government (increasing tax revenue while reducing demand for benefits, tax credits, and subsidised accommodation and health care).

We will build on employment actions for women through targeted engagement

27 The Plan identifies a number of priority areas that could support women's employment [REDACTED]. These actions are based on initial discussion with the Minister for Women's National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (NACEW), the International Women's Caucus, focus groups of wāhine Māori and Pacific women, and agencies responsible for the other six employment action plans.

28 These actions include:

28.1 Addressing structural inequalities in the labour market such as the gender pay gap, pay equity and pay transparency;

28.2 Increasing access and uptake of training and employment programmes, and ensuring that these provide into improved employment opportunities for women;

- 28.3 Recognition of existing qualifications and skills and increased career progression support;
- 28.4 Improving access to quality, affordable childcare to support and enable employment opportunities;
- 28.5 Eliminating harassment and discrimination to promote an inclusive workplace for all; particularly around age, ethnicity, ability, motherhood status, and sex, gender and sexual orientation; and
- 28.6 Recognising and supporting women’s paid and unpaid work responsibilities through initiatives such as increased paid parental provisions.

29 To test and build on these actions, I propose that NACEW undertake targeted engagement with women, together with its partner agencies⁶ and with support from the Ministry for Women. NACEW is well suited to this role because of its extensive sector expertise and networks. The engagement process will prioritise engagement towards groups of women who experience poor labour market outcomes (wāhine Māori, Pacific women, disabled women, women from ethnic and migrant communities, younger and older women, LGBTQIA+, and mothers, especially sole mothers) and engage with them through a series of open-ended questions (rather than presenting predetermined actions).

Actions to support women’s employment in the other six action plans

30 In March 2021, the Minister for Social Development and Employment invited Ministers responsible for other Employment Action Plans⁷ to include specific actions targeted towards supporting women in the labour market [SWC-21-MIN-0022 refers]. For example, there is an alignment between actions that support wāhine Māori in the Women’s Action Plan and in the Māori Employment Action Plan. There are also a number of cross cutting actions that impact on population groups across all seven employment action plans. My officials will continue to work with other agencies to ensure employment actions relevant to women are included within these plans.

Final Women’s Employment Action Plan

31 [REDACTED]

32 Once the Plan is finalised, a framework for monitoring the ongoing progress of the Plan and its implementation, including indicators to assess labour market outcomes for women, will be developed in conjunction with other relevant Employment Action Plan agencies and operational agencies. I will report back on the implementation of the Plan to the Employment, Education and Training Ministers Group and through future updates on the Employment Strategy.

Gendered data collection across Employment, Education and Training initiatives is imperative for tracking progress and evaluating effectiveness

33 Monitoring data on women’s participation across EET initiatives is critical. Ongoing commitment to strengthening gendered data collection and improving demographic data

⁶ Māori Women’s Welfare League, PACIFICA, Rural Women New Zealand, National Council of Women New Zealand, YWCA

⁷ women, youth, disabled people, Māori, Pacific Peoples, older workers, and former refugees, recent migrants and ethnic communities

generally will help to better understanding of the benefits of EET initiatives (and other relevant programmes and services) and their responsiveness to population groups.

- 34 Gendered data is now being collected and monitored across all initiatives except Jobs for Nature, Infrastructure Reference Group projects, and Alo Vaka (Auckland Pacific Skills Shift). However, initiatives reporting data account for less than 2% of job placements initiatives.
- 35 Women's participation rates for combined EET initiatives for March and June 2021 has remained largely static. Women's representation is generally higher for employment initiatives compared to education/training initiatives, which are largely made up of apprenticeships. However, women's share of participation in apprenticeships and access to education initiatives increased from 25% to 27% over the March to June 2021 quarter. Women's representation within employment initiatives remained the same over both quarters (44%). Women were more likely to take up a Transition to Work Grant or Te Ara Mahi, and less likely to be supported through Mana in Mahi or the \$5k to Work programme.
- 36 While the systematic discrimination of women in the labour market continues and women continue to disproportionately bear the burden of economic downturns, it is important to monitor the labour market levers and trends. We need to continue to strengthen gender data collection and reporting on women's participation across the EET initiatives, and more generally across existing and new employment programmes.

Part Two: Report back on the social impacts of COVID-19 on women

- 37 The Ministries of Education, Health, Social Development, Housing and Urban Development, and the Joint Venture on the Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence have provided reports on progress towards addressing the social impact of COVID-19 on women, as requested by Cabinet [CAB-21-MIN-0113 refers]. Full agency reports are available in Appendix Four.

Ministry of Education

- 38 The Ministry of Education does not collect data on the social impact of COVID-19 on women specifically, and as such there is no evidence on the extent to which women in education may have been disproportionately affected. However, the vast majority of the teaching workforce is women, just under half of learners in compulsory education are women, and 60% of tertiary learners are women.
- 39 Student and teacher wellbeing, student participation and attendance, and access to digital technologies were key COVID-19 related concerns raised in the education sector. Home-based learning and childcare arrangements were also key concerns. For some women, lockdowns mean having to work from home, looking after children and assisting with schoolwork. For women teachers, many with their own children to care for at home, teaching their students remotely can be particularly challenging. While some of these issues tend to abate quickly once the country returns to Alert Level 1 conditions, other issues can have ongoing impacts. A range of education supports and initiatives have been developed to address the immediate and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 that are likely to have affected women and girls. These include:

39.1 providing students with devices and improving connectivity for households;

- 39.2 providing financial support to tertiary students who are unable to study online, a temporary \$20 million fund for students who faced hardship from the impacts of COVID-19, and a fund which made all apprenticeships and a range of training programmes at sub-degree level free for learners until December 2022; and
- 39.3 strengthening mental health support services for students and educators to manage ongoing stresses related to COVID-19 and improve wellbeing.

Ministry of Health

- 40 The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated periods of movement restrictions have increased pressure on the health system. During the periods of Alert Level 3 and 4, the health system had to divert resource from routine appointments and surgery to the health system response. This resulted in delayed screening, appointments and procedures for women. Budget 2020 and 2021 allocated funding to assist with the catch up of appointments and procedures within DHBs and community providers. Alongside additional funding, the Ministry of Health is supporting providers of breast and cervical screening to catch up on screening appointments.
- 41 The Ministry of Health is also aware of the strain COVID-19 has on people's mental health, and continues to expand access to a range of support services and self-help tools to support people through this time. COVID-19 changed the way women accessed pregnancy and post-natal care, including maternal mental health services. Some women reported feeling isolated and alone in the postnatal period during the first period at Alert Level 3 and 4 as a support person was not permitted to stay with the women after the birth. DHBs have considered the holistic needs of women in the postnatal period and have adjusted their visiting policies accordingly. During the most recent period at Alert Level 3 and 4, some DHBs have allowed a support person to stay with the women if safe and appropriate. The Ministry is currently undertaking a stocktake of all maternal mental health services which will be completed by the end of the year.

Ministry of Housing and Urban Development

- 42 The experience of homelessness for women is poorly understood. COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities for groups that already experience high rates of homelessness. Women are one of the groups identified in the Aotearoa New Zealand Homelessness Action Plan as being at risk of homelessness.
- 43 The Action Plan recognises that women experiencing homelessness are likely to face specific challenges. These include being less likely to be identified as homeless, that single parent families are more likely than two parent families to be in temporary accommodation and women are more likely to be the primary caregiver of children and young people. It can be difficult to quantify the number of women experiencing homelessness because they are often not present in public spaces as rough sleepers, who are more often male.
- 44 Data from the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development shows that the number of women accessing emergency accommodation from March 2020 to March 2021 was up 33% from 3,861 women to 5,145.
- 45 In July 2020, Cabinet agreed to bring forward the development of specific areas of work to respond to emerging needs and build on the COVID-19 response. This included an action to develop further responses for cohorts at risk of homelessness, of which women were identified. In addition, the delivery of 1,005 additional Transitional Housing places up to February 2021 was one of the key immediate actions of the Action Plan. Women are

more likely to be the sole or primary caregiver of children and young people and 60% of the additional Transitional Housing places are for whānau with children.

Ministry of Social Development (MSD)

- 46 MSD played, and is playing, a key role in the Government's response to the impact of COVID-19. This has included providing essential services in response to unprecedented demand for income, housing, employment assistance, food and community funding, while also continuing to provide its usual services and support. While these supports are not exclusively for women, we know that women will benefit from these.
- 47 Lockdown experiences differ for men and women. In lockdown, women are more likely to carry the burden of increased unpaid work such as childcare and caregiving responsibilities. We are also aware that family and sexual violence is likely to increase during periods of lockdown, making it much harder for victims to find and access support. These are existing issues in our communities that were exacerbated by COVID-19, particularly for wāhine Māori, Pacific women and disabled women, but they are not new issues. MSD funded services to respond to increased pressure and demand, and is also undertaking longer term work to address these issues.
- 48 Disabled women have been identified as a population group whose social wellbeing was disproportionately affected by COVID-19. In response to lockdown, funding was provided to support disabled people to stay connected to their community and address the isolation experienced during this time. MSD is undertaking longer-term work to address accessibility barriers for disabled people, which will help reduce disabled women's inequities.

Joint Venture on the Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence

- 49 Women are three times more likely to experience intimate partner violence than men, and three times more likely to experience sexual assault than men (NZ Crime and Victim Survey 2019/20). Māori are more likely to be victims of both family violence (4.8% compared to 2.1% for the total population) and intimate partner or sexual violence: (23% compared to 16% for the total population).⁸ One in two wāhine Māori have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner and had not reported it to the Police⁹. Disabled women experience high rates of family and sexual violence, compared with non-disabled women¹⁰. Family violence and sexual violence (FVSV) have had significant impacts on the social wellbeing of women which has been further emphasised by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 50 New Zealand Police reported that during alert level 4 in 2020, there was a drop in the number of reported sexual assaults, likely linked to the ban on social gatherings and interactions outside a person's bubble and therefore reducing the opportunity for external reporting. However, we know that lockdown can increase the risk of violence from a partner or family member and there may be significant challenges for some in seeking help.

⁸ NZ Crime and Victim Survey-Māori victimisation in Aotearoa New Zealand 2018/2019

⁹ Janet L. Fanslow & Elizabeth M. Robinson (2011) Sticks, Stones, or Words? Counting the Prevalence of Different Types of Intimate Partner Violence Reported by New Zealand Women, *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 20:7, 741-759, DOI: [10.1080/10926771.2011.608221](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2011.608221)

¹⁰ American Journal of Preventative Medicine notes that 40% of disabled women experience violence from their partner, compared with 25% of non-disabled women. Disabled women also reported significantly higher rates of sexual intimate partner violence at 17% <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/447398/forty-percent-of-disabled-women-experience-family-violence-research-shows>

- 51 Reports from women's refuge centres around the country in 2020 indicated they were inundated with women and children seeking help from an abuser. Feedback received by the Human Rights Commission from refuges, sexual violence services, and helplines, reported increases in calls on family violence and sexual violence. In September 2020, victim advocates indicated that there was an increase in family violence, and that the brutality of attacks and severity of injuries was significantly worse.
- 52 Home isolation has meant women and children are more exposed to their abusers, and are unable to escape to safer spaces like schools or employment. Longer-term financial, social and health impacts of COVID-19 will have long running impacts on FVSV, with the potential to elevate and exacerbate violence.
- 53 Family violence thrives where there is a power imbalance and is fed by stressors such as loss of employment, financial strain and housing insecurity. As part of the overall COVID-19 pandemic response the Joint Venture (JV) took a systemic and proactive approach by collaborating with the FVSV sector, non-government organisation (NGOs) and kaupapa Māori providers to ensure that people who needed help for FVSV were still able to access help in the context of COVID-19. Later this year, the Government will release a National Strategy to set a collective pathway for government, tangata whenua and community to eliminate family violence and sexual violence.

Ministry for Women COVID-19 fund for women

- 54 As has been canvassed above, the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown had a disproportionate economic and social effect on women and girls. These effects included job losses, loss of income, increased unpaid caring work, and increased family violence. Many women have not yet recovered from that lockdown. These women are typically isolated and have many barriers to accessing government support whether it be through language challenges, fear, mistrust of government agencies or a lack of knowledge of where to go for help.
- 55 While there are other government supports available to marginalised New Zealanders, including women, through schemes such as the wage subsidy, there are additional needs that are not met through existing funding. Examples include, lack of access or information on period products, help with leaving an abusing partner, culturally appropriate support networks for migrant women, mental health support for LGBTQ+ women, and a lack of access to basic toiletries, amongst a wide range of social supports provided at grass roots and community level.
- 56 Through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRFF), the Government agreed a \$2m in Vote Women to provide support to women and girls at a local level. The Ministry for Women managed the disbursement of funds to grassroots community organisations who support women and girls in the immediate need in the aftermath of the 2020 lockdown [CAB-20-MIN-0328.24 refers]. The Fund supported 155 organisations and over ten thousand (10,570) women and their families directly benefited from the funded projects. The fund has been reinstated with an additional \$2 million following the current COVID-19 Delta outbreak [CMG-21-MIN-0015 refers].

Te Puni Kōkiri - Whānau Ora COVID-19 Delta Outbreak Response

- 57 Te Puni Kōkiri has distributed an additional \$23.032m to Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies as an immediate response to the impacts of COVID-19. Over 730,000 whānau have been supported during this time, with a high proportion of whānau members being wāhine Māori. Access to kai was a challenge for whānau with most providers mobilising

their operations to provide much needed kai packs to whānau. Apart from kai identified as a consistent need across all three commissioning agencies, other key reasons identified for seeking support are related to less family income, income uncertainty and an ability to meet basic needs, mental health issues (increasing), lack of access to critical resources for learning e.g., laptops and data resulting in increased inequalities in education for tamariki and rangatahi Māori.

Part Three: Recommendation to develop a National Action Plan for Women

- 58 COVID-19 presents a window of opportunity to make strategic changes now for the long-term benefit of all New Zealand women, while there is broad momentum for change and openness to rethinking economic and sociological structural issues. The steps and decisions that we take now will dictate whether we return to a pre-COVID status quo, or whether we choose to lift both our line of sight and our ambition.
- 59 In April, I was directed by Cabinet to consider whether a National Action Plan for Women was needed, and to report back my findings. The last Action Plan for New Zealand Women was launched in 2004 under Hon Ruth Dyson. This plan was not renewed on its expiration, in part because its time-bound actions were considered to have been met, and there has not been a subsequent plan or strategy developed to date even though this is a specific United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommendation for New Zealand.
- 60 A National Action Plan would be an opportunity to illuminate a path forward for progress across numerous facets of New Zealand women's lives, recognising the diverse experiences of women in Aotearoa and offering an aspirational vision for what a genuinely gender-equal society could look like. It would be an opportunity to put in place a lasting framework with the potential to achieve genuine, inter-generational progress.
- 61 A Plan, in the form of a high-level strategy or overarching statement for New Zealand, would sit above any other specific strategies and plans (such as the Women's Employment Action Plan) This would provide clarity and guidance to agencies as they build their gender analysis competency and capability, prioritise work, and embed gender analysis in both their baseline work and new initiatives. A National Action Plan would be in place to set the direction and align prioritisation across programmes, initiatives, and policy.
- 62 Specifically, a national strategy could:
- 62.1 provide an over-arching 'policy umbrella' for the breadth of Government work related to women, including meeting obligations to wāhine Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and highlight any gaps related to actions for women;
 - 62.2 provide a lever to drive gender and ethnic analysis implementation across government policy development;
 - 62.3 enable government to meet its international obligations and support New Zealand's international reputation as a leader on gender equality issues, for example, the longstanding recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
 - 62.4 provide an opportunity for Government to take action collectively with NGOs; and public visibility on the Government's goals and progress, and to stimulate national dialogue.

63 For these reasons, I consider that the timing is right to develop a national plan or strategy for women in New Zealand and that there are clear drivers that support doing so. If Cabinet agrees to progress a National Action Plan, I intend to report back on the development of the plan in six months, with a view to a draft plan by the end of 2022. The development would be led by the Ministry for Women, with input, advice, and information from agencies across the public sector, as well as wāhine Māori, NGOs, the private sector, and academics.

Financial Implications

64 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this paper.

Legislative Implications

65 There are no legislative implications arising from the recommendations in this paper.

Impact Analysis

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

66 The Women's Employment Action Plan recognises our obligations to wāhine Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of active protection/rangatiratanga (self-determination), partnership, equity (addressing disparities in outcomes for wāhine Māori), and options (recognising wāhine Māori-specific approaches to issues that directly affect wāhine Māori). This plan acknowledges and seeks to learn from the WAI 2700 Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry currently being heard by the Waitangi Tribunal. This inquiry examines claims alleging prejudice against wāhine Māori arising from breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in both historical and contemporary times. At the heart of all the claims is the loss of rangatiratanga and the social, economic, environmental and cultural loss that has occurred as a result.

Regulatory Impact Statement

67 The proposals in this paper do not have any regulatory impacts.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

68 Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) requirements do not apply to the proposals in this paper.

Population Implications

69 The gendered perspective of this paper is developed with regard for key populations, intersectional considerations and system complexities. It includes wāhine Māori, Pacific women, disabled women, women from ethnic and migrant communities, younger and older women, LGBTQIA+, and mothers, especially sole mothers. These are groups of women who are disproportionately experiencing adverse outcomes, such as significant rates of family and sexual violence and job instability. Information will be gathered and included at the sub-population level throughout the development of the Women's Employment Action, as much as possible. Specific population group information is also reported within other relevant Cabinet papers on the Māori Employment Action Plan, Pacific Employment Action Plan, Former Refugees, Recent Migrants and Ethnic Communities, Youth Employment Action Plan, Older workers Employment Action Plan, Working Matters Disability Employment Action Plan, and the Employment Strategy.

Human Rights

- 70 The Women's Employment Action will support New Zealand to achieve Articles 10, 11 and 13 of United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (women's rights to non-discrimination in education, employment and economic and social activities). It is consistent with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 7) that recognises the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of "just and favourable conditions of work", including specific reference to enabling "a decent living for themselves and their families", and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 6 - Women with disabilities.

Consultation

- 71 Targeted engagement has been undertaken with the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, Māori Women's Welfare League, PACIFICA, Rural Women New Zealand, National Council of Women New Zealand, YWCA, Global Women, Iti Rearea Collective, Māori Women's Development Inc., Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi New Zealand Public Service Association, the International Women's Caucus, focus groups with Pacific women in South Auckland and Māori women in Gisborne, and with government agencies that lead employment action plans.
- 72 The following agencies were consulted on this paper: Ministries of Social Development, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment, Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Ministry of Ethnic Communities, Joint Venture on Family Violence and Sexual Violence Business Unit, Worksafe New Zealand, Ministry for the Environment, Treasury, Office for Seniors, Office for Disability Issues, Tertiary Education Commission, Public Service Commission, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Employment, Education and Training Secretariat.

Communications

- 73 I intend to develop a communications plan to support the release of the finalised Plan, following targeted engagement.

Proactive Release

- 74 I intend to publish this paper, subject to any redactions, pursuant to Cabinet Office circular CO (18) 4.

Recommendations

- 75 The Minister for Women recommends that the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee:

Women's Employment Action Plan

- 1 **note** that Cabinet invited the Minister for Women to report back to Social Wellbeing Committee (SWC) by October 2021 on progress on the development of a Women's Employment Action Plan;
- 2 **agree** that the Ministry for Women focus on actions to enhance employment outcomes for women, in particular women who experience negative outcomes in the labour market (e.g. wāhine Māori, Pacific women, disabled women, women from ethnic and migrant

communities, younger and older women, LGBTQIA+, and mothers, especially sole mothers);

3 **agree** that targeted engagement on the Action Plan will commence in November 2021, and will be led by NACEW, together with its partner agencies and support from the Ministry for Women;

4 **agree** that, once actions are confirmed, financial and resourcing implications as a result of each action will need to be determined in collaboration with relevant agencies;

5

[REDACTED]

6 **agree** that following the release of the final Women's Employment Action Plan, a framework for monitoring implementation progress will be developed, including indicators to assess labour market outcomes for women, in conjunction with other relevant agencies;

Gendered data collection across employment and training initiatives

7 **agree** to continue to collect and strengthen data and reporting on the participation of all groups of women across the EET initiatives, and more generally across existing and new employment programmes;

Social impact of COVID-19 on women

8 **note** that the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Development and Employment, Housing and Urban Development, and the Joint Venture on the Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence have provided reports on progress towards addressing the social impact of COVID-19 on women, as requested by Cabinet [CAB-21-MIN-0113 refers] and that Government has agreed to reinstate the \$2 million COVID-19 Community Fund, to be administered by the Ministry for Women to help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on women [CMG-21-MIN-0015 refers]; and

National Action Plan for Women

9 **agree** that work commence to develop a high-level strategy for women in Aotearoa New Zealand, and report back to Cabinet on progress by the end of 2022, as per the CEDAW recommendation.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Jan Tinetti

Minister for Women