

APEC Professional Services and Mutual Recognition Community of Practice

Session 3 – Wednesday, 30 November 2022 – 11:00AM to 12:30PM (AEDT)

Session Theme: MRAs, Women and Skills

Session 3 Discussion Summary

Overview of themes

The theme of Session 3 was MRAs, Women and Skills, which was covered by two presentations and facilitated discussion.

Presentation 1 – Scene setting: Exploring gender in MRAs and mutual recognition practice

Professor Chris Ziguras, from the Australian APEC Study Centre, made a presentation based on some high-level analysis of the online MRA Inventory database. He explained the method of analysis, which explored gender balance in professional services occupations, and then looked at the distribution in the APEC region of MRAs across professional services occupations.

A key observation arising from this analysis is an indicative trend towards there being more MRAs made for professions where the gender balance is in favour of men. Professor Ziguras qualified this observation by suggesting that there should be further, more in depth research to check and confirm this indicative trend and to explore the reasons for it.

There was a short follow up discussion immediately after this presentation, during which participants shared their comments and questions about the analysis. Several participants suggested that the analysis tends to confirm their anecdotal knowledge and qualitative experience of working within the mutual recognition sphere.

Presentation 2 – Women in services trade: some reflections from our work on the APEC Logistics-related services project

Dr Mia Mikic, Research Fellow, Waikato Management School, Waikato University, provided a comprehensive presentation on observations arising from her work in the trade logistics-related services arena.

Dr Mikic made the general point that the place of gender in trade is an issue that has started to gain traction in recent years. She then pointed to recent trends that show that, despite women being the majority employed in services at the domestic economy level, their participation in exportable services is much lower than that of men. A similar trend applies to firms and MSMEs owned and operated by women. The rise of digital technologies and service delivery could be a major step towards improving accessibility to trade in services for women.

In the logistics-related services arena specifically, the first issue is that there is limited data that would allow a proper analysis of the participation of women in trade in these services. The anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a similar trend in this arena compared to trade in services generally. Dr Mikic then provided some insights about steps that could improve the participation of women in logistics-related services trade.

Dr Mikic then explored how various trade agreements could better acknowledge and promote the participation of women in trade in services. She pointed to activity at the WTO, and specifically mentioned the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on Services Domestic Regulation, which, as first for WTO rules, expressly prohibits measures that discriminate against women. There is also a rise in the number of Regional Trade Agreements that include gender provisions, but these provisions demonstrate a lot of diverse characteristics and in the main are 'promissory notes' and not enforceable provisions.

Finally, Dr Mikic explored how MRAs for professional services might support the emerging trend to bring greater gender balance in trade in services generally. Ideas centre around breaking down barriers that may be preventing the establishment of MRAs for occupations where women are most present (for example, education), better harmonising standards and processes for mutual recognition to ensure they do not discriminate against women and encouraging the uptake and use of digital technologies for the delivery of professional services by women.

A link to both presentations made at Session 3 can be [found here](#).

The terms of reference for the Community of Practice are available on the [APEC Projects Database](#)

Summary of key discussion points

During the facilitated discussion that followed both presentations, the following key points emerged:

- Strong agreement with the suggestion more can be done to apply a gender lens to work happening towards making and implementing MRAs at the regional and domestic levels
- The sharing of anecdotal knowledge and experience of matters of gender in specific sectors of professional services trade tend to confirm that there are some structural issues around the participation of women in professional services trade
- Some participants pointed to some efforts that have been made by professional bodies to consider gender in mutual recognition practices, and the expectation that these efforts will increase as women come into leadership of these bodies:
 - suggestion that studies show that women can engage better in paperless trading (without physical presence) - moving MRAs and licensing to digital platforms likely to assist in increasing the participation of women in services trade export work
 - where MRAs and Visas well-aligned (Ireland identified as a possible example) and partners can also move, would help
 - MRAs providing for 2-year exchange programs where professionals come back and have an exchange of knowledge focus is one way to address concern in some economies that MRAs facilitate 'brain- drain'
- There was strong support for the suggestion that more data, research and analysis is needed to properly understand what the barriers are to the making and implementing of MRAs, not just in relation to the participation of women in professional services trade, but also other areas of impact / broader trade goals like inclusivity, accessibility and the environment