



# Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Department of Human Services

Submission into the economic,  
social and cultural impacts of  
migration in Australia.

April 2011

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## **1 Introduction**

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and its service delivery agencies welcome the opportunity to provide comment to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia.

The Department of Human Services includes the Child Support Agency, CRS Australia and Human Services portfolio agencies – Centrelink, Medicare Australia and Australian Hearing. The portfolio endeavours to ensure that its services are fully accessible to people from a diverse cultural and linguistic background and are culturally appropriate and easy to use.

Policy responsibility for programs and services that are delivered by DHS reside with numerous policy departments including the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and Department of Health and Ageing. DHS works closely with policy departments to ensure that service delivery perspectives are taken into account in the development and delivery of policy initiatives and changes.

This submission will focus on the role of multiculturalism and the Federal Government’s Social Inclusion Agenda and how the portfolio delivers government programs to reduce social exclusion. It will also briefly describe the programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.

DHS provides a central service delivery policy and coordination role for the delivery of services across the portfolio as well as being the delivery agency for child support and vocational rehabilitation services. DHS works with other departments and agencies to ensure early consideration of service delivery issues in the policy development process to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of service delivery by agencies in the Human Services portfolio. DHS also focuses on cross-portfolio objectives such as the reduction of health and welfare fraud and providing improved access to services for Indigenous Australians. Its work has contributed to an improved service delivery for a range of Australians, including the homeless, the sick, children, seniors, Indigenous Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) customers, same-sex couples and farmers affected by drought.

Due to the wide and varied nature of the programs and services DHS delivers and that most Australian citizens and many non-citizens access these programs and services, arrangements are tailored to ensure equitable access and outcomes for our CALD customers.

## **2 Multiculturalism and the Federal Government’s social inclusion agenda**

DHS subscribes to the Australian Government’s vision of a socially inclusive society where all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. DHS models itself on the principle that all customer groups should be able to contribute in the design and delivery of its services. A key barrier to accessing services can often be an inability to understand due to factors such as language.

All DHS agencies are able to provide customers with access to interpreting services when interacting with DHS agencies and important information brochures are generally translated into key, relevant languages other than English.

## **2.1 Service Delivery Reform**

The DHS Service Delivery Reform (SDR) agenda was announced on 16 December 2009 with an agenda to fundamentally change the way portfolio agencies deliver services to our customers. SDR will increase the convenience for customers, including CALD customers in their interactions with portfolio agencies. SDR also works to improve the sharing of specialists and expertise across the portfolio in recognition of the diversity of customer needs.

Service delivery reform will simplify people's dealings with government. It will give them more control over how they receive services, and better support and assistance when they need it. To achieve these goals, the DHS portfolio is changing the way it works. Involving customers in a co-design process is a method by which the community, stakeholders and staff are involved in the development and implementation of new services and programs and the improvement of existing programs.

Under SDR, Case Coordination is a new business process that will enable the portfolio to consistently identify people in need of additional support beyond payment eligibility, connect customers to appropriate services in the community and assist people with complex needs. Case coordination is aimed at providing services to the priority groups identified by the Social Inclusion Agenda and will complement the work already undertaken by portfolio agencies. Case Coordination will build on individual and community strengths by utilising a strength-based approach to supporting vulnerable customers. A strengths-based approach places the customer at the centre of the process, promoting collaboration, engagement and empowerment.

Individual DHS agencies are also incorporating social inclusion into their multicultural programs in the following way:

## **2.2 Medicare Australia**

With a wide network of branches, over 900 Medicare Australia Access Points and online services, Medicare Australia is enabling Australia's culturally diverse population to access its programs and services with ease.

Medicare Australia works together with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to provide a translating and interpreting service for non-English speaking migrants and refugees.

The Medicare Australia website provides access to information kits (as a download or online order) for new arrivals in 19 different languages. The information kits contain key messages about the main health programs and services offered by Medicare Australia, including Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, The Australian Organ Donor Register and the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register. This service is promoted through DIAC settlement packages including the *Beginning Life in Australia* brochure for newly arrived migrants and orientation services for humanitarian entrants. Information kits are also available on CD-ROM in single or multiple language versions. CDs are also distributed to migrant resource centres and their release announced through ethnic press channels.

Overseas visitors, applicants for permanent residence and new migrants may be entitled to enrolment in the Medicare Program. Under Australia's Reciprocal Health Care Agreements (with the following countries) residents of the following countries are entitled to receive medically necessary health cover while visiting Australia:

Belgium	Finland
UK	The Netherlands
Sweden	Malta
Norway	Republic of Ireland
New Zealand	Italy

## 2.3 Centrelink

Centrelink delivers payments and services for a broad range of policy departments and other organisations to over seven million customers, of whom 20 per cent or 1.4 million have been identified as from a CALD background. Centrelink's purpose is to assist individuals and families to become self-sufficient through personalised assistance and co-ordinated service delivery.

Centrelink plays an important role in the lives of many people and attaches great importance to the responsibility that goes with this. The agency is very conscious of the need for its services to be accessible to all and easy to use. To this end, there is an extensive range of specialist services aimed at customers from a CALD background.

Centrelink's Multicultural Services Branch assists the agency in achieving its strategic goals for multicultural customers and has recently finalised its national multicultural directions for the next three years. *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010-2013* is a strong strategic statement that positions Centrelink well for meeting the current and future challenges and expectations for Multicultural Australia.

The Government has specifically identified 'vulnerable new arrivals, including refugees' as one of a number of at-risk groups under its Social Inclusion Agenda. The priority given to new arrivals recognises that people such as those from a CALD background may belong to more than one of the identified groups.

Centrelink incorporates its commitment to social inclusion within the fabric of its strategic design and operational framework. The general drivers for this approach come from the reform agenda for government administration and service delivery and a growing expectation from the community for better engagement with the Third Sector organisations on government processes.

### Community Engagement

Centrelink's approach to engagement with the community draws directly from the principles outlined in the Government's Social Inclusion Agenda and the National Compact. Social Inclusion Principles include: reducing disadvantage; increasing social and economic participation; and, developing a greater voice combined with greater responsibility. The National Compact is the framework for cooperation and partnership between the Government and Third Sector Organisations. Its principles rely on the notion of a shared vision and partnership with a strong community sector.

Since the inception of Centrelink in 1997, the agency has engaged with the community sector and stakeholder groups through a diversity of forums, either initiated and supported by Centrelink or driven by Third Sector organisations. In the context of the Government's emphasis on community relationships, Centrelink developed a National Community Engagement Strategy in consultation with government and community stakeholders. This revised approach was endorsed by the then Minister for Human Services, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, on 18 May 2010. It provides for a strong and expanded national advisory framework with an increased focus on processes and activities that improve the receipt, discussion and response to issues raised by stakeholders and increased community involvement in service co-design.

Centrelink has convened a National Multicultural Advisory Group since 1997. The Group meets annually and includes representatives from peak national multicultural community organisations and Government agencies. The next meeting will be held in Canberra in July 2011.

Centrelink consults quarterly with multicultural communities at local, state and territory levels through its Multicultural Advisory Committees/Forums and also convenes local consultative forums in some regions.

### **Multicultural Service Officer Program**

Centrelink has a national network of Multicultural Service Officers (MSOs) who work with staff, customers and local communities on multicultural service delivery. MSOs:

- disseminate information to customers and community organisations;
- participate in local community and interagency forums and networks;
- facilitate local Centrelink multicultural reference groups;
- promote community feedback to Centrelink about access and services;
- provide training to staff on multicultural service delivery; and
- provide support and broker assistance in complex cases.

The MSO program is a significant extension of the Centrelink multicultural service delivery strategy and represents the actualisation of social inclusion objectives for customers from a CALD background.

Centrelink MSOs assist migrants and refugees to participate in training, education and employment. They are a primary contact in local Centrelink offices for those skilled migrants who wish to have their overseas skills and qualifications recognised using the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals (ASDOT) program managed by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition. The ASDOT program provides grants for assessments and/or examinations that are necessary to qualify for employment in regulated professions in Australia.

MSOs also use the knowledge gained through their interactions with customers and community representatives to identify innovative strategies and projects that will contribute to socially inclusive outcomes. Often this is done by pinpointing community skills that may be underutilised, brokering training or support and putting customers on a path to successful settlement.

Much of the work undertaken by Centrelink's MSO Program is about working in partnership with the community to identify issues, assess gaps and put forward solutions. Some of the projects and

initiatives outlined on pages 9 and 10 of this submission are examples of this ongoing work which has given migrant and refugee communities the opportunity to gain or build on skills that can assist them to establish a business or work in an area that is culturally appropriate and of benefit to the wider community.

## **Communication**

Each government initiative delivered by Centrelink is underpinned by a comprehensive communication strategy which identifies appropriate products and channels based on the target audience. Strategies for customers from a CALD background, including refugees, are formulated based on community preference as well as levels of literacy in their original languages. Centrelink endeavours to identify communication preferences through extensive consultation with specific customer groups. This work has resulted in an increased focus on audio-visual products for refugee customers who have limited literacy in their own language.

Centrelink products include:

- translated written and audio information products in 64 languages;
- fortnightly broadcasts on national SBS radio in up to 15 languages, each program is then distributed to 121 ethnic community radio stations;
- regular articles published in up to 100 ethnic newspapers in over 30 languages; and
- *The Journey*, a national Centrelink newsletter published quarterly in English and distributed to over 1,600 community agencies, providing timely information on events, changes and activities affecting Centrelink's multicultural customers.

Centrelink promotes, facilitates and participates in social inclusion events such as Harmony Day, Refugee Day, Refugee Week and Social Inclusion Week. These events provide an opportunity to celebrate cultural diversity, as well as promote community participation, inclusiveness and respect.

Centrelink also works actively with the Australian Cultural Orientation Program delivered by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. This program is provided to refugee and humanitarian visa holders who are preparing to settle in Australia while they are still in detention centres. The Australian Cultural Orientation Program provides practical information and advice and accurate and targeted Centrelink information is a key part of this program.

## **Training**

Centrelink is committed to maintaining a workforce that is culturally competent and has the skills to provide all its customers with a level of service that is equitable and accessible in terms of payment, services and outcomes. To ensure this is the case for customers from a CALD background, Centrelink maintains a wide range of multicultural reference materials, training products and tools to support multicultural service delivery. These can be used by Centrelink staff and by other agencies and include:

- 'Multicultural Customer Service' Training Package – a computer assisted learning package covering multicultural issues, interpreters, translations and intercultural communication;
- 'A Guide to Ethnic Naming Practices' featuring naming conventions for 66 languages;

- ‘Working with Interpreters’ DVD covering common problems faced when working with interpreters and strategies for conducting three-way interviews;
- ‘Refugee customers – cultural considerations’ training DVD providing insight into the refugee experience and information on the common intercultural misunderstandings that refugees experience; and
- a range of formal training packages available for self-paced or facilitated training sessions, including ‘Working Across Cultures,’ ‘Culture – Our Window to the World’, and ‘Helping Customers to Participate’.

## Language Services

To ensure that customers who speak languages other than English have equality in both access and participation, Centrelink provides free interpreters and translation services for their business with Centrelink.

Centrelink has enshrined this right within its Customer Charter and actively promotes the use of interpreters to staff at all levels. Services are provided through free on-site or telephone interpreting services through a national register of almost 3,000 professional contracted interpreters covering over 220 languages.

The Centrelink Multilingual Call Centre (13 1202) provides services to customers in their own language from anywhere in Australia. It is operated by skilled bilingual customer service advisers who provide assistance in language on a one-to-one basis rather than through three way interpreting. These customers are supported by telephone interpreters where a bilingual staff member is unavailable.

The Centrelink Multilingual Call Centre is the only Call Centre of its kind in Australia and is a prime example of social inclusion in practice, providing an additional communication channel for customers from a CALD background and allowing them to conduct and finalise their business over the telephone.

## 2.4 Child Support Program

The Child Support Program (CSP) provides support and services to customers from a culturally and linguistically diverse background in a number of ways:

- Customers have access to a translating and interpreting service that can set up a three way phone conversation between them, an interpreter and a Child Support Officer.
- Interpreters can be arranged for face to face appointments held in CSP regional service centres.
- Customers can access a number of key CSP publications in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese, such as *The Parent’s Guide to Child Support*, and the popular *Me and My* series.

- There is a factsheet titled *Introduction to child support for customers from a diverse background* which is designed to explain what child support is for customers from a diverse background, it is also available in the five languages listed above.
- The CSP outreach strategy (face to face service provision) targets customers considered 'hard to reach' for reasons of location, language, culture or physical abilities.

Over the next 12-18 months the CSP will also be undertaking targeted activities to:

- improve CSP's current referral options to be appropriate for the needs of CALD customers;
- interact with multicultural communities and going beyond providing translated products;
- improve how new immigrants and CALD communities are able to gain the information to understand the CSP's role and, the support or benefits they may be entitled to from the government as a whole, after separation;
- gain a better understanding of different cultures and their expectations of relationships and family violence and how CALD communities interact with the CSP; and
- address customer concerns about information 'getting back to' the other parent where a translator is used, particularly where family violence is a concern.

### **Child support international services**

The CSP also provides services to separated parents where one parent lives in Australia and the other lives overseas. The CSP registers and collects overseas child support liabilities referred to Australia, and registers and refers Australian child support liabilities to overseas authorities for collection on CSP's behalf.

The CSP also manages cases where the residency of one or both parents is undetermined or the case is an associated domestic case (a domestic case and one of the parents also has an international case). The CSP provides these services through the development and maintenance of inter-country relationships and agreements to support Australian children through collection of child support.

## **3 Programs for new migrants, including refugees that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society**

DHS works in partnership with DIAC, other government agencies, non-for-profit groups and the community when designing and implementing new programs. DHS agencies, Medicare Australia and Centrelink are two of the first government agencies to see new arrivals and recognise the importance of these early contacts and the opportunity to make successful connections. Therefore, DHS is committed to looking at new avenues to reach and support CALD customers so that all Australians regardless of their ethnicity and English language skills, can access relevant government services and become active participants of Australian society.

Some of the existing programs and services for new migrants, including refugees, that DHS offer include:

### **3.1 Medicare Australia**

Applicants for permanent residency and new migrants may be entitled to enrolment in the Medicare program, depending on their circumstances. To assist these customers Medicare Australia is

working closely with DIAC to improve service delivery to customers common to both agencies. This includes data exchange between the agencies to facilitate Medicare enrolments for migrants and refugees. Address details of eligible temporary residents and new migrants are given electronically to DIAC when Medicare entitlement has been established. This information assists with contacting the customer and also provides statistics of preferred settlement areas.

### **3.2 Centrelink**

Centrelink works with other agencies throughout the settlement process for humanitarian entrants and refugees. Centrelink's work with DIAC and settlement providers assists in determining ahead of time who is arriving, where they are coming from and most importantly, which language they speak. This knowledge of demand ahead of time means that Centrelink can procure interpreters in new and emerging languages.

Centrelink provides tailored assistance for issues facing newly-arrived migrants and refugees around initial settlement, participation and integration into Australian society. Centrelink Refugee Servicing Units, Multicultural Service Officers and service delivery staff work collaboratively with external providers to ensure refugee and humanitarian customers receive timely income support payments, information, assessments and referrals, and ongoing support. This is critical during the initial settlement period.

Centrelink provides information through On-arrival Seminars and ongoing customer and community support. Assistance includes referrals to:

- Job Services Australia providers for employment assistance;
- English language training and literacy and numeracy programs;
- Centrelink specialists such as Social Workers and Job Capacity Assessors; and
- other community and non-government agencies.

Centrelink works with policy departments and the community to support innovative programs for the successful settlement of new migrants and refugees. Some recent innovative programs include:

- Place-based Services - Young Refugee Initiative in Fairfield (NSW) and Broadmeadows (Victoria) in 2008-2010. The initiative had a high proportion of Iraqi and African participants and was successful in increasing access to and participation in local employment, education and training services.
- Social Inclusion Pathways for Refugee Youth. This initiative is an eight week bridging course to support disconnected young refugee students and job seekers who are not coping in the mainstream education system. The curriculum includes literacy, numeracy, computer literacy, TAFE trades tasters, work readiness and building resilience.
- Pathways to Primary Industry in Western Sydney 2007-2010. This project was initiated by a Centrelink Multicultural Services Officer in partnership with a number of Western Sydney community and government agencies. This project aims to improve employment outcomes in the agricultural industry for people from refugee communities.
- Employment Pathways for Refugees, Western Australia 2009-2010. This initiative targeted the new Burmese and Karen refugee communities. Participants were provided with an

introductory ‘trades taster’ course at the local Polytechnic West enabling them to take a free 10-week course in tiling, bricklaying, soft furnishing, stonemasonry and solid plastering. Special English classes to support the skills being learnt were also provided.

- Social Inclusion Project, Werribee Victoria 2008. The project provides training in hospitality and catering to Language, Literacy & Numeracy Program students from new and emerging communities. The first phase of the project included the opening of a community kitchen to provide work experience at Werribee Community Centre.

Centrelink recognises the contribution migrants have made to Australia and encourages their participation in its own workforce.

In recent years, Centrelink has actively recruited people from new and emerging communities, in particular from African countries. Some Centrelink areas undertook selection exercises targeted to their local demographics, for example by using a recruitment provider with specialised knowledge of African communities or using a diversity-focused selection process.

The diversity of Centrelink’s current workforce, including contracted interpreters and bilingual staff, reflects the role migration has played in building long term productive capacity.

Centrelink has international Social Security Agreements with 25 countries: New Zealand, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Spain, Malta, the Netherlands, Ireland, Portugal, Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, United States of America, Chile, Croatia, Slovenia, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, Korea, Greece, Japan, Finland, and Poland. Local communities, representing these nationalities and others, have played an active and invaluable role in assisting the government to negotiate these international agreements for the benefit of all parties concerned.

Centrelink hosts a number of international delegations to showcase service delivery best practice and build relationships with representatives of other Governments. In 2009-10, Centrelink hosted more than 35 delegations from countries in Europe, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific. Many of these were facilitated or supported by various diaspora community agencies within Australia.

### **3.3 Child Support Program**

Research that was conducted in 2007 by Myriad Consulting into CSP service delivery and communication with multicultural customers identified a range of challenges that CALD customers face, particularly with regard to awareness and access. The research found that migrant groups often had a low awareness of the CSP’s role and function, and that there are different cultural perceptions and values such as those around family matters being private, and communities with collectivist cultural frameworks rather than individualistic frameworks.

The work that CSP had done to date will now be even more closely linked with Centrelink and other agencies within the portfolio as the service delivery reform agenda progresses. This will provide opportunities to address these concerns.

CSP is currently implementing new national outreach and stakeholder engagement strategies that will:

- Focus outreach servicing on communities with high numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse customers, particularly in identified priority social inclusion areas.

- Deliver more effective outreach by partnering with relevant stakeholders such as Centrelink and Migrant Resource Centres to tailor activities to the needs of each cultural group, taking into account cultural sensitivities around family separation.
- Provide information sessions to community service providers that work in communities with large migrant populations, so that they can provide mutual customers with correct information about their child support rights and responsibilities.
- Ensure that stakeholders that have expertise in working with migrant groups are consulted when CSP reviews or designs new products and services that may impact on cultural and linguistically diverse customers.

## **4 Conclusion**

In addition to the richness that multiculturalism brings to Australian society it also provides interesting challenges to DHS to meet the needs of CALD customers. These challenges include not only delivering programs and avenues for CALD customers to engage with DHS and the Australian society but also ensuring customer awareness of these services and programs within diverse communities.

In designing services and programs in consultation with policy departments, DHS is mindful of the fundamentals of social inclusion to ensure that all programs honour the intention that all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to be active participants in our society. DHS is implementing co-design mechanisms of engaging and actively involving all stakeholders, including CALD customers and organisations that support CALD customers in designing and delivering services across all stages of the program conception, including planning, development and rollout. Co-design enables DHS the opportunity to combine our knowledge with the ideas and insights of the community to ensure we are truly providing the services that people want need and can easily access. All of the programs and strategies outlined in this submission contribute to the continued success of multiculturalism in Australia.