



10 August 2020

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### **FECCA Submission into Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations.

FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency and members to Government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of people living in Australia from CALD backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

Diaspora communities form a big part of Australia's as a successful multicultural nation and Australia has a long tradition of diaspora communities settling in and restarting their lives in this country. Appropriate support to these communities in settling, living, contribution and actively participate in the society is essential for a socially cohesive Australia.

FECCA would welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission as required. FECCA acknowledges the Government's efforts in dealing with these complex issues and offers its support in its efforts to respond to this pandemic.

## Recommendations

- Increase opportunities for targeted financial support for diaspora communities.
- Make available funding opportunities not just for projects or programs but also for organisations to improve/access infrastructure, processes and capacity building.
- Engage with multicultural/ethnic community councils or organisations to ensure priorities for funding and policy is set according to needs in the community
- Develop support mechanisms/training opportunities for writing grant applications and grant administration.
- The wait and processing times for migrants who have applied for citizenship be significantly shortened.
- The Government must ensure open, clear, consistent and timely information to applicants for permanent residency and family reunion.
- The Government must process applications within a reasonable timeframe to ensure people are given fair treatment and an opportunity to plan a future.
- Ensure the next iteration of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children is more inclusive of CALD women, their experiences, and their needs.
- Invest in CALD-specific FDV services, including crisis and emergency accommodation services.
- Upskill current FDV services to ensure they are culturally competent and can cater to CALD women.
- Review and amend the eligibility criteria for those accessing Family Violence Provisions.
- Establish a two-way communication process where support is provided to diaspora communities, especially NECs, and where government learn from these communities on their strengths, needs, knowledge and skills. Ensure this communication is ongoing and genuine not just mobilised in relation to crises or to achieve policy outcomes.
- Strengthen connections with grassroots organisations.
- Develop trust through participation and engagement. Broaden connections with NECs beyond figurehead leaders.
- Targeted funding to ethnic/multicultural community organisations and association to hold workshops focusing on understanding of parliamentary processes for diaspora communities.
- Ensure a two-way engagement strategy to make sure communication is effective and understood as intended.
- Develop and maintain relationships with multicultural/community organisations to facilitate connections with communities and community leaders.
- Commit to and fund cultural appropriate services for migrants and refugees seeking employment, including resume information, support and guidance.
- Develop information for employers to better understand what diverse experiences and skills are and how they can add to their business.
- Reduce the barriers to employment of migrants by supporting employers with the skills needed to manage diverse workplaces including; cultural competence training; support to increase understanding of and confidence in overseas qualifications and English language assessments
- CALD data standards should be revised to better capture the complexity of multiculturalism in Australia and the revised data standards should be consistently used by all Commonwealth and State/Territory Government departments and agencies.
- These disaggregated data collected by agencies must be available externally for the purposes of analysis and research.

- General population surveys must ensure that sampling methodologies and collected data are inclusive of people from CALD backgrounds in order to be representative of the Australian population as a whole.

## Overview

This submission investigates the broader issues facing diaspora communities in Australia with regards to their participating in, contributing to and living in Australia. According to a definition by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in 2017, diaspora communities consist of ‘migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background.’<sup>1</sup>

As part of Australia’s multicultural policy, the Government focuses on integration and social cohesion where the goal is to help all communities become actively part of, and benefit from, Australia’s economic and social development.<sup>2</sup> To allow this to happen, it is essential that services are accessible, flexible and made available for people to participate and contribute to Australian society.

According to the Scanlon Foundation the indicators for social cohesion are:<sup>3</sup>

- Belonging: shared values, identification with Australia, trust
- Social justice and equity: evaluation of national policies
- Participation: voluntary work, political and cooperative involvement
- Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy: experiences of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers
- Worth: life satisfaction and happiness, future expectation

People’s experiences of belonging in a new country and their ability to participate and contribute, as demonstrated by the Scanlon Foundation, form part of the development of social cohesion. The challenges, strengths and attributions of diaspora communities that facilitate participation and contribution to the Australian society is explored further in this submission.

## Resources and Appropriate Funding

Diaspora community associations and organisations are incredibly important for communities in a range of different ways. Ethno-specific community organisations serve an essential and diverse role as support for their communities—a place to feel a sense of belonging, support and understanding. The organisations or associations are created out of a need in the community for support and representation and are often the first point of contact for many people on arrival in a new country. Community members are familiar with these organisations or associations and have trust and confidence in them. This trust means that the role of many of these organisations is to pass on relevant information to their community members, link people to services, welcome new migrants or refugees and assist community members in need. A very important role of these associations is preserving and encouraging pride in a community’s culture through hosting celebrations of special national, cultural or religious days. During community consultations FECCA heard about community associations organising celebrations for Samoan Independence Day and Sri Lankan New Year. Other

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<sup>1</sup> [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs>

<sup>3</sup> <https://scanlonfoundation.org.au/social-cohesion-pillars/>

celebrations and events hosted by consulted associations and communities to promote pride in their culture and social cohesion were the Al salaam festival, Mosque open days, Australia Day events and participating in the Toowoomba flower parade.

FECCA heard in community consultations how individuals seek support within their cultural communities for issues they consider too personal or culturally inappropriate to discuss with service providers outside the community.<sup>4</sup> These issues can include:

- support for victims/survivors of family and domestic violence when access to appropriate services is inadequate
- bilingual support and patient advocacy for individuals in hospital
- support for families and individuals moving through the criminal justice system

Diaspora community associations or organisations also serve as a bridge between government and community and require adequate funding and resources to be able to continue their important job of welcoming, supporting and connecting with new arrivals. These resources include facilities to meet, plan and host events. FECCA recommends there are adequate and appropriate resources to assist migrants and their families to build sustainable, prosperous and successful lives in Australia, including through the establishment of multicultural centres or other places for communities to meet, host meetings, practice their faith and organise events. This resourcing includes ensuring a commitment to continuous funding to regional Ethnic Communities Councils and Multicultural Communities Councils to assist in settlement of new migrants on arrival.

Further, it is essential to invest in community organisations, including volunteers and local community leaders, to allow them to continue to build social cohesion and foster welcoming communities especially in rural and regional locations. Building, supporting and celebrating the role of volunteers in rural and regional Australia, and in general, takes time, resources and collaboration. It is essential that local volunteers are be acknowledged and supported for the work they are doing and as the bridge between established and new communities.

State government or local council grants for diaspora communities help to strengthen relationships between government and the community. Multicultural arts grants and funds have proved to be very successful in multicultural hubs such as City of Blacktown. These grants have empowered community members to continue to celebrate their cultures and histories through art, while also working closely with local government officers. This also helps diaspora communities to feel a stronger sense of belonging to the area as they can see that they are being listen to and invested in.

FECCA has heard during community consultations how inadequate finances is a major challenge in diaspora communities' self-representation and advocacy. Through FECCA consultations, the following barriers were highlighted by diaspora communities in efforts to source funding:

- lack of skilled personnel to draft successful funding applications
- absence of track record in successfully acquitting prior grants
- competing with more established CALD communities or mainstream organisations for limited pool of grants conflict between receiving funding for individual projects or service provision and ability to carry out advocacy
- limitations in criteria for funding opportunities often preclude new and emerging communities or activities which these communities prioritise.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/New-Emerging-Communities-in-Australia-Enhancing-Capacity-for-Advocacy.pdf>

In applying for large grants, smaller and newer diaspora communities often lack a competitive advantage when applying for the same grants as more established CALD communities or when competing with mainstream organisations. This aspect of competition is a concern for many communities and the perception of competition is often considered a deterrent to writing applications. Many community members worry that their limited organisational structure and physical infrastructure is a disadvantage in major grant applications and therefore either do not apply or search for smaller one-off grants.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase opportunities for targeted financial support for diaspora communities.
- Make available funding opportunities not just for projects or programs but also for organisations to improve/access infrastructure, processes and capacity building.
- Engage with multicultural/ethnic community councils or organisations to ensure priorities for funding and policy is set according to needs in the community
- Develop support mechanisms/training opportunities for writing grant applications and grant administration.

### Safety Concerns and Resilience of Vulnerable Groups

New arrivals to Australia as well as more established diaspora communities experience a range of challenges in their every-day lives related to their experiences of feeling connected to and part of the Australian society. FECCA works with communities from CALD backgrounds and hear about concerns impacting on people's lives through a number of mediums such as community consultations, feedback from FECCA members across the nation and engagement with stakeholders working in the settlement sector.

FECCA emphasises the importance of understanding the diversity within diversity and the intersectionality of communities and people from CALD backgrounds. While some may experience few challenges to living in Australia, others may experience a range of challenges cutting across a range of different areas of life—including different experiences before arriving in Australia, gender, cultural and linguistic background, age and disability. Because of this intersectionality, flexibility in addressing challenges, and an understanding of the fact that 'one size won't fit all' is essential.

FECCA also wants to emphasise the importance of understanding the strength and resilience that people from CALD backgrounds have. Communities work together, support each other and work through Australia's laws and social systems to establish their lives in Australia. Yet, there are several challenges that must be addressed to facilitate this process.

### Racism

It is undeniable that there are racist views held in Australia. The Scanlon Foundation annual survey on social cohesion shows that despite data indicating that racist values are held only by a small minority in contemporary Australia,<sup>5</sup> experiences of racial discrimination are high. In 2019, for

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2019* (Caulfield East: Monash University, 2019), 83, <https://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Mapping-Social-Cohesion-2019-FINAL-3.pdf>.

example, 19% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination in the past year on the basis of their 'skin colour, ethnic origin or religion'.<sup>6</sup> FECCA emphasises that we must take care not to oversimplify experiences of racism. The racism faced by our new and emerging communities from Africa, West Asia and South Asia is not the same as that experienced by those coming from Europe after WWII. Today's racism has been described as being premised more around religion than country of origin. The 2011 Scanlon Foundation Survey found that attitudes held towards Muslims were far more negative than those held towards Christians or Buddhists.

The nature of racism is also changing with the emergence of new media, and these forms of racism are in many ways new and unexplored terrain. FECCA has heard in consultation that communities find the mainstream media responsible for spreading lies and reinforcing stereotypes which is challenging, especially for children. For example, during consultations in Ballarat, FECCA heard from young people that although the supposed 'African gangs' issue was reported in Melbourne, these stereotypes travel far and with negative media attention—the youth noted how regional people can 'get worried'. FECCA heard that for Muslims living in Australia there is a sense that the public generally have a lack of understanding about Islam, Muslims and the diversity within the religion. During consultations, diaspora communities expressed their hopes for tools to confront racism in the most productive way.

#### **Recommendations:**

- FECCA calls for a bi-partisan national anti-racism strategy to ensure social cohesion on all levels of society and to create a level playing field for all in a society that values diversity.
- The Government must challenge the perception, and reality, of racism and reality of an increase in anti-migrant sentiment by taking a leadership role in setting a positive tone and narrative around migrants and refugees, and refrain from politicising those issues.

#### **Temporary Migrants**

The development of a sense of belonging and social cohesion is dependent on a persons' feeling of safety and the ability to plan a secure future in a new country and, as explored by the Scanlon Foundation, ones' feeling of worth in the new society through life satisfaction, happiness and future expectations.

The lack of transparency from the Department of Home Affairs, limited communication, as well as the extended waiting times have led to the coining of a new phrase by FECCA's member in Shepparton, namely *visa anxiety*. This visa anxiety is linked to both the waiting period for permanent residency and to family reunion as it explains people's stress about their life, worry about their family and the inability to plan a secure future. The mental health implications linked to visa anxiety must be considered when processing applications for permanent residency (PR) as a matter of humanity.

The temporary nature of their visa is a consequence of the complicated and everchanging pathway to permanency that those wanting to call Australia home must navigate not a statement of intent. The number of people waiting for their application for PR to be processed has not been published by the Department of Home Affairs. FECCA has been contacted by numerous PR applicants for whom, during a 3 year period, the wait time has increased from 3 months to now 29 months from the time

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

of application. To apply for PR these people have already fulfilled all requirements during their two or three year temporary visa.

In consultations FECCA has heard:

- 'I had lost the job and no welfare are given to us being a visa holder whereas we had applied for permanent residency 887 Visa since July 2018 and still waiting due to government increasing the processing time.' (applied for PR 21 months ago)
- 'Yes the processing time for our permanent residency -887 visa is increased to 26 to 29 months by DOHA earlier when I applied last year it was waiting period of 9 to 10 months.' (applied for PR 14 months ago)
- 'Been waiting for permanent residency under subclass 887 near about two years only contacted once by home affair and been asked about my newborn's medical which we have done in 5 days, now it's been 6 months and we haven't heard back. The whole family is struggling because of this never-ending processing in this crisis.' (applied for PR 23 months ago)

The situation for people on temporary visas was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic causing previously employed people to lose their income simply due to their visa type. During the shutdown period communities assisted each other with essential food provision to ensure that nobody went hungry as reported by many FECCA members. For those communities with many people stood down or employment terminated on temporary visas this support can only reach so far:

- 'Either they can give me PR or give JobKeeper payment so that I can survive here' (applied for PR 10 months ago)
- 'Extremely long processing time (26-29 months) for 887 visa after fulfilling requirements for 4 years on a 489 visa. People like us are stuck in a limbo, deprioritised and unable to move forward with our lives. The virus has put us in a difficult position and we feel unwanted.' (applied for PR 12 months ago)

The exclusion of people on a temporary visa during a crisis is an added challenge for people in Australia living on temporary visas. Already they face numerous challenges to achieving their aspirations of settling in Australia with extended waiting times of permanency applications, separation from family due to ineligibility in applying for family reunion, and other challenges depending on visa type. During COVID-19 recovery, until these people have their PR applications processed, they will not be able to 'bounce back' and will need ongoing support. A plan must be put in place for the wellbeing of those left behind during COVID-19 to ensure Australia recovers with a whole of society approach. This must include the future of migration, the role of temporary migration and a review of the consistent increase in PR application wait times.

Temporary migrants form part of the Australian community, they pay taxes and many prepare to become permanent residents of Australia in the future. Yet the pathway to permanency has become increasingly more difficult in the past years, making people feel unwelcome.

Australia has one of the most costly and complex migration systems in the world. As of December 2019, the Department of Home Affairs has 128,383 citizenship applications that have not yet been processed. The processing time for 90% of applications is 23 months. The cost of a permanent residency application for each applicant is currently \$3,600 and \$1,800 for dependants. Applicants

also need to be earning a minimum of \$53,900 annually for the last five years. FECCA heard how people felt excluded during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- I didn't always feel welcome. I have contributed to the welfare of Australian citizens through health care and aged care services, however in current times of need from COVID-19, my needs felt disregarded

Feeling unwelcome, being treated differently because of one's background and having to prove oneself constantly does not lead to a cohesive society in which people feel part of the same future and where they feel their contribution is appreciated:

- I am a permanent resident and the process made me not feel welcome, have been treated as suspicious and someone who is taking 'advantage of the system'.
- All temporary visa workers have dream to become Australian citizen, we have invested money, effort and time to obtain our visas and we are ready to contribute in the Australian community. We are not looking for financial support.

During consultations FECCA staff heard many stories on the devastating and mentally challenging impact from lack of appropriate and accessible pathways to citizenship. The stress, worry and mental illness caused by Government policy and slow processing times that FECCA heard of during consultations is a national issue. Processes must be put in place to ensure open, appropriate and clear information provision on people's applications and speedy processes to avoid a national crisis of visa anxiety.

### **Family reunion**

Related to people's experiences of safety, belonging and a secure future is the issue of family reunion. The benefits of family reunification for refugees and migrants cannot be underestimated: It is a generally agreed fact that the family is the fundamental unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State. Following separation caused by forced displacement such as from persecution and war, family reunification is often the only way to ensure respect for a refugee's right to family unity. Family reunion plays an essential role to help persons rebuild their lives and can provide critical support to adapt to new and challenging circumstances. Restoring families can also ease the sense of loss that accompanies many refugees who, in addition to family, have lost their country, network and life as they knew it.

FECCA believes that family migration is integral to successful settlement of migrants in Australia, and also contributes to social cohesion and the wellbeing of the whole community.

FECCA is concerned that there are many barriers to family reunion for migrants and refugees such as limitations of eligibility for family reunion, extensive waiting periods and prohibitively high costs. This cost can include airfares, migration agents, legal fees, assurance of support, and years of financial and material support once the family member arrives in Australia. The additional financial burden on families through high visa costs and assurances of support places family reunion out of the reach of many humanitarian entrants.

### **Recommendations:**

- The wait and processing times for migrants who have applied for citizenship be significantly shortened.



- The Government must ensure open, clear, consistent and timely information to applicants for permanent residency and family reunion.
- The Government must process applications within a reasonable timeframe to ensure people are given fair treatment and an opportunity to plan a future.

### **Domestic and Family Violence**

Family and domestic violence (FDV) in Australia is viewed as a significant ongoing issue, with enormous social and economic costs. Research has repeatedly shown that women are disproportionately more likely to suffer from FDV and sexual violence than men. Women from CALD backgrounds are made even more vulnerable based on a range of factors including: a greater likelihood of not being a permanent resident, having limited or no access to social services; lower levels of English proficiency that can impact employment, education and the ability to form connections with the larger community<sup>7</sup>; being overrepresented in casualised sectors which leads to financial instability and dependency. These vulnerabilities can be amplified for older women, women with disabilities, and those who identify as LGBTIQ+.

The fourth National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children had limited reference to CALD women and families. FECCA recommends that empowering CALD women and introducing tailored strategies to tackle FDV in CALD communities should be a key outcome of future Plans. These strategies should be co-designed with CALD communities and relevant services providers to ensure they meet the needs of CALD women.

FECCA has heard during multiple consultations about problems accessing appropriate FDV support services. Currently, there are very limited multicultural service providers that cater to CALD women and their children. Those that do provide crisis accommodation and case management services are often working to deliver numerous other services, such as legal representation, resettlement, and employment without sufficient funding. Moreover, organisations that provide CALD specific FDV services such as In Touch Multicultural Centre and Linking Hearts are based in city centres and are less accessible to women in rural and regional areas. These organisations need additional funding to provide for the growing number of CALD women in Australia.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure the next iteration of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children is more inclusive of CALD women, their experiences, and their needs.
- Invest in CALD-specific FDV services, including crisis and emergency accommodation services.
- Upskill current FDV services to ensure they are culturally competent and can cater to CALD women.
- Review and amend the eligibility criteria for those accessing Family Violence Provisions.

### **Diaspora Communities and Participation in Democratic and Social Institutions**

Barriers to full participation in Australian democratic and social institutions for diaspora communities are often linked to advocacy skills, knowledge about systems and processes, connections and

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<sup>7</sup> 1 FECCA (2019) 'Community, Connection and Flexibility Prove Key To Learning English', Australian Mosaic Issue 55, found at [http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FECCA-mosaic-Issue-52\\_WEB.pdf](http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FECCA-mosaic-Issue-52_WEB.pdf)

networks with broader community, advocacy organisations and decision makers in Government departments, and service providers. Additionally, and constitutionally, migrants who are dual citizens are unable to represent themselves or their constituents in Parliament.<sup>8</sup>

Advocacy allows individuals and communities to articulate priorities, needs and aspirations to stakeholders. Community advocates can help those who make decisions about policies and service provision better understand the needs of CALD communities with the goal of improving outcomes for those individuals and communities. Strong advocates can also ensure that their communities are strong and vibrant. This is important because the issues and challenges faced by diaspora communities can be different to the needs of the broader community and different to previous generations of migrants. Advocacy ensures that vulnerable individuals and communities can<sup>9</sup>:

- have their voices heard on issues that impact their lives
- communicate the barriers they face in accessing services and other social, economic and civic opportunities
- receive information relevant to them and in an understandable and accessible format
- defend and safeguard the rights of vulnerable members of NECs
- have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives.

Issues facing newcomers to Australia include barriers accessing government services, accessing information, English language proficiency, securing employment, education, and housing especially during the settlement period. Beyond settlement, diaspora communities want their needs and aspirations to be recognised in Australia's economic policies; civic participation and the political process; and social policies (for example related to racism and multiculturalism).

Further, for larger diaspora families, the costs of family reunion, permanent residency applications and citizenship can add up quickly and act as a major barrier to social and democratic participation. Aside from social and democratic consequences, diaspora communities will also face additional barriers when participating in the workforce, as many workplaces look for employees who are Australian citizens with Australian qualifications. Understandably, lack of citizenship can have a detrimental effect on all members of diaspora communities because, while they may identify as Australian, they are not Australian citizens.

FECCA **recommends** the following to ensure a broader participation by diaspora communities in Australian democratic and social institution:

- Establish a two-way communication process where support is provided to diaspora communities, especially NECs, and where government learn from these communities on their strengths, needs, knowledge and skills. Ensure this communication is ongoing and genuine not just mobilised in relation to crises or to achieve policy outcomes.
- Strengthen connections with grassroots organisations.
- Develop trust through participation and engagement. Broaden connections with NECs beyond figurehead leaders.

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<sup>8</sup> FECCA is a strong supporter of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and has long called for the establishment of a Voice to Parliament. FECCA calls for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples gain true representation in Parliament and be able to voice their concerns on the laws that affect them. FECCA believes to achieve true access and equity for Australia's newest residents, our Traditional Owners must be acknowledged first.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theadvocacypeople.org.uk/seap>

- Targeted funding to ethnic/multicultural community organisations and association to hold workshops focusing on understanding of parliamentary processes for diaspora communities.

## Engagement with Diaspora Communities

Diaspora communities living in Australia can face a complex range of systematic barriers that hinder full social and democratic participation if these services are not suitable for a diverse population. A complicated system without links between siloed services hinders easily accessible services and information. If information provision does not cater for those with languages other than English, a large portion of the Australian population will miss out on important information concerning their right to necessary services. These services are designed to benefit all Australians, but many migrants are still missing out. Barriers to accessing these services can be addressed through ensuring that necessary information is available online, in-print, and in-person. Information should also be available in commonly spoken languages other than English. FECCA has heard in community consultations how people want to work, want to participate and want to contribute to their new home country. To facilitate this participation, challenges must be addressed in culturally appropriate, targeted and meaningful manners.

To strengthen communication and partnership between government and diaspora communities, meaningful two-way engagement is essential. FECCA recommends that that communication and partnerships between diaspora communities and government should be mutually beneficial, well-informed, and work towards long-term change. Diaspora communities can provide a wealth of information around their experiences and are best placed to co-design better government service and practice. Partnering with diaspora communities also works towards building capacity for community members and allows them to become better informed about government processes and services.

Community organisations play a role that cannot be replicated by government. Community organisations have trust, respect and a cultural understanding of their clients—these are important elements to use and strengthen. In engaging and communicating with people and communities from CALD backgrounds, governments must value the hard work and genuine engagement by community organisations with community leaders over time. Without coordination across government services, multicultural/community organisations often assist clients to navigate and engage.

### Recommendations:

- Ensure a two-way engagement strategy to make sure communication is effective and understood as intended.
- Develop and maintain relationships with multicultural/community organisations to facilitate connections with communities and community leaders.

## Social Cohesion and Belonging

In FECCA consultations during 2019<sup>10</sup>, two main concerns emerged as incredibly important for people in the process of developing a sense of belonging in Australia. These were access to employment and

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<sup>10</sup> <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FECCA-Consultation-Report-2019.pdf>

migration issues such as access to permanent residency, citizenship and family reunion. The ability to participate and contribute in society creates feelings of belong through experiences of respect, recognition and value.

The opportunity to participate and contribute to Australian society through appropriate and meaningful employment has been raised during FECCA consultations numerous times. With regards to social cohesion and multicultural access and equity, the Australian Government notes they 'recognise the importance of mutual respect and mutual responsibility'.<sup>11</sup> This mutuality, however, must be based on fair and accessible services allowing people to participate and contribute through accessing employment opportunities.

In Australia, 47 per cent of highly skilled migrants are underemployed, compared to 23 per cent of similarly skilled Australian-born workers, and after five years in Australia, 40 per cent of skilled migrants still work in lower skilled jobs.<sup>12</sup> Barriers in recruitment can be attributed to this. FECCA consultations during 2019 heard that it is difficult to find employment in general and, further, employment suiting their background and skills. This was a concern for both skilled migrants and other arrivals to Australia such as humanitarian entrants.

There are numerous barriers faced by people from CALD backgrounds in accessing employment including:

- lack of local referees and Australian work experience
- skills recognition
- bias, conscious and unconscious
- unfamiliarity with the 'Australian way' of writing a CV
- limited networks and connections to the community
- limited computer literacy or limited access to digital tools to apply for jobs

FECCA has heard during community consultations how employment services often lack understanding of people's background and experience. FECCA has also heard how a person's neighbor is often more reliable in helping them find employment than JobActive providers.

While employment agencies may lack the understanding of their diverse clients, during national FECCA consultations, many communities suggested that employers also need to gain a better understanding of diversity to solve the problem. FECCA heard that unlike many other countries, Australia has a strong focus on 'pieces of paper' equaling experience. For example, FECCA met a woman who had worked in a bank in her country of origin but in Australia needed to complete a course to do the same job.

Many people explained to FECCA that experience from overseas does not help them get a job in Australia saying, 'how can I get local experience if you don't give me a job?' FECCA heard that lack of social networks and local references created barriers to finding a job. Others noted how the expectation of how a resume should look in Australia differs widely from expectations elsewhere in the world. A person from Pakistan told FECCA that once they understood and changed their resume to the 'Australian way', they more easily found a job. They also suggested that everyone should

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs>

<sup>12</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet Victoria, Centre for Ethical Leadership, University of Melbourne, "Recruit Smarter: Report of Findings," accessed May 13, 2020, 18. <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-01/Recruit-Smarter-Report-of-Findings.pdf>.

receive this information on arrival. FECCA also heard in consultations how limited computer literacy or lack of tools such as smart phones and computers was for some women a challenge to finding a job or accessing general information. This indicates a need to re-think how job searches happen and what support people need.

For diaspora communities, finding long-term and sustainable employment is dependent on many factors such as networks with the wider community and employers, having Australian work experience, and recognition of overseas skills. Community advocates provide significant support by:

- linking individuals to employment networks or employers
- ensuring the translation of qualification/skills certificates
- assisting individuals to understand Australian employment cultural norms
- locating and purchasing appropriate work attire and equipment. Community networks ensure a smoother running of everyday activities through individuals helping each other with daily activities such as child care and cooking of meals.

This advocacy is particularly important for those involved in care giving duties who are mostly 'at-home' and therefore at greater risk of isolation and loneliness. These networks assist in identifying community members who have particular vulnerabilities or needs and then organising community based assistance for the tasks where they require support

### *Crisis situations and Employment*

The COVID-19 pandemic added to the challenges of accessing appropriate and meaningful employment for new arrivals and established migrants in Australia. For temporary migrants who had been working in Australia, it was a 'slap in the face' to learn that they were not eligible for JobKeeper. After years of having paid taxes to Australia—of having contributed and participated in the society at the same level as others in Australia—they were told they were not eligible for any support from the Government during the pandemic. This decision to 'draw the line somewhere' has left taxpayers in Australia without access to support during this global pandemic. This decision has also arbitrarily discriminated against businesses in Australia who employ people on temporary visas who have therefore been ineligible for government support. FECCA heard many stories from the community during this difficult time:

- 'I've been stood down from my permanent part-time contract at work and my company is eligible for JobKeeper but I'm not because I'm a temporary resident.'
- 'My wife and I were both laid off from our jobs. Since our visa is temporary, we haven't received any help from the government or the companies we worked for despite we've been working for almost four years in the case of my wife and over one in mine.'
- 'Two days before I lost my full-time job. A main reason for losing the job could be they can't hold us as they might not get JobKeeper payment as we are not Australian citizen or permanent resident. What else can we do in this situation apart from encouraging us to find new job and getting more tense about how to deal with financial situation?'

The Government's decisions around eligibility for JobKeeper has resulted in destitution for many. Charities are being overwhelmed by a huge amount of people who hold temporary visas seeking help for basics such as food and shelter. For those now falling into poverty, this health crisis will be even

more difficult to bounce back from. Many people have reached out to FECCA expressing that they are 'feeling so rejected and lost my hope'.

This decision by Government to exclude temporary migrants went against the dual commitment component of its multicultural policy. This will have an impact on future decisions by many migrants to arrive in Australia for employment.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Commit to and fund cultural appropriate services for migrants and refugees seeking employment, including resume information, support and guidance.
- Develop information for employers to better understand what diverse experiences and skills are and how they can add to their business.
- Reduce the barriers to employment of migrants by supporting employers with the skills needed to manage diverse workplaces including; cultural competence training; support to increase understanding of and confidence in overseas qualifications and English language assessments

#### **Data collection**

Related to the above challenges and recommendations, FECCA emphasises the need to understand the diversity of the diaspora communities in Australia. Only by collecting accurate and consistent administrative data can Government know how to address challenges faced by diaspora communities as well as build of communities' strengths.

FECCA has numerous times noted how current Australian data collection and reporting on cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly in relation to human services planning and delivery (including health, mental health, aged care and disability) is inadequate. This is true of administrative and survey data, as well as social and medical research.

FECCA suggests that in order for Government and its services to appropriately respond to clients effectively and consider the diversity of clients and the challenges faced by their client base, they must understand the communities they serve through accurate and consistent administrative data. This is essential for evidence-based policy, resource allocation and service planning. Only with disaggregated, consistent and comparable CALD data can Government ensure that services are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all people in Australia.

FECCA has heard in community consultations how:

- They [Government] could help me find suitable services by first understanding my needs and then ensuring services are set up to meet them. Targeting information would be much easier in they knew who they were trying to communicate with.

Relying on country of birth and language spoken at home as the main and sole measure of diversity in policy and research is an inadequate measure of ethnicity in certain individuals such as ethnic Chinese born in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, ethnic Indians born in countries such as Fiji, the United Kingdom and Uganda, people born in refugee camps, and the growing population in Australia who are Australian-born but whose parents are migrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Country of birth also does not capture other factors that can have important impact on

inequalities to access to and quality of provided health services such as English language proficiency and discrimination based on race/ethnicity.

FECCA has heard a call for an understanding of specific need that could start by collecting relevant data. 'I am amazed that government departments don't even ask about heritage, outside whether you speak a different language and where you were born. My needs are very different from those of a white middle class British family. But the Government here would now know that from the data they collect. I worry that they don't understand the specific health needs and different health trajectories of people from different ethnicities. And I worry that government services do not understand the psychological and socio-economic impacts on us living in a majority white ethnic community.'

It is essential that Government gathers more detailed information about the many challenges faced by CALD communities. 'Knowing the clients' was felt necessary to be able to respond in appropriate ways and offer the variety of services needed.

**Recommendations:**

- CALD data standards should be revised to better capture the complexity of multiculturalism in Australia and the revised data standards should be consistently used by all Commonwealth and State/Territory Government departments and agencies.
- These disaggregated data collected by agencies must be available externally for the purposes of analysis and research.
- General population surveys must ensure that sampling methodologies and collected data are inclusive of people from CALD backgrounds in order to be representative of the Australian population as a whole.