



**MULTICULTURAL
AUSTRALIA**

it's who we are

**Worker Rights Education and Support Services
Program for Migrant and Refugee Communities
in Queensland**

4 September
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Electronic submission

Re: Additional information from Multicultural Australia (following appearance at Public Hearing on the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework)

QUESTION: Senator STEWART: When it's completed—whatever version you're happy with—the report on the experience of migrant and refugee workers would be great for us to have as a committee.

ANSWER: Multicultural Australia thanks the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR) for this opportunity to provide additional information on the Worker Rights Education and Support Services Program for vulnerable migrant and refugee communities in Queensland.

Information provided in this document comprises background information to the Worker rights education and support services program and findings from the first year of delivery (across a four-year program). It also includes an outline of proposed activities for the second year of the project and beyond. Multicultural Australia would be happy to keep the PJCHR updated on the project activities and outcomes over the next two years.

Worker rights education and support services program for migrant and refugee communities in Queensland

The Queensland Government has funded a program of support to provide worker rights education to new Queenslanders and assistance to vulnerable migrant workers. The project is aimed at reducing (migrant) worker vulnerability by supporting workers to understand their rights at work and develop confidence in seeking rectification of issues in the workplace.

Multicultural Australia is delivering this project in partnership with the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) – in collaboration with Queensland Community Alliance (QCA).

Project aims:

The Worker rights education and support services program for migrant and refugee communities in Queensland aims to:

- Enhance the confidence and capacity of migrant and refugee workers in Queensland in knowing their rights and responding to workplace issues, abuses, or mistreatment.
- Strengthen community-based support for workers experiencing migrant and refugee worker issues, abuses, or mistreatment; and

- Grow and promote equitable access to safe and secure employment for migrant and refugee workers in Queensland.

Project Scope and Inclusions:

Project scope of work extends over four years (2022-2026) and includes an initial impact and vulnerability study in the first year and subsequent design and delivery of education and support services for migrant workers.

Project expectations are to target vulnerable workers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including temporary visa holders (acknowledging that there are other migrant workers experiencing vulnerabilities, who will also benefit from the project). Our project is framed by an understanding that migrant and refugee experiences are broad – including, refugees/humanitarian entrants/people seeking asylum; temporary migrants (including international students or people on short-term work visas); and independent and dependant migrants (in skilled or family migration categories). These categories encompass significant cultural and linguistic diversity, various modes of arrival in Australia, varying lengths of time spent in Australia and potentially include first- or second-generation migrants to Australia.

The initial impact and vulnerability study in the first project year is designed to gather evidence to:

- Deepen understanding of the needs and experiences of vulnerable migrant or refugee workers in Queensland in knowing their rights and responding to issues in the workplace.
- Determine the reach of existing information and support channels (formal and informal) to inform better accessibility and effective methods of engagement.

Project design

The project is delivered in stages, with the design varying across the life of the project. However, embedding community voice, experience and engagement is central across the life of the project. The project is 'Peer-led' – with identified community members ('Community Champions') leading all stages of the project. A Project Reference Group, comprising staff from project delivery organisations and community members with lived experience, provides advice and guidance at key points in the project.

Year 1 Program outcomes were supported by a framework of key approaches including-Community Engagement methodology (Bonding, Banding, Building and Bridging) with a Peer-Led Project, Trauma-Informed Practice and Community Organising methods. Project partners work together to ensure a collective understanding of best practices for working with cultural communities. The project has a significant co-design component staged to foreground lived experience of Community Champions across all project phases to ensure inclusive, accessible, and culturally competent design and implementation of outcomes.

Worker Rights Education and Support Services Program – Year 1

Impact and Vulnerability Study

Year 1 of the project commenced with an Impact and Vulnerability study, that aimed to deepen understanding of the needs and experiences of vulnerable migrant and refugee workers and to determine the reach of existing information and support channels (formal and informal) to inform better accessibility and effective methods of engagement.

Community listening exercises were led by Community Champions and informed by further desktop research and literature review and analysis. All community champions were identified based on their engagement with the Project and knowledge of their communities. Community interviews sought to identify the key risks and vulnerabilities and reasons for migrant workers being exposed to labour exploitation and how labour exploitation might manifest. As the aim was to explore the contemporaneous experiences of migrant workers, a strengths-based, trauma informed approach was used. A strengths-based approach focuses on the capacities, abilities and agency of individuals.

The Impact and vulnerability study identified that vulnerable culturally and linguistically diverse communities are:

- Exposed to wage issues (unfair rates/ underpayment/ scams/ contract type/ superannuation)
- Workplace discrimination (based on age/visa type/language skills)
- Workplace Health and Safety issues
- Barriers to access to information and supports; and
- Financial fear and instability.

Community listening exercises revealed that factors increasing vulnerability to work exploitation include age, gender, arrival time, visa type and language literacy. Low English language proficiency impacts worker awareness and comprehension of WHS regulations and rights. Many workers experience a devaluating effect of skill underutilization, which has a direct impact on mental and psychosocial health. Work precarity, exemplified in low or suppressed wages and financial uncertainty, is highly present in these cohorts. Concerningly, sexual assault and exploitation are reported.

Communities and individuals also reported:

- Limited knowledge of existing mainstream support services
- Struggle to engage with services, and
- Relevant support services are not culturally responsive.

Year 1 Capacity Building Program

In response to impact/vulnerability study findings, Year 1 progressed with a capacity-building program of three workshops delivered in collaboration with Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO), Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHRC) and United Workers Union.

The program was delivered to **28** Community Champions representing **12** cultural groups including Syrian, Afghan, Sri Lankan, Somali, Indian, Taiwanese, Iraqi, Congolese, Burundian, Chinese, Singaporean, and Colombian. Using the newly acquired knowledge, information, and skills, and with project team support, Community Champions developed **20** workshops reaching **395** members of their own communities. Feedback on capacity-building workshops showed overlaps in issues experienced across the cultural communities.

Community Champions reported they benefited most from training materials with a practical focus, obtaining new information, knowledge, and skills to raise awareness of work rights from credible trusted sources (e.g., FWO), sharing experiences of work rights issues and expanding their community networks. Awareness-raising and knowledge of work rights were identified as highest priority outcomes for Community Champions' respective communities.

Community Champions' response overall to the training delivered in Year 1 was positive:

- *(The Program) has opened up so many avenues for community to gel together, have sense of belonging, a united voice. (Community Champion 4).*
- *(Best aspects were) meeting people from other communities. Understanding work rights for international students and migrants. To know we are not alone, we are seen. That there are people who care. That Government is invested in this kind of project. (Community Champion 9).*

Champions identified a need for additional and extended training, indicating an eagerness to engage with significantly more educational resources on work rights such as handbooks, guides or similar; and made a range of recommendations on the format, delivery modalities, and outreach of next iteration of capacity-building. Through a rigorous application of co-design, Year 1 provided communities with a voice to shape future iteration of Program components to benefit incoming Community Champions in Year 2.

Worker Rights Education & Support Services Program – Year 2 and beyond

Year 2 of the project will build on Year 1 outcomes – with a focus on re-design of community-listening resources and support information and, in collaboration with key knowledge partners, production of new educational content and resources (i.e., training sessions, materials). This will include a stronger focus on collective action and tailored collaboration with supporting partners, prioritising regional agencies and communities. A new cohort of Community Champions will be engaged to undertake education and training, followed by evaluation and plans for Years 3 and 4.

To enable sustainability of outcomes, Year 2 focus will prioritise formation of Communities of Practice (CoP) that will engage in co-design of educational components for future cohorts and the broader community. The first CoP will engage Community Champions from Year 1 and

community members from other community engagement projects through Multicultural Australia¹.

Year 2 aims to produce a new work rights community-listening curriculum, a newly articulated framework for community engagement in work rights issues accompanied by a strategy to build capacity across cultural communities.

Further information

We thank the PJCHR for the opportunity to provide this information on the Workers rights education and support services program for migrant and refugee communities in Queensland. We would be happy to assist with any additional queries or information on this project, including regular updates through the life of the project.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Castley

CEO, Multicultural Australia

¹ For example, we work with cultural communities in education, capacity building project on domestic and family violence (DFV). In collaboration with cultural communities and service providers, we have developed the Family Peace Building model – an early intervention and DFV prevention model for diverse communities. Using a culturally informed approach, this model provides community leaders and representatives with tools and training to respond to DFV in their communities. Community members in the Family Peace Building Project are leading transformative work in their communities – and they will be invited to the Worker Rights education and support services program as well.