

## Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into migration settlement outcomes.

### **Author Declaration and Educational Background**

This submission document is solely prepared by the author based on my research in a settlement experience of South Sudanese community in Australia. I have also worked for many years as a social worker in settlement area of refugee and migrants before taking my research career. I hold a bachelor of social work, a master degree and just completing my Ph.D. research project at the Victoria University of Melbourne, Australia. I can be reached via email:

### **Introduction**

The settlement of refugees is the last solution for those who are forced to flee their homeland and move to another country with the possibility of remaining there permanently. They come with dreams and hopes of rebuilding their lives, making contributions to their new country as well as preparing the foundations for their next generation or grandchildren as we see in the history of Australia today. Australia has a long and successful record of settling migrants and humanitarian refugees since 1893. The first asylum seeker groups received between 1893 and 1947 were identified as Lutherans, a Christian group that escaped restrictions on their right to worship within the state of Prussia; they began settling in South Australia. Recent years, many refugees and migrants from African countries were settled in Australia. These migrants and refugees from African countries brought unique challenges to the settlement program in Australia because of their disadvantaged backgrounds in areas of English and other skills. However, they are hardworking individuals and families who have a desire to establish themselves better in Australia through engaging in employment and education.

‘Settlement’ is the process of adjustment as newly arrived refugees experience new challenges as they are establishing themselves and become independent in Australia. However, the (re)

settlement of people from refugee backgrounds in a new country is a complex and ongoing process that requires support from the host community, government and non-government agencies to address different settlement challenges. Among the bigger issues holding individuals and families back from enjoying the successful settlement program in Australia is a lack of support and connection with employment. Most refugees and migrants who have relevant skills to work are constantly denied a participation in employment by the people who work within organizations and have no interest in engaging support or employing refugees.

As a social worker and researcher who worked with refugees, migrants, I have seen a failure with settlement service providers due to insufficient provision of services and promotion of policy beyond the settlement organization. In order to coordinate better settlement services and policy, people with migrant and refugee backgrounds who sufficient experiences should be engaged in a delivering of the settlement service to the community. There are great skills and experienced people in the area of settlement, but they are not adequately engaged by the currently settlement service providers.

### **The Myths and Facts about what so called ‘Apex gang’ in Melbourne**

The African youth rioted in Melbourne is a result of lack of support services, youth young people and their families in Melbourne. Settlement agents only provide support services for a duration of five years. Youths are still struggling to find their way, even after five because of racism and other prejudices which faces them in the mainstream. What so called ‘Apex Gang’ by the mainstream media is merely the activities of disengaged youths who had nothing to tangible to engage. Some of encountering bullying, racism and discrimination in school, which made them drop from schools. Once they dropped, they have no connected with your families because their expected them to remain in schools. We have seen many youth riots in Australia, but of course, some of these riots had never been treated as gang issues. They are indeed treated as normal youth issues and not gang issues in the mainstream. This raised a question of how bad prejudices are in the mainstream media in demanding the image of minorities. There are issues that make these particular youths become disengaged starting from schools where some of them are diminished by either teachers or other students? It is also followed by lack of opportunities and discrimination

in the workplace, even they managed to get jobs, it is more difficult to hold a job in an environment you are put down all the time regardless of any effort of hard work and skills.

**Problems in School:** There are serious issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at school. Students from refugee backgrounds are used to provide funds to schools, and yet there is not enough service to assist students to engage in learning and settle better at school. They are constantly bullied due to backgrounds and racially abuse at the schools. This is one of the main issues which make young people drop out of schools, they come disengaged from school, their own families and communities because their families and communities expected them to be at school, but the school has a lot of problems for them. Many of these young people who have dropped out schools and are not in the workforce are not engaged in criminal activities as we have seen with the case of African young people in Victoria State. The education department from both the state level and the federal level must review the support for migrants and refugee young people at schools, private and government schools. I have included two examples of how the problem looks like in school. Parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds have no choice then to tell their young people to cope with the problems at schools.

**Case study 1: Ms. Vivian Maker**

My son goes to private school, I pay tuition fee and he gets special funding because of his refugee status. No enough provided to my son at all schools. People him modified work because he is struggling to work his work. Modified work is not going to help him in anything. It is an upset for the future failure for him.

**Case study 2: Mr. Joseph Lino**

My daughter being told students in her school that we black people are bad and that we don't like black people. One day, she entered into a fight with another student who told her black people are bad and dirty, my daughter was in trouble because she stands up for herself and other black people, including indigenous Australia. She suspended from school while there was nothing done to the student who bullied her.

**Racism and Discrimination in Employment:** The issue of racism and discrimination is affecting refugee from African backgrounds more than counterparts. There are more likely to be victim compared to the other migrants and refugees. They are more likely to be rejected when applying for jobs after attending interviews, not because they are not qualified enough, but because of any disclosed negative feeling about this particular group of people. There is no successful settlement outcome when any human being is subjected to racism and discrimination. It is caused frustration and a lot of mental health problems in both individual and family levels. Racism and discrimination have been holding people back from employment, particularly those who have completed their studies in Australia, who are still being discriminated against in the workforce for reasons relating to their skin colour. People who have encountered or experienced any form of discrimination develop low levels of wellbeing, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, or worse, actual anxiety or stress.

**Family and Youth Support:** migrant and refugee families required different levels of support services compared to their encounter part of the mainstream community. They are vulnerable to cultural shock and confusion during their settlement periods. As a result of cultural shock and confusion, many families of migrants and refugee backgrounds become dysfunctional and abandoned their caring roles for both dad and mum. A necessary conflict emerges from time to time in which separation or divorce become high. Young people from separating dysfunctional families are more likely to be disengaged and involved in negative activities such as drinking heavily or disobeying authority. Some get involved in criminal activities such shopping lifting, stealing a car and drive them without a license as we have seen these cases in with many young people from refugee backgrounds, particularly African community. Families and young people need to be supported while settling in Australia to understanding the challenges which come with acculturation as well as understanding the freedom and what come with freedom. Freedom is not about your own choice to disobey family values and cultural values.

### **Case study 3: Monica Riek**

<p>I'm very much stressed because of my son. He is not listening to me anymore, he refused to go to school and when I talk to him, he told me I have no way of controlling his life. He does what he wanted about his life and people should not bother him about school or doing anything. He</p>
--

like hanging out with friends and his are involved in negative activities. I wanted to take him back to Africa, but he will not accept to go. He has a court hearing coming up soon because of what he did with his friends. All his friends have a bad record with the police. Nobody is helping me with my son now and I have younger children to care for. She stopped and cried

**Designing Settlement Services:** there is a clear lack of participation of refugees and migrants when it comes to the designing and delivering of the settlement services. This lack of consultation and participation of refugees and migrants has been existing for many years. People from a refugee background had expressed their frustration and concerns during my research on settlement issues, claiming that settlement agents lack genuine engaging and consulting with communities from refugee backgrounds. There is a need to include experts and skilled people in designing and delivering of settlement services for refugees and migrants. This process needs to be embraced by agencies including government agencies as the best way of engaging experts and skilled people with refugee backgrounds.

**Mental Health:** there are serious mental health related issues which often left unnoticed and unaddressed within the refugee and migrant communities. Lack of mental health services to address trauma issues is one of the problems which make their settlement more difficult and also created lots of family breakdown. Many families and individuals had experienced traumatic events in their lives, but left unaddressed for a long time or noticed by the service providers. My research and observation tells me that mental health services needed to be introduced within refugee and migrant communities to assist them in addressing some of the social issues.

Trauma is caused by an overwhelmingly negative event that causes a lasting impact on the victim's mental and emotional stability. Trauma can manifest in different ways, through physically violent or emotional violence within the family.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, Refugee and migrant families do require support service to assist them during their settlement period in order to integrate and assimilate into mainstream community successfully. This can be done in a number of ways to facilitate this process. For example, establishing a connection between newly arrived groups and their neighbours is critical. This can make them feel

welcome in the community, as this can reduce feelings of alienation or rejection. The lack of interaction and contact with neighbours is quite common among families from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly with the African background because of their physical appearance and lack of confidence in the English language. It is common for such people to feel rejected and unwelcome in Australia, especially families with children.

Lack of employment and engagement in productive activities often causes destructive behaviour and conflict within families. Families who need support from service providers or close relatives sometimes cannot obtain that support in time to rescue the situation. Often support that families could receive from service providers does not meet their needs due to lack of understanding about cultural differences and expectations. Working with refugees and other migrants require understanding, listening, and empathy – adopting a contextualised approach which is holistic yet individualised and grounded in human rights. For instance, the connection among family members both within and beyond Australia is fundamentally important to the process of healing and rehabilitation. Connections with other family members can facilitate emotional and practical support as well as provide a sense of belonging and identity.

With youth, we have seen recent challenges with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds which the core centre of this inquiry. Specialised support services or programs can assist in providing connections with Australian groups and communities, and this can enhance their integration and present other opportunities to alleviate their settlement challenges and trauma.

My Ph.D. study has made a number of recommendations for the support programs, such as mentoring, to assist young people to move beyond their own community and link up with the wider Australian society. Reconnecting with those young people, who may have moved away from families, to their cultural heritage is a way of supporting them to understand the importance of their own culture. This can be one of the best approaches in providing intervention services and support to newly arrived young migrants and refugees before they face difficult settlement issues.

Some of my recommended reading in relation to settlement issues is provided below for the committee to read them.

Abur, W and Spaaij, R (2016) Settlement and employment experiences of South Sudanese people from refugee backgrounds in Melbourne, Australia [online]. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, <[http://afsaap.org.au/assets/vol37no2december2016\\_arbur\\_spaaij\\_107-128.pdf](http://afsaap.org.au/assets/vol37no2december2016_arbur_spaaij_107-128.pdf)>.

Abur, W. (2012). A study of the South Sudanese refugees' perspectives of settlement in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Unpublished Master's thesis. Melbourne: Victoria University. <<http://vuir.vu.edu.au/22013/1/abur.pdf>>.

Correa-Velez, I., Spaaij, R., & Upham, S. (2013). 'We are not here to claim better services than any other': Social exclusion among men from refugee backgrounds in urban and regional Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 26(2), 163-186. DOI: 10.1093/jrs/fes003.