



**MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL
OF NEW SOUTH WALES INCORPORATED**

(MCC NSW Inc. I4401100)

For a Multicultural New South Wales

All correspondence to Chair – PO Box 298 Kingsgrove NSW 2208 Australia

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee page:1

23 July 2020

Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Madam/Sir

FADT submission: Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

The Multicultural Communities Council NSW (MCC) is an organisation representing culturally and linguistically diverse community groups in NSW. MCC is committed to building and maintaining a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society in Australia. With respect to the terms of reference of the Inquiry, MCC is pleased to present the following submissions:

Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia, with particular reference to:

- a. support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations, including government grants and other funding;***

Community based funding

Current funding models are not focused on priority issues and vulnerable communities, are too **bureaucratic**, not sufficiently open and transparent, piecemeal, and wasteful. At present funding occurs without coordination and independently at national, state and local community levels and for single issues such as sport, health, legal, environmental – all very disjointed.

Funding should be based on the community model, this is, direct to vulnerable communities, not directed through commercial service providers or restricted to older established community organisations. Funding is very competitive and such organisations engage specialists to lodge applications but lack adequate cultural awareness and empathy (commercial) or outdated experiences (older established community organisations).

Truly vulnerable diaspora communities hardly get to experience the benefits of funding, especially as size, volunteer basis and lack of broader community support limits their opportunities. Government should designate priority communities and the priority issues for funding, particularly Hazara, Rohingya, North Korean, Tamil, Bhutanese, Uyghurs, Mongolian, Sub-Saharan African. Such a focus would be more productive and see real change.

An independent investigative inquiry into current migrant and diaspora community funding is recommended.



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Equity in Access and Information

Provide equity in access and information by ensuring:

- (a) that fee-free interpreters are provided to improve access to health, environmental, community and legal services for people from multicultural communities.
- (b) all government agencies make basic information about the agency available in a range of community languages (role of the agency, contact details, interpreters) across the established and newly arrived communities.
- (c) that information provided in country of origin is consistent with information provided on arrival. Recent migrants indicate that information provided before and after arrival is very different.

b. safety concerns among diaspora communities, and means for strengthening the protection and resilience of vulnerable groups;

Key initiatives

1. Address racism experienced by the diaspora communities in Australia, particularly people of faith and colour. Racism often goes unreported as victims are fearful of complaining so that it does not jeopardise their visa situation and gaining permanent residency. Government agencies must be more proactive in speaking out against racism/discrimination of diaspora communities.
2. Develop systemic approach to collect data on diaspora communities to inform evidence-based policy and service planning and implementation
3. Equitable and compassionate treatment and support to vulnerable diaspora communities such as refugees and asylum seekers and recognising the intersectionality of disadvantages within the communities.
4. Complicated legal systems, that take years to have matters heard, disempowers diaspora community members.

National Recognition of Diaspora Communities' Contribution

Programs that support diaspora communities should be complimented by awareness throughout the broader Australian society of the benefits of multiculturalism to the nation. Creating a greater and wide-spread awareness of these positive benefits for both the nation and for the quality of life of individuals throughout the broader Australian society, the positive engagement of the nation with multiculturalism, is essential in order to make Australia both a harmonious and highly productive nation.

It is important to ensure there is not a disengagement between diaspora communities themselves and with main stream society. Empower people, not separate or divide.

This approach can be enhanced by:

- programs encouraging the mainstream to learn and practise using a second language



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- cultural activities focused on the mainstream to lessen misunderstanding and encourage cohesion.

Heritage projects that recognise national or international links of diaspora communities with Australia need support and funding. This should be proactively pursued by the Government, not a reaction to the strongest lobbying. The Sikh community have found it incredibly difficult to get the Australian War Memorial to host Sikh heritage (relating to Sikh soldiers who fought with ANZACS as well as in broader battles across the world and in history).

Mentoring and Volunteering

- (a) Develop mentoring and volunteering programs through settlement programs to connect people across cultures (long term residents with recent arrivals) in local geographic areas to support involvement in a range of community programs and local activities (i.e. local orientation, council and community education programs).
- (b) Develop and implement buddy systems between new migrants from existing cultural backgrounds to nurture mutual support amongst new arrivals.
- (c) Implement mentoring/buddy systems within education curriculums at all levels to support migrants to integrate and promote tolerance, understanding and cultural knowledge within the broader Australian community.

The Catholic school education system in the ACT has developed highly successful programs where parents and students with English as their first language provide after school homework assistance to Sudanese students whose parents have no or poor English. Success is not just with student educational results but also in Sudanese families being warmly welcomed into mainstream sporting and cultural Canberra life.

Specialised culturally responsive information

Make adjustments of the publications for new arrivals in accordance to country of origin considering the needs and preferences instead of pure translation.

Traditions and identity

Develop creative programs to prevent loss of traditions, to help young people with identity and languages and to increase their cultural awareness and cultural competency through organisations such as youth centres, community centres, neighbourhood centres and multicultural community councils.

Debt and efficient use of utilities

Education about the management of waste and efficient use of utilities, such as energy and water, will ensure that diaspora communities introduction to life in Australia is not started with debt to utility providers or local government and community reprimands. An understanding of the effects of climate change unique to Australia will assist them to understand the broader concerns of the Australian community.



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Domestic violence and government institutions

It is well recognised, even within our legal systems, that many diaspora communities, based on overseas and local experiences, do not trust the police. They are very fearful of authority and don't know who they can trust and seek support from. At best they turn to friends or local community services. Yet often they have no alternatives but dealing with the police. Police need greater cultural awareness and options for understanding and dealing with the differences between diaspora communities.

For example, an Indian student couple may well be individuals with separate visas but in effect are not independent identities, they are governed by their families. Serious violence often goes unreported. Alternatively, intervention by police may leave the victim isolated and without financial support from either their partner or their own family – the victim is then even more vulnerable.

A further example is women arriving on a spouse visas are not eligible for support like other visa categories, and particularly if they leave their partners. They tend to keep the abuse hidden and suffer in silence. This places enormous strain on their physical and mental health. Local agencies including police have limited success in being able to support these women as they are fearful of authority and they have nowhere to go. Service agencies lack of capacity in their organisations to support these women due to funding, lack of ability to access free interpreters and clients not meeting the residency criteria.

c. barriers to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australia's democratic and social institutions, and mechanisms for addressing these barriers;

Governance of Diaspora Community Organisations

Branch stacking within political parties has had close media attention in 2020 including the resignation of some officials from their party positions and the launching of internal party enquiries. Yet its equivalent within diaspora community and multicultural organisations (to the extent that organisations become dominated and controlled by one community or even on extended family) has seen an absence of State government intervention. This leads to the exploitation of vulnerable groups, misuse of government funds, the failure of organisations to fulfil their constitutional mission, and a lack of confidence and respect for Australia's democratic and social institutions.

Government intervention either through a new body or the empowerment of existing bodies such as the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission would ensure proper conduct within community organisations. This should include the appointment of representatives from diaspora communities to such government bodies. At present such representation is usually only made to so-called government multicultural bodies.



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Large organisations (e.g. budgets over \$200,000) should be required to have minimum governance stands set by the government to avoid internal manipulation, such as no more than one family member to sit on the governing board/committee, limited terms of office, codes of conduct. Professional associations/institutes have such models but they are distinctly lacking within the diaspora community sector.

Diaspora communities are diverse - some have strong links back with home countries - others detest the home country (due to politics and fear of persecution). The home country is also not the same, while this may be true from religious or ethnic originality, but may not be true from place of birth. Recent arrivals often find they are culturally distant from others who they think are from the same diaspora (perhaps migrated to Australia 30yrs ago). This requires a better understanding between government and the community, and places onus on the community to educate government and the broader community.

However people are caught up in earning a living and studies, they become socially isolated from their communities due to lack of time, so there is little time to volunteer except sporadically. So resources are required to engage, research, write articles/books and develop financially productive relationships with 'home' countries.

Formal Multicultural Education

Specific multicultural education programs and specialist staff roles have been significantly decreased, marginalised or rationalised within government departments and agencies, such as TAFE, over the past decade.

Required:

- (a) Strong and consistent Commonwealth leadership and commitment to education that recognises the need for specific and customised programs to meet the needs of diaspora communities. Appropriate, specific and customised Education and Training pathways and programs are the best strategies for positive outcomes for diaspora communities including Department of Home Affairs Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and DESE's Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program.
- (b) The SEE type programs are vital in order to assist diaspora communities better meet their diverse employment skill needs (orientation to Australian workplaces and standards, professional communication skills) in order to fast track employment in skill shortages areas and successful engagement in the Australian workforce. Advanced vocational training is a pathway to employment and leads to enhancement of professional and communication skills.
- (c) Both government (TAFE) and private training institutions must have Multicultural Education Programs. These programs founded in 1988 following active representation of diaspora communities have been gradually eliminated due to budget cuts and privatisation of the technical education sector. Yet with over 40% of students from a non-English speaking background, they are more essential



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than ever. Greater emphasis here would see many thousands of people from diaspora communities benefit here from customised multicultural education courses in vocational, orientation, special purpose English, cross cultural and employability skills. Without this the full potential of our workforce and the utilisation of all of the skills and experiences available within Australia is not achieved and cause diaspora communities to be an ongoing strain on the welfare sector. This is a direct and specific Commonwealth responsibility.

Cultural Awareness and Cultural Competency

The capacity of Australia's skilled migrant intake is seriously undermined by the lack of cultural awareness and cultural competency within employers and the community. Too many highly skilled members of diaspora communities withdraw from their skilled career employment area and work for themselves in unskilled roles. While there are cases of blatant vilification within the workforce, far more extensive is the lack of welcome, inclusivity and comfort due to poor cultural awareness and cultural competency.

Mechanisms need to be established that ensure:

- (a) the teaching of cultural awareness is compulsory throughout all years of Primary School, including exposure to cultural diversity; and
- (b) the implementation accredited cultural competence training within the workforce, to the extent that cultural competency is given similar employer status to that now granted to Occupational Health and Safety.

Ability to access Government services

Diaspora communities often need orientation to Australian culture and workplace orientation and the high fees required by Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutes prohibit people from participating in professional development and skill enhancement.

Migrants under the 2 years waiting period should be allowed to access

- (a) all government services especially unrestricted access to the Jobactive program;
- (b) VET programs and be exempt from fees as other migrants are under Centerlink.

Overseas qualifications

Reassess overseas qualification and recognition systems and implement local 'on the job' accreditation programs that allow migrants to utilise and demonstrate their skills within the Australian workplace.

d. opportunities to strengthen communication and partnerships between government and diaspora communities in Australia;

Engagement needed, not just one-way communication

Merely just providing one-way communication via interpreted material on websites, in brochures or media releases to ethnic media is not an effective means of achieving participation and integration. Bilingual educators provide for full two-way engagement



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with individual members of diaspora communities directly through forums and simians, through local government, utility providers, diaspora community organisations and the ethnic media. This model includes a range of intervention such as events, festivals, workshops, field trips, print materials, media and social marketing.

This Bilingual educator model should be expanded across range of languages to achieve awareness and responsiveness on:

- accommodation,
- health and medical system especially major preventable diseases,
- education,
- employment,
- Centrelink,
- environmental sustainability
- multiculturalism and cross-cultural awareness,
- the political system, including the adversarial nature of politics in Australia and support for women going into politics,
- all priority areas for full participation and integration.

It is also extremely important to recognise the impact on families back in certain home countries if their family member here participates in politics in Australia, e.g. Uyghur community.

Multicultural Directory

Establish an online multicultural business directory to support and promote the wide range of culturally diverse experiences, services, entertainment and products available from business, government and community sectors. This has three key practical benefits:

- (a) Support and safety. There would be a real practical element to the service, with increased access to information for diaspora communities as well as potential migrants to government and community-based services such as interpreters, translators, bilingual/bicultural educators, disability, aged, family and children's services that meet diverse cultural and linguistic needs.
- (b) Acceptance. This would establish wide spread community acceptance of cultural diversity as a characteristic of the Australian way of living, exposing the wider community to the rich vitality of cultural experiences available in Australia.
- (c) Economic. Businesses will benefit substantially through new and additional customers and turnover. The national economy will benefit with increased local and international tourism particularly from Asia and the Pacific Rim. This will also add a selling tool to Australia's bids to host major international events, demonstrating our cultural diversity and multicultural assets, enhancing visitors' experiences.

Marketing of functioning diaspora community hubs

Promoting the rich culture and colour of local communities not only enhances the confidence of and respect for diaspora communities, it also feeds into tourism, stimulates



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local business, provides employment and encourages the wider community support for multiculturalism. Diaspora communities can then be regarded as an asset, making Australia more culturally rich and vibrant, more entertaining, and more economically successful. National and State governments should respond to the interest shown by local government, tourism councils and chambers of commerce.

e. any related matters.

Teaching of Languages and Culture in Schools

In 2008 the Commonwealth Government commendably allocated \$62.4M over four years to help school students to become familiar with the languages and culture of China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. In 2010 the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations produced a Report on the state of these four languages in schools. However the policies of State Governments have often circumvented these commitments. For example the NSW Department of Education specifically discriminates against the four languages at the Higher School Certificate level.

In essence, these 4 languages have eligibility restrictions on students that are not required of any European language students. If a student is or has parents from one of those four countries, they are forced to do the highest level of the language (Extension level) or not do it at all. This is regardless of the level or lack of knowledge of the language. Other languages students can do the lower level regardless of prior efficiency or family origin. This discrimination causes many students not to study the language of their ethnic background at all – something that is bad for retaining their culture but also bad for our nation's economic and cultural development.

In addition the MCC is aware (particularly from interactions during the last National Census) that many young people avoid studying their families first language as doing so is perceived as diminishing their attempts at achieving an 'Australian identity'.

A broad and proactive national implementation program is needed with a great range of languages to strengthen the protection and resilience of vulnerable diaspora communities and to also enhance all diaspora communities' contribution to our international trade and tourism.

Fostering a belonging to Australian environment

Develop and implement a "fostering Australian environmental citizenship" program for all diaspora communities that enhances belonging, and encourages participation in, and contributes to a healthy Australian society by:

- a) familiarising diaspora communities with the natural environment and its benefits
- b) introduction to Australian indigenous culture and 'caring for country'



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- c) strengthen education on history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Communities . Foster Aboriginal reconciliation within the diaspora communities.
- d) understanding of basic environmental practice in an Australian context - i.e. recycling and waste systems, sustainable water and energy use, environmental regulation
- e) connection to community gardens/local bush care programs
- f) teaching about the diversity of the marine environment and its protection including the dangers of the surf and some waterways particularly eating seafood from these areas.
- g) knowledge on the rights and the support migrants can receive to deal with the rising energy and water costs, a concept they may not experienced in their country of origin, and ways to reduce these costs by embracing energy and water efficiency technologies and behaviour.

Have innovative projects to introduce and familiarise diaspora communities to the Australian bushland and Australian indigenous culture through workshops and field trips into the local natural environment. A greater understanding of Australia's environment and indigenous culture diaspora communities provides an enhanced sense of belonging, reduced their alienation from their environment and increases their ability to participate in the wider Australia context.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to address the issues above and making time to read them.

Kind Regards,
Yours sincerely,

Dr Anthony Pun, OAM
Chair, MCC NSW

Mr Mark Franklin
Director, MCC NSW

On behalf of
The Multicultural Communities Council of NSW Inc.