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Australian Parliament
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Submission no. 409

25 April 2011

Ms Jane Hearn
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Dear Ms Hearn

Please find attached a submission from the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.

We appreciate the grant of an extension to prepare the document.

Yours sincerely

Josef Szwarc
Manager
Policy and Research

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

April 2011

Introduction

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into multiculturalism.

The submission focuses on two themes of the inquiry's terms of reference:

- The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda; and
- Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.

With respect to the theme of *multiculturalism and social inclusion*, we welcome explicit acknowledgement within both policy frameworks that they are integrally related. The initiation of the multiculturalism policy framework with a specific aim to promote social inclusion will contribute expertise and resources so that due attention is paid to the significance of 'diversity' in determining the causes of exclusion and developing effective and appropriate responses.

We believe the present inquiry can promote achievement of the complementary aims of social inclusion and multiculturalism by considering and making recommendations with respect to two related subjects:

- The collection and analysis of evidence and data to inform policy and service provision; and

- Strengthening the government's access and equity framework.

In particular, we propose that the inquiry adopt the following recommendations:

1. The planned work to ensure data collected by government agencies on client services can be disaggregated by so-called 'markers of cultural diversity' should also consider related indicators of disadvantage;
2. The Joint Standing Committee should examine the imminent national budget and comment on the adequacy of funding for the new Australian Multicultural Council to undertake its responsibilities;
3. The Australian Government should designate the Australian Multicultural Council to conduct the proposed inquiry into the responsiveness of Australian Government services to clients disadvantaged by cultural or linguistic barriers and provide the Council with adequate resources to do so properly.

With respect to the theme of *settlement and participation*, we commend for the inquiry's attention 'Ucan2', an innovative program for young people of refugee backgrounds that promotes their educational, economic and social participation and integration into Australian society.

Our submission complements and supports the contributions of other bodies with whom we are associated and in particular the Refugee Council of Australia and Multicultural Mental Health Australia.

Before turning to the substance of the submission, we describe Foundation House and its interest in contributing to this important inquiry.

About Foundation House and its interest in this inquiry

Foundation House was established in 1987 to assist survivors of torture and trauma, of refugee backgrounds, who had settled in Victoria. Today, we provide services to more than 3000 survivors each year, in the form of counselling, advocacy, family support, group work, psycho-education and complementary therapies. As well as direct services to clients, Foundation House provides training, consultancy and support for service providers in the health, education and welfare sectors. It also conducts and commissions research to improve policies, programs and services that affect the health and well-being of people of refugee backgrounds.

Foundation House is a not-for-profit organisation that receives funding from the Australian and Victorian governments, philanthropic trusts and private donations. We are contracted by the Department of Health and Ageing to provide services under the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma.

Foundation House is a member of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), a national network of agencies that provide specialist torture and trauma rehabilitation services to people from refugee or refugee-like backgrounds. There is a FASSTT agency in each state and territory. FASSTT agencies collectively work with approximately 13,000 clients each year.

Our interest in this inquiry is that the recovery of people from the impacts of torture and trauma depend not only the availability of specialised clinical services from Foundation House and other FASSTT agencies. The health and well-being of survivors and of people of refugee backgrounds at large is profoundly affected by their capacity and opportunity to participate in Australian society, by the accessibility and responsiveness of government and non-governmental services to people of diverse needs and backgrounds, by their experience of acceptance or of hostility by the mainstream institutions and members of society.

The links between social inclusion, multiculturalism and the settlement of refugees are well captured in the concept of 'integration' which has been adopted internationally as a key concept for refugee resettlement. This is defined as follows in the principles for resettlement adopted by the UNHCR International Conference on the Reception and Integration of Refugees in 2001¹:

Integration is a mutual, dynamic, multi-faceted and on-going process. "From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population." (Adapted from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, "Policy on Integration," 1999)

Integration is "multi-dimensional in that it relates both to the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of resettlement as well as to refugees' own perceptions of, acceptance by and membership in the host society." (*ibid*)

The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda

Since the inception of multiculturalism as a national public policy framework, one of its key elements has been to promote 'equality of opportunity', a precursor of the current notion of social inclusion. For example, according to Labor Government Minister for Immigration Al Grassby in 1973, "(m)y concept of a society able to sustain growth and change without disintegration is a society based on equal opportunity for all...This means full scope for all to develop their personal potential, no matter how diverse their origins, beliefs, wealth or ability."ⁱⁱ Eight years later Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser stated:

Not least, multiculturalism is about equality of opportunity for the members of all groups to participate in and benefit from Australia's social, economic and political life. This concern with equality of opportunity is dictated by both morality and hard-nosed realism. I am talking here about basic human rights, not benevolence which the giver bestows or withdraws at will.ⁱⁱⁱ

We are pleased to note the clear acknowledgement in contemporary statements that social inclusion and multiculturalism are complementary and integrally connected. For example:

- the Social Inclusion Principles for Australia provide that "funding and service delivery should promote equitable access to universal benefits and services for Australians *in all their diversity*" (Aspirational Principle 1) (emphasis added); discrimination on grounds including national and ethnic background is recognized as a cause of social exclusion manifest in – among other things - ill health and employment discrimination;^{iv}
- The Australian Government's Multicultural Policy Principles state that the Government is "committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers" and that the multicultural policy "aligns with the Government's Social Inclusion Agenda where Australians of all backgrounds feel valued and can participate in our society."^v

It is critical that – as noted - the Social Inclusion Agenda explicitly acknowledges that policy makers and service providers must have regard to salient dimensions of 'diversity' in determining the causes of exclusion and developing effective and appropriate responses. Translating this conceptual recognition into detailed, concrete forms will be challenging given the breadth of the agenda and the magnitude of the challenges to its realisation. The initiation of the Multiculturalism policy framework with a specific aim to promote social inclusion will contribute expertise and resources so that due attention is paid to the significance of the diversity of the Australian population.

A key challenge for the social inclusion agenda in general and for the social inclusion dimension of multiculturalism is to ensure that policies and programs reach vulnerable groups and are effective in achieving their aims.

We believe the present inquiry can promote these aims by considering and making recommendations with respect to two related subjects:

- The collection and analysis of evidence and data to inform policy and service provision; and
- Strengthening the Government's access and equity framework.

Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy

Policy makers and service providers need robust information to do their job well and this has been recognised in the work undertaken to develop both the social inclusion agenda and multiculturalism.

One of the Principles of Approach of the Social Inclusion Agenda is "Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy" which states:

Progress towards social inclusion must be accompanied by better information, faster learning and better use of knowledge to improve outcomes. As far as possible, interventions should draw on:

- practical experience of community and other delivery organisations;
- existing research and the evidence base on what works; and
- monitoring and evaluating strategies as they develop, focusing on outcomes as well as processes.

.....

It will also be important for government to report regularly on progress in social inclusion, using clear indicators and reporting from the perspective of the individual, the family, the neighbourhood or the community affected. Indicators should be responsive to effective policy interventions and identify the essence of the problem and have a clear and accepted interpretation.^{vi}

The Social Inclusion Board has properly acknowledged that for certain population groups such as recent migrants and humanitarian/refugee entrants, "issues will only be revealed once the indicators have been disaggregated and examined by social and demographic characteristics."^{vii}

The collection and analysis of evidence about key indicators from groups such as people of refugee backgrounds has been seriously inadequate, as has been noted by various commentators for a considerable period of time. Periodic remedial initiatives have yielded only ad hoc results. For example, the *Access and Equity Report 2006-2008* advised that “In collaboration with DIAC, the ABS is developing a set of well-being indicators for Australia’s culturally diverse population, using ABS data and data obtained by other agencies.”^{viii} This project has apparently not been completed.

We welcome that the Australian Government has announced that it will “work with state and territory governments...to ensure that data collected by government agencies on client services can be disaggregated by markers of cultural diversity, such as country-of- birth, ancestry, languages spoken at home and level of English proficiency.”^{ix}

Engaging the states and territories is vital because they have lead or shared responsibilities in key policy and service areas such as health and education. There is a dearth of essential disaggregated data at these levels of government as there is at national level.

In order to most effectively promote social inclusion, the data that is collected should allow not only the disaggregation of what are described as “markers of *cultural* diversity” but also of other characteristics that may be indicators of vulnerability to exclusion, such as refugee background, associated with the settlement in Australia of people from other countries. It is likely that that was intended and it would be good to ensure that the focus of attention is clearly broader than might be indicated by simply referring to “cultural” diversity.

Recommendation

The Joint Standing Committee should recommend to the Australian Government that the planned work to ensure data collected by government agencies on client services can be disaggregated by so-called markers of ‘cultural’ diversity also considers related indicators of disadvantage.

Strengthening access and equity

(i) Access and equity reporting

Requiring government agencies to provide regular access and equity reports is a good idea in principle but in practice has been a less effective tool than government and stakeholders probably desired when reporting was introduced in 1993.

Access and equity reports were supposed to be annual but the last report covered two years to mid 2008 and was tabled in 2009.

Reports are replete with descriptive accounts of actions with relatively little if any evidence or analysis of their impacts so it is not possible to assess what is working well and what is not and what gaps there may be.

The weaknesses in the current framework may be attributed a number of factors. One is that inadequate resources have been allocated to the task - there are no identifiable allocations in agency budgets but it is starkly apparent that very little is spent on the compilation of information in the reports. Another is that agencies report on themselves without external scrutiny. Thirdly, there is not a distinct expert agency (whether statutorily or administratively independent of government) that coordinates, commissions and undertakes research on pertinent subjects.

We welcome that Government will address the issue of external scrutiny of access and equity reporting by designating the new Australian Multicultural Council to manage the access and equity strategy from 2012 “to help strengthen the independence of access and equity reporting from government and provide for a more robust reporting framework.”^x The Council will not be able to do so unless it has reasonable resources at its disposal. At the time of writing, Government has yet to indicate the funds that the Council will have. The Joint Standing Committee will be in a position to assess the funding when the Australian Government budget is announced in May. If few or no funds are specifically allocated, there should be grounds for concern about the Council’s capacity to discharge its responsibilities effectively.

Recommendation

The Joint Standing Committee should examine the budget and comment on the adequacy of funding for the new Australian Multicultural Council to undertake its responsibilities.

(ii) Inquiry into access and equity

We welcome the Government’s announcement of “an inquiry into the responsiveness of Australian Government services to clients disadvantaged by cultural or linguistic barriers. The outcome of this inquiry would provide the Government with a comprehensive view on how existing services are performing and how they could be improved.”^{xi}

The announcement does not indicate who will conduct the inquiry. It is important that the inquiry is an independent exercise in order that it be and be seen to be objective. It would be sensible for the Australian Multicultural Council to have carriage of the inquiry given that it will be

responsible for managing the access and equity strategy from 2012. The Council will require adequate resources to undertake the inquiry

Recommendation

The Joint Standing Committee should recommend to the Government that the Australian Multicultural Council conduct the proposed inquiry into the responsiveness of Australian Government services to clients disadvantaged by cultural or linguistic barriers and provide the Council with adequate resources to do so properly.

Innovative ideas for settlement programs

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration has invited accounts of innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.

A specific example we commend to the attention of the Committee is Ucan2, a project designed to enhance the process of transition from 'on arrival' education to mainstream education and training programs for young men and women aged 16 to 24 of refugee backgrounds.

Over the past 5 years, more than 20 percent of those settling under the Humanitarian Program have been 16-24 years of age. The majority of their Australian counterparts are entering their post-compulsory school years or making the transition to further education, training or employment. While eager to take advantage of these opportunities, young people of refugee backgrounds face formidable barriers.

The implicit assumptions behind mainstream education and training provision are that entrants have acquired the skills, social knowledge and support systems to access and cope with the requirements of post-secondary education and the workplace. Such assumptions are misplaced when considering the experiences of recently-arrived young people of refugee backgrounds. Many have had little formal schooling. They are not proficient in English. They have commonly been through profoundly stressful and traumatic events in countries of origin and transit. They may have lost or be separated from close family members. They may encounter discrimination and hostility in Australia.

Research into effective strategies to improve overall school completion commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education noted that specific interventions were required for those from a refugee background, including case management; smaller class sizes; intensive coordinated welfare support; supplementary or out-of-school-hours programs; and targeted assistance for skill development.^{xii} Similarly, research into educational provision for refugee youth with minimal or no schooling

commissioned by DIAC concluded that “Delivering effective programs for refugee youth entails additional pastoral work, linking in to youth-related networks, responding to complex issues, finding and devising appropriate content, and arranging adjunct activities”.^{xiii}

Ucan2

In response to these issues, Foundation House, the Centre for Multicultural Youth and Adult Multicultural Education Services developed the Ucan2 program in order to increase education, training and employment opportunities for young people of refugee backgrounds in the first 15 months of the resettlement, recovery and integration process.

Under the program, in partnership with their English language provider, young people are provided with education case management; an experiential curriculum which develops work and life skills and prepares the young people for part time work experience; a social support program and connections to mainstream society through developing relationships with volunteers; and psycho-social support.

Ucan2 has been successfully integrated into several Victorian education programs – the Adult Multicultural Education Programs, the English Language School Curriculum and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. It will be piloted in Queensland beginning in 2011. Approximately 280-300 young people aged 16 to 24 will participate in Ucan2 in 2011.

Independent evaluation by the McCaughey Centre of the University of Melbourne has found participants benefitting in language, confidence, psychosocial support and work experience. There were also significant positive changes in social connections such as increased numbers of Australian friends, born both locally and overseas. The provision of psychosocial support to students was recognised as extremely valuable as well as the crucial role of social connections in promoting integration and inclusion. The evaluation found that relationships formed within the program may also provide an important source of linking social capital consisting of valued connections to other services and agencies for participants.

Some students gained part-time work following their work experience and others reported that the skills, knowledge, experience and contacts they had acquired would hold them in good stead for future job seeking.

Ucan2 has been funded through a philanthropic trust for the past 3 years and the donor has agreed to continue funding it until June 2012. The longer term future of this important initiative depends upon mainstream governmental and non-governmental education providers recognising its value and committing themselves to adapting the framework of their services to respond effectively to the particular needs of these new members of our society.

We commend Ucan2 for the consideration of the inquiry and would be pleased to provide additional information if requested.

ⁱ <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opensslPDFViewer.html?docid=3b1797164&query=integration%20principles> , retrieved 21 April 2011.

ⁱⁱ Grassby, A. J. "A Multi-cultural Society for the Future" Canberra, Australian Government, Publishing Service, 1973. Paper by the Minister for Immigration, the Hon. A. J. Grassby Prepared for a symposium in Melbourne 11 August 1973.

ⁱⁱⁱ Inaugural Address on Multiculturalism to the Institute of Multicultural Affairs, 30 November 1981.

^{iv} Social Inclusion Board, *A stronger, Fairer Australia – Reducing Social Disadvantage and Increasing National Prosperity*, 9.

^v Australian Government, *The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy*, 5.

^{vi} 'Social Inclusion Principles for Australia'. Retrieved March 23 2011 from <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SI/Agenda/Principles/Documents/SIPrinciples.pdf>, p4.

^{vii} Australian Social Inclusion Board, 'Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is Faring' 2010. Retrieved March 23 2011 from http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Documents/SI_HowAusIsFaring.pdf, p17.

^{viii} Page 49.

^{ix} 'People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy'. Retrieved March 23 2011 from http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf. p 8.

^x Ibid, p8.

^{xi} Ibid, p8.

^{xii} Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2008, unpublished – available on request.

^{xiii} "Opening the Door" AMEP Research Centre 2008, p.70.