

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION ON THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS OF MIGRATION ON AUSTRALIA

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

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

There is no denying Australia's multicultural make up. At the time of the 2006 Census, 23.9 per cent of Australia's population was born overseas and 45.0 per cent were either born overseas or had at least one overseas-born parent. Multiculturalism has been a hugely successful social policy in Australia and multicultural policy's bipartisan support in the 80's and early 90's was instrumental in creating social cohesion and a real sense of acceptance and belonging among newly arrived Australians from diverse backgrounds.

Current multicultural policy

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre welcomes the recent adoption of *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy*, and endorses the multicultural principles that it promotes. The Australian Government's professed unwavering commitment to a multicultural Australia is laudable. The appointment of a new, more independent Australian Multicultural Council is welcome and Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre is looking forward to being consulted about the development of a national anti-racism policy.

The initiatives outlined in the new policy in respect of access and equity appear promising, but Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends expanding the Australian Multicultural Council's mandate to include an examination of the effectiveness of access and equity measures in place in Australia's States and Territories to benchmark best practice and determine whether a federal Multiculturalism Act would provide more impetus for improvements in public sector performance in respect of the implementation of access and equity measures.

Public education

The Australian Government needs to build on and promote the benefits of migration to the Australian public in order to foster a real understanding of multiculturalism and prevent racism and social exclusion. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends a public education campaign clearly articulating that multiculturalism is about inclusiveness and is a policy that embraces all the cultures present in Australia, from Anglo-Celtic Australians, migrants and refugees to Australia's diverse Indigenous cultures and emphasising that civics education is a focus of the Citizenship test.

Cultural maintenance

Cultural expression by Australia's diverse ethnic communities contributes to the strengthening of identity and social cohesion within those groups. Ethno-specific organisations and clubs, sports teams, schools, places of worship and ethnic newspapers media contribute to social and cultural fulfilment and individual and collective well-being. The maintenance of creativity and the vitality of cultures and institutions benefits present and future generations of migrants and gives them the

confidence and security to reach out to broader sections of the community both individually and collectively, through the arts, small business, festivals and cultural performances.

Potential Role of the Social Inclusion Agenda

A better question to ask is what should be the role of the Social Inclusion Agenda in promoting the benefits of multiculturalism so that Australians of all ethnicities are socially included. Australia accepts migrants with lesser or no fluency in English under the family and humanitarian streams. Recent arrival in a new country whose government, social and legal systems are all new and where the new migrant usually has no social networks, needs to be recognised as a difficult transition period for all migrants, even those fluent in English.

The Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda particularly needs to acknowledge the multiple social disadvantages suffered by refugees and humanitarian entrants who often have little or no English when they arrive, are traumatised by memories of persecution (such as torture, rape and imprisonment) and war, who have often been 'warehoused', sometimes for decades in refugee camps with inadequate nutrition, poor health and little or no education and are often long term unemployed. Many have witnessed horrific events and have had immediate family members killed. Some have family missing. The effect on their lives can be debilitating: flashbacks, nightmares, poor concentration and consequent learning difficulties to name a few. Some of these refugees have been boat people. Although they are amongst the most vulnerable people in Australia, they are stigmatised by the media and politicians and would have to be the most socially excluded people in Australia. As the most multiply disadvantaged (usually with poor English, poor education, traumatised and malnourished with poor mental and physical health, unemployed, poverty stricken, often with large families, newly arrived with no social networks and little understanding of Australia's social, financial and legal systems, and on occasion subjected to racism), and, in the case of former boat people, the most maligned and excluded, refugees and humanitarian entrants deserve to be a top priority in any Social Inclusion Agenda.

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre concurs with views expressed by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD) in its response to Australia's fifteenth to seventeenth periodic reports to the Committee that 'multiple forms of discrimination are experienced by some Indigenous Australians, African Australians, Muslim Australians, international students and asylum seekers'¹ and its recommendation that Australia 'strengthen the race and cultural dimensions of its Social Inclusion Agenda.'² We note the recent recommendation of the Australian Human Rights Commission 'that the Australian Government Social Inclusion Board include in its list of priority areas (I) newly arrived migrants, (II) disadvantaged migrants and (III) people from refugee backgrounds'³ and recommend, in particular, the specific prioritisation of people from refugee backgrounds and disadvantaged or vulnerable migrants.

¹ Australian Human Rights Commission, *UN Committee urges more progress on race discrimination*, media release, 27 August 2010

² United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), *Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 9 of the convention: concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, CERD, Seventy-seventh session, CERD/C/AUS/CO/15-17, 27 August 2010

³ Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Information concerning Australia and the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*', 8 July 2010, Recommendation 1, p.5

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre endorses Recommendation 8 of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council in its statement on cultural diversity and recommendations to government, *The People of Australia*:

That the government's Social Inclusion Agenda develop strategies that will address the particular needs of vulnerable migrants and refugees, ensuring that location-based approaches reach these groups and that there is consultation with appropriate clients, experts and advisory bodies⁴.

Fostering links between communities

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends the Social Inclusion Agenda prioritise providing further opportunities for the broader community to meet and mingle with migrant communities and become better educated about other cultures. Participation in cultural activities builds inclusive societies that uphold the equal dignity of and respect for all cultures and is advocated in the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* to which Australia is a State Party.

The Multicultural Youth Sports Partnership Program outlined in *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy* that aims connecting youth from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds into neighbourhood sports and community organisations is an example of a multicultural social inclusion initiative.

Public education

The benefits that ethnic diversity has brought to Australia in terms of the creation of a modern cosmopolitan nation interested in, and educated about other cultures and traditions should not be underestimated, particularly in an increasingly globalised world. The Australian education system should also have a role in educating our youth on these benefits by capitalising on existing easy local access to a vast array of ethnic businesses, global products and cultural activities in all of our major cities for school excursions and study. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that promotion of the economic and social benefits of migration to the Australian public be a central focus of primary school curricula, and an integral part of the teaching of Australian history in high schools.

2. The contribution of diaspora communities to Australia's relationships with Europe, the UK, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region.

Australia needs to further capitalise on the language skills and cultural knowledge that migrants and refugees bring with them to engage in foreign trade and develop domestic niche markets. According to the 2006 Census, 7.8 per cent of Australia's population speak Cantonese at home, and 7 per cent Mandarin, and China has just overtaken the United States as Australia's most important trading partner. With around 200 languages spoken in Australia, the potential benefits are manifold. Australia has large numbers of speakers of many of the most important world languages. For instance, 7.7 per cent of Australia's population speak Arabic at home, and 3.1 per cent speak Spanish.

⁴ Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, *The People of Australia: The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's statement on cultural diversity and recommendations to government*, April 2010. P.18

The Department of Foreign Affairs website acknowledges the 'people-to-people links' or connections that the settlement of migrants and refugees has created with Europe, the Middle East and Africa⁵. The existence of a large number of ethnic chambers of commerce in Australia facilitates bilateral trade and forges strong links between Australia's ethnic and mainstream businesses and other nations. They provide information about overseas markets, networks and culturally appropriate marketing advice, and assist foreign companies wanting to invest in Australia. They exemplify productive diversity in action.

Australia has begun to capitalise on its productive diversity through the development of major export markets such as Halal meat and other products and by attracting global companies to set up bases here because of its multilingual workforce (for instance Cisco Systems' Asia Pacific technical Assistance Centre which handles calls mainly in Asia Pacific languages, including Mandarin, Korean, Indian languages, Cantonese, Thai, Indonesian).

Australia has more than 100 ethnic newspapers, ranging from modest periodicals to major weekly and daily publications in more than 40 languages, (including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese and Korean), television (including SBS and ethno-specific television such as TBV Australia) and radio (more than 100 metropolitan and regional stations in Australia broadcasting in some 100 languages). This media provides information and commentary not only on Australian events but also on events in migrants' countries of origin and multicultural marketing opportunities for importers of products from migrants' countries of origin and entrepreneurial Australians that develop products aimed at ethnic tastes and markets.

The presence of over 200 ethnic communities in Australia means that visiting foreign dignitaries often are warmly received by their ethnic diaspora and invited to community functions which give them a real insight into multiculturalism in practice in Australia and allow them to be treated in a culturally familiar manner for at least part of their visit. This treatment often contributes to improved international relations.

Refugee communities often protest at the visit of political leaders and officials from a government that has persecuted them. Often Australia does not host visits from governments with poor human rights records but sometimes those governments can be high profile major trading partners such as China or significant regional players such as Indonesia. Australia should not ignore its obligations under the Refugee Convention and treat asylum seekers from countries like China and West Papua differently from those persecuted in other parts of the world. Political leaders and officials from repressive regimes need to be exposed to the non-negotiable exercise of human rights in democratic nations if they are ever to seriously consider improving their own human rights record. A constitutionally entrenched Australian Bill of Rights based on the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* protecting freedom of speech and the right of peaceful assembly would go a long way towards deflecting pressure from foreign governments on the Australian Government (and even, in some cases, local councils) by legally enshrining the protection of human rights in Australia.

⁵ *Australia in brief: Foreign and trade policy* at http://www.dfat.gov.au/aib/foreign_trade_policy.html, downloaded on 7 April 2011

Settlement and participation

3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that opportunities to work in social enterprises be an integral part of the settlement process for refugees. The benefits are manifold: acculturation to the Australian workforce; benefiting from training, mentoring and support; gaining local referees; and obtaining a heightened sense of self worth through employment. Refugees often suffer post traumatic distress and its effects including flashbacks and depression and need a safe and secure work environment which can accommodate absences or behavioural swings to give them 'a foot up' when they need it. They can then gain the confidence, skills, demeanour and improved mental health to be able to work successfully in mainstream employment.

In its recent report *What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants*, the Refugee Council of Australia recommends:

*greater investment in social enterprise initiatives that bring together refugee and humanitarian entrants and their communities and community services and that have a focus on employment outcomes*⁶.

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends providing work experience programmes in government, particularly at the local government level. Even a brief placement in an Australian workplace has very beneficial effects in terms of gaining acculturation and local referees. The Tasmanian Government's Work Placement Program is a model that has had some success⁷ for both refugees and newly arrived migrants. The work experience needs to be supported by providing diversity training for all staff and supervisors in the workplace and creating a supportive environment including by appropriate orientation and induction.

Given the manifold barriers to employment faced by refugee and humanitarian entrants, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre considers affirmative action in employment for them to be fully warranted and supports the Refugee Council of Australia's recent recommendation that:

*DEEWR establish an incentive scheme to encourage and support employers to provide traineeships and apprenticeships targeting refugee and humanitarian entrants, including and particularly through the Federal and State public service*⁸.

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre commends Brisbane City Council as the first government in Australia to acknowledge the significant disadvantage suffered by refugees by effectively making

⁶ Refugee Council of Australia, *What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants*, June 2010, p.7

⁷ cf. Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee of the Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide to Humanitarian Settlement*, pp.81-85, 2008

⁸ Refugee Council of Australia, *What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants*, June 2010, p.7

them an EEO category for Council employment.

As a major employer in Brisbane, the council has endorsed a target of employing 240 people of refugee backgrounds out of its workforce of over 8000 staff. The council is implementing its Multicultural Employment Infrastructure Program, which will help it to attain this goal through its partnerships with state, federal, business, union and community agencies. The target, 3 per cent, is based on the percentage of people in Brisbane with a refugee background.⁹

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that people with a refugee background be made an EEO category by all levels of government in Australia.

4. Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole.

An effective anti-racism campaign (as is planned *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy*) would contribute to improving social cohesion and the reception from employers that skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants receive in relation to job applications. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that the Australian Government re-establish the Diversity Australia website to promote the business benefits of cultural diversity and that become the focus of school curricula as discussed above.

Two stage processing means that business migrants and some skilled migrants wishing to upgrade their skills on arrival in Australia to meet State government licensing or recognition requirements are required to pay international student fees during a time when they are ineligible for Centrelink benefits. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends either waiving the fees for bridging courses or lowering the fees to the Australian level from migrants on temporary business and skilled visas that lead to permanent visas.

National productive capacity

5. The role migration has played and contributes to building Australia's long term productive capacity;

Australia has benefited enormously from the labour of its migrants over the decades. Currently skilled migration which brings to Australia educated and qualified professionals whose schooling and higher education the Australian taxpayer has not had to fund or subsidise. When their skills and experience are recognised and accepted, these migrants can make a vital contribution to the economy. Tailoring the intake by fast tracking priority skills allows the government to address skilled shortages in a timely and efficient manner.

⁹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Access and Equity in Government Services Report 2006-08*, 2009, downloaded from DIAC's website on 10/4/2011

In June 2006, 29 per cent of small business operators were born overseas¹⁰. Small businesses provided employment for 5.1 million people as at June 2008, accounting for around half of private sector employment at that time¹¹.

According to Access Economics' *Migrants Fiscal Impact Model: 2008 Update*, the Commonwealth government budget will benefit by some \$536 million in the first year though the 2006-07 migrant intake in total. That level of benefit grows steadily over time, to reach \$1.34 billion by Year 20 (after arrival), in 2007-08 prices. Although most of the benefits to the economy is accrued through skilled stream migration, Australia eventually even benefits economically by the settlement and employment of refugees and humanitarian entrants¹².

6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants; and

A number of barriers exist that often prevent skilled migrants taking up employment in their field of expertise. These include the fact that recognition of skills by a national assessment body such as VETASSESS or NOOSR for migration purposes does not always equate into full recognition by a State Government licensing authority but this is not adequately explained to skilled migrants prior to them coming to Australia. Once here they often need to undertake expensive bridging courses at a time when they are not even entitled to receive Centrelink benefits. Employers can be racist and are often prejudiced about overseas qualifications and unaccepting of foreign accents regardless of the level of English proficiency. As a result, skilled migrants can often end up working in lesser paid and less skilled occupations.

Australia underutilises the skills of refugees and humanitarian entrants. No data is collected about their qualifications and experience on their application forms for humanitarian stream visas. Given widespread interest in the Australian corporate sector in corporate social responsibility, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that DEEWR create a tool similar to the skill matching database (run by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to match pooled skilled migrants with regional employers¹³) to market the existence of skilled refugees to corporate Australia. The database should also contain details of currently unskilled refugee and humanitarian entrants looking for an apprenticeship or other trainee position.

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that State and Federal governments in Australia provide ongoing funding to support mentoring, training and support programs that have a successful

¹⁰ ABS Australian Industry 2007–08 – 8155.0, Table 2.1, p 24. (quoted from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/AboutDIISR/FactSheets/Pages/SmallBusinessFactSheet.aspx> downloaded on 8 April 2011)

¹¹ ABS Australian Small Business Operators – Findings From the 2005 and 2006 Characteristics of Small Business Surveys, 2005–06, released 6 August 2008. 8127.0 (quoted from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/AboutDIISR/FactSheets/Pages/SmallBusinessFactSheet.aspx> downloaded on 8 April 2011)

¹² Access Economics, *Migrants Fiscal Impact Model: 2008 Update*, 11 April 2008, p.ii

¹³ c.f Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Skill Matching Database*, at <http://www.immi.gov.au/skills/> downloaded on 11/4/2011

track record in assisting skilled migrants and refugees into employment such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence's *Given the Chance* programme¹⁴.

¹⁴ cf. Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee of the Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide to Humanitarian Settlement*, pp.67-75, 2008

7. Potential government initiatives to better assist migrant communities establish business enterprises.

In June 2006, 29 per cent of small business operators were born overseas¹⁵. Research suggests that migrants from non-English-speaking-backgrounds are comparatively more successful at establishing small business enterprises when compared to Australian-born entrepreneurs and migrants from English-speaking backgrounds¹⁶. However, websites such as that of Australian Business Funding Centre currently provide information about grants and other assistance exclusively in English. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that information about government assistance and grants for small business be translated into community languages and linked to the websites of ethnic Chambers of Commerce.

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre recommends that business enterprise centres and business incubators be promoted to migrant business people through advertisements in ethnic media and that governments employ bilingual staff to assist migrants understand requirements and to complete the necessary documentation to apply for government grants. We also recommend that free language assistance be made available through the Translating and Interpreter Service and that written material provided to assist business people be made available in major community languages.

Access and equity measures need to be introduced into all government funded services for business in Australia, including consulting ethnic business communities about the types of programmes that should be in place. The data that is collected through business surveys needs to be disaggregated into the languages spoken at home by business owners and operators. Such data collection is an integral part of access and equity and serves to enable agencies to effectively target translated material and bilingual staff support in the languages that are most needed.

¹⁵ ABS Australian Industry 2007–08 – 8155.0, Table 2.1, p 24. (quoted from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/AboutDIISR/FactSheets/Pages/SmallBusinessFactSheet.aspx> downloaded on 8 April 2011)

¹⁶ Refugee Council of Australia, *What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants*, June 2010, p.6