

30 January 2017

Mr Jason Wood MP  
Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Wood,

**Re: Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes**

I write on behalf of the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC), a leading settlement agency responsible for providing Humanitarian Settlement Services to all new arrivals in South Australia for the past quarter of a century. The AMRC has also provided general settlement services and community development and empowerment programs to all new and establishing communities in metropolitan and regional South Australia since 1979. It has also been responsible for the past 4 years in supporting bridging visa holders as a provider of the Status Resolution Support Service.

The AMRC has long experience in state and commonwealth settlement planning, delivery, review and service improvement as well as considerable innovation in service development. This is due to our participatory governance including over 150 financial member organisations and individuals, most representing our client groups who elect the AMRC Board; our volunteer and work experience program, drawing on the skills and qualifications of over 300 key bilingual, bicultural community volunteers providing us with feedback and assurance that we represent their interests; our bilingual bicultural staff who are highly qualified and supported through continuous professional development; and our diverse and targeted partnerships and collaborations, ensuring broad ownership of settlement outcomes and linkages and engagement between host communities and the new arrivals they receive.

Our submission is based on the South Australian settlement experience that does not necessarily reflect the situation in any other state. Nevertheless, we are very mindful of the effect of social marginalisation on young people and from time to time Adelaide has experienced isolated cases of youth incidents. With respect to social marginalisation of youth gangs, we recommend thorough research is undertaken to identify the relationship between settlement and social marginalisation of young people who we consider may be the children of second and third generation migrant parents, rather than new settlers.



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Mainstreaming policies with services mainly delivered by welfare organisations may have contributed to some of the youth problems faced in some localities. Post 5 years they are not eligible for services through specialist settlement organisations. Marginalised groups do not access mainstream services due to continued lack of mainstream cultural competence, despite government access and equity policies.

The AMRC is an executive member of the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) and has input into, and endorsed SCoA's submission. The Multicultural Youth Australia Network (MYAN) has also submitted on youth issues. Thus the AMRC's submission will not duplicate the material in these two submissions, but rather will describe the South Australian experience and models of good practice. Within a national context, the AMRC is one of the oldest standing MRCs in Australia and the only one in South Australia. We are proud to have supported positive settlement outcomes for our diverse cohorts of migrants from refugee background, both in metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia.

With respect to the Terms of Reference:

**1. The mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants**

Specialist settlement services that have as their core function:

- a) community development and empowerment programs
- b) participatory governance that supports cultural competence and ownership by the client communities they serve
- c) a repository of knowledge and experience, flexibility and agility in responding to changing environments and
- d) are able to work collaboratively and in partnership with a broad mix of government, non-government services and community supports to continually improve integration, social cohesion and a sense of belonging for the clients groups and ownership by the broader service sector and community

are best placed to effectively settle and integrate migrants, including young migrants and especially those of refugee background.

The AMRC's focus over the past two decades has increasingly been to shift the paradigm from a service welfare framework to a community development and empowerment focus for the settlement of migrants, and especially those of refugee background. These new arrivals are temporarily vulnerable, and evidence has shown that provided with empowerment support they quickly utilise their resilience and entrepreneurial skills to contribute to Australia's economy and to civic society.

Unfortunately, at the same time the welfare sector has increased its influence in the settlement space and government funding tends to be based primarily on a welfare model, especially post the HSS and SGP where resources for critical services after the first five years are provided in most part to the mainstream welfare sector and not distributed equitably to settlement agencies.

Our long experience and evidence strongly indicates that communities who may be temporarily vulnerable, want to become independent and empowered to contribute to civil and economic society as soon as possible.

Examples of two relatively small and emerging communities in South Australia have proven that with specialist settlement support and assistance they can develop their internal resources within a decade of arrival to support their communities and to assist their integration, including connectedness of their young people as bicultural achievers and leaders.

To elaborate on these examples, I offer the following.

The Afghan and Burmese communities in South Australia have had different migration experiences as refugees. Both communities have focused on utilising their internal resources to support their young people through education, the arts and sport; their women through community education on the rights of women and by publically condemning family violence; and they have been in the forefront of engaging mainstream South Australia through their participation on committees and forums and through their dedication to purchase their own physical facilities without any government support - as did their predecessors, the Greeks and Italians. They have chosen South Australia through their actions to be the Place to Call Home.

The provision of effective and ongoing support to these groups to develop their governance, their infrastructure and internal leadership resources has not been properly acknowledged and resourced post the 5 year term of the SGP. And this very critical long-term process relies on the goodwill and ad hoc resources of specialist settlement agencies.

Sadly for the Afghan community, many of their members continue to remain sole men, supporting wives and children abroad. This situation culminates in resources being wasted in mental health support for many of these men as well as resources from their earnings going overseas rather than being used productively in Australia to support their independence. Due to the lack of family re-union certainty, the impact of sustainable settlement and employment, particularly in the many small country towns dotted around South Australia, poses a huge risk to these small towns with depleting established populations.

Increased cultural competence of mainstream service providers is critical to enhance settlement outcomes as most of the resources for longer term settlement programs are directed to these services. However, evidence indicates that although we have progressed markedly in the past decades, for the most part, both government, and non-government services continue to replicate themselves and are slow to respond competently to the continuing diversity of new arrivals.

Settlement should be seen as a lifelong process for some very vulnerable individuals and groups and settlement service providers should be resourced to continue focusing on community empowerment rather than longer term arrivals being discarded to the welfare sector and continuing to be viewed as *victims* rather than active agents in their path to full participation.

## **2. National and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects**

We refer to the recent Triennial and International Conference of the *Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA)*, '*Settlement and Citizenship In A Civil Society*' held in May 2016, which the AMRC was privileged to be invited to direct. The recommendations of this report, as well as the *National Settlement Services Standards* produced by SCoA, provide best practice

strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects. They also indicate the credibility and advancement of the settlement sector, and particularly the specialist MRC agencies, with respect to service excellence both nationally and internationally.

Regarding best practice strategies, the current Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program has gone out to tender at a time when long-term business certainty requires service continuity and improvement, rather than service changes.

We look forward to:

- a) The next tender contract having longevity of 5 to 10 years to bring certainty to business plans, minimise risk and ensure the building up of best practice through innovation, sector expertise and national sharing and collaboration
- b) Opening up the housing market to ensure that both private and public housing is available to new arrivals rather than relegating them to areas where social housing is concentrated
- c) Providing resources to specialist settlement agencies through the new HSP tender, SGP and social cohesion programs as well as other allied programs to maximise the use of specialist resources for the greatest outcomes and impact
- d) Settling people where there is work certainty, eg in regional towns as well as metropolitan areas. However, settlement and other key services need to be available in small towns as well as metropolitan areas to ensure sustainability
- e) Ensuring AMEP is resourced to become more flexible and agile in its response to the diversity of cohorts and localities and
- f) Supporting external and ongoing service review through academic research and service pilots to identify and market good practice models.

*(See attachment 1: **Report on Sustainable Regional Development: A case study of the Limestone Coast 2016**, A partnership of the AMRC (formerly Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia) with the Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, Adelaide University and the Local Government Association of South Australia, The City of Mt Gambier, The District Council of Grant, The Naracoorte-Lucindale Council and The Tatiara District Council.*

*See also attachment 2: **Navigating Employment Pathways Forum & Expo Forum Report 2016**, a partnership of the AMRC with the Department of Employment.)*

### **3. The importance of English language ability on a migrant's settlement outcome**

This is of paramount importance, not just for young people, but for males and females in the family and requires the resourcing in the first two years in order for a substantial percentage of new arrivals to gain an acceptable English proficiency. We urge the Commonwealth to consider the balance between DHS work requirements and English language training, rather than take a short term approach of new arrivals having to make choices that work against their ability to learn English to a specific standard and thus are prohibited from advancing beyond manual casual and seasonal work.

### **4. Whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects**

Most of our work is with migrants of refugee background. With respect to those new arrivals we understand that the Commonwealth brings humanitarian entrants into the

country based on the level of need and understanding that most of these new arrivals have come from conflict and war situations, and/or waiting in camps pre-arrival. Strengthening their settlement outcomes could be achieved through strengthening AUSCO through which prospective new arrivals could begin to learn English and also understand the laws and values of our Australian society as well as their rights and obligations and what they can expect on arrival. Where AUSCO has been delivered pre-arrival it has assisted our reception and orientation of new arrivals.

**5. The social engagement of youth migrants, including involvement of youth migrants in anti-social behaviour such as gang activity**

The AMRC has a youth empowerment program in which individual, family and community safety education plays a very important part. As importantly, we offer education and training initiatives which lead to work experience and employment for young people. We do need to shift the perception that particularly young people of refugee backgrounds, and/or of religious/cultural communities different from our own, are victims, or dangerous and non-productive - thus alienating and excluding them from social and economic participation. A sense of belonging for young people requires their social connectedness with their own ethnic community - feeling proud of and seeing their own heritage valued – before they will commit fully to being proud of being Australians.

*(See attachment 3: Report on the Intergenerational Youth Forum, Let's Talk Together About Living Safe December 2015).*

**6. The adequacy of the *Migration Act 1958* character test provisions as a means to address issues arising from this behaviour**

We believe that the Commonwealth has a very rigorous and robust security and character testing of all refugees that it brings into the country, and subsequently it has a very robust and rigorous character test of people applying for citizenship. It is also our experience that the receiving society and the reception that new arrival families receive plays a very important role in their ability to settle effectively, to feel they belong, and to feel they can participate.

**Recommendation 1**

**Government social program initiatives and resources need to be more strategically allocated to concentrate on empowerment and community development approaches enabling new arrivals to shift from a vulnerable state to become independent and productive as residents and citizens rather than being relegated to being refugees.**

**Recommendation 2**

**Resources currently concentrated in mainstream services for individuals and groups post the SGP 5 years need to be open and available to specialist settlement services who are well placed to effect change for migrant communities and groups within these, to minimise their marginalisation and vulnerability.**

We are happy to make ourselves available to provide the Committee with further information as you may require it.

I look forward to your response and to the outcome of the report.

Yours sincerely

Eugenia Tsoulis OAM  
Chief Executive Officer

**Attachments:**

- 1) Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: A Case Study of the Limestone Coast 2016
- 2) Navigating Employment Pathways Forum & Expo Report 2016
- 3) Report on the Intergenerational Youth Forum, Let's Talk Together About Living Safe  
December 2015