

**Submission to the**

***Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia 2011***

**Joint Standing Committee on Migration**

**Sydney Multicultural Community Services Inc.**

**8 April 2011**

Authorised by: Ms Rosa Loria, Executive Officer

## Key points and recommendations

### 1. Terminology

In many policy documents, including the new multicultural policy, there is no definition provided for the term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' creating confusion for the reader. It is important to define multicultural terms and concepts used in key policy documents and to apply definitions consistently.

#### **Recommendation 1**

*It is recommended that the Australian Multicultural Council develop a guide to terminology to be employed in the context of multiculturalism.*

### 2. Bipartisan support for multiculturalism

A strong socially just and cohesive society cannot be achieved without bipartisan support for multiculturalism and a sustained political will to implement the policy for the benefit of all Australians.

Sydney Multicultural Community Services commends the Australian Government for developing the new national multicultural policy and its intent to establish a permanent bipartisan body to provide advice to inform a national multicultural Australian strategy.

It is not clear from the document what form the national multicultural Australian strategy will take, when it is planned to be developed and how it will align with already announced strategies such as the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy and initiatives to strengthen access and equity.

#### **Recommendation 2**

*It is recommended that additional detail regarding the development of the national multicultural strategy be provided by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs.*

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

Sydney Multicultural Community Services welcomes the recognition that the multicultural policy aligns with the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda and is not subsumed by it.

The Social Inclusion Agenda does not address structural barriers that impact on the achievement of equitable settlement outcomes for new arrivals nor does it adequately address the needs of those who become socially excluded as an outcome of emigration.

Policy frameworks are required that can facilitate economic, social and cultural integration for the broader spectrum of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

### 4. Multicultural policy parameters

Multicultural policy does not provide the primary policy framework through which all forms of cultural and linguistically diversity can appropriately be addressed.

**Recommendation 3**

*The culturally and linguistically diverse groups encompassed by the multicultural policy should be defined and the extent to which these groups are the focus of each of the principles of the multicultural policy should be outlined.*

**Recommendation 4:**

*Dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must inform the multicultural strategy and provision should be made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the Australian Multicultural Council.*

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

**5.1 Groups targeted for settlement support services**

Settlement support services need to be available to the much broader spectrum of migrants than is currently possible under the Department of Immigration and Citizenship administered Settlement Grants Program.

English language proficiency, of itself, is not an appropriate indicator of migrants' capacity to negotiate new systems and to make a timely and effective cultural transition.

In the absence of settlement support the path to acculturation is unnecessarily protracted and frustrating for many new arrivals not eligible for SGP services.

**Recommendation 5:**

*It is recommended that the Australian Government extend access to settlement support services by providing universal access to Settlement Grants Program services for:*

- *Family Stream migrants,*
- *Skilled Independent migrants, and*
- *Selected temporary residents (Prospective Marriage, Provisional Partner, Provisional Spouse and Provisional Interdependency visa holders and their dependants) in metropolitan as well as rural and regional areas.*

**5.2 Service models**

New models are required that will provide the necessary infrastructure to identify migrants and refugees service needs and allow newly arrived communities to be more actively involved in the development and management of support services for their community beyond initial settlement.

A new service model is required that will complement the SGP and support implementation of the new multicultural policy at the regional level. The new service could:

- Inform the development and implementation of the access and equity strategy in relation to settlement services by:

- identifying and providing advice to policy makers on the specific barriers to access to government programs and services experienced by migrants and refugees during settlement period
- providing advice to policy makers on the special needs of migrants and refugees and service models and interventions that can address those needs, and by,
- supporting newly arrived communities and government agencies to implement and evaluate new service initiatives for migrants and refugees.
- Facilitate development of sustainable linkages between newly arrived groups and service providers with the view to engaging newly arrived groups in local community initiatives.
- Enhance interaction between newly arrived groups and
  - longer settled groups
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and
  - the broader Australian community.
- Assist and/or empower new arrivals to take a leadership role within the community.
- Build the capacity of new and emerging communities to develop and manage support services for their community.

**Recommendation 6:**

*It is recommended that the Australian Government establish a multicultural settlement services program to enhance migrants and refugees participation in and contribution to the Australian community.*

*The program would complement the Settlement Grants Program and support implementation of the new multicultural policy at the regional level.*

*The multicultural settlement service could be the key element of a multi-functional 'one-stop' service hub for migrants and refugees. Services that could be co-located at the hub include:*

- SGP services
- Specialist SGP services e.g. immigration assistance and housing, and
- Employment support services as outlined in response to topic area 6 of this submission to the Inquiry.

Access to migrant and refugee dedicated employment and training programs is also a key issue impacting on settlement outcomes.

**Recommendation 7**

*The Australian government should collaborate with state and territory governments to develop a migrant and refugee employment and training program and provide dedicated funding for its implementation. The program should be available to the under-employed as well as the unemployed and eligibility should be open to family and skill stream arrivals subject to the two year waiting period as well as humanitarian entrants. Moreover the program should be fee exempt for all participants.*

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

The nature and extent of support required by migrants and refugees to achieve employment in their occupation varies based on a number of factors including their early access to recognition support services, access to local work experience, the availability of gap training, their capacity to successfully negotiate employment and work practices in a new cultural environment and proficiency in English.

Holistic models of service provision are required that can maximize use of the wealth of qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience that migrants and refugees bring to Australia and to minimize the dissatisfaction that individuals and their families experience when their skills and knowledge are not utilized.

**Recommendation 8**

*The Australian government should develop a national migrant skill utilisation strategy and collaborate with state and territory governments to establish skilled migrant and refugee employment and training support services that incorporate the following key elements:*

- *Information and case management*
  - *Information and referral services to support access to assessment services by those with overseas gained skills and qualifications targeting those who have not undergone assessment prior to immigrating to Australia; and, access to mentoring programs, work experience, training and professional networks.*
  - *Case management, incorporating development of an employment and training plan for those needing to undertake work experience, training and mentoring programs.*
- *Local work experience coordinated by staff with the demonstrated capacity to develop and sustain linkages with employers in key industry areas.*
- *Mentoring support coordinated by staff with appropriate industry knowledge and contacts.*
- *Training*
  - *Gap training with integrated communication skills and English language training as required.*
  - *Preparation for the Occupational English Test*
  - *Retraining programs in areas of industry demand with integrated communication skills and English language training as required for those whose qualifications are not recognized and who wish to apply their skills and knowledge in a related field.*

The cost associated with skills assessment and training is often prohibitive for migrants in the first years after arrival.

**Recommendation 8**

*It is recommended that the Australian Government:*

- *Extend access to the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals Program to permanent residents undertaking assessments in trades areas to meet state and territory licensing requirements.*
- *Remove the requirement that applicants for the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals Program be resident for at least two years.*
- *Provide a skills recognition allowance to migrants subject to a two year waiting period for benefits to allow them to undertake gap training as soon as possible after their arrival.*

## ***Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia 2011***

### **Joint Standing Committee on Migration**

#### **Sydney Multicultural Community Services Inc. Submission**

Sydney Multicultural Community Services Inc. (Sydney MCS) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's *Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia 2011*.

#### **The organisation**

Sydney Multicultural Community Services is a community based not-for-profit organisation specialising in service provision for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Services currently focus on aged care, carer support, settlement, migration support, crisis relief and financial support and are delivered in the Eastern Suburbs, Inner Sydney and Inner Western Sydney statistical sub-divisions.

Sydney Multicultural Community Services has been providing settlement services in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney since its establishment as a migrant resource centre in 1981 (the then Botany Migrant Resource Centre). Settlement services are currently provided under the Settlement Grants and Complex Case Support programs and, as of April 2011 the Humanitarian Settlement Services Program.

As a migrant resource centre the agency delivered or provided an auspice for multicultural project initiatives in a diverse range of other program areas, including in the areas of employment, education and training. For instance Sydney Multicultural Community Services established the Botany Multicultural Community Youth Support Scheme that later became a Skillshare program service.

The organisation's comments to the inquiry reflect its role as a service provider focusing primarily on the needs of the overseas-born from non-English speaking backgrounds.

#### **Terminology**

In this submission the term 'non-English speaking background' refers to those, other than Australia's First Peoples, whose first language is not English or whose cultural background is derived from a non-English speaking tradition.<sup>1</sup> The term includes English speakers, non-English speakers, people born in Australia and those born overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> National Population Council 1987 *Guide to appropriate use of terminology employed in the context of immigration, multiculturalism and ethnic affairs* Prepared by the Ethnic Affairs and Settlement Committee.

Use of the term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' as an alternative for 'non-English speaking background' as defined above is problematic. The term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' has diverse interpretations in different contexts. Moreover it often has 'fluid' interpretations within the same policy context. For instance the term is used with reference to:

- Individuals and groups within the Australian population, other than those whose ancestry is Anglo-Saxon, Anglo Celtic, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, who differ according to religion, race, language and ethnicity, and/or

the whole Australian population that differs according to religion, race, language and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

- People who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex as well as with reference to people from non-English speaking backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

***In many policy documents, including the new multicultural policy, there is no definition provided for the term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' creating confusion for the reader. It is important to define multicultural terms and concepts used in key policy documents and to apply definitions consistently.***

#### ***Recommendation 1***

***It is recommended that the Australian Multicultural Council develop a guide to terminology to be employed in the context of multiculturalism.***

## **Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation**

### *Bipartisan support for multiculturalism*

As a multicultural community service provider this organisation is keenly aware of the significance of a national multicultural policy and sustained bipartisan support for such a policy. Australian society is culturally diverse. Individuals and groups cannot participate and contribute equally when political leaders fail to champion diversity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Community Relations Commission For a multicultural New South Wales *Multicultural Policies and Services Program (formerly EAPS)* webpage. Retrieved 29 March 2011 from

[http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/multicultural\\_policies\\_and\\_services\\_program\\_formally\\_eaps](http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/multicultural_policies_and_services_program_formally_eaps)

<sup>3</sup> Productivity Commission 2011, *Caring for Older Australians*, Draft Inquiry Report, Canberra (p 273)

<sup>4</sup> Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2010. *"Different but Equal" FECCA's National Multicultural Agenda*. Retrieved 29 March 2011 from

<http://www.fecca.org.au/PDF/DifferentButEqualNov2010.pdf>



In the period from 1996 – 2007 ambivalence towards multiculturalism<sup>5</sup> on the part of the Federal Coalition government led by John Howard, was associated with an erosion of support for multicultural and migrant dedicated initiatives. Core funding for Migrant Resource Centres ceased, for example to be available effectively restricting access to settlement support to the most vulnerable new arrivals. Further, the Advanced English for Migrants program was incorporated into the new Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program for all Australians severely restricting migrants and refugees access to tailored vocational skill development programs that provided linked English language training.

In the absence of political will at the national level even the strong legislative base for multiculturalism in New South Wales proved insufficient to safeguard migrant dedicated services.<sup>6</sup> With waning support for multiculturalism New South Wales Government agencies began to argue that people from non-English speaking backgrounds were no longer a priority and that resources had to be allocated to meet Commonwealth Government targets in other areas.

When the Commonwealth Government imposed budget cuts on New South Wales in 2004 support services for people from non-English speaking backgrounds were further affected. The New South Labor government led by Bob Carr determined that two highly successful education and training programs that it had funded since 1989 were in fact ‘employment and integration services’ and therefore the responsibility of the Commonwealth.<sup>7</sup> In the 2004 mini-budget, the *Skilled Migrant Placement and Mature Workers Programs* were both axed. A short time later the New South Wales Government also disbanded the unit within the Department of Education and Training that provided support for the recognition of overseas qualifications.

***A strong socially just and cohesive society cannot be achieved without bipartisan support for multiculturalism and a sustained political will to implement the policy for the benefit of all Australians.***

***Sydney Multicultural Community Services commends the Australian Government for developing the new national multicultural policy and its intent to establish a permanent bipartisan body to provide advice to inform a national multicultural Australian strategy.***

It is not clear from the document what form the national multicultural Australian strategy will take, when it is planned to be developed and how it will align with already announced strategies such as the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy and initiatives to strengthen access and equity.

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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Collaboration, 2010. *A Multicultural Australia*. Retrieved 29 March 2011 from [http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/factsheets/Multicultural\\_FactSheet.pdf#zoom=100](http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/factsheets/Multicultural_FactSheet.pdf#zoom=100)

<sup>6</sup> New South Wales enshrined multiculturalism in legislation for the first time in Australia. The *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act (2000)* established four Principles of Multiculturalism as the policy of the State and required public authorities to observe the Principles of Multiculturalism in the conduct of their affairs.

<sup>7</sup> Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Council 29 June 2004. *Hansard & Papers* webpage. Retrieved 23 March 2011 from <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20040629012>

## **Recommendation 2**

***It is recommended that additional detail regarding the development of the national multicultural strategy be provided by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs.***

### **Topic 1: The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda**

Sydney Multicultural Community Services welcomes the recognition that the multicultural policy aligns with the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda and is not subsumed by it.

***The Social Inclusion Agenda does not address structural barriers that impact on the achievement of equitable settlement outcomes for new arrivals.***

Immigrants have restricted access to many government services for a period of two years after arrival in Australia, including to employment services and to Centrelink payments such as Newstart, Youth and Sickness Allowance and Austudy. Not surprisingly employment service providers have limited contact with newly arrived migrants and limited knowledge of the barriers this group faces in their integration to the Australian labour market. Further this group's lack of eligibility for Centrelink payments means they are generally 'under the radar' when Australian government agencies are considering policy and program responses to address the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers.

***The current Social Inclusion Agenda does not adequately address the needs of those who become socially excluded as an outcome of emigration.***

Australia's social inclusion policy focuses on those identified as being the most disadvantaged i.e. *those trapped in a spiral of disadvantage caused by family circumstances, low expectations, community poverty, lack of suitable and affordable housing, illness or discrimination – often leading to early school leaving, long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health.*<sup>8</sup>

The Agenda does not take sufficient account of the impact of the migration process on social inclusion. It does not for instance adequately address the impact of cultural dislocation on labour market outcomes for immigrants. Skill development strategies linked to the Agenda, such as the Productivity Places Program give priority to those who have not achieved a post-school qualification. This effectively restricts access to the initiatives by unemployed people with overseas gained post-school qualifications who may need to retrain to gain employment.

***Policy frameworks are required that can facilitate economic, social and cultural integration for the broader spectrum of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.***

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<sup>8</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009. *A Stronger, Fairer Australia* (p 1). Retrieved 28 March, 2011 from <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Documents/BrochureAStrongerFairerAustralia.pdf>

### *Policy parameters*

The new national multicultural policy reinforces that 'Multiculturalism is about all Australians and for all Australians'. While this is true, in practice the broader Australian community is not equally the focus of each of the four principles. To illustrate this point:

- *Principle 1: The Australian Government celebrates and values the benefits of cultural diversity for all Australians, within the broader aims of national unity, community harmony and maintenance of our democratic values.*

Interaction and dialogue across culturally and linguistically diverse communities is both a prerequisite for and an outcome of a socially cohesive society. Cultural diversity in this context embraces all Australians and brings benefits for the Australian population overall. Initiatives must be implemented that facilitate dialogues and interaction amongst all Australians.<sup>9</sup>

- *Principle 3: The Australian Government welcomes the economic, trade and investment benefits which arise from our successful multicultural nation.*

While the application of this principle brings benefits for all Australians the focus is generally on those from non-English speaking backgrounds who have the cultural capital (cross-cultural skills and knowledge, including knowledge of networks within overseas markets) to support the development of sustainable linkages with countries with which Australia has had limited commercial dealings, historically.

- *Principle 2: The Australian Government is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.*

The focus of the social justice dimension of multiculturalism has previously been people from non-English speaking backgrounds. While this may be the intent of the principle, reference to 'Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds' obscures the scope and purpose.

***Multicultural policy does not provide the primary policy framework through which all forms of cultural and linguistically diversity can appropriately be addressed.*** While this is recognised in the multicultural policy with reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people there are other culturally and linguistically diverse groups such as the deaf community whose needs multicultural policy cannot of itself effectively address.

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<sup>9</sup> Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2010. "Different but Equal" FECCA's National Multicultural Agenda (p 13). Retrieved 29 March 2011 from <http://www.fecca.org.au/PDF/DifferentButEqualNov2010.pdf>

### **Recommendation 3**

***The culturally and linguistically diverse groups encompassed by the multicultural policy should be defined and the extent to which these groups are the focus of each of the principles of the multicultural policy should be outlined.***

It is essential that all Australians, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds, engage with Australia's First People and participate in the reconciliation process. Sydney Multicultural Community Services strongly endorses the primary premise of FECCA's National Multicultural Agenda that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first Australians and that reconciliation with them is primary to the ability of our country to create a strong sense of nationhood and cohesion.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommendation 4:**

***Dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must inform the multicultural strategy and provision should be made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the Australian Multicultural Council.***

## **Settlement and participation**

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

*Groups targeted for settlement support services*

Sydney Multicultural Community Services is of the strongly held view that ***settlement support services need to be available to the much broader spectrum of migrants than is currently possible under the Department of Immigration and Citizenship administered Settlement Grants Program.***

Settlement services delivered through the Settlement Grants program are currently limited to humanitarian entrants and refugees, family stream migrants with low English proficiency and dependants of skilled migrants or selected temporary residents in rural and regional areas with low levels of English proficiency.

Migrants arrive in Australia with diverse skills, including English language skills. Irrespective however of their English language proficiency levels they experience cultural dislocation. Knowledge of

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<sup>10</sup> Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2010. "Different but Equal" FECCA's National Multicultural Agenda (p 12). Retrieved 29 March 2011 from <http://www.fecca.org.au/PDF/DifferentButEqualNov2010.pdf>

Australian employment, education, legal, financial systems, practices and protocols is for instance limited and support is generally required to access services.

***English language proficiency, of itself, is not an appropriate indicator of migrants' capacity to negotiate new systems and to make a timely and effective cultural transition.***

As noted by one of this agency's staff who previously assisted people outside of the SGP target groups in a voluntary capacity *'if you don't know what you don't know about the systems and processes here computer literacy skills and good English can't assist you to get the outcome you're after, such as a job in your field. Someone needs to make you aware of your options – what is available and how the information is relevant to you ... someone who can bridge the cultural divide'*.

The same officer also noted that many of these new arrivals had relied on informal advice provided by community members that was often out-of-date and could be 'clouded' by the informant's negative settlement experiences. As a consequence many had not pursued options (mainly in relation to employment) that may have been available to them.

***In the absence of settlement support the path to acculturation is unnecessarily protracted and frustrating for many new arrivals not eligible for SGP services.***

The Australian migrant intake is increasingly more highly skilled and more settler arrivals from other than the main English speaking countries now have higher levels of English proficiency. Settlement services need to be responsive to the needs of these groups.

Sydney Multicultural Community Services cannot assist these individuals under the SGP and has very limited capacity to assist and/or refer these individuals to other service providers. There are no agencies funded through other government programs to provide settlement support to these groups in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. Moreover this appears to be the case in the metropolitan area overall.

***Settlement support services need to be able to maximise settlement outcomes for the broad spectrum of settler arrivals.***

***Recommendation 5:***

***It is recommended that the Australian Government extend access to settlement support services by providing universal access to Settlement Grants Program services for:***

- ***Family Stream migrants,***
- ***Skilled Independent migrants, and***
- ***Selected temporary residents (Prospective Marriage, Provisional Partner, Provisional Spouse and Provisional Interdependency visa holders and their dependants) in metropolitan as well as rural and regional areas.***

This organisation's experience in the provision of services under the Migrant Resource Centre program reinforces that services are accessed on a needs basis with greater support provided to those with complex needs. Universal access did not result in any undue pressure for services by

those who were most able to negotiate a new cultural environment with minimal support by service providers.

#### *Service models*

The current settlement service model (SGP) focuses on direct services though there is some provision made for capacity building initiatives targeting newly arrived communities with significant numbers of new arrivals. The assumption underpinning the current SGP is that all other groups have no special settlement needs and any issues they encounter can or should be addressed through 'mainstream' programs.

This is not the reality as evidenced by service providers. As indicated earlier Federal and State Government support for migrant and refugee dedicated programs varies considerably over time.

The integration of MRC core funding (salaries and infra-structure costs) with CSSS funding to form the Settlement Grants Program, accompanied as it was by a shift to short-term project based funding severely undermined the capacity of specialist multicultural community service providers (i.e. former and current MRCs) to undertake community capacity building activities and to work with government funded services to address the needs of the broad spectrum of migrants and refugees.

***New models are required that will provide the necessary infrastructure to identify migrants and refugees service needs and allow newly arrived communities to be more actively involved in the development and management of support services for their community beyond initial settlement.***

***A new service model is required that will complement the SGP and support implementation of the new multicultural policy at the regional level. The new service could:***

- ***Inform the development and implementation of the access and equity strategy in relation to settlement services by:***
  - ***identifying and providing advice to policy makers on the specific barriers to access to government programs and services experienced by migrants and refugees during settlement period***
  - ***providing advice to policy makers on the special needs of migrants and refugees and service models and interventions that can address those needs, and by,***
  - ***supporting newly arrived communities and government agencies to implement and evaluate new service initiatives for migrants and refugees.***
- ***Facilitate development of sustainable linkages between newly arrived groups and service providers with the view to engaging newly arrived groups in local community initiatives.***
- ***Enhance interaction between newly arrived groups and***
  - ***longer settled groups***
  - ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and***
  - ***the broader Australian community.***
- ***Assist and/or empower new arrivals to take a leadership role within the community.***
- ***Build the capacity of new and emerging communities to develop and manage support services for their community.***

**Recommendation 6:**

***It is recommended that the Australian Government establish a multicultural settlement services program to enhance migrants and refugees participation in and contribution to the Australian community.***

***The program would complement the Settlement Grants Program and support implementation of the new multicultural policy at the regional level.***

The services should be managed and delivered by generalist multicultural community-based not-for-profit agencies with a demonstrated capacity to deliver such services.

Core funding should be available to cover infrastructure costs (rent, utilities and for core staff) and to allow for sustained program and services provision.

Funding should be subject to a tender process and be for a minimum of three years with consideration given to funding services for five years. An extended period of funding would assist in building trust and sustainable collaborative links between key stakeholders e.g. between newly arrived groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people.

The services should be available in all regions with a significant migrant and refugee intake. It is envisaged that services would be provided in all of the Sydney metropolitan area as well as particular regional and rural areas of New South Wales.

In a recent paper, *Directions for 2011-12 Settlement Grants Program*, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship flagged the possibility of developing service hubs. The concept is supported by Sydney Multicultural Community Services.

***The multicultural settlement service could be the key element of a multi-functional 'one-stop' service hub for migrants and refugees. Services that could be co-located at the hub include:***

- ***SGP services***
- ***Specialist SGP services e.g. immigration assistance and housing, and***
- ***Employment support services as outlined in response to topic area 6 of this submission to the Inquiry.***

Access to migrant and refugee dedicated employment and training programs is also a key issue impacting on settlement outcomes.

Innovative vocational education and training models to support sustainable employment outcomes for migrants, refugees and disadvantaged job seekers from non-English speaking backgrounds have been developed over many years. Examples include orientation programs for skilled migrants, access programs for refugee youth and retraining programs for mature age job seekers.

Many of these initiatives provided for vocational skills development with integrated English language training and were very effective in achieving employment and/or further study outcomes for job

seekers from non-English speaking backgrounds. In the past many of these programs were funded under a migrant dedicated program – the Advanced English for Migrants Program which was later subsumed into the advanced vocational stream of the Language, Literacy and Numeracy program also funded by DEEWR. Significantly, as an outcome of the latest Language, Literacy and Numeracy program tender (announced in 2010) linked vocational and English language skills training is no longer available under the program.

### **Recommendation 7**

***The Australian government should collaborate with state and territory governments to develop a migrant and refugee employment and training program and provide dedicated funding for its implementation. The program should be available to the under-employed as well as the unemployed and eligibility should be open to family and skill stream arrivals subject to the two year waiting period as well as humanitarian entrants. Moreover the program should be fee exempt for all participants.***

## **National productive capacity**

### **Topic 6: The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants**

Immigration is a major contributor to Australia's population growth and to the skilled labour demands of Australian industry. Until more recently the focus of policy makers has been primary applicants under the Skill Stream and the effective utilization of their skills. There is however a high number of highly skilled individuals entering Australia under the Family Stream, as secondary applicants under the Skill Stream and also under the Humanitarian Program<sup>11</sup>.

Data from surveys of immigrants to Australia conducted by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship indicate that while skill stream entrants perform much better in the Australian labour market than entrants under other streams there is considerable scope to improve employment outcomes for those from other than the main English speaking countries in all streams.<sup>12</sup>

The nature and extent of support required by migrants and refugees to achieve employment in their occupation varies based on a number of factors including their early access to recognition support services, access to local work experience, the availability of gap training, their capacity to

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. *Immigration update 2009-2010* indicates that of settler arrivals in 2009-10 who had been in employment prior to their arrival, 89.6 per cent of primary and 74.3 per cent of secondary applicants under the Skill Stream; 68.8 per cent of primary and 60.2 per cent of secondary applicants under the Family Stream; and 43.8 per cent of primary and 33.4 per cent of secondary applicants under the Humanitarian Program had been in managerial, professional, associate professional or trade occupations.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship August 2007: *New Migrant Outcomes: Results from the third longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia pp 35-37*



successfully negotiate employment and work practices in a new cultural environment and proficiency in English.

Holistic models of service provision are required that can maximize use of the wealth of qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience that migrants and refugees bring to Australia and to minimize the dissatisfaction that individuals and their families experience when their skills and knowledge are not utilized.

#### **Recommendation 9**

***The Australian government should develop a national migrant skill utilisation strategy and collaborate with state and territory governments to establish skilled migrant and refugee employment and training support services that incorporate the following key elements:***

- ***Information and case management***
  - ***Information and referral services to support access to assessment services by those with overseas gained skills and qualifications targeting those who have not undergone assessment prior to immigrating to Australia; and, access to mentoring programs, work experience, training and professional networks.***
  - ***Case management, incorporating development of an employment and training plan for those needing to undertake work experience, training and mentoring programs.***
- ***Local work experience coordinated by staff with the demonstrated capacity to develop and sustain linkages with employers in key industry areas.***
- ***Mentoring support coordinated by staff with appropriate industry knowledge and contacts.***
- ***Training***
  - ***Gap training with integrated communication skills and English language training as required.***
  - ***Preparation for the Occupational English Test***
  - ***Retraining programs in areas of industry demand with integrated communication skills and English language training as required for those whose qualifications are not recognized and who wish to apply their skills and knowledge in a related field.***

The development and implementation of the national migrant skills strategy should be supported by a national body comprising representatives from industry, the education and training sector (vocational and university), professional associations, peak community groups (e.g. FECCA) and relevant government agencies (DEEWR, DIAC).

All migrants and refugees with overseas gained skills and qualifications should have access to the proposed specialist skilled migrant and refugee employment and training service.

*The cost associated with skills assessment and training is often prohibitive for migrants in the first years after arrival.*

**Recommendation 8**

*It is recommended that the Australian Government:*

- *Extend access to the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals Program to permanent residents undertaking assessments in trades areas to meet state and territory licensing requirements.*
- *Removing the requirement that applicants for the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals Program be resident for at least two years.*
- *Providing a skills recognition allowance to migrants subject to a two year waiting period for benefits to allow them to undertake gap training as soon as possible after their arrival.*