

Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
Submission to Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia



Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre (Spectrum MRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Federal Government's Joint Standing Committee on Migration's request for a submission regarding the Public Inquiry on Multiculturalism. Spectrum MRC's specific interest in submitting this response relates to our organisation's work in advocating for the interest of newly arrived communities to help ensure their positive settlement in Melbourne's North -West Metropolitan Region.

About our Organisation

Spectrum MRC is a not-for-profit community organisation working to assist generations of migrants and refugees to successfully settle and reach their full potential in Australia. The organisation was initially established in 1980 to provide settlement services for migrants and refugees living in the North - West Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. As service demand has expanded, Spectrum MRC has responded by offering support reaching widely across Melbourne, including specific project areas which have state-wide reach. The scope of our services includes:

- Influencing society to build more inclusive communities;
- Delivering culturally appropriate and responsive settlement & family services;
- Making immigration advice affordable for individuals and employers;
- Empowering communities to identify and address settlement challenges;
- Providing culturally-tailored, hands-on & job-focused training;
- Transitioning jobseekers into sustainable employment;
- Assisting ageing migrants and people with a disability to participate in life at home and in the community.

All Spectrum MRC activities are driven by a client focus and help to support newcomers in their transition to Australian society and the organisation aims to foster economic and social inclusion at the onset of clients' arrival.

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

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

Spectrum MRC has seen multiculturalism embraced and subsequently dismissed as a policy framework in the past few years. This shifting has sent mixed messages to Australia's multicultural community about the value the federal government places on diversity and the contribution migrant and refugees make to Australia. Our organisation has seen the positive impact the promotion of multiculturalism has had on newly arrived community in Victoria through the strong work Victoria's Multicultural Commission has undertaken in the past 10 years. Through the delivery of key positive messages about diverse communities, Victoria has become a state of choice for many new arrivals. Spectrum MRC would welcome a similar approach to promoting multiculturalism at a federal level and would also value a clear articulation about what social inclusion means specifically for migrants and refugees. The term social inclusion should not be used as a substitute for multiculturalism and valuing diversity.

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

Diaspora communities have made a unique contribution to the bi-lateral relationship Australia has with nations globally. The economic benefit of these relationships is significant as the corporate sector is able to take advantage of a bi-lingual workforce. The workforce diversity is a point of difference Australia has in comparison with other western nations.

In addition to the bi-lateral trade benefits diaspora communities have, remittances are an additional phenomenon that adds significant financial benefit to home nations of migrants and refugees. The remittances of diaspora communities should not be underestimated either as these contribute to the economies of migrants' home nations, especially in the case of countries such as Tonga where a significant proportion of income from the community in Australia is sent home.

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;

Spectrum MRC has a strong history of developing innovative programs in response to client needs for support which goes beyond casework to further address specific challenges to economic and social participation. These programs have been developed following extensive consultation with clients, community groups and other service providers to identify 'gaps'. This anecdotal evidence is then supported by data and statistical information to ensure project success.

An example of this approach is a program which addressed a need for employment and small business skill development across newly arrived women. Spectrum MRC partnered with Women's Health in the North (WHIN) to establish the **Enterprising Women Program** (Victorian Government's Community Support Fund, 2005-2008), this innovative education and employment project helped over 300 women from CALD backgrounds across the Melbourne northern metropolitan region, to seek employment or explore starting their own businesses. The program provided financial literacy sessions, support and training in setting up small (micro) business, including the development of business plans, with no interest loans available to women completing this training. Priority was given to women otherwise excluded from economic and financial participation for a range of reasons. These included socio-economic status, employment status, ethnic or cultural background, English language barriers, or a combination of all these factors. Participants formed small group credit circles, through which they were able to access small, interest-free loans to assist in the establishment of micro-enterprises. It delivered six business programs, which evaluations found to have increased women's confidence and skills around starting a business, as well as social links in the community. In addition, follow-up interviews with women revealed that 60% of participants went on to start a business. Not one of the women defaulted on their micro-enterprise loan.

The **Refugee Action Program** (RAP) is a positive example of supporting refugee community groups to drive their own settlement initiatives and assist their communities in participating fully in Australian society. The program empowers community from a refugee and humanitarian background to:

- More fully participate in and engage with their local communities;
- Access existing services;
- Identify local issues and concerns;
- Plan tailored, community-owned responses; and
- Enhance local capacity and improve settlement outcomes.

The RAP also provides a point of coordination for service providers as it enables them to better understand and address local needs of communities

Spectrum MRC would like to make a comment about the in-flexibility of some funding agreements and how these agreements inhibit innovative service design. Also the short term nature of government funding also restrict the ability of project to address long term integration and participation challenges.

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

Spectrum MRC sees settlement of new arrivals as a life long process which continues in different stages. Clients require support and assistance throughout the various stages of settlement and our organisation does not see the need for 'incentives' to be offered to clients' to achieve positive outcomes.

At the onset, Spectrum MRC sees that there is a need to ensure more realistic images and experiences of Australia are presented throughout the AUSCO program to ensure that expectations are aligned with reality.

In order for long term settlement to be a positive, inclusive process for new arrivals it is integral that migrants and refugees are appropriately linked in to support services and are aware of civic participation opportunities to enhance engagement with the local community. Programs such as volunteering are a positive way to improve new arrivals' support networks and importantly also recognizes that settlement is linked to host communities' attitudes and efforts towards welcoming diversity. Local council plays a role in preparing the local community for the arrival of new settlers, this helps to promote a greater sense of long term social connection. This approach has been used to great effect in Canada and helped to foster greater connectedness amongst residents and new comers.

An example of a program which works towards achieving positive settlement outcomes to ensure families overcome some of the cultural challenges associated with settling in a foreign country is Parenting in a New Culture (PINC):

Parenting in a New Culture (PINC) – FAHCSIA-funded program since 2003

- Sometimes migrant community groups have cultural and social values about parenting and families which are different from mainstream Australian cultural and social values and norms. Spectrum MRC addresses some of these issues by offering programs and projects specifically tailored to respond to the needs of migrant communities who might not find what they need in mainstream services.
- Over the years, Spectrum staff have identified an emerging need and a lack of options within the mainstream parenting services, addressing intergenerational conflict and parenting adolescents, in terms of courses being tailored for specific communities and addressing their specific needs.
- The project targeted migrant community groups whose cultural and social values regarding parenting and families are quite different from mainstream Australian cultural and social values and norms.
- The aim of the project is to increase the parenting skills of new migrant parents within three migrant and refugee community groups in the context of the new Australian social and educational environments and for the benefit of their young children through:
 - Strengthening and supporting parents' roles and producing positive parenting outcomes.
 - Piloting and delivery of specific parenting orientation programs and skills development for parents of Pre School aged children from Arabic, Chinese and Samoan community groups.
 - Needs of more newly arrived communities (especially Congolese, Sierra Leonean, Liberian and Burundi). The needs of more established communities were addressed with the Intergenerational Fact sheets series.
- In 2006, Spectrum was successful in obtaining a funding from FACHSIA, for "Addressing inter-generational conflict in established and newly arrived communities" project. The project focused on 4 communities - targeting two established communities - former Yugoslavian and Turkish, and two newly emerging communities - Assyrian-Chaldean and Somali. This project was funded for the period of 15 months, from the end of November 2006 until end of February 2008.
- We are currently working with Congolese, Sierra Leonean, Liberian and Burundi communities – these programs are a good demonstration of DIAC not shouldering the full responsibility for integration of CALD communities – mainstream departments need to ensure they have funding for culturally-tailored approaches to integration across lifespan issues.

National productive capacity

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

Spectrum MRC has seen from over 30 years of working with new arrivals that the desire to engage in the workforce and financially participate is a very strong trend which has remained consistent. Historically, migration has played a very important role in contributing to skill shortage areas to increase the nation's productive capacity and insure industries continue to grow. An example of has obviously been the post WW II migration wave which saw the arrival of Europeans to contribute to infrastructure development in Australia's boom economy. A more recent example is the engagement of bi-lingual migrant and refugee workers in the Aged Care and Community Services sector, a sector which is continuing to grow. The engagement of multicultural communities in this sector has an unquantifiable benefit for the nation's productivity. Bi-lingual carers provide respite to sons and daughters caring for elderly parents allowing them to re-engage in the workforce.

Further examples of the way migrant groups can continue to engage in Australia's workforce are below:

Training refugee community groups to become **Refugee Employment and Training Liaisons/ Advocates:**

The project aims to address the gap that often exists between the employment/training sector and refugee communities to increase their understanding of the sector as well as link communities directly to places that offer employment opportunities.

- **Stage 1:** Community Employment Advocates attend training/workshop series where they are orientated and create networks with employment and training sector (unpaid)
- **Stage 2:** Community Employment Advocates are placed within community organisations and employment agencies (either as a traineeship or work placement), and as part of their duties work with their community to strengthen employment opportunities and networks. Communities create database of aspirations within the communities so as to be better able to match existing gap between industry and relevantly qualified candidates (paid)

To specifically address other barriers to employment, Spectrum has worked in partnership with many other organisations. A few examples are detailed below:

- **Assyrian Chaldean Women's Education & Employment Expo** – the Assyrian Chaldean Women's Community Council indicated that there was a low-level of knowledge within their community about eligibility for the AMEP program, what was involved in Certificate level courses under the PPP program and in the aged care industry, which was of high interest. Together with AMES Melbourne, the Northern AMEP program and the Assyrian Chaldean Women's Community Council, Spectrum co-staged an Expo to bring together a range of speakers and an opportunity for the community to have their awareness raised about the AMEP program, PPP courses, our MHSS program and funding for social enterprises to set up small businesses. This knowledge empowered them to make an informed decision about their next career as many were transitioning from full-time parents as their children became school-age or were looking to re-enter the workforce due to personal career and/or financial reasons;
- **African Pathways Program: Positive Transitions Project** – Many community leaders from Horn of African communities raised the issue with Spectrum about unsuccessful performance at school for leading to low retention rates and hence high unemployment with youth in their communities. Together with Mission Australia, Spectrum undertook this project to investigate the community, education and family issues facing Horn of African communities when settling in Victoria and ultimately support young people from these

communities in the Darebin and Banyule LGAs, through key transitional points into and through secondary school and increase the likelihood of successful schooling for African youth;

- **Second-Chance Book-keepers (SCBK) Project** – A new Monash University study released in April 2008 by Dr Bob Birrell, indicated that almost half of Australia's skilled migrants from non-English speaking countries cannot get a job in their field of expertise, and this resonated with our anecdotal experience in the *SkillFill* program. As a partnership between our RTO and the National Association of Accounting Technicians (NAAT), this project gained funding from DEEWR's **Adult Literacy Innovation Project** (2008-) as an innovative and collaborative partnership with industry to reduce skills shortages and develop best practice for the wider sector. The fundamental aim of this project is to pilot a course to provide employment pathways and reduce the barriers faced by many unemployed overseas-qualified book-keepers, who lack English literacy, business communication skills and/or Australian field experience. The project will have the following aims and objectives:
 - consolidate the knowledge and experience of overseas-qualified book-keepers with curriculum which establishes the key competencies required in MYOB within an Australian small to medium business context;
 - provide an induction to Australian workplace culture to improve their business communication skills
 - increase their literacy, specific to the book-keeping field, to improve their employability &
 - provide job-search training, covering resume writing, interviews and job market trends.
6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants.

Spectrum MRC has worked with skilled migrants through various Victorian Government funding, most recently with the SkillFill Program, and can testify to some of the challenges associated with this groups' meaningful engagement in the employment market. SkillFill achieved employment outcomes for 40 skilled engineers and below is an outline of the financial impact these jobs will have for the Australian economy following the investment of \$240,000 by the state government:

- The financial return to the federal government was \$400,000 in income tax in the first year of employment for skilled migrants.
- For every \$1 invested in this bridging program, \$1.67 was returned to federal government.
- Most participants were aged 36yrs, if they had a 25 yr working life all things remaining constant they would collectively contribute \$10m in income tax all this from a one-off expenditure of \$240,000. This does not take into account the disposable income they acquire throughout the duration of their working lives.

The Australian workforce is under – utilising the expertise of skilled migrants due to:

- Australian employers not recognising overseas skills and experience
- The lack of local work experience of many new arrivals
- Employers negative stereotypes about diverse workforce
- The lack of understanding of Australian workplace culture and systems / processes.

Many skilled migrants have very little support to assist them to understand Australian employment / recruiting processes or to be connected with professional networks. Even with the appropriate skills and training in a job shortage industry, skilled migrants can often remain out of work with no access to financial or social welfare support in the first 2 years resulting in long term unemployment, gradual skill loss and CV redundancy. The increasing competitiveness of the employment market means that funding for projects to assist on a one-on-one basis is essential in ensuring the best utilisation of skilled migrants' productive capacity. The return from investment in these types of support programs is significant. Spectrum MRC, through Skillfill, was able to place 40 skilled migrants in employment as a result of:

- intensive case management including targeted advice, referrals and support that enhances the client's employment opportunities;
- access to supplementary training and industry registration that supports competitiveness within the labour market;
- intensive specialised and targeted job search support including developing the client's knowledge and skills on accessing and maintaining employment within an Australian workplace;
- a work placement;
- a reverse marketing service;
- support through work placement as well as post employment; and
- quarterly industry networking opportunities.

Aside from working directly with skilled migrants, our organisation has discovered the benefits of working with employers to educate them on the on the benefits of skilled migrant employment and promote positive success stories.

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

From Spectrum MRC's experience, we know that many new comers are entrepreneurial and although they may find barriers to engaging in mainstream employment due to lack of Australian workplace experience, non-Australian qualifications and language and literacy challenges, migrants and refugees have strong interest in commencing small businesses. The difficulty is identifying appropriate training to support business ideas as programs such as NEIS are not tailored to the individual needs of diverse communities.

In addition to a tailored NEIS program, Government support programs which capitalize on business mentoring models would also be beneficial. These mentors can assist migrants and refugees interested in starting small business through providing access to networks and sharing expertise.

Summary of Recommendations

To summarise, Spectrum MRC would like to propose recommendations for the Federal Government to ensure that a bi-partisan, national commitment to promoting diversity and multiculturalism does not just remain in theory but is translated into funding programs for deliverable outcomes.

- 1)** That the federal government clearly articulates the link between social inclusion and multiculturalism and that clear public messages be reinforces about the value of diversity.
- 2)** That the federal government prioritises longer term funding for innovative settlement programs promoting inclusion and social connectedness across migrant, refugee groups and established communities.
- 3)** That the federal government develops tailored employment support programs for both refugees and migrants, including skilled migrants, to ensure new arrivals' meaningful economic participation in their employment field.
- 4)** That the federal government prioritises the need for tailored small business programs specifically designed to assist migrants and refugees which takes into account the individual language literacy and numeracy needs of this group.

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