

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

I would like to take the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism. As migrant, academic, volunteer with ethnic organisations, mother I have developed a strong interest in multiculturalism and am forwarding a personal response to the submission.

My response builds on the experience I have acquired working with migrants and international students, as well as settling in Australia myself.

Thanks for taking it into account,

Regards,

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

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

Many Australians seem to believe that multiculturalism is not about them, but about minority groups needing special rights and who they have little to do with. Multiculturalism has to be about everyone and policies developed should take this into account.

Australia is not made up of one culture, two or three cultures, but a multiplicity of cultures. Unfortunately these cultures tend to sometimes exist in separated cultural spheres, potentially causing social fragmentation. The government can play an important role ensuring cultures meet, through providing a context, physical and virtual places where cultures meet to share ideas.

Today 'others' are more visible than ever before. Travel and international migration ensures more people meet more people from everywhere in the world. It is no longer possible to ignore the 'others', we need to live with them. We do not need to love these others, nor adopt their practices, but it would be foolish not to find out how they do things, or whether we can learn something from them. To do so we need to engage in on-going communication. Meetings of cultures also provide opportunities for re-evaluating and possibly re-affirming existing practices and beliefs. This is how societies evolve.

Government can take the lead and foster an environment supporting such discussion. Many initiatives supporting multiculturalism do not go much beyond food and folkloric dance festivals, which tend to reinforce stereotypes. Thereby such activities tend to alienate the many migrants, transnationals who would like to succeed, be part of Australian society but cannot recognise themselves in multiculturalism as presented.

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

Migration today rarely just goes one way. People come and go, acquiring experiences, competencies and skills. Any multicultural agenda today needs to refer to transnational communities, temporary migrants such as international students, as well as to more permanent migrants.

Many international students end up staying or spending significant time in Australia. As a result Australia somehow becomes part of their identity, an experience that will stay forever. International relations involve relations between people. International students present opportunities to strengthen such relations. Higher Degree by Research students particularly tend occupy influential positions when they to return to their home countries. Australia should foster such opportunities and encourage the representation of international students as guests, who need to be welcomed and supported. Unfortunately not all international students have positive experiences in Australia. Lack of access to services, lack of clarity on status of families and education for their children, lack of integration between local and international students, insufficient support offered by many educational institutions, and in some cases racism makes this difficult. Australia has progressed by creating the Council for International Students and opportunities for international students to engage with policy makers. Such initiatives are important and need to be taken seriously, by giving them the tools and the power to voice concerns of international students and be heard.

Many migrants keep close links with their country of origin and could contribute far more to relationships between Australia and the rest of the world. Many have good networks and the competencies to operate in diverse cultural environments, but these networks and competencies are underused and undervalued. More often they are seen as a potential problem, rather than as a potential asset. Migrants are judged negatively by their differences, which prevents them to demonstrate their skills.

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; and

Giving new settlers the feeling they belong and can contribute is an essential condition for their integration into society. Migrants who feel as outsiders will tend to find other places for belonging, back home (mentally and emotionally) or by joining groups of other disenfranchised.

Many migrants can return home mentally and emotionally by turning to international media where they can get news and entertainment from home in their home language. While this may be important to them, it is also important to created spaces that can mediate between here and

there. Ethnic media can provide such a space and needs to be supported. Participation in ethnic radio provides migrants a voice and sense of belonging, and more importantly creates an intermediary space, that bridges the old and the new country. It provides local content, news, stories, but in migrants' languages.

However it is important that ethnic media are well supported so they do not end up being seen as places for the marginalised. If this is the image they have, migrants who want to be successful will avoid them.

Work contributes hugely to social recognition. Settlement programs should provide resources to support migrants learning how to make the best of the skills they have, how their skills can be recognised. Mentoring programs, practical work experience where they can be learn how to operate in an Australian work environment and acquire references are important. What is important is that these programs are developed not as bandaids for the 'disabled', to remedy deficiencies, but as genuine programs recognising existing skills and developing these further.

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

As active volunteer in community radio, I would like to see the government support ethnic media. Ethnic media is most effective in catering for diverse needs and interests of people from various cultural backgrounds. But ethnic media needs to be well supported to be able to do a good job. If not, they tend to be seen as refuges for the marginalised, something most migrants do not like to identify themselves with.

Media plays an important role in telling people how to view the world. Unfortunately the Australian media is not very good at representing overseas born Australians (Adele Horin, Sydney Morning Herald 13/11/2010, p 26). Migrant groups are not often present in success stories and more likely to appear in crime stories. Existing media has to be encouraged to better represent the diversity of the Australian population. It may be difficult to influence commercial media, but the government can encourage public media and ethnic media to portray ethnic diversity in more representative ways, thus encouraging a greater feeling of belonging.

Today migrants can access overseas media very easily. As a result some continue to mentally live in another world. Having a local media they can relate to, which represents people like them, who speak their language, allows building bridges between cultures. Australian ethnic

media provides programs they can understand and can contribute to. By doing so ethnic media also carries out citizenship education. Ethnic media has been found to act as 'cultural site in which political and migratory experiences interact and intervene to produce migratory mediascapes in which contradictory interpretations of identity are played out' (Cohen, 2008, *We are staying in our country*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, 6).

National productive capacity

Multiculturalism tends to separate groups, representing migrants as problems to be solved, and not as assets. Since they are seen as having nothing to offer, transnationals, migrant communities are expected to adapt. Migrants who cannot play out Australian social rituals are generally rejected. It is not what they know, what they can do that counts, but their lack of capacity to express themselves as Australians, their lack of Australian references that will count. Many migrant coming Australia are highly educated, yet 'good qualifications do not translate as readily for some migrants into good jobs as is the case for Australian born men and women' ('Calling Australia home' *Natsem* report, 2010). Work allows people to participate in society, and create a self identity of participants, contributors.

Rather than reject people from different cultural background, it may be important to set up mentoring schemes – for negotiating social practice and allowing people from different social backgrounds to be able to bring forward their capabilities and skills.

People who relate best to migrants and other transnationals are often Australians who have spend time overseas. While few come back speaking a second language (and even fewer more than two) the experience seems to provide an openness of mind, a willingness to communicate, a preparedness to see oneself as part of the multicultural mosaic.

Recommendations

- Support the idea of multiculturalism as relevant for all Australians, encourage the development of multicultural competencies for all Australians, through educating Australians to speak foreign languages, to learn overseas work practices, to travel for study or work exchange.
- Support the representation of transnationals as people who are multi-skilled, rather than people who cannot write and speak English very well, eat strange things and dress strangely.

- Ensure multiculturalism is not portrayed as a clash of culture, but as opportunities to discuss values, practices and ongoing negotiation about who we are and what sort of society we want.
- Support programs helping migrants articulate existing skills, and acquire implicit social work related skills which are crucial to gaining jobs in Australia. This could be done through mentoring programs, work practice valuing migrants.
- Develop more effective processes to facilitate recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications so that migrants can be employed in their field of expertise.
- Support ethnic media so it can give voice to all members of the multicultural population, foster multiple cultural competencies and operate as bridges and spaces of discussion between cultures.