



111 Woodville Road
WOODVILLE SA 5011
Tel.: (08) 8345 5266
Fax.: (08) 8345 5277

31st March 2011

Ms Jane Hearn
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Dear Ms Hearn

Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

Please find below the MCCSA response to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.

We look forward to the response from the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to the submissions.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further comments or clarification on our response.

Yours Sincerely

Vivien Hope
Executive Officer

Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

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

Multiculturalism is an integral part of our society and therefore complements the social inclusion agenda. It ensures that language and culture are recognised as key factors that influence the degree to which people fully participate in Australian society.

However, the term 'multiculturalism' is often misinterpreted and misunderstood for a number of reasons. It is a policy that helps guide us towards an equitable, harmonious and prosperous society, but it does not state what we need to do to get there. For multiculturalism to be widely understood and accepted, we must first determine and clearly enunciate what it means to be an Australian. This includes ensuring that all Australians understand and accept the legal, social, moral and ethical principles upon which this country operates. In short, we need to be clear what it means to be an Australian, but not from a purely mainstream perspective.

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

People from these communities bring to Australia a wide range of linguistic and cultural skills that facilitate business opportunities with countries around the world, and in particular our key trading partners. They also help local businesses to be more innovative and attuned to best practices overseas. The number and diversity of ethnic chambers of commerce established in our States and Territories reflect this.

People from diaspora countries also bring a rich cultural and linguistic diversity that helps us to overcome the barriers imposed by our geographical isolation and mono-cultural heritage.

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

New migrants, and especially refugees, receive a wide range of support services in the first few years of settlement through programs that are very well resourced by the Australian Government. However, after this period it often appears that the Australian Government transfers most of the responsibility for funding of support programs to the State and Territory Governments. This leads to a considerable decrease in funding for programs to support new migrants and refugees at a crucial point in their settlement. This is the stage where they are seeking to establish themselves and helping to build strong and sustainable communities. It is then left to NGOs and CALD communities to use their limited resources to support the new migrants and their communities.

The limited and often short-term one-off funding forces NGOs to be innovative. The MCCSA has run a number of innovative programs over the last 6 years. We have found that sport and arts based programs are an effective way of helping youth and families to develop the contacts, confidence and resilience to successfully settle here. Not only do they offer healthy and positive activities, but they create opportunities for refugees and people from mainstream and CALD communities to interact and share their ideas and experiences. We have determined that communication between these groups is a key component of successful settlement.

The MCCSA has helped to launch two successful and sustainable sports based programs.

The Grange Tennis Club Advantage Refugee Program provides subsidised membership and coaching fees to refugee youth. It encourages the youth to participate in a healthy mainstream activity at a local club with a culturally appropriate environment, helps the youth and their families to make friends and develop networks and to feel that they are part of the wider community.

3Ball Basketball is a 3 on 3 half court version played outdoors. It is extremely popular with refugee and CALD youth, and helps to open up pathways to club and district basketball. The 3Ball SA Basketball Association is recognised and supported by Basketball SA and Basketball Australia.

The MCCSA has used several arts based projects to help refugee and CALD people to explore and express their barriers to settlement. Arts based projects, and especially theatrical performances, are an effective medium for conveying the key messages and for encouraging interaction between the different groups.

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

It is widely recognised that migrants make a significant positive contribution to the social and economic development of Australia, once they have established themselves here. There are several factors that impact on long-term settlement patterns.

Gaining meaningful employment is crucial to long-term settlement, whether it is for humanitarian, family, sponsored or business migrants. It provides them with a sense of achievement, pride and self worth and enables them to contribute socially and economically to their new home. Securing employment in Australia often requires the applicant to have formal qualifications and work experience in Australia. We have found that many refugees are able to obtain certificate level qualifications in various vocations, however these are rarely linked with opportunities to gain work experience and traineeships. Refugees who obtain qualifications, but do not get work experience and traineeships face considerable barriers to gaining employment. This is often due to racial, linguistic and cultural barriers faced by new migrants and the stereotypical views held by employers.

Migrants who come to Australia under the skilled migration category, face barriers in getting their existing skills and qualifications recognised by Australian industry associations. There should be greater incentives for local employers to recruit skilled migrants and subsidies to enrol them in bridging courses, including English language, to help them to adjust to the Australian work environment. There should also be clearer information provided to prospective migrants about any difficulties or delays in getting overseas qualifications recognised by the relevant industry boards and associations in Australia.

Migrants who have tertiary level qualifications also face considerable barriers to employment. Many are forced to retake under-graduate courses before they can work in their chosen field. To correct this, there needs to be continual improvement in the assessment of overseas qualifications and a greater focus on research positions in Australian universities and other organisations.

National productive capacity

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

As mentioned earlier, migration has had a significant impact on the social, economic and cultural development of Australia. We need to develop ways to quantify the social and cultural benefits so that they can be measured and valued in the same context as economic benefits.

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

Australia has had mixed success over the last 50 years in utilising the skills of migrants. This is due to factors such as discrimination by local employers and employees, difficulties accepting overseas qualifications, language and cultural barriers, failure to help migrants to develop social networks and a general inability to understand how to manage these skills.

While we have programs designed to attract skilled migrants to Australia and to link them to particular industries, we lack processes and systems for managing the social aspects of business and skilled migration. We need to ensure that these migrants and their families develop social as well as business networks. In many cases there are people within our CALD communities who are able to assist with this.

Unfortunately, our efforts to engage our State Government agencies on this front over the years have been met with disinterest and a lack of understanding by them of the complexities surrounding settlement.

Over the years we have also had several large-scale migrations where people have been promised work commensurate with their skills, only to find on arrival that they are expected to do manual labour. Even now, some communities still carry a grudge about what they were promised 40 or 50 years ago.

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

The vast majority of businesses in Australia, and the largest employers are small to medium enterprises, however, most of the incentives such as tax breaks are provided to large businesses. Most of the large businesses are multi-nationals, and therefore the profits that ensue from the incentives go overseas.

It would therefore be logical to offer more incentives to help establish and support small to medium enterprises. This could include more business incubators, funding to support research and innovation, incentives to establish small to medium enterprises in rural and regional areas and programs to encourage and support partnerships with overseas companies.