

**Australian Parliament  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
Submission no. 399**



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**  
Australian Multicultural Advisory Council

Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP  
Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
C/- Secretariat JSCM  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Vamvakinou

The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) greatly appreciated the opportunity to appear before the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's *Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia* on 2 March 2011.

AMAC welcomes a focus on multiculturalism and believes the Inquiry comes at an opportune time as the Commonwealth proceeds with the implementation of the new national multicultural policy.

Given the importance of the Inquiry, AMAC would like to submit further evidence and elaborate on the points made to the Committee during our appearance on 2 March 2011. In particular, the Council would like to elaborate on the need for policies that speak to the future of multicultural Australia.

Once again, the Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry and to provide advice that might assist the Committee in the formation of further recommendations to Government.

Yours sincerely

Judge Rauf Soulio  
Deputy Chair

15 April 2011

**SUBMISSION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL ADVISORY COUNCIL  
(AMAC) TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION (JSCM) –  
'INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA'**

***Role of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council***

1. The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) was established on 17 December 2008.
2. AMAC consists of 16 members with a wide range of backgrounds, experience and professional expertise, and reflects a balance of ages and gender.
3. AMAC provides the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs with advice on:
  - social cohesion issues relating to Australia's cultural and religious diversity
  - overcoming intolerance and racism in Australia
  - communicating the social and economic benefits of Australia's cultural diversity to the broad community
  - issues relating to the social and civic participation of migrants in Australian society
  - significant policy announcements that impact on cultural diversity

***AMAC's advice to government on multicultural policy***

4. From 2008 to 2010 AMAC was asked to develop advice to government on a multicultural policy. This advice was formally delivered to government on 30 April 2010 in the form of a document – *The People of Australia: The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's statement on cultural diversity and recommendations to government*.
5. The first part of the advice is a narrative of Australia's ongoing multicultural success story, split into three sections: 'our history', 'rights and responsibilities', and 'our future'. The second part consists of a series of ten headline recommendations for government consideration.

***AMAC stakeholder consultations***

6. In preparing the statement, AMAC members consulted with state and territory government agencies in mid-2009. AMAC also hosted a series of public roundtable discussions in each state and territory in November 2009. The roundtables were attended by a broad range of organisations, including groups representing particular communities and social interests. Further, members invited academics who have written on multiculturalism or Australia's diversity to submit their views on issues that should be considered in the preparation of a new policy.

***The Government's Response***

7. The Government responded to these recommendations through the development of a new national multicultural policy. AMAC's recommendations were all 'supported' or 'supported in principle'. A full exposition of the Government's response is at Attachment A.

#### ***'The People of Australia - Australia's Multicultural Policy'***

8. The Government's new multicultural policy, *The People of Australia - Australia's Multicultural Policy*, was launched by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Hon Chris Bowen MP on 16 February 2011.
9. The Government's policy embraces Australia's shared values and cultural traditions. It recognises our rights and responsibilities as enshrined in our citizenship pledge and supports the rights of all to celebrate, practise and maintain their cultural traditions within the law.
10. The policy also includes three new initiatives: an independent Australian Multicultural Council (AMC), a National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy, and a Multicultural Youth Sports Partnership Program.
11. AMAC welcomes the announcement by government that the new council will be independent and will be selected on the advice of an independent panel in a similar manner to appointments made to the board of SBS and the ABC.

#### ***Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Terms of Reference***

12. The points below follow the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's terms of reference (set out in Attachment B).

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

1. **The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda**
13. Multiculturalism in Australia has been critical to building participation and inclusion for Australians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. AMAC believes that Australia's multicultural policy should closely align with the Government's Social Inclusion Agenda. There is a need for multicultural principles to be more firmly embedded in the formation of broader social policies.
14. The Council notes that the profile of disadvantage and exclusion for vulnerable migrants and refugees is unique. The points of disadvantage for migrants are intense, reflecting both linguistic and cultural barriers to inclusion. Social interaction and participation relies on language, but such communication is predicated on learned and common meaning including behavior, customs and traditions.
15. AMAC considers that refugees and migrants, particularly from countries where English is not the main language, tend to experience multiple forms of disadvantage. Vulnerable migrants and refugees have less individual resources (home ownership, social networks, common cultural norms, Australian qualifications, work history or income) and face significant barriers when

accessing community resources (social services, transport, health care and education).

16. Over the long-term, issues such as discrimination can affect the life opportunities of migrants, especially those from non-English speaking countries. Discrimination can be on the basis of ethnicity, but it may also be on the basis of religion or culture.
17. Analysis of trends from the 2010 report *Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is Faring* shows that English proficiency is the most significant determinant of disadvantage for migrants and refugees. At the time of the 2006 Census, more than half a million Australian residents (approximately 3 per cent of the total population) recorded that they did not speak English well or did not speak English at all.<sup>1</sup>
18. Settlement and integration are lifelong processes and migrants and refugees continue to be vulnerable past the initial settlement process. For example, the 2008-09 edition of *Population Flows*, noted that the global financial crisis led to a sharp increase in the unemployment rate for migrants from non-English speaking countries. Longitudinal surveys of employment have shown that migrants are generally more affected by adverse economic conditions than people born in Australia.
19. Council members have expressed support for the locality-based approach to interventions adopted by the social inclusion agenda. However, it must be noted that locations of disadvantage are also likely to be areas with high migrant populations, particularly from non-English speaking backgrounds. For example, Dandenong in Victoria which has been recognised as a location of concentrated disadvantage, has over three times more people with low English proficiency than the national average.<sup>2</sup>
20. The Council believes that locality based approaches to foster social inclusion need to recognise the specific needs of non-English speaking communities, and must adapt service delivery to engage with vulnerable migrants and refugees.
21. AMAC is concerned that older migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are at particular risk of social exclusion. The Council notes that the proportion of older Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in the population is increasing at a significantly higher rate than the Australian-born community.
22. The Productivity Commission's recent draft report on *Caring For Older Australians* (January 2011) noted that Australia's population of older people from a non-English speaking background is expected to increase by over 40 per cent between 2011 and 2026 in line with the overall increase in the older population. By 2026, it is projected that one in four Australians aged 80 and over will be from a non-English speaking background. (Gibson et al. 2001)
23. Further, evidence suggests older migrants do not fully utilise aged care and community services. The Council supports the adequate funding of ethno-

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<sup>1</sup> 2006 Census tables, see [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

<sup>2</sup> *Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is Faring*, Australian Government (2010).

specific aged-care services and standards for mainstream aged care services.

24. The Productivity Commission's draft recommendation in this area is that there should be provision of ongoing and comprehensive interpreter services (either within facilities or through telephone translators) for clients from non-English speaking backgrounds and that staff undertake professional development activities which increase their cultural awareness (Productivity Commission, *Caring for Older Australians Draft Report*, January 2011). AMAC supports these recommendations.

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

25. Australia is a net beneficiary in terms of skills and social capital from global population movements. Migrants bring experience, expertise, and often also a network of overseas business and professional contacts. Maintaining a culturally and linguistically diverse society enhances our connections and supports our trade and investment ties, particularly with developing economies.
26. The move toward skilled migration means Australia's migration program includes an increasing number of highly educated young professionals, who are often upwardly mobile in their country of origin.
27. In addition, the composition of our program has shifted towards new and emerging economies. People born in North East Asia now account for the most significant share of new arrivals (21.7 per cent), indeed the number of Chinese born Australians has increased nearly sixfold in the past two decades and in the 2009-10 program year, China was the second largest source country.
28. As the Report of the Government's Productivity and Prosperity Advisory Panel 'Setting up Australia for the Future' argues, there is a clear link between migration, trade and investment. Countries tend to trade and invest more with an economy when they have domestic communities that have migrated from that country. The report notes that companies exporting to East Asia are three times as likely to have staff of East Asian ancestry.
29. As the economies of Asia, and particularly China, continue to develop, the focus of our trade will shift from the importation of raw commodities to consumer goods, food and technology. The growing middle class in China and East Asia presents future opportunities for Australia beyond our mining and resource industries.
30. AMAC is concerned to ensure our policies place us in the best position to capitalise on our diverse population through future shifts in the global economy. In particular, the Council believes consideration should be given to a campaign to market the edge that Australia's diverse workforce provides.
31. While there is evidence to demonstrate the economic case for a diverse workforce, more could be done to promote the benefits of diversity to our domestic business community. Incentives could be considered for companies who commit to diversity-friendly work practices and consider diversity in their hiring practices.

32. The Council also supports the implementation of a national languages policy. A high proficiency in languages has clear economic benefits and will be instrumental to the development of Australia as a regional economic and trading hub.
33. A national languages policy would require a cross-portfolio commitment to consider Australia's language needs – from acquiring English to communicating with non-English speakers, or equipping future generations with language skills for a global economy.
34. Such a languages policy has resource implications and requires significant coordination. AMAC suggests that an inter-departmental working group or advisory panel would be needed to support the design of the policy.
35. The Council also considers that there is a need for greater research and analysis on the impact of non-permanent migration on our economic linkages, particularly with emerging economies.
36. Australia's own overseas diaspora communities also perform an informal ambassadorial role and help build connections between Australian interests and overseas business, research and professional organisations.
37. As technology has created faster and cheaper modes of communication, Australians residing overseas have remained connected and often maintain strong business or professional interests in Australia. Approximately one third of Australians living abroad intend to return to Australia. Those who have worked in a professional capacity return with greater exposure to overseas practices and trends, and provide an important skill injection into the Australian workforce.
38. Consideration should also be given to the role played by the one million Australians that permanently reside outside our borders. AMAC believes there is merit in exploring policies that seek to better capitalise on the potential role of our overseas communities in strengthening our economic interests.

### **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**
39. The Council believes there is a need for coordinated settlement services and a need to articulate the role of settlement services in the context of the broader social aims of equitable and productive participation in Australian society.
40. The Council is of the view that English proficiency is the single most significant impediment to labour market integration and participation in Australian society. Almost half of migrants not proficient in spoken English are in the lowest income bracket in Australia.<sup>3</sup> According to census data, migrants not proficient in English also had lower rates of participation in the workforce and were also

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<sup>3</sup> *Perspectives on Migrants*, ABS (2007).

among those least likely to have had contact with family and friends more than once a week.<sup>4</sup>

41. Conversely, people born in Australia were three times more likely to participate in community groups than a person born overseas and not proficient in English.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, language registers as a greater barrier to social participation than income. People in the lowest income bracket were still much more likely to participate in community groups than those with low language skills.<sup>6</sup>
42. Additionally, it is noteworthy that full-time employment rates for migrants from English speaking countries are significantly higher than for migrants from non-English speaking countries.
43. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the reason for considering that English language training was inappropriate was the period of time for which training was offered.
44. At present, dependants of skilled migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants are provided 510 hours of free language tuition. The Council believes that a range of factors make attainment of English in this period difficult to achieve.
45. Vulnerable migrants and refugees can face the added difficulty of a lack of formal education or little prior learning experience.<sup>7</sup> Formal schooling provides learning skills as much as it provides practical content. It also cements an understanding of the structure of the education system and the culture of our educational institutions.
46. A recent report by the Australian Human Rights Commission noted that the complicated pre-arrival experiences of humanitarian entrants from African countries meant traditional language approaches may not be as effective.<sup>8</sup>
47. For refugees, pre-arrival experiences can significantly impact on the capacity to engage in the learning process. Up to 25 per cent of people entering under Australia's humanitarian program have had experiences of torture or trauma.<sup>9</sup> Such experiences can affect memory and concentration and the level of in-class confidence and engagement.<sup>10</sup> Poor health can also significantly impact learning outcomes.
48. The language tuition needs of new arrivals and those who are more established vary considerably. The rate of language acquisition is greatly assisted by sustained usage. Family stream migrants and refugees have few social links and low levels of employment participation. Outside of formal classes and engagement with service providers there may be limited opportunities to practise English skills.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Opening the door: Provision for Refugee Youth with Minimal/No Schooling in the AMEP*, More (2008).

<sup>8</sup> *In Our Own Words*, Australian Human Rights Commission (2010).

<sup>9</sup> *The Role of the AMEP in Building a Holistic Settlement and Multicultural Program*, P. Aristotle (1999).

<sup>10</sup> *Teaching the Survivors of Torture and Trauma*, AMEP Research Centre ([www.ameprc.mq.edu.au](http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au)).

49. AMAC supports an increase in hours offered and considers that improvements could be made to the program to achieve better learning outcomes. Other international models have looked to combine language learning with structured social settings tailored to the settlement needs of migrants.
50. The Council believes consideration should also be given to initiatives that address the specific needs of humanitarian entrants who are not literate in their native language and have not previously engaged with formal education structures.
51. More broadly, AMAC believes the competitive tendering arrangements that currently facilitate the provision of settlement services should be reviewed. Competitive tendering diminishes the level of collaboration in the sector and can induce a competitive atmosphere that detracts from client outcomes.
52. Settlement services are integrated with community services and require strong local networks. Changes to the provider can mean significant down time while relationships are re-built. Competitive tendering also creates inefficiencies as the focus of providers can shift to grant and tender applications instead of direct service delivery. Some organisations have also indicated that funding uncertainty undermines investment in staff development.
53. The Council believes the move to competitive tendering can also have the effect of reducing community involvement in the settlement of refugees and migrants. In particular, short funding cycles can reduce the capacity of organisations to invest time in building local community goodwill and engaging with local volunteers.
54. AMAC recently began consideration of current practices to promote regional resettlement in Australia. AMAC notes that humanitarian entrants and migrants settled in regional locations can have better settlement outcomes, including a greater sense of belonging and increased proficiency in English.
55. AMAC has given consideration to models that include planned secondary resettlement of refugees and migrants and the use of existing networks of settlement services. AMAC has also looked at how established settlement service providers from metropolitan areas should be encouraged to mentor regional settlement service providers to share skills and experience, as well as allow flexible delivery of settlement services applicable to the regional and rural areas.
56. AMAC would also like to see state and/or local governments or Councils (perhaps in partnership with industry) fund additional training, including work experience, language training or further study, as part of a package to encourage employment participation and even regional settlement.
57. AMAC is of the opinion that more could be done to involve parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (particularly humanitarian backgrounds) in their children's schooling. There is a need for policies and programs which support such involvement including through volunteering. AMAC believes consideration should be given to a formal mechanism, such as a national roundtable, involving participants in the volunteering, parental,



education and social policy sectors, to develop recommendations and policy in this area.

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

58. AMAC believes that too little attention is given to the role of effective settlement programs in increasing the productivity dividends of our migration program. As has been noted by the Government's Productivity and Prosperity Advisory Panel, the benefits of skilled migration are realised only when the program provides the right workers *in time* for those who need them.
59. A migration program that is consistently calibrated to the needs of industry is less effective if new migrants spend significant down time adjusting to a new culture, competing for jobs in an unfamiliar labour market and attaining recognition for overseas skills and qualifications.
60. According to a survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Australia ranked better than most countries in terms of employment outcomes for migrant communities. Australia recorded the lowest migrant unemployment rate in absolute terms as well as the lowest rate in comparison to the domestic born population.
61. However, skilled migrants often spend the first few years post arrival working in a low skilled occupation in order to demonstrate local employment experience or to fund attainment of an Australian qualification.
62. This is supported by data which shows the unemployment rate for newly arrived migrants is very high, at up to 25 per cent. Indeed, it takes five years for the expected unemployment level to normalise to a level comparable to the Australia-born population.
63. At present, settlement services are only provided to dependants of skilled migrants, humanitarian entrants and family stream migrants. AMAC is keen to see renewed attention paid to the effect of government policies in settlement on economic participation rates for both skilled and unskilled migrants.
64. The Council considers there is merit in a cost-benefit analysis around potential productivity gains of an extension of settlement services to skilled stream migrants and temporary residents.
65. AMAC acknowledges the unique and complex needs of young people, and the related strategies and approaches required to facilitate meaningful participation and engagement of young people.
66. Approximately 25 per cent of the total youth population identify as multicultural and national settlement statistics show some 70 per cent of humanitarian entrants are under the age of 30 years, with these trends unlikely to change over the next five years (Ferguson, 2009).
67. Although research is scarce, it is widely agreed that new and recently arrived refugee youth face a unique set of challenges that place them at increased

risk of poor education and employment outcomes.

68. Risk factors include limited English language skills; difficulty understanding and negotiating education, training, and employment systems; limited or interrupted former education; psychosocial problems associated with pre and post-migration familial pressures; a lack of support at home; and racism and discrimination (de Anstiss, 2009; Jupp & Luckey, 1990; Stevenson & Willet, 2007).
69. In addition, as the parents of refugees are not familiar with Australian education and career pathways, young refugees are often unable to seek parental advice to inform decision making during the transition from school to work or higher education.
70. AMAC notes that the settlement process has traditionally worked with adults and has not had a dedicated and customised focus on building support for newly arrived youth. In recent years there has been a shift towards reprioritising young humanitarian entrants and the Council believes this has resulted in a greater appreciation of their contribution.
71. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds play a pivotal role in facilitating the participation of their family in the Australian community. Young people are often their parents' link to the wider community. They may act as gatekeepers in their parents' access to information about life in Australia, they often interpret and advocate for their parents, and they may care for younger siblings (MYSA 2010).

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

72. AMAC considers that the economic benefits of migration on our productive capacity are significant. Migration has stabilised the age structure of Australia's workforce, increased the pool of skills and expertise Australian industry can draw from, facilitated greater investment and innovation and raised average incomes.
73. AMAC recognises the link between participation and productive capacity. At present Australia's labour force participation is only the tenth highest in the OECD at 76.5 per cent, meaning there is scope to raise our productivity through policies that increase workforce participation.
74. The focus on skilled migration has led to greater rates of labour force participation. A recent edition of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship 'Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants' showed that the participation rate of migrants was 15 per cent higher than the national average.
75. AMAC believe consideration could be given to mechanisms that boost the level of labour force participation for non-skilled migrants, such as family streams and humanitarian entrants, such as programs which provide local employment experience or orientation to the Australian workplace.
76. The Council is of the view that the value of migrant communities cannot

always be adequately calculated in economic terms. For example, migrant communities in Australia have stimulated our intellectual and artistic communities and have contributed to our cultural wealth.

77. The diversity of our migrant intake has seen Australia mature from a largely monocultural nation, whose interactions were limited to other Western nations, to a more cosmopolitan multicultural nation, enjoying the benefits of interactions and exchanges on a global level.
78. Indeed, as the Productivity and Prosperity Report argues, a dynamic society is more likely to adopt new technologies and innovate. In addition, it notes that the growth in our population brought about by migration, has led to a shorter cycle of infrastructure renewal, allowing all Australians to benefit from state-of-the-art transport and communication technologies.

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

79. The Council believes the skills of migrants under all categories of entry to Australia are often underutilised.
80. While recognising recent improvements to the targeting of the skilled migration program, there are still a significant number of skilled migrants who have difficulty competing for jobs due to a lack of understanding of Australian recruitment, interviewing and workplace practices. Further barriers include language and cultural differences and employment discrimination.
81. In addition, there are a significant number of humanitarian entrants who possess overseas qualifications and skills which are not recognised in Australia. English proficiency levels and a lack of Australian work experience often prevent professionally qualified people of refugee background from obtaining work in their field of expertise, often in industries experiencing skill shortages.
82. AMAC acknowledges that migrants and refugees can face significant discrimination in the employment market. A general lack of knowledge of other cultures and practices may also lead to reluctance by some employers to hire staff from diverse backgrounds.
83. Many skilled and professional migrants require support with career advice and training information to help them to make the transition to appropriate employment options. The Council is concerned that there are limited programs and services currently in existence that provide such support. The level of assistance is further decreased if migrants accept employment in a lower skilled job, as most support is focused on the unemployed job seeker, not on people who are underemployed or work at levels below their capabilities.
84. Language is often a barrier for professional and skilled migrants. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program provides English language and literacy training linked to job-related workplace training and is designed to help workers meet their current and future employment and training needs.

However it is significantly underutilised in the workplace. AMAC believes there would be benefits in refocusing the program to be industry led, rather than employer led.

85. AMAC believes that any employment strategies for migrants should also consider the implementation of regional and rural employment programs. Many rural areas have difficulty attracting and retaining skilled and professional employees. Programs that assist migrants to relocate to rural areas for employment and professional advancement should be considered.

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

86. According to ABS statistics, while 24 per cent of Australians were born overseas, 27 per cent of business operators are overseas born.

87. However, significant barriers remain, particularly for migrants and refugees who are unfamiliar with Australian business practices. Many migrants and refugees have a range of commerce and business skills from their country of origin but do not have knowledge of the Australian context.

88. AMAC believes there is merit in providing mentoring support and assistance in understanding business administration such as taxation requirements, business legislation, company and legal structures, workplace regulations and insurance provisions. Many migrants have knowledge of how to produce, market and sell a product, but have less knowledge of the Australian market. While the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme is an important federal government initiative, the program targets unemployed people and does not necessarily meet the specific needs of migrants and refugees.

89. Similarly in states and territories there are small business advice services and Chambers of Commerce which are generally not targeted towards the needs of migrants and refugees.

90. AMAC is interested in the extent to which current training providers offer small business training packages and short courses to assist migrants to enter the business world and learn the basics of business administration in Australia. These packages need to focus on learning 'the language of business' in Australia.

91. *Jobs Australia* is the national, peak body for not-for-profit organisations that assists unemployed people to obtain and retain employment. The network helps members to make the most effective use of their resources by providing specialist services such as high-level human resources expertise that targets the need of its members.

92. A similar structure could be implemented as a federally led initiative with a centralised body providing advice and information to state and local government bodies to assist such bodies in providing business support for migrants and refugees.

93. For example in Queensland, the state government runs Skilling Solutions

Queensland (SSQ) which provides a free training and career information service with information on formal skills recognition, career pathways, training options, and apprenticeships and traineeships.

94. A national body could resource organisations such as SSQ to implement the necessary training and support programs to assist migrants and refugees in establishing local businesses. This initiative could have a flow on productivity effect as many migrant business owners will employ staff from CALD backgrounds.

15 April 2011

Please contact the AMAC secretariat for further information on this submission, or matters relating to AMAC:

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