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Ms Maria Vamvakinou
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email

Dear Ms Vamvakinou

OriginsInfo Submission to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this submission to the Inquiry on this important matter and thank you for agreeing to accept this late submission.

Background

I am the owner and principal consultant of a small business that specialises in measuring the extent of participation of culturally and linguistic (CALD) communities in government services, workforces, and commercial databases of customers. This capability enables users to assess, for example, product holdings, value, customer satisfaction, or employee profile, by CALD group.

OriginsInfo's clients include, among others, the Victorian Department of Health, Medibank Private, and well recognised brands from sectors including banking, financial services, telecommunications, motoring services, sports management, retail, automotive, and political parties.

Context

Australia's cultural diversity and the likely increase of that diversity are both well documented and acknowledged at all levels of government and across the Australian community. It is widely accepted that a large proportion of future population growth will be accounted for by migrants arriving under the various skilled worker and humanitarian programs.

According to the Social Inclusion Board of the Australian Government, social inclusion is about ensuring that everyone is able to participate fully in economic and community life as part of an agenda to build a stronger, fairer Australia. This broadens the government's long established commitment to the principles of access and equity.

The lack of specific reference to CALD communities by the Social Inclusion Board may be read as a deficiency – or it may be interpreted as a recognition that common usage of the terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘CALD’ have come to be associated with a narrow interpretation restricting their use to the contexts of immigration, settlement and citizenship.

Access and equity is an issue for all Australians – and this includes third or fourth generation people of, for example, Italian, Greek, Chinese, or even Anglo and Celtic heritage. Assimilation into Australian society (‘mainstreaming’) does not occur within a nominal five year settlement period, and in many cases does not occur at all. Indeed, we might ask, why should it? A person doesn’t lose core cultural heritage or values over an arbitrary number of years, or even over generations. There is much evidence that migrant groups revert to language and other indicators of cultural association as they age.

Implications for Businesses

Taking this broader view of multiculturalism and its importance to the economy, our cultural diversity presents significant opportunities and challenges for Australian businesses. Multicultural marketing recognises that the normal marketing approach of ‘one size fits all’ does not maximise the effectiveness of communication to cultural segments who need products and services to be promoted, presented, and packaged in ways that acknowledge and reflect their cultural context.

‘One size fits all’ marketing results in lost opportunities for business – but it is also a lost opportunity for the CALD citizen who feels ostracised by marketing messages that fail to resonate.

Many of Australia’s larger commercial brands are incorporating workplace cultural diversity as a performance indicator that is reported to shareholders as part of a commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Implications for the Public Sector

It is long-established practice in almost all public sector organisations to report on how it fulfils its access and equity obligations relating to cultural diversity. Many of the larger public sector entities are obliged to report to government through mechanisms such as the Multicultural Policies and Services Program in New South Wales. Reporting under this program describes ‘outcomes’ and ‘ranges of achievement’ against some suggested criteria.

Much of this reporting is descriptive of initiatives taken and anecdotal in the reporting of outcomes. Parts of the health service lead the way in obtaining and reporting on quantified evidence of the extent to which CALD communities are served by and engaged – but in other parts of the health service and other public service sectors it is limited.

The Importance of Measurement

The JSC seeks to “make recommendations that maximise the positive effects of migration”. The terms of reference relating to ‘social inclusion’ and ‘participation’ are of particular relevance to the challenge of measurement.

Few organisations have sufficiently detailed data to be able to measure inclusion and participation of individuals from CALD communities. This is usually because it is either not

necessary or appropriate to request and collect data about cultural background from individual clients and customers. OriginsInfo facilitates this measurement with a high degree of accuracy and without intrusion or offence.

Clearly, with an evidence base achieved through measurement, users can develop management initiatives that aim to achieve more desirable outcomes and, by having a baseline, users can monitor how inclusion and participation are improving over time.

A new measurement option is now available to commercial and public sector organisations in Australia. Recent research and development has made it technically possible and sufficiently reliable to use name analysis as a surrogate for cultural background. The following table summarises the pros and cons of using different measurement methodologies.

Table 1 - Measurement and Evidence Base - Choices

Data and Measurement Option	Advantage	Disadvantage	Issues
Anecdotal	No cost Good for initial assessment and hypothesis setting	Accuracy reflects individual perception and context of observer's wider knowledge Bias; lack of consistency	Insufficient as evidence base for policy and resource allocation
Direct Data Capture From Clients	Voluntary self response Can design as free-form response or structured to suit context and objectives	Intrusive; potential for offence Non-response; inaccurate response Inefficient; costly Range of interpretations of 'cultural background'	Variable data quality Coding responses is difficult Need to derive a classification that is consistent with market needs and allows comparison with the wider market
ABS Data	Good for area analysis and reporting High participation and coverage Globally respected census bureau	High non-response rates for culturally-related data Data released in aggregated form for areas of c 200-300 households Small counts subject to random adjustment	Cannot reasonably be applied to individual clients and customers Not useful in measurement of client or customer participation
Name Analysis	Fast processing – 5m/hour 99.5% coding Statistically robust Can be used on a list of clients	Requires names of clients Individual accuracy around 85%, lower for some cultures Less effective for Indigenous Australians	Efficient and cost-effective assessment of cultural participation in services and products Outcomes can be used to inform and guide targeted communications to promote positive change

Recommendations

Based on the JSC desire to maximise positive effects of migration relating to productive capacity, service reach and full economic participation, the following recommendation are submitted for consideration.

1. Taking a broad approach to social inclusion should not ignore the reality of Australia's multicultural composition. Australia's cultural diversity is often a determinant of inclusion and should be acknowledged and validated through specific use and reference in the work of the Social Inclusion agenda and its publications.
2. Any definition of cultural diversity should recognise that long term migrants and people of second and third generation migrants still possess values and exhibit behaviours that reflect their cultural context. Such values and behaviours often determine the extent of participation in services and the wider economy.
3. Measurement is the basis for the evidence that justifies management initiatives and resource allocation. The data used for measurement should be relevant to context. Public sector organisations should be challenged to create the strongest possible evidence base to support policy decisions and CALD reporting.
4. New measurement methodologies, such as those based on robust name analysis, open up many opportunities for measurement of CALD participation in commercial and public sector organisations. These should be recognised and encouraged as being an entirely appropriate approach to measurement.
5. Initiatives in the commercial sector for improved engagement with cultural market segments are mutually beneficial for commerce and for CALD community members. Best practice in multicultural marketing and should be encouraged and promoted in both the commercial and public sectors.

Kind Regards

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