

**MIGRANT RESOURCE NORTH WEST INC  
RESPONSE TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION INQUIRY  
INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA**

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**RATIONALE FOR RESPONSE**

The Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) North West was established in 1989, and it provides a range of settlement, disability advocacy, and home and community care services. It is a member based organization with a committee of management which is elected on a biennial basis. Its members represent 11 different ethnicities.

The MRC North West provides services across the North Western suburbs of Melbourne, and its two offices, where direct services are delivered, are based in St Albans and Broadmeadows.

As part of its mission statement the MRC North West is dedicated to pursuing equality of opportunity for all people in our community and challenging discrimination through a range of mechanisms such systemic advocacy. The opportunity to respond to this Inquiry is very much consistent with this role. It is hoped that the localized perspectives provided in this response will assist the Standing Committee to enhance its understanding of the Multicultural issues it has an interest in pursuing.

**MULTICULTURALISM, SOCIAL INCLUSION & GLOBALISATION**

While Multiculturalism should be included in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda, sufficient care is required to ensure that the term and all of the principles which underlie it, are not subsumed to the point where it may no longer be recognized as an issue (with its own set of challenges) in its own right.

In this context, the Federal Government's recent decision to launch the policy document entitled *The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy*, is to be commended. The document's strengths include an affirmation of the nation's Multicultural policy principles, and a number of worthy initiatives. The challenge of those implementing the policy will be to make its context and effect directly relevant to the lives of everyday people. In some instances, this may be more straightforward. For example, the *Multicultural Arts and Festival Grants* will provide a welcome complimentary access point from which ethnic groups will be able to apply for funds which focus on diversity, intra-cultural engagement, and harmony.

The *Strengthening Access & Equity* component provides an excellent opportunity to undertake further work in making service delivery to ethnic communities responsive, equitable, and fair. One means in which this may occur is to develop monitoring frameworks which are developed following extensive consultation in each jurisdiction. These frameworks could then be endorsed via existing State and Territory mechanisms and placed on the COAG agenda for monitoring. In developing the frameworks and monitoring capacity, community organizations could be encouraged to have a central role in this process, by providing direct input. Many of these organizations themselves are recipients of government funding from a range of sources, and they may be adept at providing feedback on a range of systemic issues associated with the delivery of direct and allied services.

The *Multicultural Youth Sports Partnership Program* is also a worthy program for encouraging integration and social participation. Its announcement should also be a timely reminder that sport is not the only pathway for youth engagement. Indeed, any further work for developing alternative paths for youth engagement should be considered. In the MRC North West's experience, some youth have been engaged successfully via a range of different mechanisms such as art, education, music, and adventure activities.

In the areas in which the MRC North West operates, the contribution of diaspora communities is acutely evident. This is most pronounced in the immediate local business districts which have been transformed into areas of cross-cultural exchange, as a range of retail outlets provide diversity of product and employment opportunities. In these localities it is quite evident to see the sale of produce which emanates from Vietnam, India, Africa, Iraq, Turkey, and Lebanon. The sourcing of these products is evidence of a direct trading relationship between these diaspora communities and various regions of the world.

## **SETTLEMENT & PARTICIPATION**

The MRC North West is most supportive of any initiative which will encourage refugees and other migrants to participate and integrate into broader society. The MRC North West has identified two aspects to this issue which may merit further consideration. The first relates to consistency of service. The second is about developing or strengthening pathways to meaningful employment.

Consistency of service is important to the effective provision of settlement services. Indeed, consistency may provide one of the key barometers to quality of service. It is understood that literature associated with the latest Settlement Grants Program funding round is supportive of two or three year grants for providers. There may actually be a case for funding periods to be awarded for up to 5 years. This is understood to be a proposal not dissimilar to those who are funded in other sectors administered by the Commonwealth, and may even reflect previous periods in which English Language services may have been funded. There are many sound arguments for this to occur.

It enables organizations to develop realistic and achievable strategic plans; employ staff on a longer-term basis; and provide service from a known location on a consistent and regular basis. Such issues are of key importance in assisting to ensure that clients receive quality services.

Many refugees (and migrants entering Australia through other visa categories) have expressed frustration and disappointment that there are often inadequate employment pathways following their settlement. Many are also disappointed that they have no alternative but to enter sectors with low pay, non-continuity, and low security. While it must be acknowledged that such issues may now be a reflection of the broader global economy, it is important to promote policies and strategies which strengthen pathways from education and/or training to employment.

### **NATIONAL PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY**

It has long been established that migrants add to the productive capacity of the nation. This has occurred across a range of sectors. The issue of recognition of overseas qualifications remains an issue. Those with a range of talents across the professions continue to remonstrate about the lack of overseas recognition. Some meaningful advancements have been made on this issue, but further work clearly needs to be undertaken.

In terms of refugees, ongoing emphasis must be made on learning English. In any increasingly service based economy, such as ours, much relies on the ability to communicate clearly. While some former refugees are to be commended for achieving tertiary qualifications, it should be understood that they continue to suffer significant levels of disadvantage because they are not able to find employment in the sectors related to their studies. Any government initiative that has a focus on assisting migrants to establish business enterprises needs to have the teaching of English as part of its core.

