



**The NSW Spanish and Latin American Association
For Social Assistance (NSW SLASA)**

Submission to:

**The Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Inquiry into**

The Economic, Social and Cultural Impacts of Migration in Australia

Submission written by:

Carlos Encina
Manager
NSW SLASA
Contact: 02-9724 2220
Email: manager@nswslasa.com.au

Yvonne Santalucia
President, NSW SLASA
Management Committee

Organisational Background

The NSW Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance (NSW SLASA) is a peak organization for the Spanish speaking communities in NSW. It has a long-standing reputation for providing professional and efficient services to the community. NSW SLASA has been providing community and welfare services for the Spanish speaking communities for the last 33 years. At the moment NSW SLASA provides services from 2 different locations Fairfield and Waterloo to better support our community in the Sydney Metropolitan Area accordingly to their changing needs.

During the last 33 years NSW SLASA has developed and implemented many different community development programs for the Spanish speaking Communities in partnership with government and non-government agencies and Spanish speaking interested groups and workers. For the last 5 years NSW SLASA has been developing and organizing different activities with other ethnic community organizations to contribute to the social cohesion of Australian society, including the Afro-Latino Festival, Fairfield Multicultural Festival, Multicultural Youth Conference, and Refugee Week celebrations.

As a result of increasing contact with Spanish speaking people, particularly older people and young people looking for user friendly, language specific and culturally sensitive services and after compiling the results and recommendation of the Spanish Community Network's 2010 Spanish Speaking Conference, NSW SLASA would like to express its views on the subject of multiculturalism, social inclusion, settlement and participation through this response to your Inquiry.

More information about NSW SLASA's can be found on our website: www.nswslasa.com.au

Contact details:

Manager: Carlos Encina

Central Office: 33 Dale ST., Fairfield NSW 2165

Postal address: PO Box 1003 Fairfield NSW 2165

Phone: 02-9724.2220

Email: manager@nswslasa.com.au

Terms of Reference

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration shall inquire into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia and make recommendations to maximise the positive effects of migration. The inquiry shall examine and report on:

- **Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation**

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

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

- **Settlement and participation:**

- **National productive capacity**

1. Multiculturalism, Social Inclusion and Globalisation

It is common knowledge that migration has had a positive economic, social and cultural impact on Australia. Generally speaking, migrants and refugees show strong resilience and adaptability to new challenges and surroundings. They are willing to take menial job when first settling. Also, many migrants and refugees show a disposition for hard work and sacrifices in order to establish themselves in a new country. Their willingness to take hold of opportunities handed to them is shown in the way that their participation in TAFE and University Life as well as new business has increased in the last 30 years. In addition, there is evidence that in spite of adverse circumstances, they may continue to regard the safety and freedom offered to them in Australia in high regard.

Evidence of this is that in spite of the city of Fairfield being considered the second lowest socio-economic and health area by the SEIFA measure, the majority of its residents consider themselves happy to live in this area and believe that one of the strongest assets in the city is its diverse make up and community life according to the city wide customer service survey conducted yearly by Fairfield City Council.

However, in order to feel safe and secure as well as a feeling of belonging, Fairfield residents also state in numerous consultations and surveys that they rely on goods and services that remind them a little of their countries of origin and that they need support from language specific and cultural friendly organisations in areas where they don't have expertise or skills.

NSW SLASA clients have commented many times that having their ethnic organisation give them the confidence to participate in Australian society and connect with the mainstream on a regular basis, while at the same time they could have the pleasure of enjoying cultural and language specific programs and events and seek friendly services when needed.

The Social Inclusion agenda will not be fairly implemented is multiculturalism is not recognised as the underpinning concepts of the social inclusion agenda. Social cohesion will not be a reality unless the principles of multiculturalism and social inclusion will be implemented. The recognition of Australia as a multicultural society and the recent released of the Multicultural Policy have laid the foundation of a more fair and equal society.

Settlement and Participation

For many years the Federal Government via the Department of Immigration has allocated funding support to ethno specific organizations to provide settlement services to migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants. This funding scheme has been of great benefit to our communities and people in assisting t in their settlement process in Australia.

In addition, thanks to these funds, a large number of ethno specific organizations have been established through the years, building a social/community structure that has played a vital role in the successful settlement of many migrants and refugees. Communities which are younger than three generation of settlers find it difficult to be self sufficient or build sustainable structures to exist on their own without external support.

Existing research have proved that establishing links between migrants, refugees, humanitarian entrants and the wider community is one of the keys to 'successful' settlement. Ethno specific community organizations have been the key to establish these links for many years. They have acted as spearhead in introducing the community to the mainstream by represented theme as well as providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services to facilitate the settlement process. These organisations are the “link” between communities and mainstream; they are also the voice and the advocators on behalf of their needs as well as the encouragers of communities to showcase their culture, participate and connect with what is happening in the wider community.

Much of the collective knowledge and expertise of communities is channelled through ethnic community organizations. At the same time, much of the understanding of the Australian culture, society and government systems are sifted and translated through these organisations to the ethnic communities. Some of the reasons for this phenomenon are the lack of language proficiency, the focus on family, work and or studies and lack of expertise and knowledge of the mainstream system by a majority of people in some communities. Many first generation ethnic people, particularly family women and bread winners, leave their self-actualization and learning to the time when they retire, thus the wide need for language specific services and training on the part of ethnic communities.

In addition, the existence of ethnic specific organisations is crucial to the implementation of government policies such as, social inclusion and social cohesion because ethno-specific workers provide a channel to communities to communicate with government at three levels (federal, state and local), at the same time they provide a focal point for government department to communicate with ethnic communities. This communication process facilitates the input and consultation in the development and implementation of government policies and in modelling mainstream services that would otherwise not exist. Services and programs that ethnic community organizations provide foster community participation and integration and enhance community capacity building skills. In turn, this process supports the Federal whole-of-government social inclusion agenda,

In recent years there has been much discussion about what constitutes 'settlement' and the length of time needed for migrants and refugees to feel 'settled' in the community. While it is agreed that tangible factors such as income support, housing, employment, education, health care and family reunion are essential, it is the less tangible factors which play a vital role in the settlement process, including: being able to feel safe and secure; restoring a sense of self-worth; restoring a sense of dignity; regaining a sense of control over one's life; resolving guilt; and processing grief about the loss of self and country. The settlement journey can also be interrupted by outside factors that can set back an individual some time so far back that they find it extremely difficult to get back on track on their own. Ethno specific community based organizations have the ability and matchless resources to provide for both migrants and refugees, tangible and less tangible factors which are indispensable for a person to become active members of society and feel included. This role and or intervention from an ethno specific organisation may be needed by the individual or community and various points and can not be simply measured by years.

Currently the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is the only program that provides ongoing funding to small ethnic community organizations to deliver services and to assist in the capacity building and skilling of communities. Since its introduction this has been a highly successful program, however, when the department decided to shifted its funding priorities to favour big organizations moving funding from the ethno-specific organizations to the mainstream organization, such as Migrants Resource Centre, Anglicare, Mission Australian, St. Vincent de Paul, many smaller organisations started to wither for lack of support. In the last 2010 Settlement Grants Program (SGP) funding round the Department of Immigration allocated 1.2 million to two Migrant Resource Centres in South Western Sydney, but funding to the Lao Community Advancement, Timorese Australian Council, Assyrian Australian Association, Chinese Migrant Welfare Association, Serbian Orthodox Welfare, Vietnamese Australian Welfare Association, NSW Spanish and Latin American Association (NSW SLASA) from the Settlement Grants Programs (SGP) ceased completely or was reduced heavily. This situation has created a lot of stress and uncertainty within Ethno-specific communities.

Ethnic-specific community organisations rely heavily on the presence of a single SGP-funded position to sustain their viability, when that single SGP position was lost; a question mark is immediately raised over the future of that organisation. Particularly communities which have established organisations to assist their members' longer term settlement needs and intend to maintain a sense of cultural identity that enable them to contribute and participate in community life from a firm root base. The loss of this funding was felt as a heavy loss. It has left many ethno specific organisations without resources to contribute to the wider community through the provision of services tailored to their needs.

This issue has created an imminent possibility of collapse of ethno specific organisations. If this ever happen will presents a major loss to the community and to Government services at all levels. This situation will limit access to some communities and narrow communication channels with many communities, particular smaller, more vulnerable communities. This will have implications in the planning of services and programs for many communities, reducing their opportunities to be consulted; to contribute and participate in the life of their local and wider community with the potential to marginalise and exclude many community members.

It's a letdown to see how the discontinuation of funding is affecting the social/community infrastructure that has been built through all these years with the federal government funding. The potential collapse of ethno specific organizations will be a great loss for the community and also for the government who is going to lose the skills, experience and resource that these organizations have gained through the years. The possibility of more established ethno specific organizations to assist emerging migrants and refugees communities will be lost as well through loss of connections to ethnic community who will be left without official structure. The discontinuation of funding also erodes the community capacity of mature and more establish organisations to work alongside and mentor new and emerging ethno specific communities.

The support and continuation of funding from the Federal government to ensure the existence of ethnic specific organizations is a determining factor for the implementation of Australia's Multicultural Policy Principle 2, which stated:

“The Australian Government is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Australians from all backgrounds will be given every opportunity to participate in and contribute to Australia and its social, economic and cultural life. Australians from all backgrounds are also entitled to receive equitable access to government services. The Government will strengthen its access and equity policies to ensure that government programs and services are responsive to the needs of Australia’s culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Australia’s multicultural policy aligns with the Government’s Social Inclusion Agenda where Australians of all backgrounds feel valued and can participate in our society.”

3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society

- There is a need for the development and implementation of funding policies that will comprise a fair distribution of funding among settlement service providers to ensure a continuation of funding for more established ethno specific organizations for longer than 5 years.
- There is a need for programs with a greater focus on community development and capacity building to increase the capacity of ethnic community leaders to develop their leadership skills and teach them about the Australian system and services.
- There is a need for programs that foster the relationships between more established ethno community organizations and new emerging communities.
- There is a need for programs that will encourage greater social and working relationships among settlement service providers and ethnos specific community organizations.
- There is a need for programs that would support ethnos specific organizations financially to establish internal infrastructures that will conform to current government legislations and allow them to compete for government funding, including policies and procedures, insurances, incorporation, management.
- There is a need for programs that will develop the leadership skills of young emerging community leaders.

- There is a need for programs that will provide a holistic approach to issues affecting families.

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

The establishment of an independent body or council including representatives from federal, state and local government to develop a coordinated approach in funding policies for settlement services and ethno specific community organizations. Also, to encourage ethnic organisations to unite, pool resources and seek partnerships to serve their communities better. This body could seek long term strategies that goes beyond the believed 5 year period needed for settlement. Currently there is no coordination in the development of strategies to ensure a fairer distribution of funds available and equal access for services to migrants and refugees.

Migrants and refugees with overseas qualification would greatly benefit from programs that provide specialised tailored services to assist them with identification of barriers to employment; assistance to get their overseas qualifications recognised; help to identify skills and experience that a client may have and could be used to gain employment; support to access further studies, support to establish small businesses/company, assistance to acquire local work experience.

Additional benefits could be obtained from programs that assist migrants and refugees to secure and maintain economic self-sufficiency by providing them with the skills and resources they need to function and compete in the Australian labour and economic system. They would also benefit from programs that provide them with skills to navigate the system and obtain a permanent income that will contribute to their successful settlement. Furthermore, they would benefit immensely from programs aimed at helping them to overcome personal and structural barriers in order to become economical self sufficient by getting into employment or establishing their own business or company.

National productive capacity

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

Migrants and refugees have made a substantial contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of Australia. They have assisted in the expanding of consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets; they brought skills needed by the Australian Labour Market which has creating employment and filling empty employment places. They have made cultural, social and economic contributions that have moulded Australian society and impart vitality and multiculturalism into Australia.

Migration has been an important influence on Australian society and the economy. Increasing skilled migration would make a positive overall contribution to Australia's future per capita income levels. Migration contributes to the economy in many ways. As well as the up skilling of the workforce, economies of scale and the development of new export markets would further add to the economic benefits of migration.

Migrants have contributed to the development and expansion of small businesses, which are the cornerstone for the Australian economy. They have contributed to the development of technology bringing to the country cutting edge technology in particular from Asia and Eastern Europe. Their knowledge, connections and understanding of international business markets has contributed to the development of Australia international market.

Migrants receive benefits and goods and services from the government, but at the same time they pay taxes. Studies into this area shows that migrants and refugees contribute more in taxes than they consume in benefits and government goods and services. As migrants generate surpluses for government, Australia's economic growth is significantly enhanced as migrants directly impact on the economy through their contribution to supply and demand and their indirect contribution to government surpluses.

Migration has had a great impact in the increase of demand for infrastructure through the spending by migrants on food, clothing, electrical appliances and housing. The expansion of regional business and investment links and additions to labour and skills levels brought by migrants. Economic and strategic relations with migrant's country or origin, particularly with Asia, have been strengthened by the migration of these people to Australia.

As well as the economic benefits, skilled migrants help Australian employers fill critical labour gaps at a time when many businesses and industries are facing capacity constraints. The most important fact is that migrants and refugees intake programs are becoming vital to keep the economy growing as well as helping Australian businesses overcome skills and labour shortages.

One example of how much migrants contributed to Australian society in making significant economic, social and civic contributions is the Vietnamese community. They arrived to Australia in a large number mostly as refugees in the 1970s and 1980s and despite the significant language barriers and cultural adjustment they faced on arrival. Today, the Vietnamese are well represented in the business sector and also play an important role in broadening social, cultural and business relationships between Australia and South-East Asia. Many former Vietnamese refugees and/or their children have prominent roles in their fields.

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

For many years there has been an emphasis of allowing the migration of professionals and tradesperson to meet the shortage of skills required by the Australian Labour Market. Migrants and refugees have contributed with their skills, knowledge and expertise to the development of many professional and trades areas. Unfortunately the lack of programs containing strategies to assist

migrants and refugees professionals with overseas qualifications to utilise their skills and fully contributed to the development of Australia had hindered the full utilization of the skills they brought to the country. Currently we have situations where we find migrants and refugees with overseas qualifications driving taxis, working as couriers or in the cleaning and building industry. The lack of assistance to these professionals to gain local experience has contributed to the wasting of a great skills capital.

Migrants and refugees face barriers to secure employment due to their lack of English proficiency, lack of local work experience, lack of job seeking skills, lack of recognition of their overseas qualifications, lack of knowledge of the Australian labour market. In addition refugees face different barriers to utilize their skills due to pre-migration experiences such as torture, trauma and persecution. This could be prevented by early services that are coupled with employment support.

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

Any initiative aiming to better assist migrant communities to establish business enterprises should include a mix of professional/technical and financial support. Migrants have the potential to greatly contribute to the economic development of Australia. Their links and understanding of the business culture with their country or origin will allow them to succeed in particular businesses. It is unrealistic to think that a migrant will be able to establish business enterprises while his only income is the unemployment benefit.