

Chinese Australian Services Society Cooperative Ltd

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration re Inquiry into
Multiculturalism in Australia

Australia has been one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world with the admission of more than 6 million immigrants since the end of World War II. People from almost 200 countries have made Australia home. As there are various views in the community about the overall issue of multiculturalism, the present inquiry, hearing directly from migrant communities on the different aspects, would be greatly beneficial to ensure that positive effects of migration are maximized. Chinese Australian Services Society Cooperative Ltd (CASS), a community organisation which has served migrants from different places for 30 years, would like to present the following comments to the Joint Committee on Migration in accordance with its Terms of Reference for perusal and consideration.

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalization

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

Multiculturalism exposes a society to a variety of different ideas and ways of being that can combine to make the community more tolerant of differences as well as reaping the rewards. As long as the immigration policy of Australia continues to cater for new migrants, we will remain a multicultural society, which then calls for a multicultural policy to be in place. Such a policy provides a framework for strengthening community harmony and brings economic, cultural and social benefits. The social inclusion agenda of the Government could never be a 'complete' one without a policy for managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole.

Multiculturalism assists to realize a better Australia characterized by an enhanced degree of social justice and economic efficiency. On this rationale, the social inclusion agenda would then be able to facilitate the positive acceptance of diverse people and ideas as well as enriching the national life.

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

The millions of migrants who have come to Australia contributed much to a uniquely Australian ethos that brings along real and tangible benefits. We are richer in experience and enjoy closer economic and social links with other nations

as a direct result of the diverse multicultural population. The diversity enhances Australia's ability to compete and market globally and therefore facilitates economic growth, employment and the standard of living. Migrants from different countries not only bring with them different languages and social/cultural understandings, but also link Australia into a wealth of business and personal contacts from all over the world. Take China as an example, with so many Chinese immigrants in recent years, Australia has envisaged significant advantages in terms of economic opportunities in China which would not have been readily available if we had remained a 'closed' society.

In addition, as a society with diverse cultural and linguistic skills, Australia has been well known as a tourist destination and as an education export country.

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.

Settlement programs have all along been playing an important role in assisting new migrants to integrate and participate fully in society. At the moment, settlement programs funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship are delivered to new comers who have arrived for less than five years with low English proficiency or the dependants of skilled migrants who have low English proficiency. However, with the 16 years' of experience in running settlement services by our organisation, we find that assistance is also much needed for skilled migrants and those who are proficient in English.

Indeed, the ability to 'communicate' in English does not imply that there are no 'adjustment' problems. Those who know English would also encounter social and cultural differences and face barriers in their integration. To assist the migrants to adapt to the new environment as quickly as possible, it is deemed necessary that settlement programs should also be offered to them for their easy and early integration into the mainstream, or stimulating them to help their own community to integrate into the mainstream.

As mentioned, skilled migrants may also experience difficulties in their integration process. In particular, one would face problems in housing, taxation related matters, education for kids, adjustment to local work setting and culture, social networking, etc. in their early stages upon arrival. Established and experienced service providers for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities like our organisation should be involved in designing and providing tailor-made services that address to these specific needs. Add-on settlement programs have to be provided to meet the various challenges that different

migrants experience. If the skilled migrants are not settled well, their talents would definitely not be fully utilized. In the worst scenario, they would and could not utilize their skills at all and it will be a great loss to Australia.

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

To promote long term settlement patterns, the social and emotional needs of migrants must be addressed to. The support network, which is usually the first point of contact, is of paramount importance for a new migrant. Thus, the Government should liaise and assist services providers for the CALD communities to ensure adequate provision of such networks, which are in turn linked to mainstream services. Proactive orientation programs and packages should also be designed for reaching-out those more 'passive' new migrants to encourage their full participation into the mainstream society as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, the union with family members definitely helps much for a person to 'settle' down promptly and permanently. It is submitted that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship should facilitate the process in approving 'family re-union' cases so that those who have come could feel more 'settled' and 'secure' psychologically.

National productive capacity

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

As mentioned above, there have been 6 million immigrants since the end of World War II. With the influx of people from almost 200 countries, it is found that the society has been prosperous in many different aspects, in particular for real estate and employment markets. The education sector has also been active due to the arrivals of the second generation of new migrants while some new popular professions emerge (such as translation).

On the other hand, since 'ageing' is a serious problem for many countries, Australia is by no means an exception. Migration of people from other parts of the world in one way or the other ensures the adequate supply of the necessary energetic labour force. The problem of productivity has been greatly reduced as compared with other developed countries.

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

Although the professions of 'skilled migrants' are mainly those that have been assessed by the Government which are in 'demand' in society, it is found that the skills of these migrants may not be fully utilized in many circumstances. From the feedback of our clients, we always find that 'English' has been quite a 'barrier' for them to really obtain the related professional qualifications or relevant jobs. Due to the differences in language, together with the differences in culture and especially in rules and practices, skilled migrants do face lots of difficulties in really taking up their original 'professions/jobs'. Usually a 'waste' of human resources is envisaged. Thus, employment/vocational training programs tailored-made for skilled migrants have to be in place to facilitate them to be qualified for their professions as soon as possible. Such initiatives are extremely necessary to fully utilize human assets in society and prevent the waste of talents and skills for Australia.

In addition, the Government of course has to review the list of professions/skills in shortage from time to time and realistically estimate what kind of 'skills' we need to 'import' and/or 'train' our migrants and citizens.

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

Apart from widely promoting and encouraging entrepreneurship, the Government has to facilitate orientation and information access programs, etc for the migrant communities to encourage them to set up business enterprises. Funding support should be provided to service providers for the CALD communities to conduct such programs for their respective ethnic groups since these organisations are familiar with Australia's political, economic and social environments as well as the needs and cultural backgrounds of the participants. More resources have to be put in this aspect in order to encourage more migrants to set up businesses themselves.

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