



ethnic  
communities'  
council of  
victoria

# ECCV Submission on the Migration Programme for 2014-15 to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection

## December 2013

### Introduction

1. Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the statewide peak advocacy body representing Victorian ethno-specific agencies and multicultural organisations with a membership of approximately 220 organisations representing over 65,000 members. ECCV advocates to all levels of government in areas such as aged care, discrimination, community harmony, employment, immigration, education and training, health and community services and justice issues.
2. ECCV appreciates the opportunity to present a submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) on the size and composition of the annual permanent Migration Programme for 2014-15.
3. ECCV commends the DIBP for consulting with the multicultural community sector on the size, balance and composition of Australia's future migration intake.
4. ECCV congratulates the Australian Government for its efficient Migration Programme and in particular the online SkillSelect process. ECCV applauds the focus on Australia's economic wellbeing as the main objective of the Migration Programme in response to the strong demand for skilled workers in various sectors. In addition ECCV recognises DIBP's continued efforts to maintain fairness and compassion in supporting the reunion of Australians with their close family members.
5. ECCV emphasises the importance of having the opportunity to provide the Australian Government with additional policy input beyond the size and composition of the Migration Programme on settlement issues closely related to the migration journey of people from culturally diverse backgrounds. ECCV

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has included an additional section in this submission and requests that DIBP refers those issues to the relevant government departments.

#### Size and composition of Migration Programme

6. ECCV in general supports the size and composition of the Migration Programme that targets mainly skilled migrants for economic growth with its current 67 per cent Skill Stream and 32 per cent Family Stream places.
7. Regarding the permanent Migration Programme ECCV believes that the wellbeing of skilled migrants to a large extent depends on them being reunited with close family members from overseas. Family members provide social and cultural support as well as playing a role as family carers. Processing delays of family visas increase the burden of social isolation and inhibit their participation in society for many skilled migrants already living in Australia.

#### **Recommendation 1**

ECCV recommends more efficient processing of the backlog of partner family stream.

8. ECCV notes that a large skilled migration stream will drive the demand for family migration as migrants seek to have their partners, children, parents and other relatives join them in Australia. Many people from non-main English-speaking countries are closely connected to large extended families. For the family migration program to effectively meet the needs of skilled migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, ECCV advocates for a steady increase in the permanent family migration stream.

#### Balance of skilled and family migration streams

9. ECCV believes that whilst the skilled migration programme has economic benefits, the family migration Programme provides important social, cultural and economic benefits. ECCV notes that family migration not only benefits the wellbeing of their related skilled migrants, but also boosts the overall workforce through skilled migration, as people often choose partners with similar skills and professional qualifications. The Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants (DIAC 2011) indicates that a significant proportion of family migrants find employment contributing to labour market growth and the Australian economy.

#### **Recommendation 2**

ECCV recommends that the 2014-15 Migration Program intake level be increased to allow for a more balanced family and skilled migration.

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### Lowering the English Language Points Test

10. Currently the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) requires a very high level of English skills. This is not always required of local workers and assessment bodies, particularly in the trades' arena where lower levels of English would be acceptable and place fewer burdens on some skilled migrants.

#### **Recommendation 3**

ECCV recommends that the IELTS skills level be lowered for some occupations.

### Overview of additional policy issues

11. ECCV believes that when people from culturally diverse backgrounds migrate to Australia they embark on a journey from 'migration to settlement to citizenship' and eventually lead to full participation in our society. Migration is a significant lifestyle challenge. ECCV points out that the Australian Government has a responsibility to ensure that the migration journey is a positive experience and to facilitate each transition to minimize any hardship and distress.
12. ECCV would like the DIBP to explore greater opportunities to facilitate the migration and settlement journey and give consideration to issues such as:
  - Excessive financial cost of partner migration
  - Information provision to navigate the family migration maze
  - Better coordination of regional settlement support structures
  - Improved housing for permanent migrants
  - Public promotional campaigns to highlight the positive relationship between migrant participation and social cohesion.

### Improved access to family migration information

13. Navigating the immigration procedure maze is a daunting process for the uninformed. It is challenging and emotionally frustrating for Australians from countries where English is not the main language and for more recently arrived skilled migrants to find out how to arrange the appropriate migration visas for their partners and other family members to join them and migrate to Australia. Some Migrant Resource Centres and ethnic organisations are taking the initiative to conduct relevant information sessions in response to the settlement needs of their newly arrived clients. ECCV believes those ethnic and

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multicultural organisations are well-placed to deliver migration information sessions.

14. Without the appropriate support and updates these migration information provision roles and responsibilities are unclear and therefore such an information service is sporadic, fragmented and not sustainable.
15. Local government, for example, has a designated responsibility for conducting citizenship ceremonies. ECCV applauds the DIBP for holding forums for local council officers responsible for organising Australian citizenship ceremonies to address current issues relating to local council responsibilities when conducting those ceremonies. ECCV believes that the Australian Government has a further responsibility to make it clear to local government and relevant settlement support agencies where the responsibilities lie for conducting migration information sessions for new migrant's family migration processes.

#### **Recommendation 4**

ECCV recommends that the DIBP provides clear guidelines and support to relevant ethnic and multicultural organisations for the provision of migration information sessions.

#### *Boosting positive public perceptions*

16. ECCV acknowledges that skilled migration boosts economic growth. About 35 percent of skilled migrants experience unnecessary difficulties finding employment (ABS 2011). ECCV is aware that some employers reject job applicants from culturally diverse backgrounds due to unconscious bias. The Scanlon Foundation's *2013 Mapping Social Cohesion Report* highlighted a marked increase in reported discrimination especially towards new settlers.
17. ECCV believes that better promotion of migrant and refugee success stories is needed to alleviate negative public perceptions. ECCV empathises that increased social and economic wellbeing of skilled and family migrants from culturally diverse backgrounds depends on high participation rates which in turn improves social cohesion.

#### **Recommendation 5**

ECCV recommends better public promotion by the DIBP of success stories about how targeted skilled migration boosts productivity and innovation.

#### *Excessive visa application fees*

18. ECCV appreciates that visa pricing is based on international benchmarking and designed to recover departmental processing costs. ECCV however

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recognises that the cost of partner family visas is often carried by young Australian citizens and skilled migrants who are trying diligently to save for home-making and to establish their future family life.

19. ECCV points out that in the 21st century the monolingual fabric of our society is changing. It is common for young Australians to travel to other countries and live as "World Kids" speaking more than one language with valuable inter-cultural skills. They may study in one country, complete an internship and work experience in yet another country and eventually settle down and work back in Australia. As a result of that circular migration and transnational living, many young people are likely to form lifetime partnerships with someone from a country outside Australia.
20. ECCV community consultation indicates that, whilst people have the right to get married and live in Australia with the partners of their choice, many couples are burdened by excessive partner migration costs just when they are starting a new life together, leaving them significantly financially disadvantaged and emotionally frustrated.
21. ECCV feedback suggests that cumulative costs of visa charges, medical reports, xrays, medical examinations, interpreters, and translating documents could set back an individual, and couples, by as much as \$4,000 to \$6,500 at a stage of their lives when they are trying to save for their future.

#### **Recommendation 6**

ECCV recommends that the Australian Government consider the burden of excessive migration fees and explore a suitable support system.

#### *Coordination of rural and regional settlement services*

22. ECCV community feedback indicates that unpredictable secondary migration from metropolitan to regional and rural areas is placing an unreasonable burden on settlement services especially regarding housing. Whilst a range of local government, community services and faith-based support exists they are fragmented and not well coordinated. ECCV believes there is a significant cost-saving by the DIBP investing in coordination initiatives.

#### **Recommendation 7**

ECCV recommends that the DIBP trials a pilot settlement coordination initiative in regional and rural Victoria.

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Wellbeing and the migration process

23. ECCV is concerned that the migration application process sometimes affects the wellbeing of applicants as it can be mentally stressful and medical health checks can be frustrating. ECCV's informal feedback indicates that people who go to medical health checks as part of the application process have expressed concerns regarding the lack of cultural responsiveness of these checks, for example at one facility that carries out health checks on behalf of the Department there is a limited number of female doctors available, x-rays checks can be uncomfortable for females, and the uptake of interpreting services are not appropriately facilitated.

**Recommendation 8**

ECCV recommends cultural responsiveness training and cultural competency checks for facilities that carry out health checks on behalf of the DIBP as part of the migration process.

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