



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

Work Solutions: Improving Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

**Discussion Paper
Summary**

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the *Voice of Multicultural Victoria*. As the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For 40 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ECCV	Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia
G20	Group of 20 major economies
JSA	Job Services Australia
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
LLENS	Local Learning and Employment Networks
MCEF	Migrant Communities' Employment Fund
OQU	Overseas Qualifications Unit
PWH	Price Water House
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VECCI	Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VEOHRC	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
WPP	Workforce Participation Partnerships

FOREWORD

Victorian migrants and people with a refugee experience are enthusiastic about finding jobs, however they face many challenges. Multiculturalism is good for Australia as it generates resources for our changing workforce. Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) through this Policy Discussion Paper provides a voice for Victoria's multicultural community.

Victoria would do well to make the most of its human resources and embrace newcomers who want to work no matter where they have been educated and gained their skills and experience. Recent research shows that the most productive, profitable and innovative organisations are those with a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Why then, after 40 years of multiculturalism, do we still find postgraduates from non-English backgrounds working as taxi drivers? Why are young graduates from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds still struggling to make it in the workforce? New challenges and concerns are just starting to emerge with job seekers from new and emerging communities excluded, marginalised and even further disadvantaged by the casualisation of work.

The Discussion Paper: *Work Solutions – Improving Cultural Diversity in the Workplace* shows that not much has changed in the last ten years regarding some of the difficulties migrants and refugees experience in finding jobs. This paper arose from the landmark *Work Solutions Forum* that ECCV conducted in 2013 to map the issues regarding Victoria's multicultural sector in relation to unemployment and under-employment.

It provides insights into complex and varied issues that relate to equitable access to employment, education and training for people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It also provides practical strategies and policy solutions. We call for positive action by government and employer organisations to create tangible work solutions for new migrants and refugees.

I pay a special tribute to Joe Caputo OAM JP, our Past Chairperson for driving the employment issue as a priority for ECCV and for providing the impetus for the *Work Solutions* public forum and subsequently this paper. I take this opportunity to thank Erik Lloga, Convenor of the ECCV Employment, Education and Training Policy Sub-Committee for his passion and guidance in driving the key issues and I thank its committee members for their insightful multicultural expertise. I also express a note of appreciation to Julie Fam, our intern from the Monash University School of Social Work, for her thorough and diligent commitment in preparing the basis for this paper.

I commend the recommendations in this Discussion Paper for consideration to all three levels of government.



Eddie Micallef
Chairperson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employment is the central issue for migrants and refugees. In Victoria the discussion continues about the challenges and barriers that migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face when seeking meaningful employment appropriate to their skills and experience. In recent decades a range of positive employment policies and programs were developed to assist migrant and refugee job seekers and yet, despite this, over 35 per cent of recent migrants experience some difficulty finding their first job in Australia.¹ There is a real risk of entrenched disadvantaged groups emerging, made up of unemployed migrants and people from refugee backgrounds including disillusioned young people, women and newly arrived people. What, if anything, has changed? More needs to be done. Greater leadership by government at all levels is required.

International research shows that global migration has had a positive impact on the workplace; that diversity is a key driver of innovation and increases equity^{2,3,4}. The Australian Government has increased the Skilled Migration Program. This discussion paper shows that the necessary adjustments in the local labour market and recruitment strategies in the public sector workplace have lagged behind those trends. It is essential that migration policies and programs be linked to employment opportunities and fair treatment around access to employment and training for migrants and refugees.

Employment brings many social, economic and health benefits to individuals, families and communities. Conversely, unemployment brings an increased risk of depression, poor health, and social and economic exclusion.

This paper was inspired by ECCV's Work Solutions Forum in May 2013 where participants shared their ideas, expertise and experience around workforce participation for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. It shows that the debate around employment challenges faced by migrants and refugees needs to be reinvigorated and tackled from a fresh perspective – one that places greater emphasis on practical and positive solutions that make use of evidence-based findings and on-the-ground expertise.

Contributors to this discussion paper, representing community organisations, governments, human rights groups and academics highlighted continual barriers faced by migrant job seekers in Victoria such as employer demands for local experience and lack of local networks that assist the process of finding a job. There was a reluctance of employers and professional organisations to recognise overseas qualifications, skills and experience. Limited English language proficiency was also a disadvantage. There are deficiencies in employment services for migrants and refugees and the available employment guides are overwhelming to navigate. Funding cuts to the TAFE sector have had a negative impact on education, training and employment pathways, particularly for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Contributors also pointed to innovative policy solutions to improve Victoria's culturally diverse workforce participation such as a review of employment services and overseas skills and qualifications recognition

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Characteristics of Recent Migrants, Australia, Nov 2010*. Cat.no. 6250.0, Canberra, 2011, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6250.0-Nov+2010-Main+Features-Employment?OpenDocument>

² "Global diversity and inclusion. Fostering innovation through a diverse workforce", Deloitte, Global Report, April 2011. http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_AU/au/services/consulting/human-capital/DiversityandInclusion/6d02779d94ae1310VgnVCM1000001956f00aRCRD.htm

³ Thomas Barta, Markus Kleiner and Tilo Neumann, "Is there a payoff from top-team diversity?", *McKinsey Quarterly*, (April, 2012). http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/organization/is_there_a_payoff_from_top-team_diversity, accessed 23 September 2013.

⁴ "Global diversity and inclusion. Fostering innovation through a diverse workforce", Deloitte, Global Report, April 2011. http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_AU/au/services/consulting/human-capital/DiversityandInclusion/6d02779d94ae1310VgnVCM1000001956f00aRCRD.htm

processes; establishing a better appeals process via an independent Fairness Commissioner, similar to that in Canada; and establishing a Cultural Diversity in Employment Advisory Network to ensure sustainable job creation and economic growth.

The following recommendations to federal, Victorian and local governments are based on the findings in this paper.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal Government

ECCV recommends:

1. That the Australian Government establishes an independent Office of the Fairness Commissioner similar to that in Canada to facilitate a fair and transparent appeals process that serves migrant skills and qualification recognition.
2. That a review of overseas qualifications and skills recognition processes be conducted at national and state levels to ensure appropriate recognition processes by trade associations, professional bodies and employer organisations in a fair and transparent manner.
3. That legislation is developed for the mandatory collection of cultural diversity data by federal, state and local governments and private organisations to monitor and track inclusive, diversity employment policies and practices.
4. That an independent, professional research body similar to the former Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research be established, in line with the recommendation of the Howe report *Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia* (2012).
5. That the Australian Government conducts a review of the Job Services Australia (JSA) employment services with a view to improve collaboration with ethnic and multicultural organisations, settlement service providers and employers to develop more sustainable employment outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
6. That the Australian Government develops a community-driven grants fund in close consultation with relevant multicultural and ethnic groups to address unemployment and under-employment of disadvantaged migrants and refugees.

Victorian State Government

ECCV recommends:

7. That the Victorian Government establishes a Cultural Diversity in Employment Advisory Network with representation from state and local governments, academia, Victoria's multicultural sector, VEOHRC and VicHealth to promote the benefits of a culturally diverse workforce and to provide expert advice to public sector, business community and employer organisations to assist them in becoming more culturally diverse and inclusive.
8. That the Victorian Government redirects allocations for reforms in the TAFE sector and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) programs to target disadvantaged young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
9. That the Victorian Government forms a new Overseas Qualifications Assessment Board for the recognition of overseas skills, qualifications and experience that functions to:
 - a. Secure proper assessment independent of profession and trades associations
 - b. Provide training pathways for accreditation in line with Australian standards
 - c. Streamline fair and equitable assessment procedures
10. That the Victorian Government establishes 'one-stop shop' information hubs in several locations in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria to provide face-to-face information and advice on overseas qualifications recognition for new migrants and refugees and accreditation pathways that lead to further training and employment.
11. That the Victorian Government reintroduces and expands community-based employment initiatives that work in partnerships with employers to provide job opportunities for disadvantaged migrant and refugee job seekers.
12. That the Victorian Government actively promotes and tailors existing language, literacy and numeracy programs and education and training pathways to better meet the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Local Government

ECCV recommends:

13. That Victorian local government develops inclusive recruitment strategies and targets to increase the employment of people from culturally diverse backgrounds to a minimum of at least a third in each local council within the next 10 years to reflect the level of cultural diversity in the broader population.
14. That Victorian local government reallocates resources and grants to support community-based networking initiatives for job seekers from new migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Community-based Employment Initiatives

ECCV recommends:

15. That VECCI works in partnership with multicultural peak organisations to develop effective work experience and mentoring programs for new migrants and refugees, and more inclusive workplaces.
16. That all levels of government work in partnership with multicultural community organisations to promote resources for social enterprise initiatives that are targeted at new migrant and refugee job seekers.
17. That media awareness campaigns be developed in partnership with VEOHRC, VicHealth and multicultural peak organisations to improve inclusive and culturally diverse employment policies and practices.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Action strategies for further consideration to improve cultural diversity in the workplace are as follows:

- a) A public campaign is needed to promote the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace and to raise awareness of discrimination in the realm of employment on cultural and racial grounds.
- b) In the interests of better business outcomes and meeting human rights and anti-discrimination obligations, the employee composition of organisations should be compatible with the nature of the cultural diversity of the communities and clients that they serve. This may be achieved by:
 - Reviewing human resource policies, including recruitment policies and practices.
 - Developing work experience and networking opportunities for new migrants.
 - Establishing cultural diversity in employment networks.
 - Developing cultural competence within workplaces.
 - Ongoing data collection and research.
- c) Providing additional resources to foster the entrepreneurial talent of new migrants and refugees.
- d) Further reform is required in the employment services sector in order to better meet the needs of disadvantaged migrant and refugee job seekers.
- e) National reform is required to ensure that overseas qualifications and skills are recognised by trade associations, professional bodies and employer organisations in a fair and transparent manner.
- f) More needs to be done to address the educational and training needs of new migrants and refugees with a particular focus on young people.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights a range of hidden and informal barriers to the recruitment and employment of culturally diverse people. The emphasis of this paper is derived from the in-depth insights as evidenced by the May 2013 ECCV forum and presents forward looking perspectives on multicultural employment in Victoria. The consultations, whilst informal and lacking a degree of academic rigor, consisted of broad-based community engagement with over 100 participants at a ground-breaking *Work Solutions* forum⁵ in May 2013 as well as expert multicultural input via the ECCV Employment Education and Training Policy Committee. Participants included representatives from several universities, ethnic community organisations, multicultural organisations, local government, and generic community organisations with an interest in improving cultural diversity in the workforce.

The scope of the paper includes a mapping and exploration of a wide range of issues that impact on unemployment and under-employment of migrants and refugees in Victoria. It provides a unique overview of the enormous complexity of relevant government policies and issues around migration and job creation. The paper's limitations are that it cannot be considered a comprehensive literature review; however it provides an important impetus for further academic research.

The full report of the *Work Solutions Discussion Paper* is a detailed and valuable resource document on improving cultural diversity and inclusion in Victorian workplaces. The following is a briefer summary of that paper:

2.0 BACKGROUND

The unemployment rate of migrants is higher than that of the Australian born population. In Victoria, the unemployment rate of migrants is 8.7 per cent⁶. The Australian Bureau of Statistics report *Perspectives on Migrants* (ABS 2011) states that the recent migrant population had a higher rate of unemployment (8.5 per cent) than the Australian born population (4.6 per cent)⁷.

It reports that 35 per cent of recent migrants, who arrived in Australia after the year 2000, experienced some difficulty finding their first job in Australia. The most common challenges experienced are:

- A lack of Australian work experience or references (64 per cent)
- Language difficulties (33 per cent)
- Lack of local contacts or networks (23 per cent)
- No jobs in their locality, line of work, or at all (15 per cent)
- Difficulties with their skills or qualifications not being recognised (15 per cent)⁸.

Migration, employment and personal well-being are linked. Employment leads to a positive self-identity, financial independence and a successful resettlement experience⁹. Unemployment increases the risk of

⁵ Forum *Work Solutions – Improving Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace* – jointly conducted by ECCV, Darebin Ethnic Communities Council and Darebin City Council at Preston on 21 May 2013

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Perspectives on Migrants 2011*, Cat. No. 3416.0, Canberra, 2011, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main+Features22011?OpenDocument#>

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Perspectives on Migrants 2011*, Cat. No. 3416.0, Canberra, 2011, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main+Features22011?OpenDocument#>

⁸ ABS, *Characteristics of Recent Migrants* November 2012 Paper 6250.0

economic hardship, reduces social status and inhibits engagement in meaningful activities¹⁰. People who are unemployed are more likely to experience depression and poor health, with the burden of unemployment more concentrated among particular population groups, such as recent migrants.¹¹

Changing forms of work in Australia

The predictability and security employment once offered for immigrant families to re-build life no longer exists in the same way. Women and young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, as well as international students, many of whom eventually become permanent residents, are particularly vulnerable to being trapped in casual jobs and insecure work¹².

Refugees

The 2013 Parliamentary *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia Inquiry* noted that Humanitarian migrants' contribution to productive capacity is more long term. Following what may be a heavy reliance on government support services initially, humanitarian migrants are more likely to show entrepreneurial and risk taking attributes regarding start-up businesses, with many going on to establish successful business enterprises.¹³

Women

For women, having insecure work increases the gender gap in pay, superannuation and workplace equity. Limited affordability of, and access to, education, employment and settlement services for humanitarian migrants and refugee women leads to a further disadvantage.

Youth

Young people from recently arrived backgrounds and refugees are at greater risk of leaving education earlier than their local-born counterparts, are more likely to be employed in casualised industries¹⁴ and are more susceptible to long term unemployment. Australia's unemployment rate increased to a post-global financial crisis high of 5.8 percent in August 2013¹⁵, while youth unemployment (15-19 year-olds) increased to 17.3 per cent, its highest level since October 2010.¹⁶

Youth unemployment is a ticking time-bomb globally, as it has reached a critical level in most G20 countries, including Australia, according to the Ernst and Young report: *Avoiding a Lost Generation* (2013¹⁷). The findings show that young entrepreneurs have a crucial role to play in tackling the youth unemployment crisis. Furthermore governments are increasingly looking for incentives to provide young

⁹ Louise Kyle, et al., Refugees in the labour market: Looking for cost-effective models of assistance (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2004), i.

¹⁰ Rosalie McLachlan, Geoff Gillfillan, Jenny Gordon, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, Australian Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, (Canberra, 2013) 126. http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/124549/deep-persistent-disadvantage.pdf

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Health Survey: Mental Health, Australia 2001*. Cat.no. 4811.0, Canberra, 2003, <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/9ff78528b74f5ac5ca256df100796e89?OpenDocument> in VicHealth, 'Access to Economic Resources as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing', (Research Summary 4, VicHealth, 2005), 5. <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Economic-participation/Access-to-Economic-Resources-as-a-determinant-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing.aspx>

¹² Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work 2012, *Lives on hold*, 23.

¹³ 2013 Australian Government Joint Standing Committee on Migration, *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism*, 179-180.

¹⁴ Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work, *Lives on Hold*, 20.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia Aug 2013*, Cat. No. 6202.0, Canberra 2013, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/6202.0Main%20Features2Aug%202013?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6202.0&issue=Aug%202013&num=&view=>

¹⁶ Pat McGrath, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 'Australia's unemployment rate climbs to 5.8 per cent to its highest level in four years', ABC News, posted 12 September 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-12/jobless-rate-up/4953338>

¹⁷ Ernst and Young June 2013, *Avoiding a Lost Generation – young entrepreneurs identify five imperatives for action*, produced for the G20 Young Entrepreneurs Alliance Summit Russia.

people with the tools and support to start up new businesses to create jobs and economic growth by harnessing the power of diversity.

3.0 POLICY OVERVIEW

3.1 International

Like Australia, Canada has experienced an increase in skilled migrants who have studied abroad and are seeking registration to practice in their new country. In Australia there is no direct appeal or complaints process for individuals to question decisions made by the diverse and fragmented range of professional and trades bodies regarding the assessment of overseas qualifications and skills. Australia would benefit from a similar legislation to the Office of the Fairness Commissioner, established in Ontario (2006) to hold regulators accountable and mandate fairness in the policies and procedures regarding the recognition of overseas professional qualifications.

3.2 Federal

English Language Education

Whilst the Australian Federal Government provides English language tuition for migrants and refugees through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), limited English ability is still a significant barrier to finding employment relevant to their skills.¹⁸

Recognition of overseas skills and qualifications

Australia does not have a single, unified authority that assesses and recognises overseas qualifications. Navigating the system is complex and difficult for anyone, let alone a recently arrived migrant. What appears to be a rigorous system is often fraught with frustration for the newly arrived migrant.

Data collection and research

Mandatory data collection of the cultural diversity of employees would enable organisations to make informed policy decisions on how to improve cultural diversity in the workplace that respond to both employer and employee needs.

Employment Services

Many disadvantaged job seekers, refugees and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds utilise specific services offered by Centrelink and Job Services Australia (JSA) to help them find and keep a job¹⁹. Despite a Federal Government review of service delivery in 2009 that resulted in positive reform, a Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) employment strategy paper based on community consultations indicated that the current JSA model lacks the policies, tools, procedures and resources to effectively deal with the complex issues that disadvantaged job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds present²⁰.

Some JSAs have inadequate cultural responsiveness; focus on compliance to government policy rather than service delivery; and do not effectively take into account individual circumstances that affect the job

¹⁸ Joint Standing Commission on Migration, Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism, 194.

¹⁹ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, "Job Services Australia" Australian Government, 2013, <http://deewr.gov.au/how-job-services-australia-can-help-job-seekers>

²⁰ FECCA, *Employment Strategy Paper*.

seeking process. There is a flawed use of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) tool to measure the relative disadvantage of job seekers; limited cultural competency among JSA staff; and lack of information flow between JSA providers and other groups supporting recent migrants and refugees such as settlement service providers.²¹

Migrant Communities Employment Fund

In 2013 the Australian government worked in close collaboration with the multicultural sector in Victoria to develop the Migrant Communities Employment Fund (MCEF), an innovative community-based initiative to fill gaps in employment service delivery to migrants and refugees in a targeted and culturally competent manner. The MCEF was designed to provide better engagement with employers and improve employer perceptions of migrant and refugee job seekers and workers.²²

In December 2013 the Federal Coalition Government decided not to proceed with the MCEF and redirected the allocated \$6.6 million (over two years)²³ without any replacement program to address higher levels of unemployment among recent migrants.

The MCEF was to complement existing programs such as the AMEP and provide models that could be replicated in other locations and disadvantaged groups. It had the potential to provide direct opportunities for migrants and refugees to access suitable training (including English language training), mentoring support; participate in work experience and training in Australian workplace culture; access employment opportunities; and receive employment support and post placement support²⁴.

3.3 State

Education, training and employment options for young people

In the State of Victoria there is limited information available on the extent to which Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) programs adequately target disadvantaged young people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The 2012 Funding cuts to the TAFE sector resulted in course cuts had a negative impact on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.²⁵

Overseas Qualifications Unit

The Victorian Overseas Qualifications Unit (OQU) is an online service for the assessment of overseas qualifications and related services to job seekers, employers and educational institutions²⁶. ECCV community feedback indicates that some job seekers from culturally diverse backgrounds are overwhelmed by the complexity of the current assessment and accreditation system; and would benefit from additional face-to-face support.

²¹ FECCA, *Employment Strategy Paper*.

²² "Applications open for migrant employment program", Senator Kate Lundy, July 2013. <http://www.katelundy.com.au/2013/07/05/applications-open-for-migrant-employment-program/>

²³ Australian Government, Department of Employment Migrant Communities employment fund website at <http://employment.gov.au/migrant-communities-employment-fund> accessed on 18 February 2014

²⁴ DEEWR, "Migrant Communities Employment Fund".

²⁵ Leesa Wheelahan, "TAFE cuts will affect everyone: state governments should think again", *The Conversation*, (20 September 2012) <https://theconversation.com/>

²⁶ State Government of Victoria, "The Overseas Qualifications Unit", (State Government of Victoria: October 2013) <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/employing-overseas-talent/settle-and-retain-new-workers/the-overseas-qualifications-unit>

Community partnership employment programs

In the past decade, Victorian State Government community-based employment programs such as the *Workforce Participation Partnerships (WPP)* program, with successful employment outcomes for migrant and refugee communities have not been renewed or replaced.

3.4 Local Government

Hidden barriers

Employment in local government in the Melbourne Metropolitan Area does not reflect the community it serves according to the Swinburne University report *Employment Barriers and Success Factors for Skilled Immigrants in the Melbourne public sector* (Bertone et al 2011²⁷). A range of hidden, informal barriers limit the recruitment and employment of skilled migrants and especially recent migrants in the Melbourne public sector despite positive Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation and diversity principles.

Recruitment drive

Factors that helped migrants gain public sector employment included mentoring programs, work experience, short term contracts, revised recruitment rules, and temporary visas where the employer sponsors the immigrant. The research cited in the Bertone report (2011) proposed concerted recruitment strategies and mandatory workforce data collecting on cultural diversity to assist organisations track and improve the cultural diversity profile of their staff. In light of looming skill shortages and the known benefits of cultural diversity in the workforce, the study proposed an active policy and practice drive at the local government level to overcome employment barriers faced by job seekers from culturally diverse backgrounds.

4.0 EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS - INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

This section provides insights into the day-to-day difficulties experienced by migrants and refugee job seekers. In May 2013, ECCV held a forum *Work Solutions - Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace* in partnership with Darebin Ethnic Communities' Council and the Darebin City Council. Almost 100 people attended representing ethnic communities, sports clubs, local councils, the health sector, emergency services, educational institutions and private employers. Key employment barriers experienced by migrants and refugees, identified by forum participants are:

4.1 Non-recognition of overseas qualifications and skills

Overseas qualifications, skills and experience are often not effectively and fairly recognised by employers. Many migrants and refugees find the system for recognition of overseas skills and qualifications too complex to navigate without face-to-face support resulting in further unemployment and under-employment.

4.2 Lack of culturally inclusive training programs

More targeted programs in mentoring, coaching, induction and counselling are needed to improve employment outcomes for job seekers from culturally diverse backgrounds.

4.3 Cultural competence for employers

There is a general lack of awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace and inadequate training and education programs to improve the cultural competence of employers and employees.

²⁷ Bertone et al 2011, *Employment Barriers and Success Factors for Skilled Immigrants in the Melbourne public sector*, Swinburne University

4.4 Unconscious bias in recruitment

Current recruitment processes can be ineffective for people from culturally diverse backgrounds as unconscious bias places too much emphasis on merit-based selection and inconsistent use of selection criteria are.

4.5 Over-focus on English language

Varying levels of English language competence diminished opportunities within a workplace; for example an employee with a lower level of English language ability may be misunderstood due to assimilatory attitudes of colleagues and be overlooked for promotional and other work related opportunities.

4.6 Lack of data and research

Mandatory data collection and reporting on workplace diversity is needed to help drive change in employee demographics. More research is needed to present a positive business case to employers for a culturally diverse and inclusive workplace.

4.7 Discrimination

Despite anti-discrimination legislation, racial discrimination still exists in the workplace and in employment practices as a significant human rights issue.

5.0 SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

This section in the full report provides detailed examples of community sector employment initiatives and partnerships on how to improve cultural diversity recruitment strategies and develop more inclusive workplaces around the following areas:

- Preventing Workplace Discrimination
- Local Government Practices
- Community partnerships
- Diversity and inclusion
- Social Enterprises
- Networking
- Mentoring

6.0 RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS

A range of practical guides and resources are provided in this section of the full Work Solutions Discussion Paper to assist employers improve the cultural responsiveness of their recruitment and employment practices. One example is:

- The FECCA *Harmony in the Workplace: Portfolio of factsheets for Australian employers and organisations (2013)*²⁸ - a comprehensive toolkit that covers a diverse range of issues and practices to develop a more confident and culturally competent workforce.

²⁸ Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia, *Harmony in the workplace. Delivering the diversity dividend. Portfolio of factsheets For Australian employers and organisations*, (Canberra: FECCA, 2013).

7.0 CONCLUSION

After decades of discussion about migration and employment, the challenges and barriers faced by migrant and refugee job seekers in Victoria are many, varied and complex.

While there are many examples of effective, but fragmented, 'work solutions' already in place, a more coordinated and cohesive approach is required at individual, organisation, government and community levels based on the findings and recommendations in this Work Solutions Discussion Paper.

The full report of *Work Solutions: Improving Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace* is available at www.eccv.org.au

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