



ethnic  
communities'  
council of  
victoria

# INVESTING in DIVERSITY





Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) Inc. was established in 1974 as a voluntary community based organisation.

Over 35 years later, ECCV is a non-partisan, broadly based, statewide, peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria.

ECCV's role includes supporting, consulting, liaising with and providing information to Victoria's ethnic communities.

ECCV delivers policy projects for key partners in areas like multicultural policy, aged care programs and skilled migration strategies.

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## Foreword

Budget submissions are by tradition and necessity a meeting of the fiscal and the philosophical and this year's submission by the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is no exception. As in previous years, it presents a handy snapshot for local policy makers and stakeholders of the prevailing issues affecting the multicultural sector along with a number of suggested policy remedies.

Yet this document also represents a powerful argument for continued foresight in the allocation of funding and the taking of a long-sighted view in the assessment of social benefits. Around the world too many governments are instituting cutbacks to key social services in the hopes of calming unstable economies and rectifying damage wrought by their financial sectors. It is a trend that cannot and should not be employed in this country.

Australia has been fortunate to escape much of this fall out and it is important that our governments do not fall into the trap of becoming too cautious and conservative in their policy outlook or risk eroding the confidence and potential that comes with a visionary approach that balances prudence with patience.

Across a host of policy areas, ECCV advocates for the extension of a number of successful programs and pilot initiatives as well as calls for an expansion in financial support for innovative proposals that promise to make a tangible difference to the lives of culturally diverse Victorians.

Not surprisingly, health and community care remains a primary concern. ECCV has already made note of the unique concerns facing Baby Boomers from ethnic backgrounds, some of which are reiterated here. But equally significant are health concerns relating to all age groups such as the rise in chronic disease among disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. Working closely with local communities and service providers at the ground level is part of ECCV's proposal to better assess the level of need and develop appropriate responses.

We also recognise that further opportunities are needed for ethnic youth to connect more meaningfully with a range of social circles and networks. While sport has always been a powerful tool in achieving that end, especially among young males, and ECCV makes particular suggestions in this area, the art world too offers tremendous scope for multicultural youth to improve their sense of self and place in society.

Overall, ECCV looks to the coming year as a period when a greater percentage of government spending reaches the grassroots organisations that actually work to provide the everyday services Victorians of all backgrounds and beliefs rely upon daily. Compared to other sectors in recent years, the community sector has consistently delivered high value for money in terms of program outcomes, a trend ECCV is eager to see duly rewarded and further supported in the coming year.

I commend this submission to you.

Sam Afra JP  
Chairperson



## Executive Summary

A change of government invariably brings a re-evaluation of existing approaches as well as an opportunity to pursue new ideas. Following the election of the Liberal / National Coalition to office in November 2010, ECCV, as a peak body for migrant and multicultural communities in Victoria, is keen to work with the new government to improve the recognition and representation afforded to Victorians from migrant and multicultural backgrounds as well as bolster the support for service delivery to ethnic communities in general.

ECCV has consulted with its members, project partners and key stakeholders and presents the following overview of prevailing issues and suggested responses for consideration. Key recommendations include :

- development of a special program within the curriculum of educational institutions to suit the needs and capacity of newly-arrived migrants and refugees.
- continuing support for initiatives that help connect members of new and emerging communities with mentors from various industry to guide them on leadership skills training for their communities.
- the current wage claim for equal pay for the Victorian community sector deliver an outcome which will ensure a fair wage for new and existing workers and secure the long-term viability of the sector.
- the portability of long service leave across the community and not-for-profit sector be instituted as early as possible.
- the construction of public and social housing dwellings and subsidised private rental houses be fast-tracked.
- a campaign be developed to promote more effective utilisation of existing housing stock and surplus rooms.
- regular consultation with all community stakeholders regarding any new initiative affecting the daily cost and fee structure of utilities.
- a designated percentage of internships, traineeships, and work experience placements in public, private and community enterprises coming from applicants new to the country.
- funding be provided for a full time dedicated Health Policy Officer within ECCV to explore the gaps in service provision within the journey through primary, acute and community care services.
- funding be provided for a dedicated Women's Policy Officer within ECCV to work with key stakeholders and local councils to improve disclosure of incidents of violence and abuse within domestic settings, emphasise prevention strategies, and co-ordinate outreach programs targeting women where they live.



## I. Standard of Living and Access to Opportunities

While Australia might seem to be in a comparatively healthy position by world economic standards, quality of life issues are still destined to become one of the predominant concerns of the coming few years as the gap between the wealthiest few and the poorest members of society continues to widen.

ECCV's concern in this area is two-fold. Firstly, as a peak community organisation ECCV is a vocal advocate for the institution of equal pay and fair remuneration for workers in the community sector, many of whom are female and come from non-English backgrounds.

Secondly, ECCV is increasingly concerned about the impact of rising house prices, rental rates, food prices and utilities on the cost of living and access to necessary services. While all Australians are expected to be affected by these spikes in everyday household expenses, a significant proportion of the migrant and multicultural communities occupy middle to lower socio-economic groups, making them especially vulnerable.

### 1.1 Community Sector Wage Disparities

Despite the immense and invaluable role that the community sector plays in delivering essential services to a huge number of Australians, especially the aged, disabled and underprivileged, a significant pay disparity for community workers compared to those in the private and public sector means they continue to be among the country's lowest paid workers.

ECCV believes this routine underfunding of community services not only threatens the ongoing quality of these essential services as the existing workforce finds it increasingly financially unviable and potential new workers financially unappealing, but unfairly hinders the career opportunities of certain segments of the population, namely women and workers from non-English speaking backgrounds.

#### *Portable Long Service Leave*

ECCV commends the efforts of the Office for the Community Sector (OCS) to formalise arrangements for the portability of long service leave payments for workers in the community sector. While the new Victorian Government has expressed a wish to re-examine the details of this initiative, ECCV urges the enactment of the necessary changes at the earliest convenience.

#### **Recommendations :**

- **that the current wage claim for equal pay for the Victorian community sector delivers an outcome which will ensure a fair wage for new and existing workers and secure the long-term viability of the sector.**
- **that legislative changes to ensure the portability of long service leave across the community and not-for-profit sector be instituted as early as possible.**



## 1.2 Housing

With recent reports suggesting that the waiting times for public housing in Victoria can now be as long as 18 years and the cost of rental properties speculated to rise up to another 9% in 2011, ECCV urges every effort be made to :

- fast-track the construction of public and social housing dwellings and subsidised private rental houses.
- ensure more effective utilisation of existing housing stock and surplus rooms.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) a combination of larger dwellings and decreasing household size has contributed to an increase in the proportion of households with at least one surplus bedroom over the ten-year period 1996 to 2006. In 2006 for example, the number of surplus bedrooms in Melbourne homes was estimated at over 1.3 million<sup>1</sup>.

With this in mind, ECCV urges more effective utilisation of existing housing stock through promotion of boarding in private residences and greater care in the allocation of public housing to ensure the number of rooms matches the number of occupants.

Along with other organisations who deal firsthand with consequences of mortgage stress, housing shortages, and homelessness, ECCV also believes it is time that broader financial policies affecting real estate investment and construction are reviewed such as negative gearing and the first home owner's grant, which have been identified as factors artificially inflating the cost of properties.

### **Recommendations :**

- **that the construction of public and social housing dwellings and subsidised private rental houses be fast-tracked.**
- **that a campaign be developed to promote more effective utilisation of existing housing stock and surplus rooms.**
- **that the prudence and application of financial policies such as negative gearing and the first home owners grant be reviewed to ensure the purchase and rental price of homes returns to an affordable level for everyday Australians.**

## 1.3 Utilities

Like many in the community sector, ECCV is very concerned about the impact of predicted price rises across all utilities during 2011, especially on the budgets of households which are already severely financially over-stretched for reasons such as those cited above.

<sup>1</sup> ABS, Surplus Bedrooms In Melbourne Homes



### *Smart Meters*

ECCV has previously expressed concerns about the proposed launch of 'Smart Meters' to measure Victorians' electricity consumption, noting that in too many areas it appeared that the cost burden was being shifted onto the consumer for little or no discernible benefit.

ECCV appreciates the decision by the new Victorian Liberal / National Coalition government to revisit the proposal, reiterating the belief that access to regular and affordable electricity is a basic necessity in modern Australian life and not merely a commodity for private profit. Moreover, any new initiative affecting the daily cost and pay structure of electricity must keep in mind the limited capacity of the most financially vulnerable members of society.

#### **Recommendation :**

- **that any new initiative affecting the daily cost and pay structure of electricity must involve regular consultation with all community stakeholders and accommodate the limited capacity of the most financially vulnerable members of society.**

### *Water*

ECCV notes that the exponential rate at which the global and Australian human population is growing means that attitudes toward water preservation, management and consumption must take a longer view rather than vacillate according to the latest weather incident. While the floods of early 2011 have been devastating across a number of states, it is important to remember that Australia is a naturally dry continent and in less than five years the country could be back suffering the effects of serious drought.

With this in mind, ECCV commends every effort to make every private dwelling and business as water efficient as possible through initiatives such as :

- the subsidy of water tanks.
- continued promotion of recycled water use.
- continued promotion of responsible water consumption.

## **1.4 Bank Fees**

ECCV believes that as an essential service in modern society, financial institutions have a basic moral duty to the entire community that exists beyond their own commercial profit-making goals. With the privatisation of publically-owned banks at both the state and federal levels, ECCV contends that it is now incumbent on the private institutions to assume responsibility for this social imperative.



Yet consumer advocates point to a number of practices which breach this fundamental duty of service such as :

- the raising of interest rates above official Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) levels.
- excessive account charges, especially on clients with low savings and high transaction numbers such as pensioners and low income earners.
- exit fees on accounts.
- ATM fees for use of other bank ATMs.

Moreover, ECCV notes that the advent of telephone and internet banking has not resulted in the much-promised reduction in costs and ease of access for the average bank user, but only created further obstacles for many seeking to perform the most basic functions, especially those without regular internet access or low proficiency in English. The end result being that those least able to afford being charged for basic financial services end up being charged the most.

ECCV believes it is necessary for all financial institutions to be required to have at least one savings option, unencumbered by excessive fees and charges, with the simplicity and flexibility to suit the needs of low income earners without ready access to modern technology.

**Recommendation :**

- **that all financial institutions have at least one savings option, unencumbered by excessive fees and charges, with the simplicity and flexibility to suit the needs of low income earners without ready access to modern technology.**



## 2. Healthcare and Community Services

As the old adage goes – at the end of the day, all policy is health policy. Everything that governs our day to day lives sooner or later has an impact on the standard of our health and well-being. Yet there are also some specific areas of emerging concern in the healthcare sector that require urgent attention.

Foremost among them is the progress of National and State Health Reforms and the proposed creation of Medicare Locals, while other priority areas include the implementation of Cultural Responsiveness Framework across the health sector and reforms to Victorian mental health.

### 2.1 National and state health reform

With the political landscape becoming more fractured and fluid at both state and federal levels in the past twelve months, the status of the proposed federal government takeover of funding responsibilities previously controlled by state governments remains in a holding pattern.

One aspect of the reform that has been forecast is the creation of a program called Medicare Locals. While the planning process is still in its early stages, it is intended that this will allow an increased focus on primary care, early intervention, community health and health promotion.

Should the takeover proceed, it appears the only change in the short term will be the name of the funding body. However, it is less clear what changes will be implemented in the longer term. At any rate, considerable challenges and opportunities are predicted for the health sector and it is important that the views of the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community are represented at the implementation stages.

#### *Cultural Responsiveness Framework*

Launched in 2009, the Cultural Responsiveness Framework consolidates the achievements of the former Health Service Cultural Diversity Plans and aims to improve and extend the capacity and performance of health services in terms of culturally and linguistically responsive health care.

#### *Mental Health Reform*

In late 2009 Victoria introduced reform strategy called “Because Mental Health Matters.” ECCV has found there remain issues of CALD access and health literacy exist within the mental health service system.

#### *Home Visits*

ECCV notes that home visits deliver a variety of essential services such as :

- Nutritional care – meals.
- Personal care – showering.
- Home care – cleaning.

Moreover, ECCV remains a strong advocate for the availability of home-based consultation for the disabled, frail, infirm, and single mothers, and especially in the delivery of bilingual face-to-face contact with seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds. ECCV finds clients are far more likely to provide more valuable and personalised information about quality of life issues in the comfort of their own homes.



Consultation across the health sector has highlighted the need for knowledgeable and connected ethnic advocacy in this sector and the development of more effective links with the Department of Health to ensure that multicultural Victoria receives a quality continuum of healthcare. Currently there is no formal representative to advocate for the improved health literacy and access to health services for people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

As the peak body that represents ethnic communities, ECCV is well placed to tackle the continuum of health care for people from ethnic backgrounds. A dedicated Health Policy Officer within ECCV with in-depth knowledge of the health sector can take forward issues raised in consultations as well as respond to requests from the health sector for advice on issues of cultural diversity.

ECCV representation at this stage will also give ethnic communities a stronger voice in the Medicare Locals structure and national health reform as a whole.

**Recommendations :**

**Funding be provided for a full time dedicated Health Policy Officer within ECCV to :**

- **explore the gaps in service provision for ethnic communities within the journey through primary, acute and community care services.**
- **ensure that multicultural Victoria receives a quality continuum of healthcare.**



### 3. Community Safety, Harmony and Connectedness

All successful societies rest upon a basis of community safety, harmony and connectedness, especially those with a population as diverse as Victoria. As any refugee from a war-torn nation will attest, establishing a secure and stable living environment is always an essential first step which is why ECCV makes a point of working closely with legislators, human rights advocates, law enforcement bodies and the judicial system to ensure that the interests of migrant and multicultural Victorians are duly considered and protected. From there, ECCV believes that nurturing a sense of appreciation and belonging among all members of the population is vital if the full potential of the individual and collective citizenry is to be realised.

#### 3.1 Community Safety

Whether at home or the workplace, in school or clubhouses, in public spaces or on public transport, all Victorians have the right to feel safe in their environment and free from the threat of harm to their person, possessions and loved ones.

##### *Accident Minimisation and Prevention*

Sadly, freakish, unpredictable and unfortunate accidents do occur from time to time – some involving other people, others the result of nature alone – which wreak injury, destruction or worse. For ECCV, there is a concern that a lack of awareness about potential hazards among newly-arrived and non-English speaking Victorians may be a contributing factor in some of these incidents. For example, accidental poisonings in the home or drownings in dangerous waterholes or coastal rip tides.

With the scale of disasters such as the Black Saturday bushfires and the floods in early 2011 predicted to become more prevalent due to climate change, it is essential that all Victorians be able to respond to emergencies swiftly and effectively. ECCV maintains that with appropriate awareness, preparation and response techniques these types of incidents may be preventable among migrant and multicultural communities. Moreover, this preparation should also include access to culturally-specific training such as swimming classes for refugees from countries unfamiliar with the hazards of water.

ECCV is particularly impressed by initiatives such as the Muslim swimming classes organised through the Shepparton English Language Centre which allow Muslim girls in Burquinis the opportunity to learn to swim and feel confident in the water. Such programs should be replicated throughout the state.

##### **Recommendations :**

- **that every effort be made to ensure that public signage and community awareness programs on issues of safety and accident prevention are accessible to Victorians and visitors with low or no English proficiency.**
- **that culturally sensitive initiatives such as the specially tailored swimming classes which allow Muslim girls in Burquinis the opportunity to learn to swim and feel confident in the water be replicated throughout the state.**



### *Anti-social activity*

Conversely, there are incidents involving deliberately, reckless and thoughtless human behaviour which threaten property or personal safety. The spate of incidents against international students from migrant and multicultural backgrounds which hit the headlines in late 2009 are a prime example, although the type and extent of the offence can vary markedly from threats of violence to physical assault to theft to destruction of property.

ECCV notes that too often multicultural and non-English speaking communities find themselves targeted for this kind of antisocial activity and believes that regular consultation and contact between Victoria Police and ethnic community organisations is important to build trust and confidence in the justice system.

### *Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs)*

ECCV strongly believes that the Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) and New and Emerging Community Liaison Officers (NECLOs) have been, and continue to be, a vital element in nurturing a positive and mutually beneficial relationship between the community and Victoria Police.

While ECCV respects that all Victorians should feel comfortable approaching any officer about a matter of concern – and this is an ultimate goal to be aspired to – in practice an individual with specialised knowledge of a culture and personal familiarity is naturally going to appeal more in terms of trust and confidence. Thus, the inherent value of dedicated officers offering an immediate and obvious affiliation, proficiency and sensitivity at a cultural or linguistic level. Not only does this improve the likelihood of reporting, but the quality of information.

ECCV notes however that suspicion exists among some migrant communities that MLOs are being employed more as “intelligence gatherers” on multicultural communities rather than as facilitators – a perception which needs to be addressed.

### **Recommendation :**

- **that funding and support be continued for dedicated Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) and New and Emerging Community Liaison Officers (NECLOs) within Victoria Police.**

### *Legal aid*

ECCV notes that offending behaviour is not just a legal problem that requires a legal response but is a wider communal problem with socio-economic issues and effects. Moreover, a strategy to divert young offenders from entering the juvenile justice system is highly dependent on the family. For some minority youth, however, the quality of the family environment can be an additional stressor during the turbulent adolescent period due to:

- parental settlement difficulties.
- differences in cultural values and expectations.
- changes in family roles.



ECCV calls for an integrated service system comprising governmental departments (human services and justice) and the community sector to :

- assist family units to better support their young (in the absence of family members, community-based agencies can play an important role).
- assist youth to adopt a law abiding lifestyle and participate positively in civil society.
- identify and nurture young natural leaders within communities (that have a high profile of CALD youth under supervision) to act as role models.

While it is important to develop partnerships between the justice system and community-based organisations, many of these organisations face challenges relating to limited resources. More funding is required for the community sector and for youth workers who are the most skilled practitioners trained to respond to young people's complex behaviours and needs.

ECCV also supports flexibility in the requirements that qualify youths who can be legally represented and highlights the need to address issues associated with accessing legal aid.

**Recommendation :**

- **Development of an integrated service system comprising governmental departments (human services and justice) and the community sector to assist family units to better support their young.**
- **Greater funding for the community sector and youth workers to assist in their rehabilitation of young offenders.**
- **Flexibility in the criteria which determine the eligibility and access of young offenders to legal representation and legal aid.**

### **3.2 Community Harmony**

Beyond strengthening the presence and powers of police, ECCV is a fervent advocate for other initiatives that help bridge differences and promote harmony within communities and foster interaction between communities from a diverse range of backgrounds and beliefs.

#### *Within Communities*

ECCV recognises that even within a group of people who share a common country of origin, language or heritage, divisions can still exist based on age-old enmities or long-held suspicions and prejudices. First and foremost, ECCV believes that internal and cross-cultural conflicts originating in foreign lands have no place in Australia, and perpetuating such hostilities only undermines the positive image of multicultural Victoria. Furthermore, ECCV believes that the Australian context can be a valuable environment for seeking to resolve such divisions.

ECCV also believes that international consulates and local arms of religious orders can play a valuable role in reframing conceptions of nationality and belief in a healthy and cohesive manner during national days and religious celebrations.

**Recommendation :**

- **that international consulates and religious leaders play a prominent and conciliatory role in joint celebrations of national days and religious celebrations which may be a source of contention with certain ethnic communities.**

*Between Communities*

Fair or not, there will always be occasions when the image of an ethnic, cultural or religious community finds itself under intense public scrutiny due to the inflammatory or even criminal actions or comments of an individual or individuals associated with that group, especially with the aid of the media. For smaller and newer communities without an established knowledge of how to handle such pressure, this experience can be overwhelming, isolating and disenfranchising.

ECCV believes a co-ordinated arrangement of reciprocated public support led by leaders of other communities can make a great difference in diffusing tensions and reducing the temperature of public discourse around such occasions – the general theme being that a whole community should not be judged by the actions of a few. Having affirmative voices from a variety of backgrounds helps create solidarity among diverse communities.

**Recommendation :**

- **that leaders of diverse communities have a co-ordinated arrangement of expressing reciprocated public support for, and solidarity with, other communities during occasions of tension and intense public scrutiny discourse around such occasions – emphasising that a whole community should not be judged by the actions of a few.**

### **3.3 Community Connectedness**

Along with public displays of support for other communities during occasions of intense public pressure and scrutiny ECCV maintains there is a need for diverse cultural communities to develop more practical working links. Attending the staff meetings of another community organisation, for example, can be a useful opportunity to develop a long-term meaningful connection. ECCV encourages senior managers and governing boards of diverse community groups to explore opportunities for interaction with groups from different communities and the possibility of ongoing project partnerships.

**Recommendation :**

- **that senior managers and governing boards of diverse community groups explore opportunities for interaction with groups from different communities such as making a presentation at a staff meeting, and the possibility of forging ongoing project partnerships.**



### *The Arts and Culture*

Along with sport and recreational activities, arts and culture can be a powerful instrument for strengthening connectedness among diverse communities. ECCV commends the Victorian Liberal / National coalition for their commitment to provide further funding for Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV) and assist in their relocation into new premises. MAV provides an invaluable service in assisting artists from culturally diverse backgrounds to network, access support and showcase their work.

ECCV also notes the value of initiatives such as the annual New Heartlands Refugee Art Prize which celebrates the creative talent and social contribution of visual artists from refugee backgrounds. ECCV would like to see similar opportunities for showcasing the work of new and emerging talent from migrant and multicultural backgrounds across a variety of creative spheres including writing, drama and music.

#### **Recommendation :**

- **that opportunities be developed which help showcase new and emerging talent from migrant and multicultural backgrounds across a variety of creative spheres including writing, drama and music.**



## 4. Education and Entrepreneurship

With access to education central to personal development, self-esteem and vocational advancement as well as broader social cohesion and prosperity, ECCV urges all stakeholders to work closely in developing curricula that is well-rounded, practical, accessible and personally satisfying to all Victorians irrespective of their background or social circumstances.

In stating this, ECCV recognises that not all individuals are suited or interested in pursuing high level academic qualifications. The challenge – whether it be a trades apprenticeship, a part-time intern placement, or a graduate degree – is to better connect willing and able students with appropriate opportunities that will enable them to broaden their knowledge and advance their career ambitions in a positive, culturally aware environment.

### 4.1 LOTE classes

ECCV notes the draft national curriculum for languages launched on 1 February 2011 recommends that every Australian student be required to study a second language for at least 300 hours before year 7. This proposal coincides with the Victorian Coalition's pre-election pledge to introduce compulsory LOTE classes for every Victorian primary school.

ECCV commends the aspiration at both state and federal level to improve the multilingual capacity of Australian students. However, it is important that these ambitions are backed up with sufficient resources and buy-in from the schools and teaching fraternity.

ECCV is also mindful that many of the difficulties for multilingual students occur at the tertiary level where a number of institutions have cut back on their LOTE courses and the career pathways for LOTE graduates are limited.

#### **Recommendation :**

- **that proposed improvements to the multilingual capacity of Australian students be backed up with sufficient resources and buy-in from the schools and teaching fraternity.**

### 4.2 Entrepreneurial guidance and support

Victorians from newly-arrived and non-English speaking communities are often among the most enthusiastic groups when it comes to starting their own business as individuals, families or communities. Yet this enthusiasm is too often dampened by a lack of opportunities to learn vital skills, gain first-hand experience, access mentors, make connections, and secure the necessary support and approvals to establish their enterprise.

ECCV commends initiatives which help build the confidence and leadership capacity of newly-arrived Victorians and link multicultural workers with potential employers. However, ECCV remains deeply concerned by reports that applicants for jobs still feel themselves being unfairly discriminated against based on their name, accent, race, faith, or time in Australia.



ECCV believes that there is greater merit in having a designated percentage of internships, traineeships, and work experience placements in public, private and community enterprises coming from applicants new to the country. As well as harnessing the applicant's natural eagerness to establish themselves and contribute to their now home, it will help workplaces become more accustomed to a diverse range of staff.

**Recommendation :**

- **that a designated percentage of internships, traineeships, and work experience placements in public, private and community enterprises coming from applicants new to the country.**



## 5. New and Emerging Communities

Even within the past five years, the composition of Victoria's newest ethnic communities has undergone important evolutions as numbers of arrivals from Bhutan, Burma, and Afghanistan supplement continuing growth in the state's African communities. Whatever their country of origin, however, issues of settlement advice, transition assistance, community development, and access and equity continue to be predominant concerns.

### 5.1 Settlement Advice

For many refugees and humanitarian entrants the settlement process remains a highly complex, deeply confusing, frustrating and stressful experience, due largely to a sense that insufficient information has been provided prior to arrival in terms of challenges likely to be faced and how best to negotiate their resolution.

While general data is provided as part of the existing Integrated Settlement Strategy (ISS), new arrivals frequently report that much of the information fails to be absorbed amid the anxiety and anticipation of the final stage of leaving their former country.

Development of more in-depth audio-visual material which newly-arrived migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants can view in their own language whilst on the journey to Australia may be one way of supplementing the quantity and quality of current information.

#### **Recommendation :**

- **that more in-depth audio-visual material be developed which newly-arrived migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants can view in their own language whilst on the journey to Australia.**

### 5.2 Transition Assistance – new arrivals

ECCV recognises that the successful settlement and integration of newly arrived communities does not end with their stepping onto Australian soil, but continues for many months, if not years depending on the individual's ability to adapt to different environments, social structures and cultural expectations. With this in mind, avenues of ongoing transition assistance are essential, particularly in rural and regional centres.

While the type of Transition Assistance required differs from person to person, the most common overarching themes include :

- awareness of and access to support services.
- language services.
- education about rights and responsibilities.
- connection to community networks, organisations and clubs.



### 5.3 Transition Assistance – receiving communities

Successful integration of newly arrived migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants also depends on the receiving community being adequately informed, prepared, comfortable and competent with their part of the process.

In regional centres especially, local service providers and organisations are often given insufficient time, funding and resources to deliver the quality of care and level of cultural competency they would like and are therefore left overstretched.

#### *Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils (RECCs)*

The first port of call and primary source of settlement assistance for many new arrivals in country Victoria continues to be the state's string of Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils (RECCs). Yet issues of finance, governance, accountability and administration are still problematic for a number of the RECCs. ECCV is particularly concerned by the absence of any formal multicultural assistance and advice body in the Albury-Wodonga area. As well as revisiting the funding arrangements of each RECC contingent on their establishment and enforcement of clear constitutional guidelines, ECCV will convene public forum in the Albury-Wodonga area to determine whether a local RECC should be re-activated and if so urges the state government to provide support in the initial establishment phase..

#### **Recommendations :**

- ▶ **that the funding arrangements of each RECC be revisited contingent on their establishment and enforcement of clear constitutional guidelines.**
- ▶ **that the state government support the establishment of a RECC in the Albury-Wodonga area if there is sufficient local support to make this a viable proposition.**

### 5.4 Education Pathways

Avenues into, through, and out of formal education remain a primary concern for many members of refugee and newly-arrived migrant communities, due largely to the capacity and priorities of the schooling institutions and the capacity and priorities of the refugees and migrants themselves. For example, the budgetary stresses affecting many educational institutions – especially those in the public sector – has had a direct impact on their capacity to effectively accommodate the special needs of refugees and newly-arrived communities.

Conversely, the educational readiness of newly-arrived migrants and refugees are not uniform. Some newly-arrived migrants and refugees are better placed to transition into and out of western education than others. Moreover, the disparity between demand for educational opportunities and supply of suitable educational opportunities is being further exacerbated by the tendency for recently arrived migrants to reside in outer suburbs.



**Recommendation :**

- **that particular effort be made to ensure that educational institutions include a special program within their curriculum designed to suit the needs and capacity of newly-arrived migrants and refugees.**

## **5.5 Employment Pathways**

Along with the barriers and difficulties experienced by newly-arrived migrants and refugees within the education sphere, there are particular hurdles these groups face securing gainful and lasting employment.

ECCV commends the support by government for mentorship programs which help connect members of new and emerging communities with key figures from various industries to guide them on leadership skills training for their communities.

ECCV also continues to call for greater government support and resourcing for the Overseas Qualifications Unit (OQU) to help process applications from new and emerging communities as swiftly and efficiently as possible.

**Recommendation :**

- **that support continue for initiatives that help connect members of new and emerging communities with mentors from various industries to guide them on leadership skills training for their communities.**



## 6. Ageing Ethnic Australians

Considerable public attention is now being paid to aged care in Australia and the expected surge in demand for services and specialised assistance in the decades to come. ECCV has been one of a number of advocacy bodies highlighting the extent of this emerging crisis over the past few years, especially as it relates to seniors from migrant and multicultural backgrounds. Key points highlighted by ECCV include findings that CALD older people:

- prefer to live at home longer than the average population.
- express a preference for ethno-specific services in particular Social Support Programs that require additional transport support for increased access
- depend on support from “ethnic family carers” identified in a Government Inquiry into carers, as a hidden group that lacks adequate support systems.

Many CALD seniors over 65 years of age also:

- lack a clear understanding of their rights.
- are socially isolated.
- have insufficient knowledge about health and aged care services resulting in uninformed decisions about quality lifestyle and decreased wellbeing.
- experience higher than average advanced dementia and do not seek assistance until a crisis occurs and high care institutionalised services are required.

In addressing these concerns, ECCV emphasises :

- the value of culturally appropriate assessment tools to ensure better outcomes for those with special needs.
- the need for all older people to have access to aged care information regardless of their language or background.
- the importance of utilising aged care workers from a diversity of cultural backgrounds for provision of culturally appropriate care.
- the need for all aged care staff to undertake professional development activities to increase their cultural awareness, confidence and competency.
- the availability of interpreters and language consultation services to convey valuable information to ethnic seniors and their carers.

### 6.1 Access to Early Information and Advice

When it comes to aged care, ECCV firmly believes that forewarned is not only forearmed, but also far more cost effective. By ensuring that the Victorian seniors of today and tomorrow have access to appropriate information about care options as early as possible, clients, government agencies and service providers can avoid the added strain and expense that invariably arises when major later life decisions are put off until the last minute. With this in mind, ECCV commends the work of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) in bolstering the client services for ethnic communities across councils.



Yet considerable gaps remain in the breadth and depth of available information suitable for Victorians of migrant and multicultural background, suggesting that ongoing support is also needed for face-to-face bilingual direct client support through multicultural community organisations.

In order to assist the mainstream aged care sector proactively form cultural diversity partnerships and relationships as well as to effectively access the range of multicultural aged care information resources, ECCV proposes the development of a much needed electronic resources and information website that also contains an updated version of the Multicultural Aged Care Services Directory.

**Recommendations :**

- **that support be ongoing for face-to-face bilingual direct client support through multicultural community organisations.**
- **that production of the next hard copy edition of the ECCV Multicultural Aged Care Services Directory be supplemented by an online version.**

## **6.2 Sourcing and Training an Aged Care Workforce**

ECCV acknowledges proposals to import more nurses and aged care workers from overseas to help meet expected demand. However, with a vast pool of people from culturally diverse communities already living in Australia eager to get into the field, ECCV urges governments to develop specialised, culturally sensitive aged care training programs for these applicants who might otherwise feel intimidated by the pace of standard training regimes.

ECCV particularly notes a spike in interest in the 45+ and 35+ age groups, suggesting the usual calls for mature age people interested in professional training and career opportunities for culturally specific aged care workers should be expanded beyond the 55+ age bracket.

**Recommendations :**

- **that calls for mature age people interested in professional training and career opportunities for culturally specific aged care workers be expanded beyond the usual 55+ age bracket to include 45+ and 35+ age groups.**
- **that specialised, culturally sensitive aged care training programs be developed for applicants who might otherwise feel intimidated by the pace of standard training regimes.**



## 7. Women's Policy

While the strategic advocacy for women's issues has become more prominent and effective across many mainstream areas of social policy, there is still much to be done with regard to the specific concerns of women from migrant and multicultural communities, which often encompass extra layers of complexity and nuance.

Among the particular areas of strong need are :

- Peri-Natal, Maternity and Childcare
- Domestic Violence
- Parental and Sibling Care
- Obstacles to Education and Employment

### 7.1 Peri-Natal, Maternity and Childcare in CALD communities

Among newly arrived and non-English speaking communities, issues relating to the various stages of motherhood continue to be an ongoing source of frustration. Expectant mothers from the Karen community, for example, report considerable difficulties in accessing pre-natal guidance and support from health care providers in their first language. Similarly, households with a higher than average number of children frequently report obstacles in accessing sufficient childcare support which puts additional pressure on the mother. Without the kind of child-rearing support networks many women are accustomed to in their traditional cultural environments, issues such as post-natal depression can become more prevalent.

With newly arrived migrant and refugee families likely to be on the lower end of the socio-economic strata, particular attention must be paid to ensure that family units do not succumb to extreme social pressures which can result in further marginalisation and disenfranchisement, especially among the youth.

### 7.2 Domestic Pressures and Violence

While isolating statistical data for the CALD community in Victoria has been shown to be problematic, a 2006 Victorian Government report identified that women from CALD are more likely than 'mainstream' Australian women to be victims of violence and sexual assault, experience of trauma or torture including rape and sexual violence. The report also concluded that experiences of domestic violence are far less likely to be reported by these women than other English speaking women.<sup>2</sup>

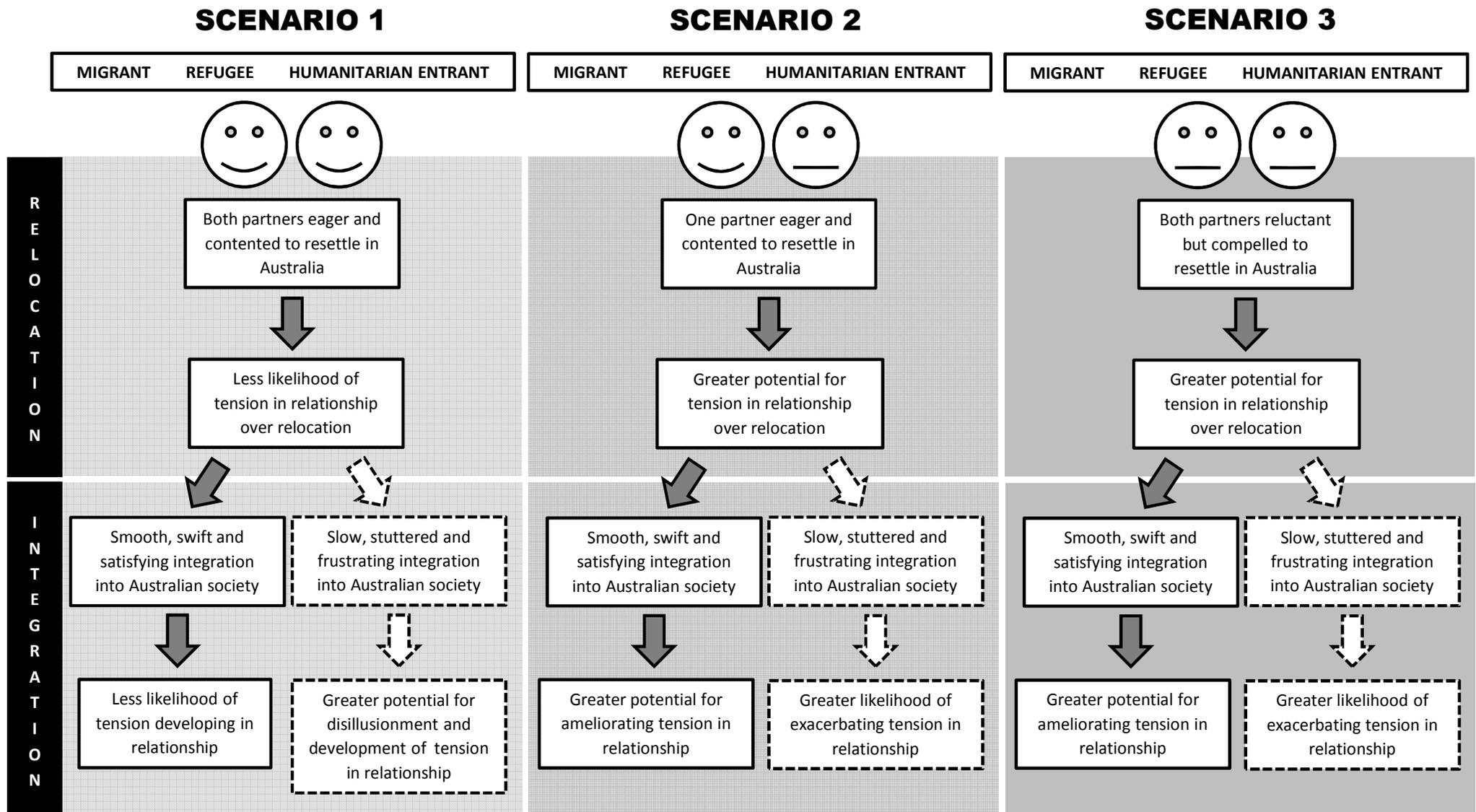
ECCV believes a more consistent, co-ordinated approach in women's support services is required across all local government jurisdictions. Not only have some local councils been found to have low awareness of services in their own areas, but transport constraints and issues of accessibility and affordability, especially in rural areas, have proven highly detrimental to family violence prevention, intervention and responses.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Human Services (2006) Building Partnerships between Mental Health, Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DHS 2006).



Fig. 1. Internal and External Pressures on Relationship during Resettlement





### 7.3 Parental and Sibling Care

Along with the responsibilities of motherhood, many women in migrant communities also carry a cultural expectation to assume the primary care of elderly parents and sometimes their own siblings. The stress of feeling sandwiched by competing demands is further exacerbated by difficulties in accessing support and frustration at obstacles impeding their own ambitions in education and employment.

### 7.4 Education and Employment

Women from migrant and multicultural backgrounds often experience obstacles to entering and advancing through the education and employment spheres, ranging from discrimination to exploitation. Discrimination can be on the basis of visible differences such as skin colour, body type, accent, dress and cultural expression, or inadequate English skills may be a hindrance.

Pressure from partners as well as the experience of migration itself may mean a humanitarian migrant woman is disinclined to participate in the workforce.

ECCV believes that the highly specialised nature of ethno / religious women's issues means the quality and timeliness of advocacy and advice to government would benefit from a designated part-time Women's Policy Officer within the ECCV structure.

The positioning of such a role within ECCV would allow for the more accurate projection of demographic shifts and development of population policies that :

- encompass all social trends and mitigating factors.
- remain independent of partisanship and political influence.
- extend beyond short-term constraints of such election cycles.

#### **Recommendation :**

- **Funding be provided for a dedicated Women's Policy Officer within ECCV to work with key stakeholders and local councils to improve :**
  - **delivery of relevant information in a timely, sensitive, and culturally competent manner**
  - **disclosure of incidents of violence and abuse within domestic settings; and**
  - **co-ordination of outreach programs targeting women where they live.**



## 8. Young Migrants and Ethnic Australian Youth

For ethnic youth (aged younger than 26) the negotiation of a healthy self-identity amid a host of competing parental / communal expectations and personal ambitions still stands as a paramount concern and primary point of contention.

In noting this, it is important to note that ethnic youth are not a homogenous category. For example, the cultural sensibilities and affiliations of Australian born youth of migrant and multicultural parents are not necessarily the same as young people who have arrived in the country as migrants, refugees, or humanitarian entrants themselves. Furthermore, the intricacies and vagaries of these differences are further complicated by the way in which the young person's cultural identity is perceived by their parents or guardians. Therefore, when it comes to approaching issues of ethnic youth, a one-size fits all mentality cannot be expected to apply in every case.

### 8.1 Young Migrants

As the name suggests, young migrants were born elsewhere and have subsequently migrated to Australia, either with their parents or sometimes unaccompanied in the case of orphaned refugees. Thus, even within the sub-category of young migrants to Australia, further sub-categories can be found based on the circumstances of their arrival, their enthusiasm about resettling in the country, and their ability to successfully integrate into society (see **Fig. 2.**).

#### *The Relocation stage*

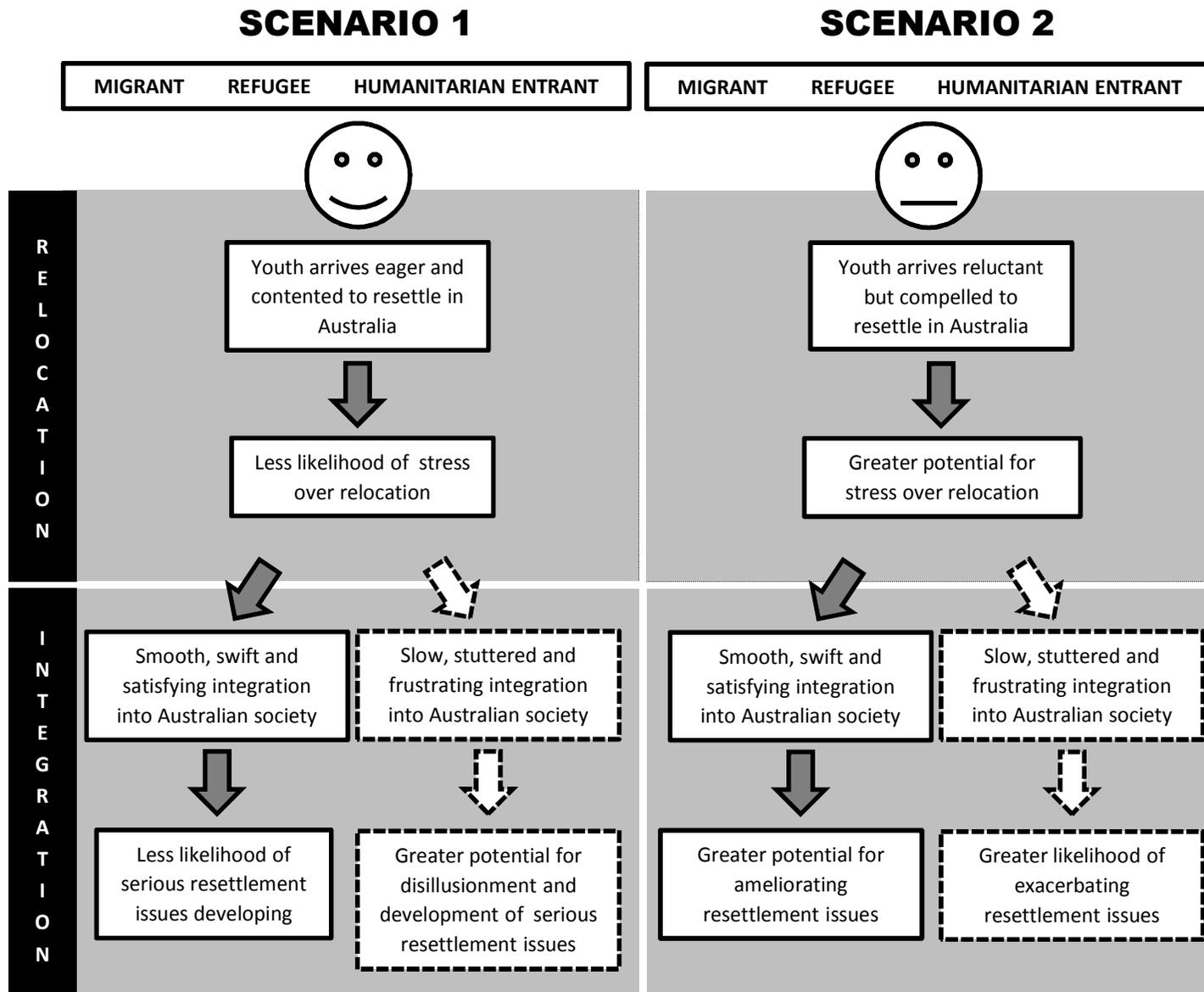
There is no hard and fast rule concerning young migrants' attitudes toward relocation to a different country. Just as there can be children of enthusiastic skilled migrants who are deeply reluctant and resentful about having to migrate with their parents, there can also be stateless young refugees forcibly dispossessed of their homeland who embrace life in Australia as a whole new opportunity, and vice versa. Among refugees and humanitarian entrants in particular, it is vital to remember that not every new arrival into Australia has relocated by choice. Many would have preferred to continue their lives in their former homeland had circumstances been more suitable, a yearning which can present an unwitting obstacle to their ability to transition wholeheartedly into their new lives. Accommodating for this fact is an important consideration in shaping support programs.

#### *The Integration stage*

Adding further complexity to the integration process is the sometimes incongruous attitudes held by migrant youth and their parents or guardians regarding the merits and direction of life in their new home. Just as one partner in a migrant relationship might feel more positive about the migration process creating tension in the household (see **Fig. 1.**), the same potential for friction can arise if the young migrant feels more enthused about embracing the new opportunities of Australian culture than their parents, or vice versa. As noted above, development of support programs for migrant families need to be mindful and accommodating of this dynamic.



Fig. 2. Internal and External Pressures on Young Migrants / Refugees / Humanitarian Entrants



**Recommendation :**

- **support programs for migrant families featuring migrant youth need to be accommodating of the possibility that respective attitudes held toward the direction and opportunities of life in Australia may not always accord, resulting in intergenerational tensions.**

**8.2 Ethnic Australian Youth**

Variations of the aforementioned issues can also be shared by Australian-born ethnic youth. However, one of the more common sources of emotional stress continues to stem from a desire by young ethnic Australians to pursue a relationship with a partner outside their cultural or religious group.

For much of the migrant and multicultural population, the rapid internationalisation of Australian society has meant that anxieties about cross-cultural relationships tend to be less intense and less common than in previous generations. However, relationships involving different religions or spiritual philosophies can still be a major source of consternation and familial distress.

If handled well, cross-cultural and interfaith couples can :

- form a starting point for building bridges between different communities.
- encourage productive and tolerant interfaith dialogue.

But even when the families of both parties are relatively open-minded about the faith of the other, issues can still develop regarding :

- pressure for one partner to convert.
- uncertainty about the faith of any succeeding generations.

According to Abe W Ata<sup>3</sup>, there are six reactive patterns to the interfaith scenario:

Conversion	One party converts to the faith of the other, or actively participates in activities without full conversion
Withdrawal	Both parties withdraw from their respective religious activities
Plurality / Active reciprocation	Each partner maintains their own faith and the other actively participates in activities
Third Option	Both parties leave their respective religions altogether and both convert to a neutral third option
Compromise / homelife integration	Elements of both partner's faiths are integrated into the family life
Plurality / Passive non-judgement	Each partner respects the other's freedom to practise their chosen faith

<sup>3</sup> Ata, Abe (2009) *Us & Them : Muslim-Christian relations and cultural harmony in Australia*, Australian Academic Press, pp129



With this in mind, ECCV urges all faith communities to ensure that families confronted with issues arising from an interfaith relationship are aware of all options and provided with the family counselling and support services when needed.

### 8.3 Community-based Activities

Along with their immediate and extended family, ethnic youth tend to draw considerable influence and support from their local cultural or faith community. One way this community influence can be positively nurtured is through sporting, arts, cultural, educational and recreational activities.

#### *Soccer tournaments*

For young males especially, soccer continues to be the most popular sporting activity among most migrant communities. ECCV notes that participation in organised tournaments can be an effective way for young migrants to :

- promote inclusion among newly-arrived Australians based on common interests;
- cultivate cross-cultural interpersonal friendships; and
- develop a sense of belonging to Australia.

More particularly, sport can be a means for occupying young people who might otherwise fall prey to anti-social or criminal activity. Yet a number of communities report difficulties for young people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds finding their way into existing teams and competitions.

ECCV believes a specific campaign is necessary to encourage established sporting teams to actively recruit players from culturally diverse backgrounds.

#### **Recommendation :**

- **That a specific campaign be launched which encourages established sporting teams to actively recruit players from culturally diverse backgrounds.**

