

19 December 2017

The Secretariat
African Ministerial Working Group (AMWG)
Victorian Multicultural Commission
Level 9, 1 Spring St
Melbourne VIC 3000
Email: AMWG.Secretariat@dpc.vic.gov.au.

Re: ECCV Submission on the Draft Victorian African Communities Action Plan

To The Secretariat

As the State's peak voice for multicultural Victoria, the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) commend the State Government for convening the African Ministerial Working Group (AMWG) and for embarking on statewide community consultations for their *Draft Victorian African Communities Action Plan* (Draft Plan) (2017). We support the key goals and action areas of employment and training, education, empowerment and prosperity and engagement and access. ECCV appreciate that racial discrimination is acknowledged as a barrier and that the positive attributes of diverse African cultures are recognised.

The Draft Plan reflects similar feedback to ECCV from diverse African communities that their migration to Victoria, from over 50 countries and over 60 ethnicities, is characterised by vastly different experiences and expectations. Understanding this diversity in culture, faith and migration needs to be reflected in the programs and policies of successful service providers. Ethno-specific organisations specialise in grass roots relationships and need to be strengthened for policies to continue to emerge from the 'ground up'.

Intergenerational focus

Having consulted with diverse African communities, especially on family violence and gender equality, ECCV sees a need to balance the Action Plan's focus on youth to include older community members and parents and appreciate that the family unit is equally important in building a socially cohesive – and inclusive - Victoria.

Employment remains a priority area of concern among diverse ECCV African community members who commented that in order to 'keep up' with government's focus on young people, training in 'soft skills' for adults are need to ensure that generations grow together and not apart.

While the priority to provide English language learning will remain high, communities are asking for training in Australian culture and customs to improve their 'soft skills' and better adapt to Victorian schools; language courses, workplaces and local communities.

Partnerships between established and African communities

The Action Plan highlights two important issues which ECCV can contribute to. It states that "supporting partners to address reporting gaps and to develop responsive policies" and "creating an interface between communities, academic and policy makers". ECCV's policy and advocacy work involves consulting communities, building capacity and liaising with government and researchers. In

so doing, we create an interface for issues and communities. ECCV will continue to offer diverse African communities our support to do what we do best. Identify gaps in policy and develop responsive policies. ECCV is publically funded to provide this support and welcome partnerships with diverse African communities and government to provide this assistance.

Within Victoria's own multicultural community, ECCV is not unaware of the work needed to bridge understanding between established migrant communities and diverse African communities. For many ECCV members, memories from the 1950s when Greek and Yugoslav adult parents became alienated from their children remain vivid. They want to support diverse African families. For established migrants, confronting the bitter experiences of their past is crucial to accepting and supporting new and emerging migrants. This is a conversation that ECCV has experience and expertise in facilitating and we welcome opportunities to strengthen diverse African community voices in Victorian Multicultural policy.

Self-reliant communities and social enterprise

Feedback to ECCV support the Action Plan's Goal 1 of Economic Prosperity. Directing resources towards diverse African entrepreneurs and social enterprise projects can uplift communities. ECCV's consultations with multicultural women in Melbourne's northern suburbs identified stories of diverse African small businesses run by women challenged by their lack of business training. Many of their ideas emerged from community values, such as sharing child-rearing, which has boomed into groups of African women interesting in running early learning centres.

A key principle of the Draft Plan is stronger partnerships between communities. As a strong partner in the Government's commitment to African communities, ECCV will continue to advocate for a participatory approach to learning and consulting with African communities to advocate for them across government portfolios.

ECCV policy and advocacy for diverse African communities

ECCV supports a submission made on behalf of the Ugandan community on the creation of a clearing house to increase information available to, and for, diverse African communities. The Action Plan's focus on building an evidence base recognizes his contribution and the need for such a clearing house.

ECCV engages regularly with members of diverse African communities including as policy interns, mentors to staff and researchers. Much of our advocacy on multicultural youth has emerged from engagement with African youth at our social cohesion roundtables. We have learnt about the unique system of debt accrued on late payments to utilities, banks, government services and laws that poorly communicate their compliance and financial terms to diverse communities. This informed ECCV's 2018-19 State Budget Submission to Treasury in which ECCV recommended that the Victorian Government allocates resources to train bilingual staff of ethno-specific and multicultural agencies to become specialist financial counsellors to provide culturally responsive training in household budgeting.

In 2015 ECCV held a roundtable on the issue of remittances in partnership with African community money transfer operators (MTOs) in Footscray. ECCV advocated to the major banks and the Federal Attorney General to recognise the compliance actions of MTOs and the detrimental effect that the closure of remittance accounts was having on diverse African communities. In 2017 ECCV facilitated a meeting between the MTOs and Federal politicians to discuss the effect of increased bank fees for international money transfers by the major Australian banks on both the MTO's and diverse African

families. These are complex and difficult issues which require patience and commitment to build the capacity of diverse African-specific organisations to lead negotiations on issues relevant to their community.

The Action Plan is thorough and ambitious, and ECCV is pleased to recommend key areas where practical resources can be achievably shared between governments, communities and services providers through the 2018-19 State Budget.

- Adult training to become adaptable individuals.
- Supporting adults with no literacy in their own language to learn the 'soft skills' usually learnt in school (special focus on diverse African women in Shepperton).
- Develop 'transformational' adult learning skills to ensure that parents and young people develop skills in socially cohesive manner.
- Intergenerational relationships and parenting skills.
- Ageing without assets, and ageing with dignity.
- Portability of pensions from African countries.
- Cross-cultural relationships in the workplace.

For more information please contact ECCV Executive Officer Dr Irene Bouzo on Email: ibouzo@eccv.org.au and Telephone: 9354 9555 or ECCV senior policy officer Carl Gopalkrishnan on Email: cgopalkrishnan@eccv.org.au.

Yours Sincerely,



Kris Pavlidis
Chairperson