

**ECCV Submission
To
The Federal
Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry
Into
Migrant Settlement Outcomes
January 2017**

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the voice of multicultural Victoria and the peak policy advocacy body for eight regional ethnic community councils and up to 220 members including ethnic and multicultural organisations across Victoria since 1974. For over 40 years, we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community. ECCV has a strong history in advocating for the rights of Victoria's multicultural communities.

ECCV welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry into Migrant Settlement outcomes.

ECCV believe that it is entirely appropriate for services to be periodically reviewed with a view to identify gaps and to improve upon them. However, the bigger picture and longer term view of migration and settlement must be the focus of any review for which Australia is acknowledged as having 'extensive experience in the integration of resettled migrants'¹.

ECCV is cautious of the terms of reference of this inquiry and is concerned about the tenuous link made between youth gang activity to the much broader picture of migration settlement and sees this as a distraction to the outcomes of Australia's migration policy and review of settlement services.

The migration settlement story in Australia is largely a positive one and its settlement program success is referred to as guide for good practice.² In its research paper on the Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, it reported "the overwhelming picture, when one takes the longer term perspective of changes the working lifetime of Humanitarian Program entrants and their children, is one of considerable achievement and success"³. The paper outlines the benefits of humanitarian entrants including 'strong display of entrepreneurial qualities ...maintaining economic linkages with their countries of origin ...significant contributions through volunteering within the wider community

¹ OECD (2016), Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection, OECD Publishing, Paris.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251236-en> page 12

² ibid

³ The Hugo Report, 2006,

<https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/research/economic-social-civic-contributions-about-the-research2011.pdf>

and their own community groups'. From this account alone it can be extrapolated that the migrant settlement program in Australia, put plainly, works.

ECCV is pleased to contribute this submission to the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes highlight the following key messages to the Committee:

1. Australia has extensive experience and offers a world class settlement program.
2. Australia's settlement program has demonstrated successful settlement of migrants and humanitarian entrants over generations of migrants.
3. Improvements to the current settlement program should be based on best practice models drawn from our OECD peers and that this can only be established following thorough research and comparison of qualitative and quantitative data.
4. The broader service system needs support to deliver culturally appropriate services to enable smoother transition from specialised settlement support services to mainstream services.
5. Education is the key to successful integration of migrants and the Government must take a longer term view of investment in education for migrants and their children.
6. Social connection and a sense of belonging assist young migrants to settle well.
7. Good settlement experience is a whole of service sector and community responsibility which requires adequate funding and acknowledgement.
8. Supporting families to maintain family structures including reunification of family members has social and economic benefits.
9. Migrant settlement outcomes are a separate matter to the issue of law and order.

1. The mix, co-ordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants

ECCV research and consultations with partner agencies have unearthed a vast range of settlement services and programs funded within the HSS (Humanitarian Settlement Services), SGP (Settlement Grants Program), CCM (Complex Case Management), torture and trauma counselling, health screening among others. Service providers report that their programs are well utilised and that there is a call for extending the timeframe and increasing resourcing for certain services and programs offered to humanitarian entrants and migrants based on the varied needs of migrants and refugees, especially short term support such as the Complex Case program.

Homework clubs

Similarly, ECCV consultations with community members have revealed that there is a genuine need to extend timelines for programs, particularly those associated with English language proficiency and education support programs. For example, homework support groups run by local migrant resource centers support primary and secondary children and bring tremendous benefit to children whose parents have little formal education or have English as a second language. Feedback from migrant resource centers and ethno specific community groups suggests that there is a high demand for homework support programs, particularly among African and Afghani youth in Melbourne's south east. Unfortunately, these programs are only offered to humanitarian entrants for up to five years after their arrival, after which time, the services cease to be available to them.

Research shows that integration issues are “more pronounced among offspring of poorly educated migrants”⁴ and that education support alleviates integration issues. Given that research has shown that the ‘bulk of humanitarian migrants entering through resettlement schemes are poorly skilled’⁵ there is a strong case for supporting the educational outcomes of migrants and their children through greater investment into education including dedicated long term initiatives. Government research has demonstrated that given the opportunity, humanitarian migrants will readily take up additional education opportunities and that these initiatives support ‘upward cross – generational mobility’ among refugee – humanitarian groups.⁶ This is a key factor contributing to the longer term success of migrant settlement.

Recommendation 1

ECCV recommends that the education programs targeted at primary and high school aged children should be exempt from the ‘5 year’ rule applied to HSS and SGP programs.

The additional benefit to attending educational support programs to improving language proficiency, literacy and numeracy, is an undeniable benefit of a sense of belonging to a local group and, more broadly, to the Australian community. The sentiment of ‘children’s happiness is felt by the whole family’ is a global phenomenon and the flow on benefits cannot be underestimated.⁷

Further, the five year time frame does not reflect a child’s educational journey, nor is it commensurate with a refugee child’s or their family’s need for support taking into consideration their migration journey and/or pre-settlement experience of torture and trauma. Thus, there is a need for effective transition from specialist settlement services to mainstream services which are competent in working with refugee and migrant families to facilitate their integration into the broader service system.

Recommendation 2

ECCV recommends that services which come into contact with migrant and refugee families be required to be trained in cultural competence including the special needs of victims of torture and trauma.

Successful settlement is a whole of community experience and the value of the support provided by community groups and associations is acknowledged in international settlement research. Initiatives such as Welcoming Cities and organisations such as clubs, churches, charities, private businesses, community welfare and sporting organisations go a long way to creating a welcoming environment and create the conditions which support integration.

⁴ ibid 1

⁵ ibid 1 page 55

⁶ ibid 3 page 143

⁷ https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/RIDR/Reports/RIDR_RPT_SyrianResettlement_FINAL_E.pdf page 35

Sporting clubs

ECCV consultation with volunteers of a sporting club in the south east of Melbourne identified that the benefit to migrant and humanitarian entrants is much broader than the children's physical participation in sport. In fact, parents of children often seek assistance on how to fill in forms or to ask for a volunteer to attend meetings as a support person. This is true for Sudanese parents attending a local netball club where, over several years, the club has developed trusting relationships with new migrants and refugees and has become integral to supporting settlement of new members in their local communities. Volunteers have played an integral part in supporting the successful progression of newly arrived migrants to realise their sporting hopes and dreams and enabled young netballers to attain state level representation in netball. A volunteer spoke of parents' commitment to supporting their families and working as many hours as they can in a week and having to miss out on watching their children's sporting progress. The club, therefore, offers a supportive network to the children and their families, and enable civil participation and sense of belonging which are recognised as key enablers of successful integration.⁸

Sadly, the clubs receive little to no financial support and rely on membership fees and court use fees to maintain equipment and the costly maintenance of court condition. Good will alone is insufficient to keep a club doing such great work to keep operating. Organisations such as these need recognition and financial support for the important role they play in implementing humanitarian policies in civil society even though they may not have a formally recognised role in settlement support.

Recommendation 3

ECCV recommends the recognition and resourcing of the settlement and social support role of sporting clubs that target new and emerging communities.

2. National and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects.

ECCV's consultations have identified that there is a great breadth of settlement services currently offered which take into consideration the different needs of migrants and humanitarian entrants not dissimilar to that which is offered by our OECD peers.

ECCV encourages the Government to undertake further research to investigate and compare the range and quality of its settlement services program currently offered to migrant and humanitarian entrants and that this research should include quantitative and qualitative data on outcomes for migrants and refugees. Further, that the outcomes of this research be compared to our national peers to enable a detailed view of Australia's migrant settlement program to inform service enhancement.

ECCV also highlights that the current inquiry is taking place simultaneously with the HSS and Complex Case tender process. ECCV urge the Government to consider the value of the current inquiry and to extend current contracts pending outcomes of this inquiry in its entirety in order to

⁸ Ibid 1 page 49

fully inform the contract awarding process. Additionally, ECCV believe that the current programs run and delivered by state and national providers and local community groups support the integration of migrants where they settle. For example, migrant resource centers, who have long established relationships with local communities through their community connections, depth of knowledge and expertise on the settlement needs of new migrants and connections with local services and support networks are an enormous asset to the existing settlement program.

Recommendation 4

ECCV recommend the Government undertake thorough review of its migrant settlement programs, including data comparison of services and outcomes for migrants with regional and global peers, prior to completing the current tender process for HSS and Complex Case tenders.

3. The importance of English language ability on a migrant’s, or prospective migrant’s settlement outcome.

ECCV concur that English language ability is a necessary skill in successful settlement outcome, of which a key factor of is workforce participation. Government research has identified that English language proficiency is lower among humanitarian migrants than other visa categories and acknowledges the ‘crucial importance of providing English language training to new humanitarian arrivals’.⁹

Similarly, English language proficiency is a key enabler for participation in other aspects of civic society. Given the importance of language in successful settlement, there is great value in investing in programs which provide intensive language support.

Recommendation 5

ECCV recommend that the government take a longer term view into investment in migrant language education as a key enabler of successful settlement.

Further, it is well understood that secure employment significantly impacts on the wellbeing of individuals and their successful participation in social and civic life, a sentiment echoed by migrant youth at ECCV’s Intergenerational Conference in November 2016.

Programs such as Job Active, which place enormous pressure on migrants to demonstrate application for in excess of 20 jobs per month, miss the mark in delivering real results. ECCV consultations have identified that these programs do not sufficiently focus on the enablers of successful employment such as English language proficiency and job readiness training. What is

⁹ Ibid 3 page 130

required is a gradual guided entry into the job market such as Denmark’s “Stepmodel”, Sweden’s “Step – In Job” program.¹⁰

Recommendation 6

ECCV recommend that the Government, in recognition of the special needs of humanitarian migrants, research best practice examples of workforce participation models as part of its review of settlement services program and apply these learnings.

4. Whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects.

Australian’s immigration policy framework is tied to its aspirations as a good global citizen, its political and economic ties and obligations as a signatory to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. These are the caveats under which it exercises its humanitarian and migrant intake policies. The scrutiny and diligence with which it applies its immigration policies is evidenced by the long wait times and cost of its immigration processes, both personal and to the state.

It is important to balance migrant intake with the longer term benefits migration brings to Australia to the short and medium term costs. The Hugo Report (2006) indicates that migrant employment is not commensurate with their qualifications and the potential for upward mobility of migrants.

The ECCV Discussion Paper *Qualified but not Recognised* (2014) highlights that the process of recognising overseas skills and qualifications in Australia is fragmented and complex. Migrants and refugees seeking to work with their overseas qualification in a specific area are required to have their skills and qualifications assessed by a registration, licensing or professional body. The process for recognition of overseas qualifications varies between different assessing authorities. The professional assessing authorities are not accountable to any centralised body, nor does an independent appeals process exist.

Recommendation 7

ECCV recommends the development of a combination of online and face-to-face affordable bridging programs and courses to support migrants and refugees seeking the recognition of their overseas qualifications and effective employment pathways in their nominated field within the first few years of their arrival in Australia.

¹⁰ Ibid 1 page 56

5. Concerns about the behaviour of some refugee young people/unintended consequences.

ECCV is concerned by the connection made in the current inquiry with the recent isolated spates of youth violence among some segments of Australian youth. The focus by the media on the 'visible minority' and linking this to the broader picture of migration settlement outcomes serves only to undermine what is otherwise a successful migration program. ECCV believes that these instances serve only to distract from the inquiry process.

The focus instead should be on what assists young people to feel a sense of belonging, community and worth.

ECCV consultation has also identified that some new migrant parents feel powerless to raise their children and discipline them according to traditional approaches. They feel threatened by a system they do not understand and paralysed to act otherwise. It is evident that what is required is parenting support to educate whole of family settlement.

Research also shows that family separation can be a major barrier to migrant settlement.¹¹ Given the high prevalence of families separated through conflict and resettlement in Australia, family reunification and consideration for the cut-off age for when a person is considered an adult (currently 18) is a significant consideration for successful settlement. Considering that families support children well beyond 18 years of age in Australia, it is prudent to increase the age limit and apply the same considerations.

Recommendation 8

ECCV recommend that the government apply adult age of 24 years when considering family reunification of separated families as per its definition of youth age of 12 to 24 years of age.

ECCV has been collaborating closely with the Victoria Police for several years especially on the development and review of its *Equality is not the Same* report to strengthen the trust and confidence in police of culturally diverse communities. ECCV provides representation to the Victoria Police via advisory groups in the areas of its Multicultural Portfolio Reference Groups, the Multifaith and Human Rights committee as well as its Seniors Committee and External Education Advisory Group. ECCV believes that has improved the cultural competency and multicultural understanding of the police force in particular in dealing with young and new and emerging community groups.

Recommendation 9

ECCV recommends that ethnic and multicultural peak organisations and multifaith organisations be resourced to provide relevant policy and practice advice to improve the way police engage with diverse communities and to strengthen community trust.

¹¹ Wilmsen, B, Family, 2013, Separation and the impacts on refugee settlement in Australia, Australian Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 48 No. 2 page 255

The ECCV research pilot study: *Intergenerational Relations in Newly-arrived Communities in Victoria* conducted by Deakin University points out that intergenerational conflicts in newly-arrived migrant families in Victoria are fuelled by the social, cultural and financial challenges they and their communities face. The pressure many of these families are under, alongside some traditional practices, can lead to family violence and family breakdown, from which a host of problems have been associated. These have significant consequences for the newly-arrived young people, their families, communities and the broader host society.

Recommendation 10

ECCV recommends that settlement programs be resourced to conduct parenting programs for newly arrived migrants and refugees that increase communication between parents and children about financial literacy for household budgets and family responsibilities.

For more information contact Galina Kozoolin, Policy Office at email gkozoolin@eccv.org.au and via telephone at 03 9354 9555