

Are We Really Living Safe Together? - Part 2

Report of Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria's Roundtable Discussion on government spending on community-based 'deradicalisation' programs held on 24 July 2015

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak advocacy organisation for ethnic and multicultural groups in Victoria. This social cohesion policy brief is the second of a two part discussion addressing community concern over future government 'deradicalisation' initiatives. After the implementation of the Federal Government's *Living Safe Together* program, culturally diverse communities expressed concern to ECCV about what will happen in Victoria.

Community leaders, service providers and individuals were invited to share their views and questions were centred on: identifying effective models of social cohesion initiatives, the effect of social cohesion policies on Victorian multiculturalism, how NGOs and government share responsibility and how young people can find trusted spaces to safely explore their strong emotions. With the language constantly changing around government approaches to community-based de-radicalisation programs, participants responded that these programs could stigmatise some groups.

While there were insightful comments from participants – all included in this brief - the roundtable also revealed different perceptions of multiculturalism. At first we felt this hindered a deeper response to our questions until we realised that this hurdle was a deeper issue. Comments pointed to a need for multiculturalism in Victoria to become more intergenerational in dimension and to learn from the past while living in the present and planning for the future. While social cohesion's role in this remained unclear there were many lessons to be applied today.

A government approach that targets communities without properly mapping intergenerational shifts in identity around multiculturalism is bound to be ineffective. Navigating that complexity requires the design of contextually-driven programs that go beyond “older” and “younger.” For example, the emphasis on Muslim youth overlooks publically organised and systemic racism and the increasing acceptability of more public expressions of racism. Global ‘inter-cultural’ shifts reflected among different multicultural generations in Victoria are also not adequately reflected in Victorian multicultural policies, legislation and language established in the 1980s and 90s. These barriers to social cohesion initiatives are not clearly understood.

The Victorian Government indicates that it is important for governments to work with NGOs. In the UK research shows a desire to learn from mistakes of the past 10 years with less focus on policing and military measures, and with more focus needed on social and community engagement. Participants supported collaboration, but service providers are limited in delivering their services if social cohesion is built into too many of their grants.

There was a sense in the room that people did not feel safe in Victoria at the present time. A lack of leadership at the national level is affecting how safe Victorian multicultural communities feel ‘on the ground’. The media is not without some responsibility for this. However, communities are reticent to provide this feedback to government if grants across sectors become tied to social cohesion as they are already struggling with resources to deliver their services.

ECCV will integrate the feedback from this discussion into our next roundtable and the development of ECCVs Biennial State Conference in 2016.

Key Consultation Feedback

KEY POINTS

The following is a snapshot of issues raised by roundtable participants.

- We need to know where the resources are coming from and if they are linked to the language of de-radicalisation and counter violent extremism.
- Is social cohesion another word for integration or assimilation?
- There is a ‘top down’ push from government to embed this term into everything.
- Social cohesion is about interacting with each other. It’s for everyone; for a multicultural society regardless of whether they are Muslims and non-Muslims; for all community groups.
- ‘Social cohesion’ is a very confusing term and creates a very time-consuming space especially for those working in the community sector with Australian Muslims.
- Some participants did not apply for the federal *Living Safe Together grants program* on principle due to the inappropriate language of radicalisation. Others applied but refused to use the language of violent extremism and were unsuccessful. Of

relevance are the learnings of the *2015 Advancing Community Cohesion Conference* held at the University of Western Sydney in July this year, where it was determined that the narrative of violent extremism should not be linked to multiculturalism.

- One definition of social cohesion presented was in the *Scanlon Report* describing a highly cohesive society that has:
 - *Positive identification with Australia;*
 - *Economic opportunity and reward for hard work and;*
 - *Satisfaction with financial circumstance.*
- People are finding it difficult to agree on what social cohesion and multiculturalism means today. Social cohesion discussion uncovered a lack of cohesion with which multicultural Victoria prides itself. The term social cohesion generated considerable confusion, frustration and lack of clarity.
- In Victoria racism that is publicly directed at young Australian Muslims and women in particular, is creating anger and frustration amongst male family members at home.

- We lack an evidence-base to explain whether overt discrimination or unconscious bias lies behind examples of racism towards Australian Muslims in our schools from students and educators alike (thought leaders). More and better cultural competency training is needed in our schools.
- Intercultural and anti-discrimination programs in schools are the most successful when targeted at students in Years 5 to 8. It's harder in high school as students are often influenced by the contrary views of their parents at home. Those programs are more effective when the parents are included.
- Whilst there were no young people from culturally diverse backgrounds present at the roundtable, discussion about youth showed a reluctance to give young people the right or space to express their feelings.
- There are many factors that lead to youth isolation including poor parenting.
- Muslim youth in Victoria today often lack social competencies to engage with people outside their ethnic and faith communities. Often they lack the opportunity to engage with the rest of the population to build those social skills. We need to build those skills to help them feel part of the rest of society.
- Older siblings bullied in schools by students and even staff challenge Australian Muslim parents who wanted to have their children enrolled in local state schools. They choose Islamic schools to protect their other children from such negative experiences.
- "I don't like the idea of a Melbourne that is racist." (participant).
- A "whole school approach" would impact positively on the broader community too.
- It appears we are dealing with an outdated form of multiculturalism that needs to be reformed. Trips down memory lane of nostalgia migration stories and past decades of multicultural policy showed that we should learn from the insights of the past, but without living in it. The question arises whether intergenerational attitudes are holding us back from multicultural reform.
- To connect across generations, we need a creative approach to improve intercultural understanding driven by celebrity personalities and entertainers to give us all a feeling of belonging and how to belong.
- Australian Muslims feel they are scrutinised as the 'enemy within' and carry an excessive burden of blame for violent extremism that is beyond their responsibility.
- Anti-Semitism is also on the rise.
- Radicalised youth are not the problem but a symptomatic residue from blaming Muslim youth in our society.
- Intercultural competence is a global movement. Intercultural citizenship training for all culturally diverse young people is more helpful than focusing on one group.
- Multiculturalism should focus on what is happening globally and not just locally to become more responsive to change. Not all overseas influences are terrorist.
- New media and computer games are potential tools to improve intercultural respect.
- We need a long term project rather than a short term projects.
- One comment was that young people need to be taught how to be more measured. An alternative view is that young people really need to be allowed to express their frustrations somehow.
- Community resilience is actually an issue across the board for youth, drugs, crime and other issues. Community resilience for social problems for young people from culturally and religiously diverse backgrounds is about their connectivity, but to shift responsibility for community resilience-to-violent extremism outcomes onto Australian Muslims is unfair.
- We need to go back to the Prime Minister and get him to change the language. As long as he is using that kind of language he is damaging Australia's multicultural community.
- There is a lack of political leadership at the federal and state government level. Some MPs who are not politically in favour of multiculturalism have a negative influence the public, social and economic context. The

general public is feeling more comfortable expressing racism so we need effective leadership from the top to counter race-and faith-based discrimination.

- We feel that we are not living safe together anymore. Australian Muslims are no longer feeling safe in public places. Increasingly in ordinary public places such as tram stops, Australian Muslim women no longer feel safe as other Australians treat them with suspicion. That had a flow-on effect to fathers, sons and brothers in their families who react with anger and frustration when they hear what happened.
- Some international students from predominantly Muslim countries they say they are becoming more radical when they come to Australia due to their increased social isolation, rather than being involved in the broader communities. Cohesion is about knowing things about the host culture. What is missing here is that some people from culturally diverse backgrounds don't understand the broader culture.
- We need to collectively work together as these are challenging times. We need to make governments take some leadership on this. It has been difficult for everyone.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- We need a more effective, whole-of-school approach to intercultural understanding, skills and competency.
- We need more resources for programs with a focus on parenting and youth cohesion.
- The narrative of violent extremism should not be linked to multiculturalism.
- We need a navigating and mapping of the shifting sands of multiculturalism to design social cohesion initiatives.
- Steps should be taken to address a disconnect between academic knowledge and the community sector's lived experience.

About ECCV Social Cohesion Policy Briefs

ECCV's social cohesion policy briefs are short snapshots from our roundtable discussions on social cohesion issues. They are not forums or education events. Culturally diverse community members, leaders and service providers are invited to attend both open and closed discussions on what is an evolving and complex issue.

To respond to the increasing rate of social change and also government policies on social cohesion, ECCV has developed a new way of consulting, analysing and sharing insights from each roundtable that give a voice to multicultural Victoria on issues that matter. We post our briefs online within two weeks.

The information is a combination of direct quotes from participants, policy analysis and human observation grounded in ECCV's 41 years of consultation with multicultural Victorians.

To receive future ECCV Social Cohesion Policy Briefs please subscribe by emailing eccv@eccv.org.au with the subject 'Subscribe to Social Cohesion PB'.

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