

Concern over proposed changes to humanitarian resettlement program, increased monitoring of migrants

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is concerned by the proposals outlined in the leaked cabinet document signalling changes to the humanitarian resettlement program and the increased monitoring of migrants.

The changes also include:

- The enforceable integration framework to assess aspiring migrants' suitability for life in Australia
- Enhanced access, use and protection of sensitive information to strengthen intelligence-led, risk-based decision making
- Continuous assessment of arrivals from pre-visa stage to post-citizenship conferral.
- A revamped citizenship test and citizenship pledge
- Tougher screening of the Syrian intake across the humanitarian program to ensure the acceptance of individuals with the highest probability of successful integration.

"In this climate, when it is so important to promote harmony and inclusivity, it is alarming to specify changes to the humanitarian program based on religious beliefs and ethnic background. To identify particular ethnic groups as undesirable for integration and increase surveillance on migrants creates anxiety and division", said Mr Caputo.

FECCA has previously expressed concerns about proposals to make changes to citizenship eligibility and the test. We believe that a strengths-based pre-citizenship process with an emphasis on civics engages and empowers migrants.

The document also recommends bringing forward proposals to reform the visa framework, removing "direct access to permanent residency to better align visa and citizenship decision-making with national security and community protection outcomes".

FECCA Chairperson Joe Caputo said, "Citizenship status and permanent residency are symbolic of acceptance and highly valued amongst immigrant groups, particularly refugees. The removal of permanent residency would eliminate any assurance of full participation in the Australian community for refugees."

As a former refugee, FECCA's New and Emerging Chair Alphonse Mulumba said, "Humanitarian entrants demonstrate a greater commitment to Australian life having been forced out by threat of persecution and fear of returning to their homeland. There is also substantial data to indicate that they display immense entrepreneurial qualities, contributing to the social, economic and cultural fabric of society. We are concerned about potentially disadvantaging and excluding some people who have so much to offer Australian society."

FECCA supports a non-discriminatory humanitarian resettlement program with a long-term vision, and that is responsive to the growing global needs for refugee resettlement.

"As a signatory to the refugee convention, we call on the government to stand by our moral and international obligations and give refugees the right to be resettled in Australia", said Mr Caputo.

We reiterate our concern on the proposed changes disproportionately singling out of refugees and migrants, which has the propensity to damage social cohesion and a sense of community belonging.

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