

Proposed English test for migrants is unfair

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) today sounded a warning against a Government proposal to use English language skills as a basis for exclusion. If the proposal succeeds, eligibility will be based on a subjective test of English—failing would deem ineligible any migrants who would otherwise be eligible to apply for permanent residency or for citizenship.

The Chairperson of FECCA, Ms Mary Patetsos said that the concept of imposing a 'shared language' on migrants at any cost carried significant risks for vulnerable groups.

"Those of us who have successfully completed the migrant journey and gained English skills should be reminded of the potential hardship this test will impose on vulnerable people such as women, older people and humanitarian entrants," Ms Patetsos said.

"FECCA has always recognised that proficiency in English is one of many factors which drive integration and social cohesion. Australian governments of all political persuasion have for decades proclaimed the success of Australian multiculturalism and its economic and social benefits. In a global economy, our multilingualism is also a great asset.

"Over those decades, a great number of migrants, from European and many other countries, have arrived here with limited English skills but have contributed hugely to Australia as permanent residents and as citizens—and to building this nation," Ms Patetsos said.

"People arriving in Australia should be provided with English language education which is realistic and attainable. With this investment a shared language is realistic and attainable. Our immigration policy should not be designed to punish and exclude the vulnerable such as women, older people and humanitarian entrants simply because they have not arrived with English proficiency. Measures that make it harder for them to live in Australia or become citizens are punitive.

"It is a huge shift of immigration policy to prohibit spouses, other family and humanitarian entrants from taking up permanent residence unless they can pass an English test.

"It is also remarkable that in an age when discrimination on the basis of gender or sexuality has been outlawed, it is now to become official policy to discriminate against people on the basis of languages acquired," Ms Patetsos said.

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community.

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