

# Multicultural Access and Equity

*Building a cohesive society through responsive services*

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Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)

2014 - 2015



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### **About FECCA**

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism.

FECCA's membership comprises state, territory and regional multicultural and ethnic communities' councils. FECCA has an elected executive committee and a professional national secretariat, responsible for implementing policies and work programs on behalf of its membership and stakeholders.

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# Executive Summary

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FECCA's 2014-15 Access and Equity Report provides a summary of the perspectives and broader feedback received through consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and service providers around Australia, regarding the design and delivery of Australian Government services. The report aims to discuss diverse community perspectives relating to the accessibility and quality of service delivery, highlighting gaps, key issue areas, models of good practice and opportunities for continued development and reform.

This report addresses two of the dimensions in the Government's Multicultural and Access and Equity Policy – responsiveness and engagement. These two dimensions were chosen following community consultations as they reflect the areas in which FECCA received the most feedback regarding government services. Responsiveness obligations include the need to ensure that policies, programs, community interactions and service delivery (in-house or outsourced) are effective for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Engagement obligations include the need to ensure effective communication and interaction between diverse community groups and respective programs and agencies, including in languages other than English.

Part I of this report identifies and discusses cross-cutting issues including awareness and information provision, self-service, and the availability of data for responsive services. Community discussion asserted that service delivery must remain focused on accommodating the needs of diverse clients, even in the context of adapting to external factors. Innovation in the delivery of services through a broad range of platforms and mechanisms is positive, but only to the extent that accessibility for all Australians, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, remains a paramount concern. Relevant and disaggregated data is crucial to improving providers' understanding of their clients, a common theme that emerged in community consultations.

Part II considers whether specific categories of government services, including translating and interpreting, education and training, employment, and welfare services, are meeting their responsiveness and engagement obligations. The report's key findings highlight the importance of culturally-competent service delivery, and the need for broad application of a person-centred approach to be flexible and responsive to complex and ever-changing client needs. An overriding theme that emerged from consultations was the need for stronger coordination between government agencies to streamline and improve the delivery of services agency-wide. It was revealed that a lack of awareness about programs and limited communication between agencies regarding the processes used to develop and implement such practices results in service delivery which does not fully cater to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

Dispersed amongst community views on the above issues and other key themes, the report suggests 'what can be done' for enhanced service development and delivery, and achieving better outcomes for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with a view to supporting their full participation. While not exhaustive, these strategies are aimed at facilitating access and equity for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

The report concludes by reiterating the importance of for more effective coordination through establishing an inter-agency implementation and evaluation platform.

# Introduction

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FECCA's 2014-15 Access and Equity Report draws on consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and service providers around Australia to provide feedback on the design and delivery of Government services. In organising these consultations, FECCA sought to hear from a diverse range of migrants and refugees living in regional and metropolitan areas of Australia. The report places particular emphasis on issues affecting new and emerging communities.

All Australians, regardless of cultural, linguistic or religious background, should be able to access Government services equitably. This report highlights the importance of tailored, culturally appropriate services for social and economic participation, accessing pathways to employment, and fostering social cohesion in our communities.

FECCA acknowledges the Australian Government's support through the Department of Social Services, for FECCA's work in seeking and communicating culturally and linguistically diverse communities' feedback on Government program design, delivery and impact on full and effective participation of Australia's migrants and refugees in economic, social and cultural life.

This report is possible due to the participation and contribution of the individuals and organisations consulted throughout the process. FECCA is grateful to everyone who shared their experiences and insights.

# Scope and Methodology

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FECCA's 2014-15 Multicultural Access and Equity Report details findings based on face-to-face consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse Australians and service providers regarding the accessibility and equitability of Australian Government services and their delivery. FECCA held four face-to-face community consultations across both metropolitan and regional locations in Australia. Full details appear below.

To complement the face-to-face consultation process, FECCA also designed an online access and equity survey, which was hosted through FECCA's website and advertised widely to culturally and linguistically diverse communities around Australia.

## **Consultations**

### ***Shepparton, Victoria (10-11 March 2015)***

Shepparton was selected as a regional location for FECCA's community consultation based on its substantial inflow of members from new and emerging communities. Shepparton has been a pilot site for the settlement of refugees and other humanitarian entrants and is amongst the most disadvantaged localities in Australia. The focus of the consultation was to assess the effectiveness and availability of government services accessed by members of new and emerging communities, as well as to explore the impact of services on their economic participation and social cohesion in a rural and regional context.

Several sessions were hosted in Shepparton across two days. On the first day FECCA met with local service providers and stakeholders including representatives of the Shepparton Police, Red Cross, Department of Human Services, Kildonan Uniting Care, GOTAFE, Primary Care Connect and many others to explore their perspectives on the barriers that local new and emerging communities could face in accessing their services. The second day was dedicated to four separate consultation sessions with members of the most pre-eminent ethnic communities in Shepparton: the Iraqi, Sudanese, Congolese and Afghan communities. The consultation was attended by 63 community members and 27 service providers.

Both days of consultations generated substantive discussions on a broad range of issues, including employment, education and training, Centrelink, housing, and translating and interpreting services.

Interpreters were used for the consultations to cater for the needs of new and emerging communities and individuals with a low level of English language proficiency.

FECCA thanks the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District and FECCA Rural and Regional Advisory Committee for the generous assistance provided in hosting FECCA's Shepparton consultation. Thanks also to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) for assisting with the translation of flyers for promotion of these consultations.

### ***Logan, Queensland (21 March 2015)***

Logan was chosen as a location to conduct a community consultation based on the large population of culturally and linguistically diverse youth in that particular locality and the spike in the unemployment rate amongst youth in South East Queensland. A range of issues affecting the lives of culturally and linguistically diverse youth were discussed at this consultation including: barriers to youth employment, education, access to government services, housing and homelessness. Attendees at this consultation included migrant and refugee youth, service providers and government representatives. A total of 21 individuals participated in the consultation.

FECCA thanks the Ethnic Communities' Council of Queensland and the FECCA Youth Advisory Committee for their generous assistance in organising this consultation.

### ***Sydney, New South Wales (24 March 2015)***

The consultation in Sydney gathered information on issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse women in general, with a special focus on health, wellbeing and domestic violence services. Sydney

was chosen as the location for this consultation as it was important to include a metropolitan location in FECCA's access and equity work.

The discussion group was made up of service providers, including those working in health, domestic violence, education, and carers' organisations, and culturally and linguistically diverse women. Fifteen women participated in the consultation.

FECCA thanks the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW and the FECCA Women's Advisory Committee for the generous assistance provided in hosting FECCA's Sydney consultation.

**Darwin, Northern Territory (31 March 2015)**

The focus of this consultation was on the accessibility of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their perceptions about the NDIS. Darwin was chosen as the location to conduct a community consultation to gather information on the readiness for the national roll out of the NDIS in July 2016 considering the remoteness of the location and availability of services in the Northern Territory. The participants were people with disabilities who have a culturally and linguistically diverse background, carers, service providers and community leaders from a multitude of backgrounds including: South Sudanese, Indonesian, Sri Lankan and Cambodian. Forty-one individuals participated in the consultation.

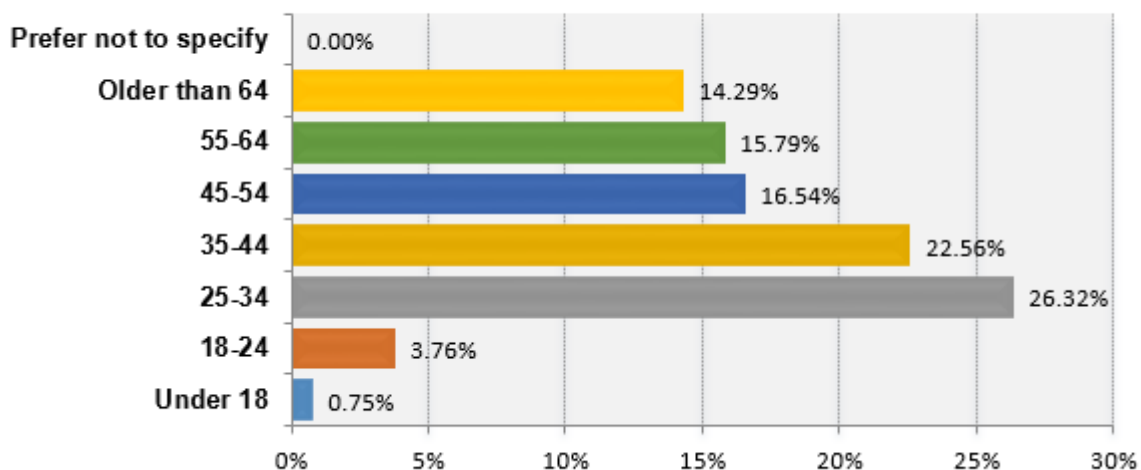
FECCA thanks the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT) and the FECCA Disability Advisory Committee for their generous assistance in organising a very successful consultation.

**FECCA 2015 Access and Equity Survey**

To complement the face-to-face consultation process FECCA designed an online access and equity survey which was advertised widely to culturally and linguistically diverse communities around Australia. The survey attracted over 130 responses from individuals representing a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia.

More than 60% of the total numbers of respondents were females and the majority fitted into the 25-34 years old (27%) and 35-44 years old (23%) age brackets. The survey had a good response rate from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in rural and regional Australia – 40% of responses - while the majority came from individuals living in metropolitan locations – 60% of the total responses.

**Age of survey participants**

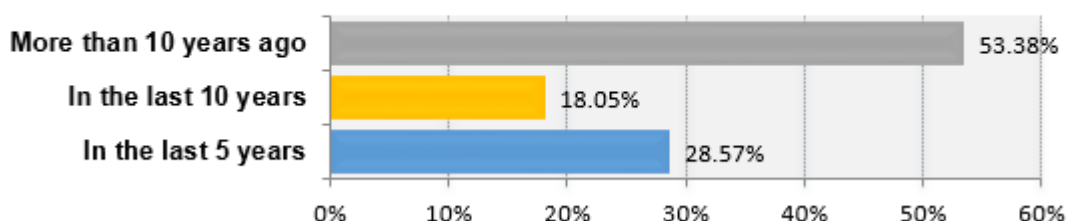


A significant proportion of survey respondents were what could be categorised as ‘new arrivals’ – a total of 47% indicated that they had arrived in Australia in the last 10 years, of which 29% had arrived more recently, in the last 5 years. A total of 54 survey participants arrived more than 10 years ago. Individuals who had arrived in Australia as a refugee or asylum seeker represented 30% of responses.

To supplement the range of perspectives from refugees and humanitarian entrants settled in rural and regional Australia, the survey was also provided as a hard copy to members of new and emerging communities in Wagga Wagga. The survey attracted the participation of 25 members from the Congolese, Afghan, Burundi, Iranian, Burmese, Sierra Leonean and Sudanese communities.

FECCA thanks the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga for their assistance with administering the survey in their region.

**Survey participants:  
Date arrived in Australia**



# Part I: Cross-Cutting Issues

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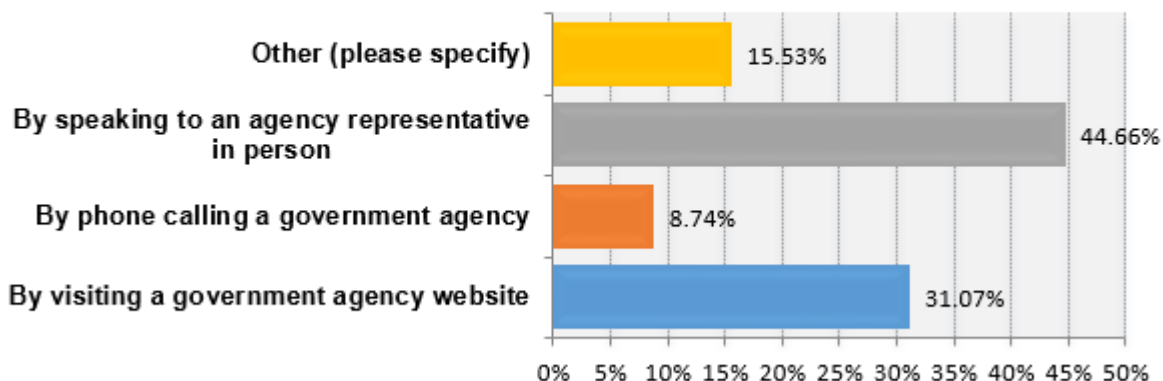
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## Information provision and awareness of services

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**Preference for information provision regarding government services**



Information provision was identified as one of the key areas that still requires improvement, despite positive progress. For example, the translated information on the Department of Human Services' website is a very positive communication tool and has the potential to bridge some of the gaps in engagement between Centrelink and the newly arrived migrants and refugees. However, the information provided is limited, is not reaching out to all the concerned communities, and it excludes community members who are illiterate or lack access to a computer and the internet.

*I have a number of tertiary qualifications and quite literate in English, but I struggle to navigate through the NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme] website to find out information. What terrifies me is what a person who cannot understand English would do if all the information they need to access is on the internet? I can't find answers to simple questions... (Female consultation participant – Darwin)*

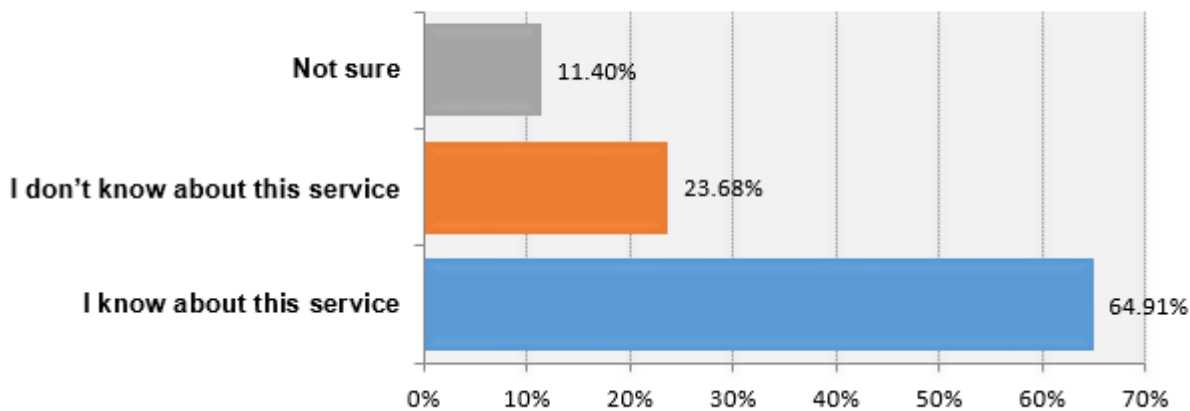
Translated information on a website might not cater to cultural and personal preferences about accessing information. Many of these communities will not look for information on their entitlements on a website but will prefer to explain their situation and get a response by talking to a service provider in person. Some community members rely on their relatives, friends or other members in the community for finding out information about eligibility for a service or benefit but the information provided might not always be truly accurate. Information provision is not only about having the information on a webpage, but also distributing information to different groups in society. Providing links to webpages on printed material will not be useful to many people who do not have access to the internet, and do not have the requisite computer and internet literacy.

Consulted youth in Logan noted that service providers should adapt information provision to the needs of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Young migrants and refugees do not tend to check government websites for accessing information and they are more active on social media sites which are a better medium for conveying messages to this group. In addition to this, other effective methods of communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse youth are through their networks, sports or social clubs, and community events.

Consultation feedback highlighted the difficulties of accessing information online for people with disabilities in rural and regional areas where access to the internet and computers is limited. General Practitioners (GPs), diagnostic groups and other community organisations were highlighted as effective means of disseminating information about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other disability services. Direct interactions such as phone conversations or meeting relevant officials face to face were considered the preferred modes of communication.

It is crucial that migrants, refugees and service providers regularly in contact with these groups are aware of the existence of relevant services and how they can access them.

### Awareness of government funded disability services



Accessibility of programs and services is closely linked to the availability of information. Significant concerns were expressed about lack of, or inability to access, information about the NDIS. The lack of clear understanding about how the NDIS is modelled, eligibility requirements, and what participants can access as part of their NDIS package, is causing distress among people with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, their carers and their communities.

*Information is not out there for people to access, the NDIA [National Disability Insurance Agency] is not visible enough. (Female community leader - Darwin)*

The lack of clear understanding about eligibility for the NDIS may deter people from approaching the relevant authorities to obtain information or access the NDIS. It is critical for service providers and NDIA officials to provide comprehensive descriptions of NDIS eligibility and in the event where a person is not eligible for the NDIS, those individuals must be informed of other avenues for access to services available to them.

It was revealed through the community consultation that, more than two years after the implementation of NDIS trial sites, there are people who are unaware of the NDIS:

*There are a considerable number of people who don't know about NDIS so these people will fall through the cracks of the system and often these are the people who should get the benefits [from NDIS participation] the most. (Service provider – Darwin)*

Considering the minimal engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse participants in the NDIS<sup>1</sup> and the lack of understanding about the Scheme, it is manifest these communities be assisted from the initial planning stages to navigate the NDIS and explore all the options available to them.

A further example of a service which would benefit from better community awareness are Police Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs). Service providers in Sydney reported positive experiences of dealing with MLOs and found it useful for these Officers to attend events and provide information to their clients and staff. It was reported that there is not good community awareness of the existence of MLOs and their role. Participants suggested extending community outreach activities to improve awareness.

Another key issue raised at consultations was the phenomenon of men applying for Apprehended Violence Orders against their female partner, even though the man is perpetrating the violence. Service providers in Sydney reported that men using violence often know the system better than their partners, for example they may have been in Australia longer and have better English proficiency, and thus can

<sup>1</sup> Participation of culturally and linguistically diverse people in the NDIS trial sites was 4%. Quarterly Report to COAG Disability Reform Council, National Disability Insurance Agency, 31 December 2014, page 18 accessed at [http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Report\\_to\\_the\\_Disability\\_Reform\\_Council\\_2014-15\\_Q2\\_02.pdf](http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Report_to_the_Disability_Reform_Council_2014-15_Q2_02.pdf)

use this to their advantage. Here the effect of the lack of awareness of services for migrant and refugee women is compounded.

## Self-Service

There is a significant push for government services to have online functionality, including the provision of information about services and service delivery (for example, making claims or lodging forms).

### What can be done?

*Government agencies should utilise ethnic media and service providers as tools for disseminating information and meeting directly with community members to discuss government services.*

*Targeted communication strategies should be applied to reach rural and regional communities. They can include conducting workshops, information sessions and other educational programs, utilising ethnic media, speaking to community leaders, and attending community events to provide information. Strategies should cater for the translation and interpretation needs of the communities to ensure that community members have a clear understanding of services as well as other avenues of support where relevant.*

Increasingly, it is expected that individuals will access government websites to find information about services. The federal government has committed “to ensure every government interaction that occurs more than 50,000 times per year can be undertaken online by 2017”.<sup>2</sup> A major reform in this area has been the introduction of the *myGov* portal, which allows individuals to link to a range of federal government services including Centrelink, the Australian Tax Office, Medicare, and Child Support.

FECCA’s consultations revealed community concern about the push to move government services online, particularly given the barriers facing culturally and linguistically diverse communities in accessing information and services in this way.

FECCA highlights the need for the consideration of accessibility issues regarding the online provision of information and service delivery. There was strong agreement among consultation and survey participants that there are many barriers for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in accessing the online space. As one young consultation participant noted, the push to use online services to obtain or provide information is based on the flawed thinking that every person accessing these services is computer literate, has access to the internet and can speak English.

Language is a major barrier, with the self-service options for services such as Centrelink unavailable in languages other than English. Providing clearly identified information online in community languages can be one way of making information about services available to people who are not literate in English, however agencies should take into account the many individuals who are also not literate in their own language.

Accessing services online is particularly difficult for many newly settled migrants and refugees, who may not have any experience using computers. Additionally, they do not have ready access to the required equipment. Some new arrivals need a significant amount of time for becoming familiar with the language and government systems and to develop computer literacy. Adding more layers of complexity to accessing information could exacerbate the already existing barriers.

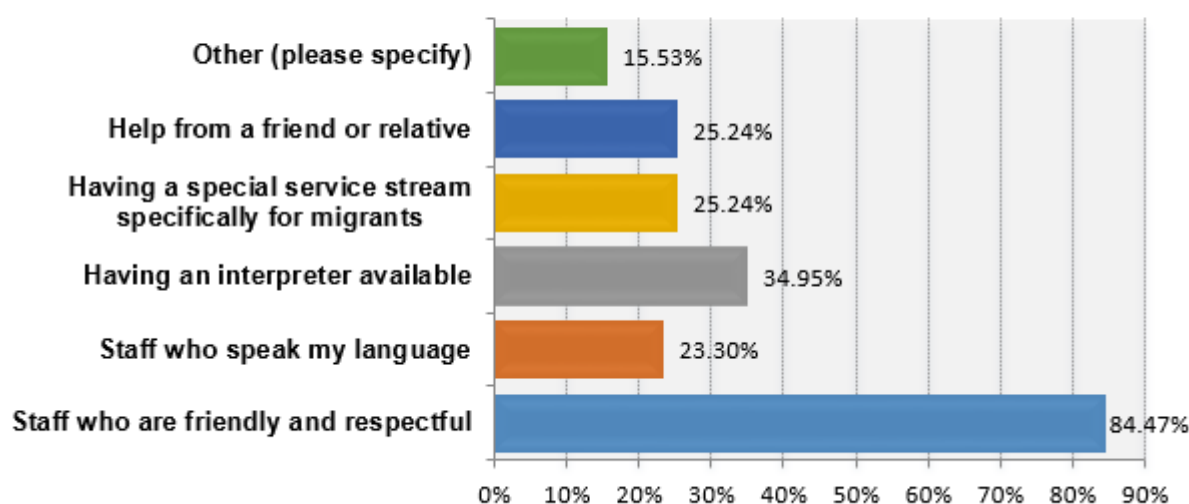
<sup>2</sup> ‘The Coalition’s Policy for E-Government and the Digital Economy’ (August 2013), p 19. Accessed at: [http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/assets/Coalitions\\_Policy\\_for\\_E-Government\\_and\\_the\\_Digital\\_Economy\\_\(2\).pdf](http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/assets/Coalitions_Policy_for_E-Government_and_the_Digital_Economy_(2).pdf)

*New migrants and refugees don't know how to use a computer. They don't own one. How are they supposed to use government websites? (Female participant – Sydney)*

Whilst some feedback from community members positively regarded the shift towards online service provision, these views were qualified by an acknowledgement of previous technological experience and equipment. Those who gave positive feedback also emphasised the importance of having alternative means of accessing services and information.

Face-to-face interaction by using an on-site or phone interpreter is the preferred and most effective form of communication according to the majority of survey respondents and consultation participants. However, there are several factors that could jeopardise this mode of engagement. Some community members cited instances when they attended the Centrelink office but they found that there was no interpreter available for their language so they had to go home and come back another day which significantly delays the resolution of their issues. Another community member noted that the help of bicultural workers with using the Centrelink system is very important but that the Centrelink office he was frequenting only had workers from Afghan and Iraqi backgrounds and no one from an African background.

### **What is most helpful for you when you are seeking to access services from a government agency or government-funded service provider?**



The complexity of online services is a barrier for many who seek to access information and services online. Some participants highlighted that navigating government websites to find relevant information can be difficult, even for those who speak English as their first language:

*myGov – for tax, Centrelink, Medicare, etc. is a good initiative but you have to verify each one of them to activate the account, it is too complex and too time consuming. People are reluctant to use the services even if they are computer literate and have access internet. (Consultation participant - Logan)*

Privacy concerns were raised with regards to accessing government services online, particularly with myGov where access to a number of services is available through one portal. Migrants and refugees may have lived in a country where the government is not trustworthy and thus are wary of anything which puts all of their personal information in one place. While myGov does not centralise the storage of an individual's information on one server, this information is not communicated well to the public.



## Availability of data for responsive services

An important aspect of stakeholder engagement under the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy is the maintenance of current information about the client base in order to support strategic planning. Knowing the diversity of the clients and communities that interact with service providers is vital to the responsiveness of services.

### **What can be done?**

*Diversified strategies should be developed to provide information about government services and programs, and to implement service delivery, via multiple platforms, including online, over the phone, and through face to face interaction, to cater for the diversity of needs and circumstances.*

Maintaining up-to-date and disaggregated information about the client group is crucial for ensuring that agency engagement results in positive outcomes. Awareness of the group's diversity and community characteristics allows service providers to strategically plan for personalised engagement strategies for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Despite the lack of direct community feedback with regards the impact of data collection and disaggregation on enhanced service delivery and outcomes for clients, evidence indicates that agencies collect very limited data on the diversity of the clients they interact with, with the disaggregation often using a limited range of diversity indicators, the most common being country of birth. Using country of birth as the indicator of cultural and linguistic diversity is significantly inadequate to the task of identifying cultural and linguistic diversity.

The languages spoken along with other information as to whether the individuals identify themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group would provide a clearer picture of the cultural diversity and identify specific needs.

While being a crucial step in government agencies enhancing their responsiveness, better collection and disaggregation of data would also provide valuable insights in the situation of specific culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia across a number of social indicators, including such important ones as employment and economic status, levels of education, health and wellbeing, family safety, social and economic participation, and reliance on government services and supports.

It is important for service providers to understand some basic demographic characteristics of their clients to ensure the best course of action is taken for each individual.

### **What can be done?**

*Better results can be achieved through appropriate data collection and disaggregation to ensure more effective and practical service delivery that would match the needs and circumstances of individuals.*

## Part II: Service Specific Information

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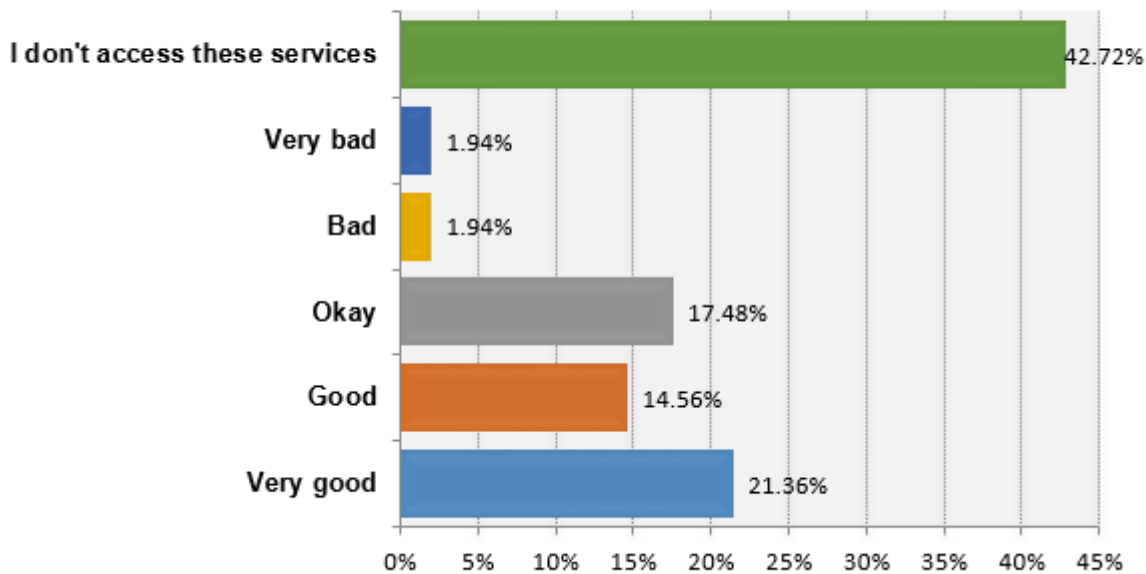
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# Translating and interpreting services

## RESPONSIVENESS

Interpreting services are crucial for the many culturally and linguistically diverse Australians who do not have English language proficiency to access federal government services. The highest response category (21.36% of survey respondents) for the question about the quality of experiences with translating and interpreting services was 'very good'.

**Rating of experience of translating and interpreting services**



However, FECCA has received significant feedback from survey and consultation participants highlighting areas where these services can improve.

### **Availability of appropriate interpreter**

Community feedback reveals that there is a lack of availability of interpreters through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) for some languages, especially at a high professional level, including with proficiency in medical terminology. There is significant difficulty of accessing an appropriate interpreter in a regional area. The availability of interpreters proficient in languages spoken by new and emerging communities was of particular concern to consultation participants.

Some examples which were highlighted through our consultations included:

- Sudanese Arabic interpreters for the South Sudanese population;
- Arabic interpreters for the Iraqi community; and
- Swahili for the Congolese community.

A number of community member's recounted experiences of not being able to access interpreters who were proficient in an appropriate language when visiting a doctor.

*I had a bad experience when I was pregnant. I couldn't understand what the doctor was saying because the interpreter was not the right one. The translation of what the doctor said was totally different than what the problem actually was because the interpreter was Arabic [instead of Sudanese Arabic or Dinka]. The communication was not working. I was too polite to say that I didn't understand. And I was having a lot of problems with the pregnancy because of using the wrong interpreter. (Female consultation participant – Shepparton)*

The lack of opportunities for people who speak community languages to become interpreters is of concern. A level of academic capacity is needed to achieve National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accreditation, so while an individual may be carrying out interpreting functions in the community, it can be difficult for them to attain the qualification. Thus enormous pressure can be placed on the small number of community members who achieve accreditation.

### **Community members as informal interpreters**

Community and family members are often used as interpreters when professional interpreters are not available or attaining their services is too cumbersome. As one service provider said, “there is quite a lot of community interpreting going on a daily basis beyond the more structured, telephone arrangements”. When going to a medical appointment, often family members will attend to assist with interpretation. In many circumstances, the use of informal community interpreters may be the explicit choice of individuals who are accessing services, while in some cases this is because of a lack of qualified interpreters. In many cases, an informal interpreter will not be appropriate.

In regional areas, given the small size of some ethnic communities, or in the case of new and emerging communities, the person acting as an interpreter in a legal setting may know either or both parties, creating a conflict of interest. Similar complexities exist in situations of domestic violence.

*We had one example when the interpreter happened to be offender of the responder. That was not known to the police members so the twist of the interpretation was problematic. It resulted in a very poor outcome for the family member. Those are the issues that we need to deal with if we attend a domestic violence case in the middle of the night. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

This example highlights the importance of having adequate numbers of interpreters in community languages available, and the difficulties with relying on community members for interpretation. In other circumstances, the objectivity of the interpreter may also need to be considered.

### **Mode of interpretation**

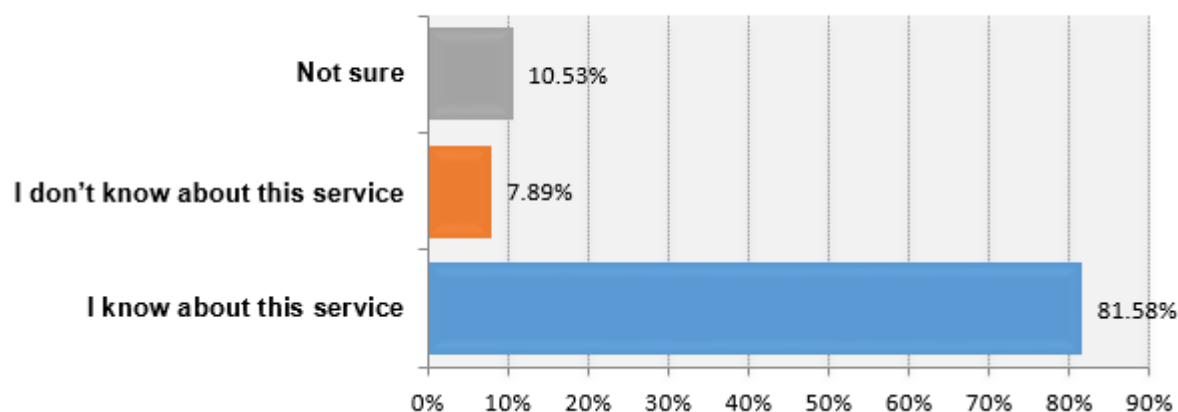
FECCA received overwhelming feedback indicating that our constituency, particularly newly arrived migrants, prefer to use an interpreter in person rather than over the phone. Many participants considered body language an integral part of their language, and thus did not feel that they could accurately use an interpreter over the phone. Another example provided was a service provider attending a client on a home visit in a regional area, who may find that the home phone line is not very good which would impede on effective interpretation.

There can be delays in getting an interpreter to attend an agency's office in person, which can mean that a client has to leave and come back to appropriately access the service. Sometimes a person will not come back if they have had difficulty accessing an interpreter. This clearly affects the responsiveness of government services as it dissuades those who should be accessing services from seeking information and assistance.

## ENGAGEMENT

All of the consultations held by FECCA in 2015 revealed that there is considerable community awareness about the Government's TIS National. Additionally, 81.58% of survey respondents knew about translating and interpreting services.

### Awareness of translating and interpreting services



There is, however, significant confusion among community members and service providers over the recent review of non-government organisations accessing the free interpreting service. Many attendees had heard that there were to be cuts to the service and were concerned about what this would mean for the future accessibility of TIS National. Reviews of this kind should be better communicated to service providers and through media outlets to ensure that accurate information reaches key stakeholders. This will also assist in preventing confusion and a loss of confidence in the service.

Medical practitioners are key stakeholders in relation to translating and interpreting services, as they communicate directly with culturally and linguistically diverse patients and provide important health services. Feedback from our consultations, particularly Shepparton and Sydney, revealed that many patients find that their GPs are resistant to utilising interpreting services for medical appointments.

*Some GPs do not use interpreters at all from TIS or refuse to register. That's the challenge we face because our clients are new arrivals and when we refer them to the GP it's like they rely more on our workers to translate for them. But we are quite concerned about that because obviously issues with that. It is challenging. It is quite a lot of the GPs that refuse to register. I think it has to do with time. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

Some medical specialists are also resistant to using interpreting services for appointments with culturally and linguistically diverse patients.

*For specialist appointments which can be difficult to get into because of long waiting lists, if you have a client that turns up to the appointment and the specialist does not have an interpreter means there will be very poor health outcomes. I had experiences with specialists refusing to use interpreters and demanding the patient to be bringing their own. The specialist was concerned about liability that the interpreter wouldn't interpret properly. So then he would expect the client to bring their own family member. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

Professional interpreters are needed for medical appointments because of the importance of accurately interpreting medical terminology.

### **What can be done?**

*Enhanced and ongoing communication with service providers is required to ensure clarity around their eligibility for TIS National services, any changes and their implications, and, in the event of their ineligibility, their multicultural access and equity obligations.*

*Strengthened engagement with medical practitioners is necessary to communicate the critical importance of using professional interpreting services, including TIS National, to interact with patients who have a low level of English language proficiency.*

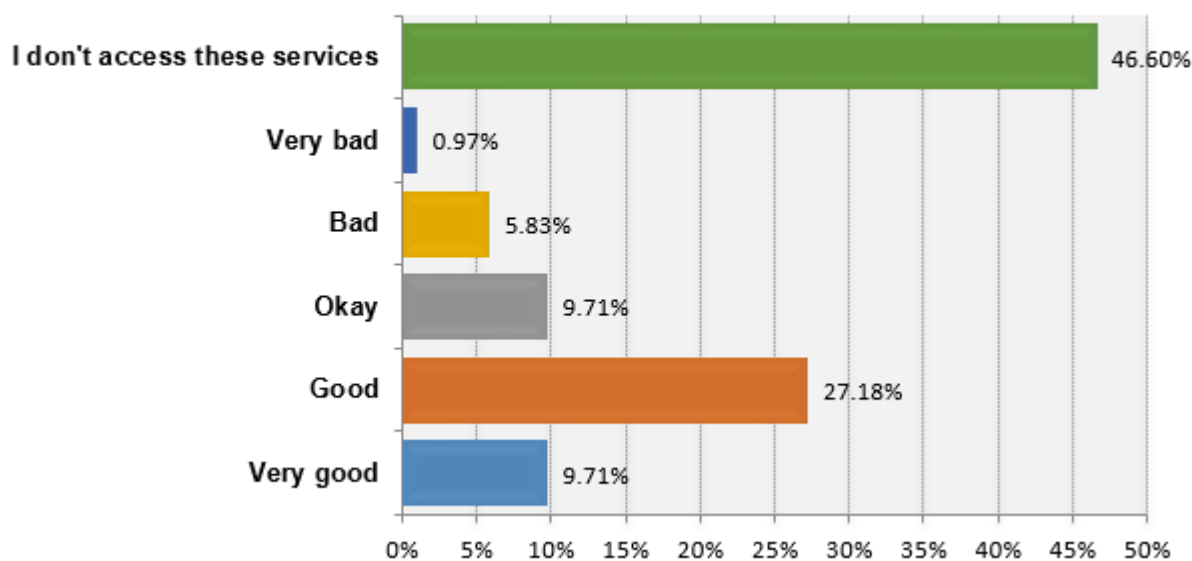
*A holistic approach, mindful of needs and circumstances of linguistically diverse community groups, is required to provide sufficient support for individuals with low level of English language proficiency through a broad range of language services, including professional and para-professional interpreting, bilingual worker support, and English language training.*

# Education and Training

Education plays a vital role in assisting individuals to enter the Australian workforce and this is particularly important for those from a refugee or migrant background. The numerous government sponsored education programs deliver a commendable service to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. However, there are certain gaps in the current system that renders these services difficult to access, or they do not deliver the outcomes expected by the recipient of the services and the government. While the majority of the FECCA access and equity survey participants did not access education and training services, over 45% of the participants were satisfied with the service provision.

## RESPONSIVENESS

**Rating of experience of education and training services**



### English language courses

The feedback received at FECCA's community consultations identified a number of gaps and barriers in accessing the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Currently, AMEP provides 510 hours of English classes at no cost to the student. The number of hours required to master/develop a second language depends on each person's capacity to absorb new information. Experiences of trauma prior to migrating and resettling in Australia may affect the ability to focus on education and successfully take on a new language. Thus, completion of the 510 hours of learning does not always translate into the level of English fluency required to engage in meaningful employment.

Many community participants, especially those from new and emerging communities, reported experiencing frustrations in obtaining employment and were of the opinion that it may be more fruitful to be engaged in some form of employment or training whilst learning English.

*The number of hours [of language lessons] is problematic. 510 hours for someone starting from ABC is not enough, especially not for getting a job. (Sudanese Male – Shepparton)*

The contents of AMEP courses require better scrutiny as many participants would benefit from a more practice-oriented training rather than academic-oriented learning. Many participants also felt that these courses need to be trade specific as far as practically possible.

*I've been here for 5 years and I have been to TAFE to learn English and then I start looking for a job. Centrelink and everyone want us to work and I am looking for a job but when I was looking for a job they told me that I needed to go back to study English again. But the person who gives me the job, he is like a teacher too because I will work in English and it will help me learn [...] (Congolese Male – Shepparton)*

### **Links to employment**

The responsiveness of some services to provide the requisite support to community members was questioned by participants. Certain Centrelink payments are dependent upon completion of, or engagement in, studies, which forces individuals to follow courses that may not be of assistance in teaching them relevant skills and seeking employment.

*From my experience, I haven't seen many people who have done a course at TAFE and found a job through those courses. I would say those courses are not useful. Most people who are doing the training in fact are either forced by Centrelink or by the employment agencies. It is not a personal choice. (Iraqi Male – Shepparton)*

In the regional context, consultation feedback contended that there should be a practical mechanism to identify courses that would benefit culturally and linguistically diverse communities based on the availability of employment opportunities, needs of the community and the needs of the individual.

### **Registered Training Organisations**

Migrants in rural and regional areas are vulnerable to exploitation by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) which are provided with financial subsidies by the government based on the number of people who are enlisted to follow courses. Consultation participants reported that RTOs visit areas with a high density of people from migrant and/or refugee backgrounds and enrol them to complete various courses. Such people are generally misinformed about the job market and may be promised recognised qualifications in Australia with a possibility of obtaining a job at the completion of the course. Although these courses are funded by the government without any cost to the individual, these qualifications do not open any career pathways and render them ineligible for further funding to obtain another qualification at the same level.

*Migrants in the rural regions are more vulnerable to exploitation by these RTOs because people are less informed about what they should be studying. ... What they do is they take influential people in the communities in the Afghan, Iraqi, Sudanese and other African communities and convince them to get 50-100 people to do the course. They get the job done, the money is going in their account but people who are suffering is the community here. (Service Provider – Shepparton)*

The inability of the individuals to identify and differentiate between those representing government authorities and RTOs and bad experiences of dealing with RTOs creates further distress among migrant and refugee communities.

*There are RTO subcontractors that will come and sign you up and runaway, you don't get a qualification and then you have a debt to the government. (Sudanese, Male – Shepparton)*

*With the RTOs we don't know the difference because so many come. We don't know who is the right person. Because they tell you to come here, like now and you don't know how that person is connected to the government body... (Sudanese Female – Shepparton)*

There is a disparity in the English language skills of an individual and English proficiency required to



study a course that the RTOs enrol migrants and refugees in. The instructors of education institutions may not know about the language proficiency of the students as they are not involved in the process of enrolling students to follow these courses. This disparity between the language skills of a culturally and linguistically diverse student and the standard of English required to successfully complete a course adds more pressure on migrant and refugee communities which could potentially result in people dropping out of courses and taking on low skilled jobs.

*RTOs have come and made promises to upskill people in home-based childcare. So we have whole different levels of qualifications and expertise in childcare in the region with not many people getting employment opportunities out of it. Everyone has a Certificate III in childcare. (Service Provider – Shepparton).*

Many who have completed a course in childcare and undertake family day care activities do not realise that they are considered self-employed and that their new income will affect the payments that they receive from Centrelink. Additionally, many do not have a clear understanding about their reporting obligations such as declaring income and the preparation of tax documentation. Crucial information of this nature is difficult to access for members of these communities and the RTOs or the RTO subcontractors who enrol these communities to follow courses do not furnish them with all the relevant information.

**Good Practice Example**

Community Learning – for students,<sup>3</sup> is a program where the state government provides additional support for learners with diverse needs to gain qualifications up to certificate level III. This program has a responsive funding model that supports partnerships between registered training organisations and community-based organisations to develop innovative training projects that help disadvantaged learners in their local communities.

**Good Practice Example**

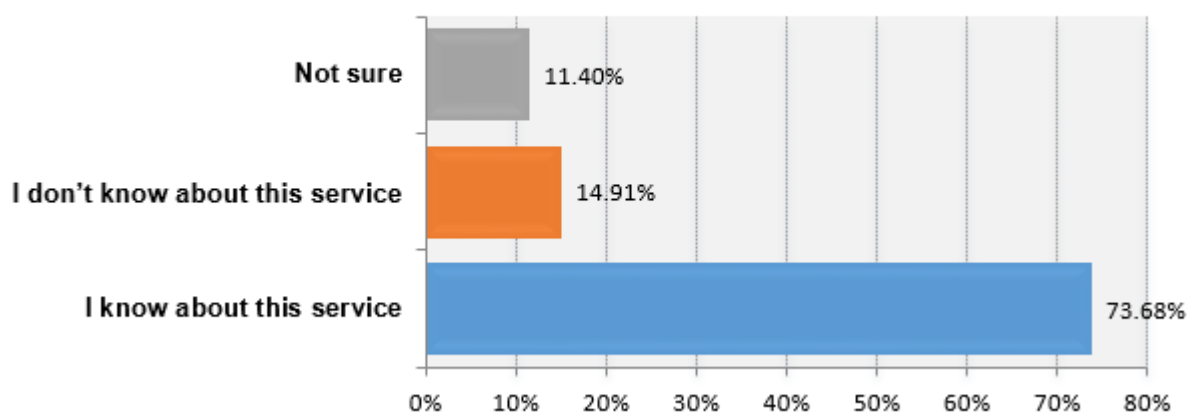
Certain TAFE colleges provide a number of facilities to those following AMEP or SEE where the new migrant students are provided with a transport allowance for a limited number of years and childcare facilities within the TAFE college for students with young children aged between 6 weeks to 6 years.<sup>4</sup>

3 Community Learning – for Students, <http://www.qld.gov.au/education/training/subsidies/pages/community.html>  
4 More information about the services can be accessed at <http://www.tafesa.edu.au/services/child-care>

## ENGAGEMENT

A clear majority of the FECCA access and equity survey participants indicated that they are aware of the education and training services such as Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Skills for Education and Employment Program (SEE). Only 15% of the participants did not know about these programs. These ratios reflect the feedback received by FECCA from the community participants at the community consultations where a clear majority of the participants were either engaged in English language program, completed a similar course or knew about the availability of English language programs.

### Awareness of education and training services



### Accessing education and training

Community members reported experiencing numerous barriers in accessing government sponsored training and apprenticeship programs, which in turn discourage culturally and linguistically diverse people from inquiring about these services, let alone participating and benefiting from them. The feedback received at a number of community consultations showed language and age barriers were most prominent among many others, including lack of awareness about training and apprenticeship opportunities and inability to attend due to practical difficulties such as transport, other family and/or educational commitments.

The age of the participants seeking to access training and apprenticeship programs was a barrier that many people in new and emerging communities and rural and regional communities experience. These apprenticeship or training programs are designed to assist young people entering the workforce. As a result, migrants and refugees of a more mature age than the target audience of the program are not eligible because of their age. By placing restrictions such as age on eligibility to participate in training programs, the agencies or the authorities restrict access to older people who wish to attain a trade qualification.

A lack of Australian work experience and difficulties in obtaining recognition of their skills drives foreign qualified migrants to find apprenticeships. There were many examples where the desperation among culturally and linguistically diverse community members to obtain Australian work experience was misused or manipulated by third parties.

*A while ago I was looking for a job as a carpenter and I found a job through the newspaper, I called them and they told me that the wage was less than it was supposed to be because I didn't have experience in Australia. But still I had experience for more than 10 years. (Iraqi Male – Shepparton)*

There was also a considerable amount of feedback on the inability to access training and apprenticeship programs based on previous experience or qualifications of migrants and refugees as they are considered to be overqualified for the apprenticeship or training programs.

*I did a Master in Information Technology at the University of Ballarat. It [was] two years. Because I came with a qualification that is recognised in Australia which was a Bachelor, they could not help me to again to study another Bachelor. I did it here but to get a job they want someone with a lot of years of experience in Australia. I don't have that. So I asked for an apprenticeship not the job. But they said that we can only give the apprenticeship to people who come out of secondary school. So I am stuck because of my Master. (Congolese Male – Shepparton)*

Mobility is also a key issue for culturally and linguistically diverse people seeking to access education and training, especially for those living in rural and regional areas. Newly arrived migrants and refugees may not have access to a private vehicle and have to rely on public transport. Many opportunities for apprenticeships require the participants to possess a driver's licence and have access to a vehicle. Even in instances where there is no requirement to be able to drive, the opportunities are available in remote parts of Australia where public transport is scarce. This process of obtaining a driver's licence is costly, and in the absence of proper employment the cost of the process may discourage, or be prohibitive, for many culturally and linguistically diverse young people to obtaining a licence.

The importance of government authorities providing information about the different avenues available to enter the job market was highlighted by community members. Moreover, there were general frustrations about the available options in regards to training or work experience opportunities. The preference of employers for new employees to have Australian work experience can compel many individuals to engage in work that is significantly below their level of qualifications and/or education from their home country.

*Actually we don't hear about these opportunities [apprenticeship/training programs]. And even when we hear about these opportunities they are in second-hand shops or cleaning the toilets at the train station. Those opportunities are not going to give us the work experience we need and it will not teach us about work environment in Australia. It is not helpful. (Sudanese Male – Shepparton)*

Instances like these are clear examples where migrants and refugees need to be informed about training programs and further education available to them.

### **Online teaching**

There are some merits to providing internet based teaching, including convenience for parents with young children, saving on the cost of transport, and students being able to study at their own pace. However, this is not a viable option for many culturally and linguistically diverse communities due to barriers with using computers and the internet, in addition to language barriers. The experience of education for many migrants and refugees has been in a classroom and they are not familiar with online modes of teaching. Many consultation participants and survey respondents highlighted their preference for face to face interaction, which is often more effective when learning a new language.

### **Children and youth**

Culturally and linguistically diverse parents may not have a clear understanding about the Australian education system as the processes and the school structures may be different in home countries. Providing these parents with information about the schools in the locality and other support mechanisms to obtain further assistance should be done at the initial stages of settlement. The provision of this information should also include rights and entitlements of individuals and other rules and regulations pertaining to discrimination, bullying and complaint mechanisms.

FECCA received feedback through regional consultation about the effect of education (or lack thereof) for young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Migrant and refugee youth do not get proper guidance within the education structure. The change in the culture and environment impacts their ability to adapt to a new environment. At young ages, engagement with school and peers shapes an individual's perception about life and culture. In the absence of proper guidance and a strong support system, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds could potentially find various undesirable paths more attractive, which often disrupt their education. It was apparent from

the comments at the community consultations that services should be more proactive and responsive to the needs of the migrant and refugee youth.

*They [culturally and linguistically diverse young people] experience a crisis of identity. They have grown up in a country different from the culture they remember from childhood. They are trying to fit into a culture that looks at the skin colour. The information is chucked at them and there's no support system to help them understand the process. Too many voices telling them things and not giving proper directions. (Service Provider – Logan)*

Overwhelmingly, community response highlighted that parents should be informed about the education pathways, especially post-school opportunities available for children as the education systems are different in Australia and their home country. There is also a lack of knowledge of the many career pathways available to their children.

*Certain cultures only focus on sending children to Universities because parents are unaware of other options such as TAFEs. The parents need to be educated [about the opportunities] first. (Service Provider – Logan)*

### **What can be done?**

*Community feedback with regards to the need for a more practical, practice-oriented structure and content of AMEP should be carefully considered under the AMEP review and reflected as part of the outcome.*

*Community awareness-raising programs, as a national initiative, are necessary for migrant and refugee families to inform them of the Australian education system with a view to achieving better support for children's participation in the schooling process.*

*Stronger safeguards are required for ensuring that government-funded employment services assist migrants and refugees to access proper training services and to obtain relevant work experience through legal and recognised channels to maximise their chances of participation in the job market and securing long-term outcomes.*

*Assistance programs are necessary for young migrants and refugees to support them to obtaining valid driver's licences.*

### **Good Practice Example**

'Braking the Cycle' is a project of Police-Citizens for Youth Club (PCYC), a non-government organisation based in Queensland, where youth between 16-25 years of age are provided with free driving lessons to complete the compulsory hours to obtain a valid driver's licence<sup>5</sup>. This is quite popular in the area and has assisted culturally and linguistically diverse youth in obtaining a licence. However, given the popularity of this program, currently there are long waiting lists to participate. The federal government could invest in similar programs to increase the participation of culturally and linguistically diverse people in Australian labour market.

5 Police-Citizens for Youth Club, Braking the Cycle, <http://www.ipswichpcyc.org.au/youth-program/braking-the-cycle>

# Employment

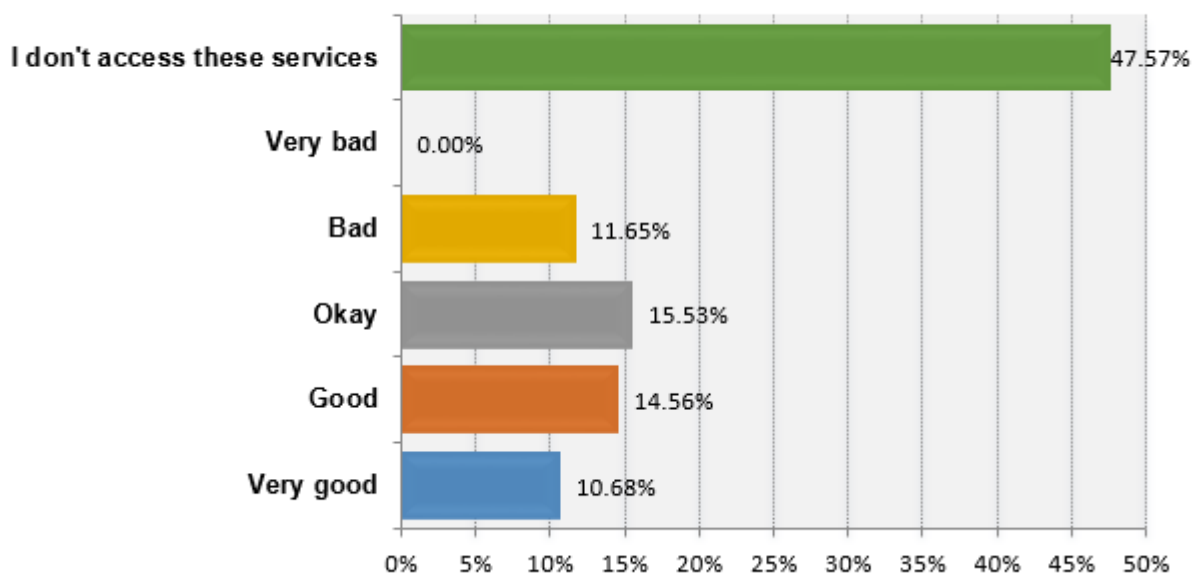
*Most of the people are not happy to continue to get the benefit from Centrelink. They tried to find a job and have their own income. But the problem is the shortage of opportunities, the employment agencies, the English barriers and discrimination.*  
(Iraqi male - Shepparton)

Employment was a key issue raised at FECCA's community consultations by community members and service providers. Community feedback discussed employment in general, with reference to general barriers, employment services, employers and community attitudes towards migrant jobseekers. These comments have been analysed in relation to the role of government-funded employment services and other relevant government agencies in facilitating access to employment for disadvantaged job seekers.

*When I came here I was very enthusiastic to get a job and start a life but they killed the hope. We have nothing to do but stay at home and take care of the children.*  
(Sudanese female – Shepparton)

## RESPONSIVENESS

**Rating of experience of employment services**



Community views on the responsiveness and effectiveness of employment services were consistently negative. Consultations and survey participants expressed frustration with the lack of flexibility of these services, their inability to produce positive outcomes for newly arrived migrant and refugee jobseekers and the lack of a tailored and creative approach that would take into consideration someone's previous experiences, skills and background.

Community perspectives indicated that employment services were generally not client-centred and therefore not effective in identifying and responding to their diverse pool of clients. Feedback indicated that employment services are driven by the service rules and what the service provider wants to prioritise and deliver, instead of being driven by consumers and their expressed needs.

Most community members providing feedback believed that the support provided by employment services was inadequate and that the job placement rate was very low for newly arrived migrants and

refugees. They claimed that the only reason these groups of jobseekers continued to use the service was because they were constrained to do so by their Centrelink requirements but that no one really trusted that employment agencies would help them gain employment.

*I have been here for more than 15 years and much of the opportunities I found through the employment agencies were as a volunteer. (Iraqi female - Shepparton)*

Most of the newly arrived migrants and refugees said that the few of them who managed to find employment did so through their own means, through their community connections and not through the assistance they received from employment agencies. Some community members noted that they have been accessing employment services for 4-5 years in a row without any positive outcome.

*Employment is one of the biggest problems in Shepparton and around the area and many access the employment services despite not having good English skills and knowing that they won't be able to find a job. They continue to access the services but they feel lost because they don't know how to find a job. (Iraqi male – Shepparton)*

According to community views, service providers had the tendency to ignore their client's previous skills and did not provide information about how they can have their experiences and skills recognised so that they can benefit from them and work in those areas. Community views expressed a lot of frustration with the fact that they felt that employment services providers were biased against their abilities, disregarded previous experience, interests and personal circumstances and failed to explore and tap into a job seeker's existing skills.

Consultation participants commented that employment services were not trying to place jobseekers in jobs related to their previous experiences and skills. Jobseekers are normally only asked by employment agencies about what certificates they have, and they ignore the fact that they might still have certain skills without having them certified. Employment services providers should have cultural competency and understand that different countries have different certification systems or ways of recognising someone skills without having a formal document. Many could have come from situations of displacement and refugee camps where they did not have access to formal education, training or attestation of their skills despite having many years of experience in a specific trade.

Further examples of complexities communicated in the consultations included the requirement to have foreign certifications translated and authenticated by the embassy of the country the certification holder the person was coming from, which allegedly could take up to several months. Overall, not having skills from overseas recognised was a great issue along with not being able to find opportunities in individuals' areas of expertise.

*For example an electrician who used to fix TVs or other electrical appliances is not needed in Australia because here if your TV has a fault you just replace it, you are not going to fix it. While in a country like Iraq you'll fix it. (Iraqi man – Shepparton)*

Consulted community members were frustrated with the lack of assistance they received from employment agencies and commented that employment agencies were not designed to help migrants or new arrivals and their structure with rigid rules is not suitable for people who did not grow up in Australia.

*They don't have an understanding of the barriers we face because they only have rules to follow. When you tell them about it they tell you that you have two options, you either look for work or we stop the payment or you go to study. They don't care because they have rules that they have to work with. Is their job and they have to do it. (Iraqi male – Shepparton)*

It was highlighted that service providers should give consideration to an individual's personal

circumstances, such as the number of children they have in their care, interests, safety on the job or health issues and attempt to find a job that can respond to their needs. One community member in Shepparton explained that employment agencies and the government need to understand that the structure of the family in some communities will be different from the Australian families that tend to have only one or two children. Some families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities can have four or up to seven small children and that can create additional challenges in terms of accessing flexible employment that would allow parents to continue to adequately care for children and covering childcare costs. Another community member expressed his disappointment about the fact that he was required to take up a job in a very busy bar in the city despite feeling unsafe because of the dangers of working around drunken people.

*You need to help yourself. Because when the employment agencies try to find work for you, they need to find wherever is the conditions or where is the payment; if they find a job for you then you have to go. But they should ask the people what they would like to work and which conditions would be suitable for them. [...] I have to take the work whatever the conditions. They are not flexible. They open the computer and whatever it is there they tell you to go for it. (Iraqi male – Shepparton)*

### **Service effectiveness in addressing barriers to employment**

The responsiveness of services can be measured in relation to how creative and proactive they are in their approach to address the barriers that jobseekers face. FECCA received feedback from job seekers from new and emerging communities about the lack of viable options put forward to them by the employment agencies. Many of them suggested that they were trapped in a cycle whereby they are referred to the job agency by Centrelink but they are unable to speak English so the employment agency will refer them to English classes. However they have large families to support and have to work, so learning English without getting a job is not a suitable option for many of them.

*It's hard to find a job even if you speak a bit of English. The government is pushing them to work but they can't speak English. Then the Government is pushing them to go and study English but they have families to support so they have to work, so what can you do? (Sudanese male – Shepparton)*

Many expressed strong disillusionment with the support provided by the employment services and the lack of positive outcomes and were frustrated that despite this, they were still required to access them as a 'tick-box' exercise.

*We don't receive much help from the employment services providers. I've been here for 8 years and they only helped me to find a job on a farm where I worked for 2 years. But after that, for 6 years, nothing. Always calling me for the next appointment but nothing. No suggestions. Sometimes they help me fill in the application but I always get rejected. And I have my experience and my certificate 3 but still no job. The employment services are just telling me to keep applying. (Congolese male - Shepparton)*

Frustration with the services receiving government funding despite failing to provide practical support was particularly evident:

*If you ask in the community, maybe 1 or 2 found a job through these agencies. How do they justify that? And you have this rigorous appointment schedule from Centrelink and you just go there and they ask you what you are doing. If you say that your friend found you a job they still tick their box and they report on it as if they helped you. But they didn't do anything for you, it is just you through your networks. But you have to report to them because otherwise you don't get the money; but the moment they know*

*that, they say that they helped us. (Congoese male – Shepparton)*

Concerns about the funding structure for employment agencies were raised consistently as people felt that the way agencies are funded can have a great impact on the quality of services delivered and how much support agencies actually provide to jobseekers. Many community members felt like they did not benefit from the funding invested in these services and suggested that the government should revise the return on its investment and ensure that a percentage of the funds can be allocated towards more targeted programs that could effectively address barriers to employment for disadvantaged jobseekers.

The consultation highlighted that although employment services should serve all jobseekers, their structure, guidelines and operating framework are designed according to the need of jobseekers who were born or have lived for most of their life in Australia, had good command of English, a general awareness of the local workplace cultures and systems and perhaps local work experience. Because of this streamlined focus, employment agencies do not have the tools to adopt a more tailored and innovative approach and develop an understanding of the diverse backgrounds of their clients and the support they need.

### **What can be done?**

*A thorough review of the available data on the outcomes achieved by mainstream employment agencies for migrant and refugee jobseekers and an analysis of effectiveness of services in placing jobseekers from non-English speaking backgrounds in meaningful employment are critical for impact assessment. Such a review should also allow for the identification of instances where employment agencies have claimed credit for job placements where jobseekers found employment through their own means, outside the assistance they were supposed to receive from the service. The results of the review should prompt clear recommendations, with a view to improving the responsiveness and performance of employment services, including through an employment strategy for culturally and linguistically diverse jobseekers.*

English language proficiency continues to be an inhibitor to accessing employment especially in areas where unemployment rates, already generally high across populations, create additional competition for employment. Some community members suggested that a more suitable way to address this issue is to provide people with more support to learn the language and other skills on the job rather than solely in a classroom environment. One of the challenges that many migrants and refugees face is that while they dedicate their time to learning English they end up losing the skills that they brought with them.

It was suggested that a way of breaking the cycle that many migrant and refugee jobseekers get trapped in is to create an arrangement between the employment agencies and employers that would allow jobseekers to be placed in employment while continuing to receive support to develop their language and professional skills on the job.

*Businesses will want someone who is qualified, who knows how to communicate with them and can do the job. [...] When I came to Australia I had to study English from 0; I don't know if I'll ever be a really good speaker, to meet the need for me to get a job. I think there should be a solution in the middle. If the employment agency places people for work, then there must be somebody there to help them, somebody who speaks their language. Some of us are professionals but the language brings us back to 0. (Sudanese male – Shepparton)*



In the regional context, it was highlighted that, in contrast to the employment market in metropolitan areas, in the local job market English skills did not present too many challenges as the requirements were not as stringent. Many people in the area will find work in orchards, farms or canneries, where they do not need a high level of English language proficiency because the work does not involve much communication and where they can work with members from their own communities. Some service providers have warned that the easy access to this type of employment and the comfortable environment of this type of work for new arrivals could create issues for this group of jobseekers in the future. Fruit picking and farm work do not provide opportunities for learning or practising English, and people can get stuck in a cycle where this is the only employment they can get, because they did not learn the language or develop their skills so that they can work in the areas they are interested in.

*The problem is that they end up staying in that type of employment rather than trying to find other employment because it is what they can do and what they feel comfortable with. They are not pushed to do something else. And I think that because of that there is only a relatively small number of new and emerging communities that are accessing employment services. They use other community members to find farm work or there are some contractors set up here to provide workforce. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

Some community members noted that in regional areas the biggest barrier was related to discrimination as local employers did not tend to employ people from migrant and refugee backgrounds despite labour shortages and high demand for unskilled workers. Some community members were puzzled by the fact that so many migrants and refugees permanently settled in Australia were struggling to find any type of employment while many of the jobs in rural areas were taken by temporary migrants who were transiting the area for five to six months. Many of these jobs occupied by seasonal migrants did not require English language skills and could easily be accessed by the migrant and refugee communities permanently established in those areas.

Employment agencies and employers often lack an understanding of people's backgrounds, their skills and how to communicate with them so they were reluctant to hire them because they assumed there were too many challenges involved.

Community members complained that employment agencies were not playing a bigger role in helping to break these misconceptions and brokering better understanding and relationships with trust between businesses and jobseekers. Because agencies themselves lack the cultural competency and personalised engagement needed to get to know a client, they fail to act as an advocate on behalf of their client and therefore fail to produce the expected employment outcome. Community views noted that employment agencies are too focused on their rules which limit their problem solving ability and creativity when dealing with the more complex circumstances that some migrants and refugees might present with.

*They will not understand the background of that person, how to communicate with them, what's their abilities and skills, what is the background they came from? How to work for that person? Is he a refugee? Did he come from Iraq? How much do you know about their country? Maybe that person has a diploma in something or a degree and is not just a refugee coming from the desert. (Iraqi male – Shepparton)*

According to the feedback received by FECCA, the support that jobseekers receive is limited. Some consultation participants noted that employment services sometimes assisted them with writing their CV, but that support was not sufficient for someone facing so many barriers. Many reiterated that employment agencies cannot deliver outcomes without directly involving the employers in the process and without investing time and resources in getting to know a client's abilities and interests. Employment agencies should act as an advocate for the client and maintain responsibility over a client's wellbeing even after they are placed on the job to ensure that they receive the support they need to fulfil the roles of the job.

People with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have additional needs and prompt employment agencies to demonstrate an increased responsiveness and flexibility. The structure of the employment services assessment is too rigid and inadequate in determining the number of hours a person is capable of being employed. The initial assessment should be revisited on a regular basis as some people improve with time and become capable of working for longer hours.

Employment provides people with disabilities with a sense of respect and belonging and employment services should become more proactive in bridging the gap between businesses and people with disability, and in placing people in jobs. People with disabilities are very interested in working, however many consultation participants had found that employers were biased and not willing to hire people with disabilities, let alone from a migrant or refugee background because of the perceived costs associated with accommodating the needs of this group of jobseekers.

*The disability employment organisation got my daughter a job that matches her ability range – 3 hours a week for 3 days a week. She could work for more hours. In the NT, a main issue is not having employers willing to accept people with disability. Although my daughter can work longer there are no employers who would offer her those options. (Carer – Darwin)*

#### **What can be done?**

*Partnerships should be developed between government-funded employment services and employers to allow migrant and refugee jobseekers to simultaneously access employment and on-the-job support to develop their language and professional skills. Such partnerships could address many of the barriers that migrants and refugees face, including lack of local experience, produce better results in terms of language and skills development than class-based training, and could also encourage businesses to adopt a more positive approach to cultural diversity in the workplace and combat discrimination. Further support could be provided through creating incentives for employers to employ jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.*

*There is a need for safeguards, such as qualitative and quantitative performance indicators, to be implemented to ensure that the provision of government-funded employment services is driven by clients' needs, interests and abilities, and focused on delivering the best employment outcomes for their clients. In order to improve responsiveness and delivery of outcomes for refugee and migrant jobseekers, the structure of the service needs to be flexible, allow for innovative approaches, and for consideration of all the interlinked factors that create barriers to accessing meaningful employment.*

#### **Self-employment**

Some consultation participants quoted the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) program as an excellent initiative for helping jobseekers to set up and run their own business while still receiving the equivalent of a Centrelink payment. The feedback received about this program was very positive and participants noted that it was generally quite successful and had positive outcomes for its beneficiaries. However many noted that awareness of the program and access to it were limited. Service providers in Shepparton explained that the program used to be delivered in their area several years ago and it was a great success. They were disappointed that the program did not seem to be running in the area anymore as it used to provide a great employment alternative for migrants and refugees that had certain skills.

There is a great interest amongst migrant and refugee jobseekers to set up their own business but that the process itself was complex and language barriers made it hard for community members to understand the requirements and regulations around setting up a business.

### **What can be done?**

The New Enterprise Incentive Scheme should be promoted widely among migrant and refugee jobseekers, along with the provision of information about opportunities to set up businesses, the associated requirements, support systems and risks.

### **Volunteering and work experience**

*Employers want you to have Australian work experience. When Australians have worked overseas, it is seen as really great, but for migrants they don't recognise your experience overseas. (Female participant – Sydney)*

Lack of local work experience is a major barrier for many jobseekers from new and emerging communities. Some of them may have spent significant periods of time in situations of displacement and therefore they have a disrupted employment history. Re-engaging with the labour market can take a longer period of time even for those who come to Australia with previous qualifications and skills. Volunteering has been at times suggested as a means to address these gaps in experience and become familiar with the Australian workplace culture.

However placement of migrant and refugee jobseekers in volunteer positions relevant to their qualifications and interests can face barriers as not many business or organisations are either willing or have the necessary resources to support someone in a volunteering role. Service providers attending the consultations noted that placing someone with language or cultural barriers in a volunteering position within an organisation required adequate infrastructure and one-on-one support which meant that volunteering programs need some investment on behalf of the host organisation in order to be able to host volunteers. Without receiving incentives or financial support from the government, many organisations are reluctant to engage in volunteering programs with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds because of the perceived costs and because they do not feel comfortable with the challenges that the person might face.

*If you place someone with language and cultural barriers in a volunteering position within an organisation it requires a whole lot of support and infrastructure. So if there was investment or support for volunteers who have English as their second language then there could be some real potential successes in getting organisations on board to recruit volunteers or training someone for those purposes. But it takes some investment in the beginning. Supporting volunteers takes a lot of time and you need designated roles to be able to do that. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

Some community members were able to provide their views on the effectiveness of the *Work for the Dole* program as Shepparton was a trial area for the scheme. Some participants commented that *Work for the Dole* placements should be developed into real jobs instead of being volunteering opportunities, or at least should involve experiences that are real employment pathways and are connected to a person's skills and professional interests.

Volunteering to obtain Australian work experience is an alien concept to some culturally and linguistically diverse communities. For many individuals, work comes with an expectation of remuneration and they may not fully comprehend the importance or relevance of being employed in a job that does not

generate any income, especially if they possess professional or educational qualifications and have work experience prior to relocating in Australia.

*Volunteering opportunities are a good way to start but young people need support at the initial stages to fill out paperwork and get requirements in place (for example, working with children checks). (Service provider – Logan)*

In certain instances, the desperation to obtain Australian work experience places culturally and linguistically diverse people at a further disadvantage, and they are easily manipulated by others. Often, under the guise of Australian work experience, culturally and linguistically diverse individuals provide manual labour and are either not paid for the work they do, or receive 'cash in hand' and are paid far less than the minimum wage.

### **What can be done?**

*Volunteering and its associated benefits should be promoted nationally as a means to acquire Australian work experience for migrant and refugee jobseekers who might not be familiar with the concept of undertaking unpaid work.*

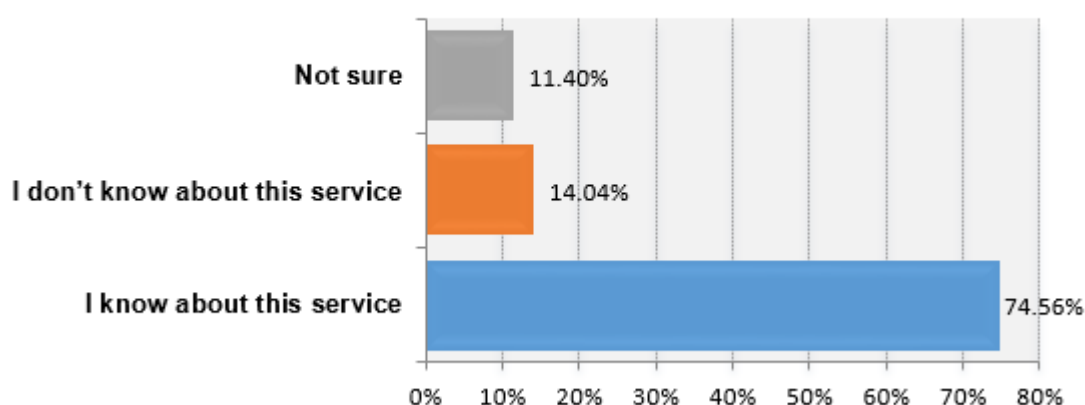
*Work for the Dole activities should be developed as real pathways for employment and the placements should be in line with a person's abilities, previous experience or career interests.*

*A national approach to implementing cultural awareness programs for employers is necessary, with a view of enhancing their understanding of, and positive response to, the specific cultural needs of the employees.*

## ENGAGEMENT

Community perspectives gathered through the 2015 FECCA Access and Equity Survey indicated that client awareness of Australian Government employment services was relatively positive: 74% of the participants to the survey indicated that they were aware of the employment services provided by the government, while 14% were not aware of them. A further 48% noted that they were not using employment services. When asked to rate their experience with accessing employment services, 11% rated their experience as being 'very good', 15% as 'good', 16% as 'okay' and 12% as 'bad'.

### Awareness of employment services



The vast majority of community members attending the FECCA consultations also seemed aware of the services provided by employment agencies but they indicated that there were mismatched expectations about what type of support and how much support employment services can provide to job seekers. The same level of awareness was not indicated though in relation to workplace relations agencies, such as the Fair Work Ombudsman, or trades and skills recognition services.

The quality of engagement with employment services providers is determined based on how well service providers know their clients, understand the barriers they face in terms of language, literacy issues and familiarity with the Australian employment systems, and whether they seek to provide a personalised experience that takes into consideration different cultural norms, preferences and circumstances.

### ***Knowing your clients and personalising engagement***

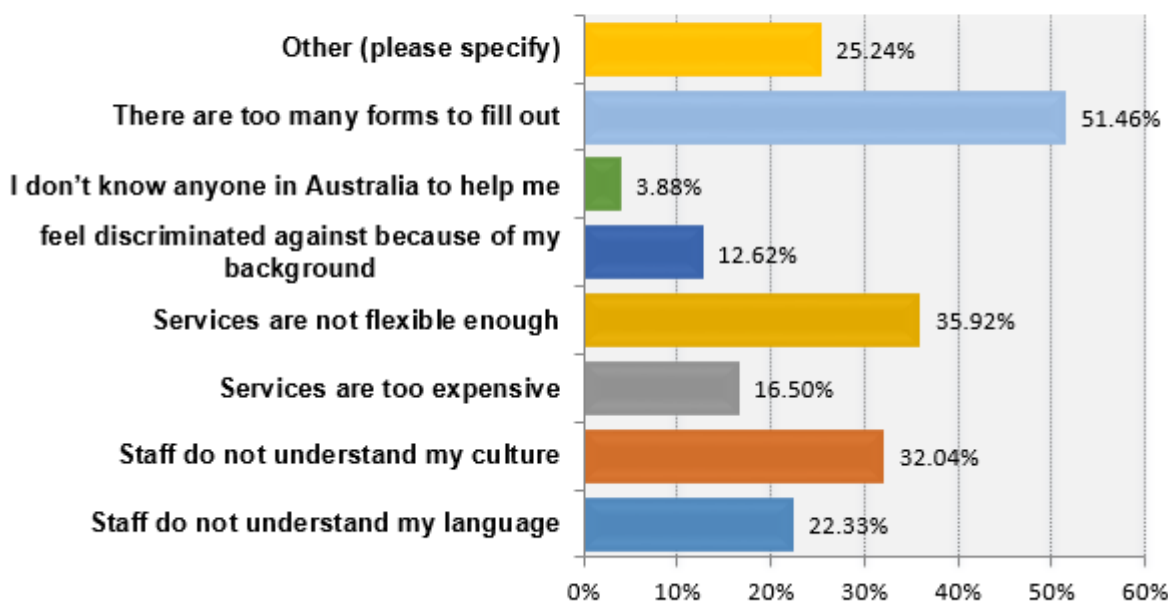
Feedback on migrant and refugee experiences with accessing employment services expressed frustration that employment services providers did not seem to have an understanding of the various barriers that migrant and refugee jobseekers faced in accessing employment and government services. This lack of awareness of diverse client bases is reflected through the adoption of a one-size-fits-all approach by employment agencies. Many community members noted that employment services provision was not adequate for clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as service providers did not adapt their communication and engagement strategies to accommodate the needs of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

FECCA has received feedback about instances of alleged exploitation of migrants and refugees particularly in rural and regional areas. Limited access to meaningful employment is something that puts people at risk of exploitation because they are willing to work for 'cash in hand' and access employment under the radar, if all the other means of accessing employment have been exhausted. Some of the factors that make this group of job seekers vulnerable to exploitation in addition to a lack job opportunities and support are a lack of work entitlements, lack an understanding and awareness of their rights, and language difficulties. Many of these workers are not registered with Centrelink, Jobs Services Australia or any other government agency and therefore they do not receive any support and are risk of

exploitation. These are circumstances and risks that employment service providers should be aware of and should mitigate through targeted community engagement and by sharing responsibility with the Fair Work Ombudsman to facilitate the provision of timely information about the risk of becoming exploited and about employees' rights and entitlements.

'Knowing your clients' in this instance can be translated into understanding the vulnerabilities of the client base and the risks that new arrivals can be exposed to if engagement strategies fail to provide the right support and educate them about their rights and responsibilities when entering the workforce.

**What is most difficult for you when you are seeking to access services from a government agency or government-funded service provider?**



Many community members commented that they wished that service providers had more knowledge of their background, what circumstances they were coming from, what skills they brought with them and what their migration journey meant for them and their ability to find employment. Having a clear understanding about the impact that refugee-like experiences and protracted displacement have on someone's ability to access employment is paramount to ensuring that employment agencies can provide tailored services and generate positive outcomes for their clients.

Consultation participants highlighted that employment agencies failed to understand the complexity of their situation in a holistic way and did not present awareness of the range of factors that determined their particular situation. Some of these factors included: aspects of their migration experience; the experience of trauma and the mental health issues associated with it; time spent in refugee camps or situations of protracted displacement without access to employment, formal education or training; the loss of skills caused by this disruption; and their lack of familiarity with the Australian workplace culture and systems, including the process of looking for a job or attending an interview. Language barriers can only exacerbate these already difficult barriers. Many jobseekers complained that they were being treated as if they had been born in Australia and they were not given additional support. This indicates that if employment services fail to understand the characteristics and diverse experiences of their client base, they are unable to provide an adequate engagement experience and assistance.

Without adequate knowledge, service providers are relying on the assumptions that they make about their clients and their circumstances. Some community members noted that because of their portrayal in the media, there were a lot of assumptions made about their previous work experiences and their ability to do a job. These assumptions are an indicator of an agency's inadequate engagement with its client

base, and create additional obstacles to allowing job seekers, employment agencies and employers to build a mutual trust relationship.

*It is understandable that employment is such an issue for Africans. What people see on the TV about Africa is wars, people in refugee camps drinking murky waters, it is Ebola. So you bring an African to work in a factory he doesn't have the positive story about where they are coming from. And that makes it harder for the employer to give that person responsibilities. There is misconception. (Congolese male – Shepparton)*

### **What can be done?**

*There is a need for awareness amongst employment services providers of their diverse client base, including cultural awareness, understanding of demographics, recognition of their personal and migration circumstances, and the associated barriers that they might face in accessing employment.*

*Acquiring and demonstrating cultural competency should be a minimum requirement for all government-funded employment services providers.*

*Targeted design and delivery of employment services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would enable jobseekers to engage with specialised staff that speak their languages, have a greater understanding of the cross-cultural and settlement issues that people face, and engage with them in a manner that they can relate to.*

### **Communication and dissemination of information**

The use of appropriate language and communication strategies has a direct impact on the quality and outcome of client engagement. Various service providers attending the consultations noted that they had received feedback about how difficult it was for new and emerging communities to find employment and to communicate with Jobs Services Australia providers, either because the provider did not use appropriate language when they assisted new and emerging communities, they did not use plain English or they did not use interpreters.

Many encounter language barriers when communicating with the service provider and the front desk staff, but despite that they were not getting practical help with looking for work. Community feedback noted instances where clients with poor language skills and sometimes illiterate in their own language, were directed to a web search engine or newspapers to look for a job. Some of these community members explained that they were struggling to communicate with the service provider in English, let alone trying to look for a job by reading written information in newspapers or the internet. They were unable to understand the job adverts or what was required of them in the process.

*When you go to the reception I talk my language because I do not know English, we can't communicate. So communication at the reception is the first issue. Now I need to go and look for a job. They will put a newspaper on the table and tell you these are the types of jobs that are available, go and look for them. But I have a problem to communicate with them, how am I going to know what is here? But I am under pressure, I have to do it. (Sudanese male - Shepparton)*

Despite clear indicators of poor engagement, clients noted that they were not comfortable with providing

direct feedback to the agency about how the service could better engage with them as they were worried that making a complaint might negatively impact on their Centrelink payments.

Other community members noted that most of the times the service providers used interpreters when communicating with people from non-English backgrounds, either by accessing phone interpreting services or by having an on-site interpreter. However it would be even more helpful if employment agencies could employ a bicultural worker who could act as an advocate and liaison between the employer, the employment agency and the job seeker and significantly improve the engagement experience.

*Where there are culturally specific bi-cultural workers, the community trusts the work and services can be delivered effectively. (Service provider – Logan)*

Community feedback noted that agencies could also improve their engagement by diversifying the way they disseminate information and by taking into consideration the cultural and personal preferences for accessing information, language proficiency, literacy and ability to use computer. Service providers in the Shepparton area noted that the primary data source for new and emerging communities was word of mouth from other members of their community, particularly in regional areas where the majority were involved in seasonal employment. Key members in the community are the main source of information for the rest of the community and it is very often the most effective way of disseminating information. However, some community participants warned that there were no regulations or control over what and how much information gets passed down to the communities through these identified leaders which can create significant gaps in communication and dissemination of vital information.

*Clients tend to make enquiries through other avenues, or more indirect enquiries about how things should happen. They don't ask for information upfront. They prefer to go through back channels to find out a solution by talking to their friends or community members instead of talking directly to the service providers. (Service provider - Shepparton)*

Community members have consistently advocated for a range of complementing strategies to address communication issues when targeting new and emerging communities, including increased face-to-face engagement and the use of ethnic newspapers or community radios.

*The new arrivals will generally be working in the areas of lower skills, less structure and less regulations. Those people will not access government websites to look for information on work rights and entitlements. Even accessing information in their own language is difficult because many of them are illiterate anyway. So you need to directly engage with those communities about the issues that you want to talk to them about. (Service provider - Shepparton)*

Face-to-face engagement has the potential to facilitate the development of a trust-based relationship between agencies and their clients. The need for building bridges and trust between government services and communities was apparent at FECCA's consultation in Logan where participants explained that young people do not have much faith in the existing support system or the individuals and organisations that are supposed to support them with accessing employment. These young people are therefore not confident about the benefits of accessing these services.

Disseminating information about issues such as work rights, entitlements, self-employment and skills recognition, came up as problematic at consultations. FECCA has learned that many migrants and humanitarian entrants were interested in self-employment as an alternative to accessing mainstream work. Many community members preferred to set up their own business or to provide services to their community. They noted that it was very difficult to find information about how to set up a business and what were the requirements for it, and employment agencies did not seem to be very helpful with regards to this.



The same was the case for the provision of information about support services in cases of workplace discrimination or exploitation where it was noted that newly arrived jobseekers and employees from migrant and refugee backgrounds were not aware of their rights or how to access support in case their rights were being breached. The majority of community members attending consultations were not aware of the role of the Fair Work Ombudsman and how they could get support. FECCA is aware that the Ombudsman has a role in educating people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds about the workplace rights and entitlements. However, the lack of awareness amongst communities about these services and the rates of exploitation happening particularly in regional areas are extremely concerning and indicates a need to review this strategy.

A similar indication of poor engagement and gaps in communication was noted in relation to clients' awareness of workers' compensation entitlements. Community perspectives noted that many people with physical injuries from migrant and refugee communities were not aware of their right to access workers' compensation or what were considered unsafe working conditions.

*I've seen a lot of people with various physical injuries as a result of working in agriculture. And they haven't been able to access work cover, even though they were being paid and paying tax, they were not familiar with the work cover process. They have long lasting injuries that makes it difficult for them to find work now because of ongoing body pain. They didn't access work cover because they didn't have any idea about it. And it's too late now. (Service provider - Shepparton)*

Participants in the consultations were also asked about whether they were aware of the process of skills and trades recognition and the recognition of previous learning, and most of them did not seem aware of those options. It was noted that there was not much promotion of the option of skills and trades recognition. In general, GPs or other medical practitioners would hear about these options more often than any other groups.

*The other problem is that the majority of these communities are refugees or migrant but not skilled migrants so they are not going to have this experience about recognising your degree or trades in order to get the visa. So we don't hear about it and there are no agencies specified to contact. They should promote it more through Centrelink or job services. Some people can have good experience like a carpenter for example but nobody is going to push them to have that experience or skill recognised. We have many in the community with experiences as mechanics, plumbers or plasterer, etc but they never heard of the opportunity of having their skills recognised. (Iraqi male – Shepparton)*

The biggest challenges for appropriate dissemination for information to newly arrived migrants and refugee jobseekers was finding the right channels and methods of communication, timing the provision of information and adjusting the amount of information according to the different stages a client goes through as part of the settlement process.

*[...]it is a matter of timing too. There is so much information that people will need to learn, about so many systems and culture, etc in the settlement process. It all can be a bit overwhelming. So unless it's relevant to that person at that time, you can hold an information session on work rights but that won't be relevant if you don't speak English yet and your opportunities to gain employment are pretty low; it is kind of insulting to tell people about their work rights when they can't even get a job. It needs to be based on need and timing. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

Some community members noted that government agencies tend to rely on community organisations to disseminate information to community members. Despite the important role that these community groups play, agencies such as employment services providers should ensure that they have a direct engagement strategy in place and should assume the responsibility for providing information about their

services directly to the communities concerned.

### **What can be done?**

*Increased cultural awareness for employment services staff communicating with consumers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would strengthen their ability to identify the communication barriers that the client faces and to adapt their engagement strategies according to these barriers.*

*There is a critical need for stronger coordination among relevant government agencies in disseminating vital information to migrant and refugee jobseekers, including information about their rights, entitlements, obligations, vulnerabilities and where to seek support.*

*Better results can be achieved by utilising the most appropriate channels of communication for the provision of information, following the different stages of settlement for the client.*

*Employment of bilingual / bicultural workers by employment services should be encouraged. This will not only facilitate communication with the client in their own language and by having a close understanding of their cultural context and issues, but it will also have the collateral effect of creating job opportunities for people in the community that could take up this role with their local agency.*

*Enhance the Fair Work Ombudsman's engagement strategy to better target culturally and linguistically diverse workers, and in particular new and emerging communities.*

*Employment agencies could improve access to information about work rights and how to get support in case of injury or exploitation by running community information sessions or providing this information to the job seeker before or at the time when they are placed on a job.*

### **Building trust relationships and working in partnership**

Many community members, particularly from new and emerging communities, highlighted that beyond ensuring adequate engagement with the job seekers, employment agencies should also demonstrate leadership and seek to engage with the employers themselves in order to educate them on the barriers and needs of employees and job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

*Employers have no training on how to deal with employees from different faiths and different backgrounds. Some cultures may require people to observe certain rules or practices based on their belief. Employers should be able to accommodate these requirements. (Young male jobseeker - Logan)*

By becoming aware of the specific circumstances, skills and needs of migrant and refugee job seekers, employers can develop a better understanding of what training is required on the job and what type of support a person needs. Job agencies should also ensure through this two way engagement that both employers and job seekers have a clear understanding of the expectations on the job. Feedback from community members indicated that some job seekers encountered communication issues when interacting with employment agencies around what was expected of them on the job and what kind of support was needed, which resulted in very poor employment outcomes.

*[...]sometimes people will get a job but they have difficulties in keeping the job because there has been a breakdown of communication and interpretation of how the job will be done, and sometimes what people are needing is to be shown how to do the job. They need one-on-one directive and structure on how to do things. A couple of community members have said that they had the experience in refugee camps, and they have been in refugee camps for a long time, so they might have lost some of the skills they may have had prior to that. (Service provider - Shepparton)*

The feedback gathered through the survey and community consultation was consistent in noting that culturally and linguistically diverse jobseekers can be victims of prejudice, discrimination or racism both in hiring practices and in the workplace. Prejudice and discriminatory behaviour is prevalent especially in rural and regional areas and within small businesses that are not owned by people from migrant backgrounds or those familiar with the migrant experience.

*I think there is bias and prejudice existing, we need to acknowledge that, but also people might be uncomfortable, they might not be familiar with having somebody on board who speaks English as a second language, and therefore is too hard, they might feel like they might offend somebody if they say the wrong thing. If people are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the cross-cultural engagement then that can be a challenge for people as well. They might not want to be prejudiced or biased but they are afraid that they might be in their unfamiliarity. (Service provider - Shepparton)*

The lack of engagement and trust between employers and jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds translates into the reluctance of small businesses in regional areas to employ jobseekers outside their personal networks and to invest additional resources to train and provide them with support on the job, an attitude which works against migrants in the recruitment process. A participant at FECCA's community consultation in Shepparton highlighted the need for personal connections to find employment:

*If you are white Australian you will get a job. For anything that you need to do here you need to be connected with someone. It is not really racism, but maybe when you go for the interview they put in their mind that you don't have any experience or anything. So they are worried that they if they would give me the job then I would not do the job right. It is not about racism but the trust. (Sudanese female – Shepparton)*

In light of the above, both community members and service providers agreed upon the important role that employment agencies should play in educating employers about the benefits of employing jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse barriers, break the stigma and build trust relationships.

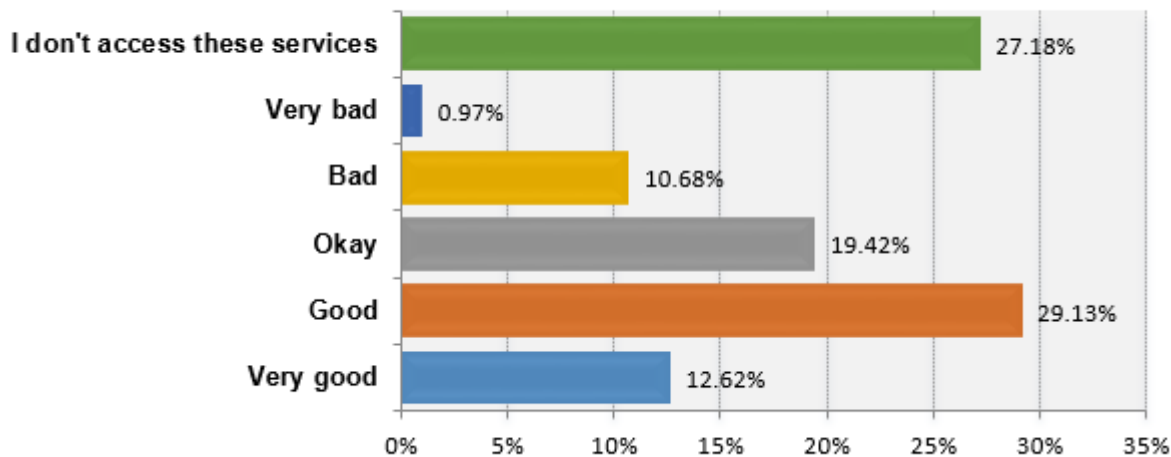
#### **What can be done?**

*There is a need for stronger leadership on behalf of employment services providers, and improved collaboration between employment agencies and employers, to promote the benefits of having a culturally diverse workforce, prevent discriminatory attitudes towards migrant and refugee jobseekers, and identify solutions for improving on-the-job support for employees from non-English speaking backgrounds.*

# Welfare services

## RESPONSIVENESS

Rating of experience of welfare services



Community perspectives about how effective Centrelink services are in addressing the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and the barriers they face were mixed. The responses from FECCA's Access and Equity survey were largely positive: 30% of the survey respondents rated their experience with accessing welfare services as being 'good', 20% as 'okay', 13% as 'very good' and 11% as 'bad'. A total of 27% of the survey participants indicated that they were not accessing welfare services. New and emerging communities in particular expressed frustration with the rigid and complex set of regulations which are difficult to understand for someone who is new to Australia, has language barriers and is not familiar with how government systems work.

Getting clear, timely and helpful information about their Centrelink entitlements and responsibilities was an issue for many community members. A female participant in Shepparton noted that she had received confusing and contradictory information from different people at Centrelink.

*The problem with Centrelink is that we never receive the same information about an issue. Everybody is saying something different about the same thing. For example when I asked about the disability pension and how many hours the person is entitled to work, everybody was saying something different. I can't get to the right answer. (Iraqi female – Shepparton)*

Others suggested that most of the community members were not entirely aware of their entitlements and they were not receiving any feedback from Centrelink about why their applications for certain benefits had been rejected. Community members were not receiving timely notifications from Centrelink about irregularities with their benefits and reporting requirements and had their payments stopped without warning and without providing an opportunity to redress the issue.

*If there is an error with the payment or the benefit or the application they don't notify the applicant straight away. Sometimes it takes ages to notify them. Because of that long period of notification, it creates more complications in the case. (Iraqi female – Shepparton)*

Another issue raised at the consultations was a lack of understanding and lack of emphasis on the barriers those clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may face. Some consultation participants cited instances when individuals were incorrectly streamed by Centrelink in assessing their

needs and the benefits there were entitled to. One consultation participant noted that beyond the above mentioned reasons this could sometimes be the case if the client does not disclose all the relevant information at the initial stages of the assessment, mainly because of a lack of trust in the agency or awareness about the importance of disclosing such information.

*Some of the refugee youth are streamed as stream 1 and stream 1 is not entitled to receive funds from Centrelink, those coming from refugee backgrounds should bypass stream 1 and receive something to survive on. (Service provider - Logan)*

One of the requirements for Centrelink payments is to access employment services and look for employment. However, participants in Shepparton had limited language skills so very often employment agencies would refer them to English classes. The English classes provided were not sufficient for preparing someone for employment and people felt they were trapped in a situation where they will depend on Centrelink benefits for a long time if their barriers to employment are not removed.

Other participants were concerned that in a family, if one of the partners is lucky enough to find employment then the other partner loses their benefit and healthcare card, a situation which creates a lot of financial issues. Community members noted that the rule was a big disadvantage for families with children as very often the wage that the working parent gets was not enough to cover all the expenses for the family and they still had to rely on the Centrelink benefit to complement their income and cover their expenses. They suggested that the benefit for the unemployed partner should continue until they become job-ready and are able to access employment. Many noted that stopping the payment of benefits for the other partner is a disincentive for members of the family to access employment because they are worse off if one of them gets a job and the other one loses their benefit.

#### **What can be done?**

*Coordination between welfare services and relevant government agencies, including their respective services, should be strengthened, to ensure that the information provided to the consumer is clear and accurate, and that the client can get a satisfactory resolution or answer at their first contact with the agency.*

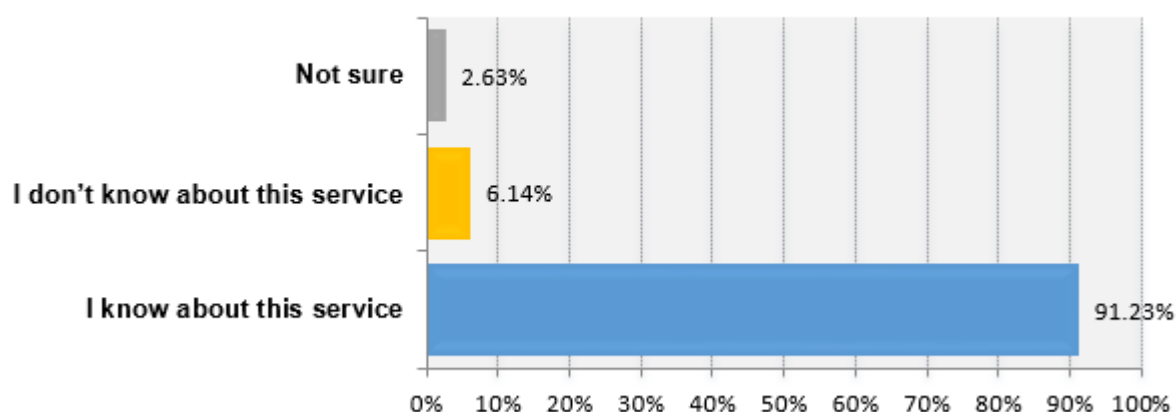
*Adequate safeguards should be adopted to promote better provision of one-on-one information and feedback about entitlements and failed applications for benefits for new arrivals who might not be familiar with the Australian welfare system and have difficulties accessing information through other means.*

*Frontline staff should be encouraged to adopt a problem-solving attitude and ensure that the client is given a chance to explain the situation and fix the issue before their benefits are stopped.*

## **ENGAGEMENT**

Community perspectives gathered by the 2015 FECCA Access and Equity Survey indicated that client awareness of Australian Government welfare services was very positive, with welfare services being the most widely known Government service: 92% of the respondents indicated that they were familiar with this service.

## Awareness of welfare services



### Communication barriers and access to information

Community views on the quality of engagement of welfare services were generally positive but indicated the need for improvement in several areas. Many community members suggested that they found it difficult to interact with Centrelink and have their questions answered adequately because of many barriers in communication.

Most of the criticism referred to the limited personalised and face-to-face engagement under the service delivery model adopted by Centrelink. The automated service delivery and the focus on self-service through the internet or over the phone creates numerous challenges for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and cannot accommodate their language barriers and limited familiarity with the government service provision. The self-service option for new arrivals that do not speak English is inefficient because it does not offer language options, so people cannot do their Centrelink business online in their own language.

*If you come from Africa using the phone and talking to an interpreter is very very hard. Our language includes a lot of signs and makes conversation on the phone difficult. It doesn't work. (Congolese female - Shepparton)*

Many community members noted that the phone service and voice recognition software does not work well for people who have different accents and significantly inhibits communication. Many members of new and emerging communities come from cultures where body language and facial expressions are very important in effective communication, even more when speaking in a new language and in an unfamiliar environment.

*The nuance when you have a face-to-face conversation with someone who knows nothing about Centrelink as government service and what they do, the body language, the eye contact are so important and so critical. (Service provider – Shepparton)*

The Centrelink multicultural phone line is preferred by culturally and linguistically diverse community members to accessing information via the website, or if attending the Centrelink office is not possible because of time constraints. Accessing the multicultural phone line could arguably reduce waiting times and allow clients to do their business more quickly, as it can be more accessible than waiting for an interpreter for a face-to-face appointment.

According to feedback received by FECCA, the waiting times for accessing the Centrelink phone service can sometimes be unreasonable though and once people get through, they then find it difficult to reach

the right solution for more complex problems. Most of the community members, especially new arrivals, felt that they get better results and were more confident if they could talk to a person face-to-face and they would provide the full details of their circumstances. Face-to-face interaction allows the service to demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness as they can explore the different factors that generate a person's problem and can identify together with the client the best workable solution.

Members of new and emerging communities attending the consultations and responding to the FECCA survey noted that their limited understanding of the Australian welfare system can also be mitigated by being able to talk to someone who has a genuine understanding of the difficulties of working out things in a new and alien environment. Facilitating communication by using clear and simple language is also important.

Language barriers, perceptions and attitudes towards government services and service providers are a key hindrance to accessing services by culturally and linguistically diverse youth. At the community consultation in Logan, a participant from Youth Correctional Services stated:

*For most CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] youth, especially those coming from a migrant or refugee background, obtaining services from the government organisations is foreign or terrifying. They don't know the right questions to ask or whom to reach. Often they are sent to meet different people in different departments and it confuses them. (Service Provider – Logan)*

Some community members noted that they also struggled to understand the correspondence received from Centrelink because it is written in English, the information is complex or they might be illiterate.

Staff with friendly, respectful and understanding attitudes are crucial for providing a positive engagement experience. Some community members responding to the FECCA survey felt that they were treated with contempt by some of the Centrelink staff, due to perceived misconceptions regarding people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Others noted that they did not feel that the staff were willing to help and had a dismissive attitude.

Young people from new and emerging communities can be particularly intimidated by service providers if they do not present a friendly and helpful attitude. Similar remarks were made by young people in Logan who noted that government officials tend to be too bureaucratic and unresponsive in their engagement with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

*People should ask the right questions to get the answers. Often if an individual is accompanied by a community service provider they receive a better outcome. This should not be the case. The officials should be in a position to provide the necessary information and make the processes accessible to every individual despite their background. (Young community member – Logan)*

The complexity of forms was another key barrier discussed at the consultation. Community members commented that they had to fill in too many forms with very complex and confusing questions. Many suggested that they needed someone's assistance with filling in the forms because of language, literacy or comprehension barriers.

*The forms are extremely confusing. Also, many services are very inflexible and I feel that if even one point doesn't fit the criteria I have no way to get help with what I need. It is also difficult to get staff to easily explain the exact requirements. (Survey participant)*

### **What can be done?**

*Personalised engagement with clients from non-English speaking backgrounds should be prioritised at the expense of automated services delivery and the reliance on electronic means of delivering information. Service delivery should allow flexibility for recognising a client's background and its likely impact upon the engagement experience, and for identifying and adopting the most effective engagement strategy based on each client's cultural, linguistic or personal circumstances.*

### **Building trust relationships**

Better understanding and engagement can be facilitated by investing more capital into building relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, by making the agency and its work more visible to them, and by developing cultural competency across all areas of engagement with these communities. Developing complaints mechanisms and better avenues for providing and receiving feedback could significantly improve the responsiveness and quality of engagement of the agency.

Many new and emerging communities come from environments where they did not have positive experiences with their government authorities and therefore are not confident enough when they access the services they are entitled to. Interacting with staff members who do not have an understanding of their cultural background and the challenges that they may face, or in more extreme cases staff members who exhibit racist attitudes, may jeopardise any efforts taken towards building a positive relationship with these communities.

FECCA has received feedback that indicates that despite the already positive steps taken, such as the multicultural phone line and the implementation of the Multicultural Services Officer program, Centrelink still has to invest in ensuring that migrant and refugee communities are confident that their experience with accessing welfare services will be a positive one. For instance, consultation participants in Logan indicated that some parents were deliberately discouraging their children from obtaining assistance from government institutions for the fear that it may affect their visa status, income generation or tax benefits. Others commented that accessing government services can sometimes be a very negative experience:

*For most CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] youth, especially those coming from a migrant or refugee background, obtaining services from the government organisations is foreign or terrifying. They don't know the right questions to ask or whom to reach. Often they are sent to meet different people in different departments and it confuses them. (Service provider – Logan)*

Some strategies that Centrelink has already adopted, including engaging bicultural workers and providing community information sessions, have received positive feedback but there is a lot of scope for them to be improved and extended. Ensuring that the range of bicultural workers matches the cultural backgrounds of the agency's client base is a first step towards ensuring that all clients have the opportunity to engage with the service in a comfortable environment where they can express their concerns to someone who they can trust, will understand their culture or background and will relate to them. When engaging bicultural workers is not possible, cultural awareness training for all the staff members interacting with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds should be a minimum requirement.

Community outreach and engaging directly with key community representatives can build awareness and mutual understanding and can improve information provision. However service providers themselves noted that engagement at the grassroots levels and targeting the right members of some communities



can be difficult and can be a slow process if community members are not familiar and confident enough to engage with government representatives.

**What can be done?**

*Personalised engagement and community outreach should be adopted as the most effective ways for disseminating information and building trust-based relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Developing strong relationships with the communities will result in better engagement experiences and confidence in the ability of agency to provide adequate support.*

# Conclusion

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As cultural and linguistic diversity of the Australian society grows, so does the diversity of individual experiences and needs, with regards to services and supports which are critical for maximising individuals' and communities' full and effective participation.

Community insights into the design and delivery of essential government services highlight the relevance of the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy. Further, the feedback emphasises the need for potential enhancement to the policy implementation, including through stronger leadership and a whole-of-government perspective, to ensure sound coordination across all agencies and levels of government to better respond to the needs of diverse clients.

### **What can be done?**

*A whole-of-government approach to implementation and evaluation can be achieved through the establishment of an inter-agency support group for Multicultural Access and Equity, as a platform from which to facilitate ongoing engagement between agencies and enable more effective coordinated action to streamline service delivery.*

*The Department of Social Services is well positioned to assume leadership, drawing together representatives on all relevant government agencies to scope the parameters of such a support group and its mandate.*

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