

**GOVERNING FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS:
A POLICY PLATFORM TO RESPOND TO AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL
AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY**

Introduction

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national policy, advocacy peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

In the lead up to the 2016 Federal Election, FECCA calls for all parties to adopt a policy platform that responds to Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity.

Recent research by Migration Council Australia and Independent Economics demonstrates that, based on current trends, Australia's projected population will be 38 million by 2050 and migration will contribute \$1,625 billion (1.6 trillion) to Australia's GDP. Moreover, migration will have added 15.7 per cent to our workforce participation rate and 5.9 per cent in GDP per capita growth.

The *2015 Intergenerational Report: Australia in 2055* recognises that migrants are generally younger than the resident population, thus migration reduces the average age of the population and slows the rate of population ageing. Additionally, migration increases the proportion of the population that is of working age and raises aggregate workforce participation. Immigration policy has the potential to counteract negative social and economic effects of Australia's ageing population.

Empowering migrants and allowing them the resources, tools and opportunities to participate in Australian society is critical to fostering their economic and social contributions. In turn, people from CALD backgrounds, including first and subsequent generations contribute to the Australian economy as consumers, employees and professionals. Their diversity and innovative spirit have enhanced both productivity and competitiveness in business. Many Australian entrepreneurs were born overseas and today own and manage small, medium and large enterprises.

Targeted policies are necessary to address the specific needs of Australia's CALD population, foster social inclusion and to continue attracting migrants.

FECCA is seeking all parties' commitment to the following policies:

1. National legislative framework on multiculturalism;
2. National language policy;
3. Productive diversity policy;
4. Migration policy;
5. Social policy (including aged care, mental health, child care, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and women's safety);
6. Communications policy; and
7. Cultural diversity and social cohesion policy.

These policies acknowledge that cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics require specific, inclusive and targeted programs that promote citizenship, access, equity and participation, and ensure no one is excluded and left behind.

They also recognise that people from CALD backgrounds are not a homogenous group. They encounter different outcomes based on a variety of factors which include: backgrounds and life experiences; length of time since their arrival; migration pathway (e.g. as a refugee); level of acculturation and exposure to Australian systems; English language proficiency; and socioeconomic status. Each of these factors impacts on the wellbeing of people from CALD backgrounds.

Adequate resourcing of these targeted policies and programs is critical.

1 – National Legislative Framework on Multiculturalism

FECCA calls for all parties to support a sound, whole-of-government and longer-term approach to multicultural policy by developing a national legislative framework on multiculturalism, through a robust process that includes both legislative inquiry and consultation.

A national legislative framework would ensure systemic change by achieving both recognition of diverse cultures coexisting in Australia, and promotion of close interaction between diverse cultures based on principles of reciprocal respect and equality.

The fundamental principle of multiculturalism needs to be embedded not just in government policy, but also in the political system, through a whole-of-government approach to multicultural affairs, which recognises and values cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity.

Based on the fundamental principles and rights established by the Constitution, including the Constitutional recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples, and other relevant acts, a legislative framework would set out clear government obligations, as well as data collection and reporting requirements, and facilitate more targeted and inclusive government policies, programs and services responsive to Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity. It would also provide a pathway for fostering research and innovation, through the establishment of a national research body on multicultural affairs.

The development of the legislative framework should be underpinned by a national stakeholder consultation, including the establishment of a joint select committee to inquire into, and report on, the steps to be taken and the scope for developing a national multicultural legislative framework.

2 – National Language Policy

FECCA calls for all parties to develop an integrated national policy framework on languages, addressing progressive second language education, sustainable community language schools, and quality and responsive language services.

National debate about language policy is typically very narrow and mostly overlooks the multiculturalism and multilingualism of our community, and occasionally, overlooks community languages as a remarkable resource that immigrant and Indigenous communities 'gift' to the nation.

A holistic language policy would provide a comprehensive approach to fostering Australia's communication resources, including English as a common and shared language, a second language for all, and support for endangered languages.

It would provide a framework for implementing mandatory second language education, supporting community language schools, and facilitating quality and responsive language services encompassing community interpreting and a strong bi-lingual bi-cultural workforce.

The framework would provide for a balanced rationale for bilingualism—covering both the trade and economic dividend, as well as its importance in fostering individual, cultural, and intellectual development in our population. A comprehensive approach would include language rights, language maintenance and language study for enrichment, identity and cultural exploration.

3 – Productive Diversity Policy

FECCA calls for all parties to commit to policy action on harnessing productivity through diversity by facilitating recognition and effective management of cultural diversity, enhancing self-employment support, streamlining overseas qualifications recognition, and promoting economic security and industry leadership representation for women from CALD backgrounds.

The policy action must be underpinned by the development of a national framework that includes:

- **Strategies, including an awareness campaign, to target the public and private sectors in enhancing understanding of the benefits of employing people from CALD backgrounds to improving productivity, innovation and growth, as well as support the sectors in creating welcoming, inclusive and culturally appropriate and aware workplace environments;**
- **Strategies to enhance the participation of CALD women in the workforce and in leadership positions, including improved data collection methods that capture gender, cultural heritage and international experience, a review of the current recruitment processes, and monitoring and evaluation processes to measure progress; and**
- **Establishment of 'one-stop shop' information hubs to provide face-to-face information and advice on overseas qualifications recognition, as well as**

through the provision of education and training, such as bridging courses, to help migrants make the most of their previous experience and up-skill.

Migrants and refugees experience higher levels of unemployment due to a range of factors, including discrimination, education background, skills recognition, language barriers and lack of Australian work experience. Many migrants and refugees are earning at or below the minimum wage. People from CALD backgrounds are among the most vulnerable in the workplace and tend to be concentrated in the sectors of the job market which create a potential for exploitation. Many people from CALD backgrounds are employed in insecure work which is often low paid, unsustainable, dangerous and isolating.

Difficulties with obtaining recognition of skills and qualifications earned overseas are among the key barriers to accessing employment in Australia. Limited information on the process to have overseas qualifications recognised, along with the costs of obtaining the recognition, pose major challenges for migrants and refugees (with the latter facing an additional complexity of providing documentation from their countries of origin).

There are specific barriers that women from CALD backgrounds face gaining employment and in the workplace. More specifically, migrant and refugee women are more likely to be earning at, or just above the minimum wage. Humanitarian stream migrants overwhelmingly earn less than the minimum wage. The disparities are evident even within the skilled stream—recent data from the Australia Bureau of Statistics reveals that the median employee income for skilled male migrants exceeds skilled female migrants across all age groups. Further, women from CALD backgrounds are overrepresented in insecure employment fields which include industries such as manufacturing, accommodation, food services, cleaning and labouring. They are more likely to be employed on a casual basis and to be at a disadvantage negotiating terms of employment.

Gender equality policies ignore the specific challenges or opportunities for CALD women and do not consider them as a group that faces intersectional barriers or as having diverse needs. Challenges impacting CALD women in fulfilling their leadership potential include experiences of discrimination, lack of access to leadership pathways and to relevant professional networks, and limited understanding in the public and private sector of the need to identify CALD women as a distinct group.

4 – Migration Policy

FECCA calls for all parties to adopt a progressive and innovative migration and population policy, based on principles of justice and equity. This would achieve an appropriate balance between various migration streams, ensure a responsive family migration program, and implement an increase in annual humanitarian intake up to 20,000.

Family Migration

The Migration Programme must achieve an appropriate balance between skilled and family migration. Skills from migrants are necessary for Australia to participate in the competitive global economy. However, it is a flawed assumption that only skilled migrants actively contribute towards innovation and the economy due to their recognised skills or

qualifications. The selectivity of immigration policies reduces the potential knowledge transfer in various industries and sectors. Increases in the proportion of skilled migration will also put pressure on the family stream, as seen in the last 10 to 15 years.

According to the recent report to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Family stream partner migrants are younger on average (more likely in their 20s and 30s) than Skilled or Humanitarian stream partners. Most partners in the Family stream speak English well. Before arrival in Australia, Family stream partners were more likely to have completed a qualification than Australian-born residents of the same age. While family migrants are not assessed on their skills for migration, 60-70 per cent of Family stream partner migrants have post-school qualifications.

Partner migrants make a significant contribution to Australia's economy through participation in the labour force. The current system whereby the number of partner visas in the Family stream is restricted by a target set annually is inequitable. Under this system, skilled migrants are able to bring their partners to Australia with relative ease while Australian citizens are subject to a considerable wait time due to the quota system.

While the number of partner visas in the Family migration stream is not capped, there is a set target number for this visa category. FECCA is aware that the target number is increasingly lower than the number of valid applications, resulting in a pipeline of applications and in many cases, a delay of approximately 2 years before being granted a visa.

The availability of family reunion is important for successful settlement, allowing migrants to maintain family ties and connections. Family reunion also relates to core human rights principles around the rights of Australians to live with their family members. Many people are forced to choose between being separated from their family or staying in Australia on a temporary visa without access to services while they wait lengthy periods for their substantive visa to be processed and finalised.

The social and particularly economic contribution of Family stream migration should not be underestimated. The approach to setting targets for eligible partners in the Family migration stream should be reviewed with a view to implementing an entirely demand-driven system.

Humanitarian Programme

A responsive Humanitarian Programme should have a longer term vision which fosters the ability of humanitarian entrants to contribute, participate and belong in Australian society, including through access to services that respond to the settlement needs of this cohort. Additional *ad hoc* intakes need to be considered to supplement the regular, and increased, Humanitarian Programme to ensure an adequate response to the global humanitarian crisis.

Existing evidence from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that humanitarian entrants are the most entrepreneurial in Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that humanitarian migrants tend to work several jobs in their first few years in Australia in order to finance their own business. They display greater entrepreneurial qualities when compared with other migrant groups, with a higher than average proportion engaging in small and medium business enterprises.

Australia benefits from numerous non-economic contributions through a successful humanitarian programme, *inter alia*, mitigating an ageing local population, enriching

Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity, providing volunteering and social care roles and contributing to the development of rural and regional areas.

5 – Social policy

We call for all parties to adopt targeted, inclusive and responsive programs—with a view to empowering CALD Australians through equity of access, experience and outcomes—across social policy and practice, and in particular, as part of the following areas where priority is established:

Aged Care

Dedicated programs (as part of the Aged Care—Home Care Program—increasing consumer choice expense measures) to support the implementation of FECCA's 2020 Vision for Older CALD Australians with the aim to facilitate the rollout of the 2017–18 aged care reforms for CALD communities through:

- co-designing the roll-out of the home care reforms, and facilitated provision of individualised funding;
- ensuring that language assistance for older people who speak little or no English is identified as an equity issue and not a user pay issue by including an allocation for language assistance for bilingual workers and/or interpreters in Home Care Packages that is separate and distinct from the allocation for services;
- communicating the benefits of Consumer Directed Care and Home Care, and providing feedback to the Government to enhance implementation; and
- fostering opportunity and capacity for communities with emerging aged care needs and their providers via partnerships brokering and expertise exchange between providers, and exploring innovative models that encompass high care at home and for-profit and not-for-profit collaborations.

A dedicated grants fund established to support the implementation of the National Ageing and Aged Care Strategy for Older People from CALD Backgrounds and its Strategic Goals through innovative projects and collaborations.

Mental health

Targeted funding for a national multicultural mental health framework and service structure that provides an informed, representative and legitimate leadership to ensure that mental health reforms achieve positive and culturally appropriate outcomes for CALD individuals and communities.

Child care

Guaranteed 24 hours of subsidised child care per week as a minimum standard for every child regardless of parents' ability to meet an activity test.

Investment of adequate resources into early childhood development and education to ensure that children from migrant and refugee backgrounds develop a sense of belonging, have access to adequate support and are empowered to preserve and develop their cultural identity while gaining knowledge and understanding of Australian culture.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Targeted funding to the multicultural sector organisations to develop and implement strategies aimed at empowering and strengthening the capacity of CALD communities to participate in the NDIS with a focus on empowerment of people with a disability, their family members and carers.

Women's safety

Targeted and comprehensive national framework to address the specific safety needs of women from CALD communities, including the implementation of responsive and culturally appropriate education and awareness campaigns; disaggregated data and research; access to justice; and cultural competency in service delivery. A national focus on awareness and prevention of domestic violence targeting CALD communities to be implemented through *Our Watch*, ANROWS and *White Ribbon* working collaboratively with FECCA.

Ensure that people seeking to escape family violence are entitled to crisis payments regardless of their visa status, as recommended in the report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Ensure that there are appropriate visa pathways to assist victims of family violence by:

- Broadening the definition of family violence in the *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth), as recommended by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, to ensure that a person who experiences violence perpetrated by a family member other than the person's spouse can apply for the family violence exception.
- Expanding the family violence exception to cover secondary applicants for onshore permanent visas, and holders of a Prospective Marriage (Subclass 300) visa who have experienced family violence but who have not married their Australian sponsor. These changes were recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission in its 2011 report, *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws – Improving Legal Frameworks*.

There is sufficient evidence and research to indicate that Australia's migrants and refugees continue to face multiple disadvantages across a number of indicators. The subsequent risk adversely affects not only migrants themselves, but also the levels of social cohesion within communities, and halts the potential for increased and inclusive economic growth, and prosperity for Australian society at large. It is imperative that the levels of multiple disadvantage of CALD Australians are addressed through all government policy and program design and delivery to eliminate any disparities in terms of equity in access, participation, and outcomes.

Increasing consumer choice and flexibility for older Australians in receipt of a Commonwealth funded Home Care Package through the *My Aged Care Gateway* will require additional support for older people from CALD backgrounds (estimated to constitute 30 per cent of the population aged 65 years and above by 2030). This will involve the adequate communication to consumers of Consumer Directed Care, strengthening capacity and confidence to navigate the system based on a digital platform to make informed choices, ensuring access to quality support if and when they need it, negotiating changes to services

as their needs change, and enabling the provision of feedback on services. High quality consumer directed care needs to address diverse needs and choices of confident and informed consumers, and respond to their cultural, linguistic, and spiritual diversity and expectations. With older people from CALD backgrounds and their carers looking to their community groups and ethno-specific/multicultural specialist services for support in receiving the services they need, successful aged care sector reform will require the expertise and guidance provided by the ethno-specific/multicultural ageing sector to be acknowledged and harnessed by Government through dedicated funding that will support ongoing specialist assistance, especially for older people from CALD backgrounds who may be isolated, vulnerable and unable to speak English..

Mental health reform is an important step towards a comprehensive mental health system providing access to person-centric integrated care packages, which will be rolled out in local communities. People from CALD backgrounds should be recognised as a vulnerable group in the mental health system and considered as a priority, requiring their unique mental health needs to be met in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way. Special consideration in the reforms implementation should be given to new migrants and refugees, particularly in view of the additional humanitarian intake and refugee experiences of torture and trauma, and the need for tailored access to mental health services for individuals and families. Older people from CALD backgrounds have also been identified as being at greater risk of suffering a mental illness, including those living in rural and remote regions.

Child care reform has the potential to achieve the two key objectives of the child care system—increasing labour force participation and improving individual child development. The quality of life of migrant and refugee children is directly affected by their access to appropriate early childhood education and care services through the development of their language skills and exposure to Australian social culture, assisting with their later transition to formal schooling. Any activity test must not disproportionately affect CALD families, particularly given the high proportion of migrant and refugee workers in insecure, casualised and variable employment (largely women).

The NDIS provides people with disability an opportunity to be independent through its central concept of 'choice and control' of the participants. The implementation of the NDIS must ensure equity in availability and accessibility of support that will respond to the needs and choices of participants from CALD backgrounds, and that the consumers are empowered to have control over supports that assist them to live well and engage with their communities. The participants from CALD backgrounds must have the supports necessary to pursue their goals in life. That includes engaging with community, cultural and aesthetic activities of their choice and receiving services from providers who are familiar with the cultural, religious and linguistic requirements of the participants. This requires strengthening capacity of individuals to navigate the free market and make informed choices about the services that respond to their requirements, including cultural needs. The critical role of multicultural sector organisations in reaching out and providing supports to people from CALD backgrounds, and their thorough understanding of diversity and needs of communities, must be recognised in this regard.

The Second Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* recognises the complex challenges faced by CALD women. Addressing family violence in multicultural communities requires an innovative, inclusive and tailored approach, that is capable of challenging stigma and recognises the impact of migration on the experience of violence, along with other economic and social factors. A vital first step in allowing for greater recognition and understanding of the various issues at play, and subsequent facilitation of effective response strategies, is enhanced disaggregated data collection and research. Experiences of family violence are often exacerbated by varying levels of cultural competency among community workers, health care professionals and law

enforcement officials that come into contact with victims of domestic violence from CALD communities, resulting in limited understanding of the complexity of the situations and ability to offer adequate support. Issues of access to justice, including availability of quality language services, culturally sensitive health and domestic violence services, and affordable housing options for women escaping violence are among the key factors impacting on CALD women's safety.

Domestic violence service providers report that the biggest issue that they are observing in relation to temporary migrant women who experience violence is that these women have no source of income due to Centrelink eligibility requirements. Without income, women cannot meet their basic needs and the needs of their dependents. Many women on temporary visas return to their abusive partners because of lack of financial resources. Without access to Centrelink payments, women cannot access a lump sum payment to assist them in times of crisis, for example, a special benefit payment. The immigration status of women who experience family violence has a significant impact on their experience of that violence and their ability to leave a violent relationship. Research conducted by inTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence showed that visa dependence was one of the main barriers to migrant women accessing legal and justice support for family violence.

6 – Communications Policy

We call for all parties to adopt a comprehensive national communications policy that supports public broadcasting in languages other than English and ethnic and multicultural public community broadcasters, including through adequate resourcing for ongoing development and innovation, and provides an inclusive and empowering digital transformation agenda.

FECCA calls for all parties to preserve the uniqueness of SBS and to commit to a non-amalgamation policy between SBS and ABC.

Information access is key to enabling a truly multicultural Australia.

SBS is a key component to Australia's success as a migrant country by facilitating social cohesion between groups of differing cultural backgrounds. Broadcasting in 74 different languages, SBS delivers enormous value to the Australian community by ensuring that all Australians—regardless of cultural or linguistic background—actively participate and are engaged in Australian society. SBS plays a significant role in the settlement of migrants and refugees into the Australian community. Further, in the current climate of global challenges, it is critical that SBS maintains its uniqueness and is adequately resourced to enable the exchange of important information in promoting the diversity of our society, as well as education needs of the community.

Ethnic community radio broadcasts 2118 hours, in 94 languages, each week, providing a highly valuable service to Australia's diverse and vibrant communities. It plays a fundamental role in promoting positive messages regarding Australia's cultural diversity and the need for the continued development of a strong, resilient and inclusive Australia. High quality, appropriate training and skills development for broadcasters and content producers is critical, with the communities producing ethnic community radio programs themselves.

The sheer number and diversity of volunteers within the ethnic community broadcasting sector sets it apart from other forms of community broadcasting, in that training needs to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of a wide range of ethnic groups. Adequate

investment in training would assist refugee communities transition more smoothly into Australian society; support young people and women to become community leaders through their involvement in the community broadcasting sector; assist older people in maintaining connection to their language and culture; and allow the sector to keep up with an ever-changing world of new media platforms, media law and globalisation.

Digital is the new communications landscape and this needs to be considered through a diversity filter. Digital transformation in government service delivery presents challenges and opportunities for the CALD population. It is imperative that transformation of government service delivery adequately meets the diverse user needs of this cohort, including language literacy, digital literacy and digital access. The digital transformation should be informed by both quantitative and qualitative evidence of CALD customers' engagement with e-Government service delivery.

7 – Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion Policy

FECCA calls for all parties to commit to a National Community Relations Strategy with funding earmarked for national and community-based projects which further promote social cohesion in Australia through innovation, education and intercultural cooperation.

Australian population data demonstrates the multicultural reality of Australia today which is an asset of which all Australians should be proud. There is a need for a coordinated national strategy that will ensure equitable outcomes for all Australians, regardless of their cultural, ethnic or religious background, so that they can contribute to Australian society and, in turn, benefit from being part of a fair, diverse and harmonious community.

An integrated approach is required to combat the stereotypes and prejudice which underpin racism in our community and in our institutions; to facilitate constructive dialogue and cross cultural understanding; and to harness the goodwill and participation of all Australians in building a national movement for positive change.

Ethno-specific, multicultural, faith and settlement sector organisations should be critical stakeholders in any such strategy design and implementation as they play an important role in integrating new arrivals into their local communities and more broadly, Australian society, through cultural, social and educational activities.