

# FECCA voices serious concerns about new English language requirements for partner visas

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) has called for the Federal Government to reconsider its decision to introduce new English language requirements for partner visas, describing the move as discriminatory.

The new policy unveiled in Tuesday's Budget will require an applicant and their sponsor to have functional-level English skills.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the English language policy requirement was aimed at promoting the social and economic inclusion of partners of permanent resident sponsors, but for many it will create further hardships.

"Significant barriers already exist for couples applying for partner visas in Australia," FECCA CEO Mohammad Al-Khafaji said.

"Massive fees can be in excess of \$7000 and much more if they go through a migration agent or lawyer, which many do in order to navigate the complex system. This is in addition to unreasonably long wait times of usually more than two years."

The government has claimed that women in particular will be spared from domestic violence and other vulnerabilities with English language skills, which reinforces false stereotypes and seeks to punish potential victims of crimes rather than addressing some uncomfortable nationwide, systemic issues.

"The implication that there are especially high levels of exploitation and family violence among migrants is untrue and unhelpful. If the government was truly concerned about this issue they would not be making life even harder for potential victims, but ensuring better access to services and support for migrants in Australia," Al-Khafaji said.

"The government is trying to frame this move as something that will help and protect partners, but if they had consulted with multicultural Australia they would have been advised that it will achieve the opposite."

Putting additional hurdles in the way of people seeking partner visas, and especially those targeted at people who do not come from an English-speaking background, will merely increase the feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement that many migrants can experience. It will also increase the emotional and financial hardship of families that already face extended separation or uncertainty.

"This sends a message that doesn't fit with our proud record as a nation that celebrates and encourages multiculturalism and diversity," Al-Khafaji said.

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