

3 December 2015

Department of Immigration and Border Protection  
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## 2016-17 Migration Programme

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

### Introduction

According to research commissioned by the Migration Council of Australia, migration makes a significant economic contribution to Australia. By 2050, migration will be contribution \$1.6 trillion to Australia's GDP, adding 5.9 per cent in GDP per capita growth.<sup>1</sup>

Qualitative benefits including the skills, knowledge and experience that migrants can bring to Australia should be considered in addition to quantitative factors when assessing Australia's migration programme. Diversity has helped to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society.

FECCA notes that adequately resourced, responsive and effectively targeted services and programs are required to address the specific needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, create employment opportunities for migrants and foster social inclusion.

### Australia's ageing population

The number of Australians aged 65 years and over is projected to more than double by 2054-55, with 1 in 1,000 people projected to be aged over 100. In 1975, this was 1 in 10,000. Further, the number of people aged 15 to 64 for every person aged 65 and over has

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<sup>1</sup> Migration Council of Australia, 'Economic Impact of Migration' (2015)

fallen from 7.3 people in 1975 to an estimated 4.5 people today. By 2054-55, this is projected to nearly halve again to 2.7 people.<sup>2</sup>

The 2015 Intergenerational Report 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 are of working age and raises aggregate workforce participation.<sup>3</sup> Immigration policy has the potential to counteract the negative social and economic effects of Australia's ageing population.

## **Family migration**

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 of Australians to live with their family members. Restricting the number of people who can access family reunion has already led to people finding other means to come to Australia to be with family, including utilising generous visitor visa provisions for Parent visa applicants.<sup>4</sup> 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.

### ***Partner visas***

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.

Family stream partner migrants are younger on average (more likely in their 20s and 30s) than Skilled or Humanitarian stream partners.<sup>5</sup> Most partners in the Family stream speak English well.<sup>6</sup> Before arrival in Australia, Family stream partners were more likely to have completed a qualification than Australian-born residents of the same age.<sup>7</sup> While family migrants are not assessed on their skills for migration, 60-70 per cent of Family stream partner migrants have post-school qualifications.<sup>8</sup>

There is no statistical difference between Family and Skilled category partners in terms of employment participation.<sup>9</sup> Partner migrants make a significant contribution to Australia's economy through participation in the labour force; 85 per cent of male partner migrants and 60 per cent of female partners in the Family and Skilled streams were employed during the first five years of settlement.<sup>10</sup> More than half of male primary migrants and about one-third of all female primary migrants in the Family visa category who were employed in 2006 were in skilled occupations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, '2015 Intergenerational Report: Australia in 2055' (March 2015), 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>4</sup> DIBP, 'Planning the 2016-17 Migration Programme: Discussion Paper' (November 2015), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Siew-Ean Khoo, Peter McDonald and Barbara Edgar, 'Contribution of Family Migration to Australia: Report to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship' (April 2013), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 36.

Family migrants also contribute to the Australian community through their participation in various social and community groups and activities.<sup>12</sup>

Given the similarities of Family stream partner migrants and Skilled stream partners, 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 target.

### ***Non-contributory parent visas and other family visas***

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection advises that there is approximately a 30 year wait before visa grant consideration for Parent (non-contributory) visa applications.<sup>13</sup> There is a delay of up to 50 years for people applying for remaining relative and aged dependent relative visa applications.<sup>14</sup>

The associated costs with the Contributory Parent visas are significantly higher than the ones for Non-Contributory visas as they are required to pay higher visa application charges and to make a substantially higher contribution to their health and welfare costs. Disadvantaged families, families with relatives overseas who are solely dependent on their support and people with disabilities or other medical conditions who want to bring over their carer find it almost impossible to sponsor their relatives or carers to come to Australia.

Family relations and responsibilities towards relatives in need in culturally and linguistically (CALD) communities are very often significantly different from what is considered most common in Australia. Many CALD Australians come from collectivistic societies whereby cultural, religious, historical or traditional beliefs and practices require family members to provide social support not only to their close family members but also to their extended family. Not being able to fulfil their family responsibilities towards a dependent relative can impact on the general wellbeing of CALD families and can negatively affect social cohesion.

### **Conclusion**

The Migration Programme must achieve the balance between skilled and family migration. Increases in the proportion of skilled migration will put pressure on the family stream, as has been seen over the last 10 to 15 years.

The social and particularly economic contribution of Family stream migration should not be under-estimated. FECCA is concerned that overlooking of the benefits of Family migration may lead to the system being heavily skewed to skilled migration.

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.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 6, 61-64.

<sup>13</sup> DIBP, 'Parent Visa Queue', <https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Brin/Fami/Capping-and-queuing/Parent-visa-queue> (accessed 18 November 2015).

<sup>14</sup> DIBP, 'Other Family Visa Queue' <https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Brin/Fami/Capping-and-queuing/Other-family-visa-queue> (accessed 18 November 2015).