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Review of Humanitarian Outcomes
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Email: humanitarianoutcomes@pmc.gov.au

FECCA submission regarding the review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants

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 strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism 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.

FECCA would welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission as required. For enquiries please contact FECCA Acting CEO Mohammad Al-Khafaji at mohammad@fecca.org.au or on (02) 6282 5755.

Recommendations

- Establish a two-way communication process where support is provided to New and Emerging Communities (NECs) and where government learn from NECs—needs, strengths, knowledge and skills. Ensure this communication is ongoing and genuine not just mobilised in relation to crises or to achieve policy outcomes.
- Increase opportunities for targeted financial support for NECs. Provide funding opportunities not just for projects or programs but also for organisations to improve infrastructure, processes and capacity building.
- Increasing cultural competency in employment service providers and employers about the diversity of background, skills, ability and knowledge of the Australian job market is essential to ensuring a positive employment outcome for all refugee and humanitarian individuals and communities.
- Ensure humanitarian entrants are assisted with skill and qualification recognition and are assisted to search for relevant and appropriate employment opportunities.
- Support English language acquisition that focuses on incentives and realistic goals. This should be based on creating opportunities for people to acquire English, recognising that for some this process will be difficult based on a range of factors including prior education, native language levels, women with children and older people.

- Support non-traditional methods of English Language acquisition, which have been more successful than classroom setting for some refugee groups.
- Reduce the barriers to employment of migrants by supporting employers with the skills needed to manage diverse workplaces including; cultural competence training; support to increase understanding of and confidence in overseas qualifications and English language assessments
- Improve the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate information regarding Australian legislation and worker rights to migrant employers and humanitarian entrants
- Increased support for refugees and humanitarian entrants to establish their own business or operate as sole traders
- The Government must challenge the perception, and reality, of racism and reality of an increase in anti-migrant sentiment by taking a leadership role in setting a positive tone and narrative around migrants and refugees, and refrain from politicising those issues.
- Support local community organisations to deliver tailor made services for new arrivals. Funding needs to increase for induction programs to ensure adequate and appropriate service is delivered (eg. Better funding for community legal education programs).
- Invest in receiving communities and encourage local communities to volunteer and assist with settlement of families, and building a wider sense of welcome for new arrivals.
- Support local sporting clubs and organisation and use sport as a vehicle for social cohesion to integrate new refugee communities.
- Encourage mainstream services, sporting clubs, celebrities, leaders and public facing events to partner with refugee organisations to celebrate and normalise the welcoming nature of our community.
- Support public campaigns that encourages people to build welcoming communities

Discussion

Employment Outcomes in Refugee and Humanitarian Cohorts

One of the most effective ways of ensuring refugee and humanitarian cohorts are empowered and included in the community is through meaningful, legal and sustainable employment. Beyond the obvious financial benefits, employment is linked to improved social cohesion, integration and sense of belonging, self-confidence, independence, English language skills, and the physical and mental health of individuals and families. These positive outcomes support the participation and inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities from the immediate settlement period and throughout their life in Australia¹.

The 2016 census data shows 31 per cent of recent migrants who have had a job in Australia reported experiencing some difficulty finding their first job. The most common perceived difficulties in finding work were:

- a lack of Australian work experience or references (65 per cent)
- a lack of local contacts or networks (31 per cent)
- language difficulties (25 per cent)²

These findings were echoed in a recent consultation with the Bhutanese community in Cairns and another with the Iraqi, Afghan, Congolese and Sudanese communities in Shepparton, Victoria³.

¹ FECCA 2011, Settlement is a Life-Long Process, FECCA, Canberra

² <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6250.0>

³ FECCA 2015, Rural and Regional Report

Assumption of Homogeneity of Ability

A case study of Iraqi, Afghan, Congolese and Sudanese communities in Shepparton, Victoria⁴ revealed a tendency for employment services and employers to make assumptions based on the persons background rather than their individual circumstances resulting in both the over and under-estimation of the ability to find a job.

This under-estimation of potential was noted by members of the Congolese and Sudanese communities where service providers and employers made assumptions and carried unconscious bias towards jobseekers from African backgrounds. They noted that because of their portrayal in the media, African jobseekers were perceived as less likely to be able to meet the roles and responsibilities of a job and were facing misconceptions about their previous work experiences and life circumstances. As an instance, a Congolese male highlighted:

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 man)

The Iraqi community members participating in the consultation noted that the majority of Iraqis in Shepparton came as educated migrants or refugees, some of them having high school diplomas and degrees. The majority of them came from urban settings where they were working as carpenters, plasters, plumbers, or other trades or skills areas which could become a great asset for the Australian job market. However, the local labour market does not benefit from the expertise of these communities while qualified members of the community continue to face barriers in accessing employment that corresponds to their skills.

Assumptions also lead to the over-estimation of some new community member in their capability to read written information, such as job adverts, and understanding the requirements. This was noted as was a significant challenge and considerably decreased the chances of jobseekers to achieve a positive employment outcome. Community members cited instances where jobseekers with poor English skills and illiterate in their own language were simply directed to a web search engine or newspaper to look for employment opportunities.

When you go to the reception I talk my language because I don't 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 man)

Increasing cultural competency in employment service providers and employer about the variation of background, skills, ability and knowledge of the Australian job market is essential to assuring a positive employment outcome for all refugee and humanitarian cohorts. This includes insuring humanitarian entrants are assisted with skill recognition and in searching and apply for employment opportunities. This sentiment was echoed in a recent consultation with the Bhutanese community in Cairns.

⁴ Ibid

Insecure employment

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) states ‘around 40 per cent of workers are engaged in insecure work arrangements such as casual work, fixed term work, contracting or labour hire.’⁵ Many people from a CALD background are employed in insecure work, which is often low paid, unsustainable, dangerous and isolating. The balance of power between an employee and employer where that employee has struggled to find employment is one reason people from CALD backgrounds are disproportionately victims of exploitation.

Insecure work affects:

- financial security due to low wages, fluctuating hours and limited paid leave entitlements
- occupational health and safety of workers due to limited knowledge and access to information
- wellbeing and health outside the workplace, including impact on family due to demanding work hours, stress, physical injury and financial insecurity
- training and skills development leading to career stagnation, skills reduction and inability to enter more sustainable and appropriate work opportunities
- career progression and opportunities due to workers being considered expendable with little recognition of the skills utilised in such employment
- social inclusion due to isolation, racism, bullying, instability and low pay that do not create feelings of belonging nor do they foster trust and feelings of security
- ability to influence workplace standards or report illegal practices due to fear

Working together to encourage integration of refugees and humanitarian entrants in the wider community

Community

A survey administered by Dr Graeme Hugo revealed that ‘community’ was very important to newly arrived migrants as a resource, a majority of settled immigrants had a strong network of friends within their ethnic community and 90 per cent of migrants provided at least one form of assistance to newly arrived migrants⁶. However in one example, community groups and initiatives aimed at supporting migrants in Murray Bridge were discontinued due to insufficient or unreliable funding⁷.

Some other challenges faced by these groups in supporting new arrivals include⁸:

- lack of accessibility of funding opportunities
- limited availability of information
- language barriers
- difficulty understanding eligibility criteria and addressing selection criteria
- availability of resources
- competing against established organisations
- lack of compatibility between funding priorities and community needs

Migrants better integrate into a society that is welcoming and free from discrimination. Consulting with local communities to undertake locally-led needs assessments and identify workforce requirements could be used to ensure communities understand and support

⁵ https://www.australianunions.org.au/about_actu

⁶ G Hugo, ‘Economic, social and civil contributions of first and second generation humanitarian entrants’, Department of Immigration and Citizenship (May, 2011)

⁷ <https://welcomingcities.org.au/murray-bridge/>

⁸ <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Improving-access-to-funding-for-NECcommunities.Pdf>

migration. Two community focused case studies from regional Victoria (Small Town Big Returns 2015⁹ and FECCA's case study on Shepparton¹⁰) reveal that the community factors to settlement success are; information targeted at typically isolated groups (women and the elderly), strong leadership, support from the community, adequate support infrastructure and English language services. Strong local leadership was important to community attitudes and social cohesion in Murray Bridge where the council declared the city as 'Refugee Friendly' and adopted the inclusive term 'new neighbours' in favour of refugee or migrant resulting in all migrants reporting a welcoming and accepting community attitude¹¹.

Discrimination

FECCA's own consultations have highlighted that Australia's current political and immigration environment is perceived by some new migrants and hostile and unwelcoming. The Scanlon Foundation found that the reported experience of discrimination on the basis of 'skin colour, ethnic origin or religion' has significantly increased from 15 percent in 2015 to 20 percent in 2017¹². To encourage integration of refugees and humanitarian entrants in the wider community the Government must challenge the perception, and reality, of racism and reality of an increase in anti-migrant sentiment.

Considerations for Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes in Regional Australia

The settlement of new arrivals in rural or regional location can raise certain challenges. FECCA has recognised that some of these challenges, including limited availability or lower quality of services, poorer infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, and social and cultural isolation, are faced by all people living in rural and regional locations in Australia, but for new and emerging communities, these issues can be exacerbated due to specific circumstances. Some of these factors include low English proficiency, limited access to cultural and religious institutions, experience of torture or trauma, racism, labelling and stereotyping. All of these factors have a great impact of effective settlement and social cohesion. Adverse reactions towards immigrants or humanitarian entrants settling in rural and regional areas can create tensions amongst community members and destabilise community harmony. The negative effects can be seen not only on the levels of social cohesion in a location, but they can also adversely impact productivity and economic development¹³.

Transport

In regional and rural South Australia public transport within and between towns are limited and costly. Decreased access to public transport in regional areas increase the dependence on private vehicles to participate in employment, health care, community and social opportunities which all increase social cohesion. Access to targeted CALD driver programs are essential for migrants to understanding: road rules, insurance, buying a car, and dealing with police. Culturally and linguistically sensitive driver program should be accessible for all migrants and include information about driving in Australia and driver practice.

⁹ Small towns, Big returns, March 2015

¹⁰ <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FECCA-Rural-and-Regional-report-June-2015-00000002.pdf>

¹¹ <https://welcomingcities.org.au/murray-bridge/>

¹² Scanlon Foundation, Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2017 (2017)

¹³ FECCA 2015, Rural and Regional Report

Entrepreneurship

Barriers to employment in the Australian workforce lead many CALD Australians, including recent migrants and refugees, to establish their own business or operate as sole traders. For example, research has demonstrated that, on average, individuals who come to Australia as refugees ‘have lower rates of workforce participation, higher rates of unemployment and lower average earning than other migrants in Australia’ and are also ‘more vulnerable to long-term unemployment’¹⁴. This is believed to be one of the reasons that Australians of refugee background ‘have the highest rates of entrepreneurship of all categories of entry of immigrants’ yet ‘face the greatest barriers to entrepreneurship’¹⁵. In a recent consultation with the in Cairns, the Bhutanese community recognised that a focus on providing practical support for humanitarian entrants in entrepreneurship and start up opportunities such as by providing office space to incubate new ideas especially for younger people.

Relevant Case Studies/Resources

FECCA Rural and Regional report June 2015 ¹⁶	A case study of the Iraqi, Afghan, Congolese and Sudanese communities in Shepparton, Victoria
FECCA Future of Work and Workers ¹⁷	Submission to the Inquiry on the Future of Work and Workers
Welcoming Cities network ¹⁸	FECCA supports the Welcoming Cities network in setting the National Standard for cultural diversity and inclusion policy and practice
Murray Bridge: A blueprint for good migrant settlement ¹⁹	This report presents the findings of this research, which are then applied to a blueprint for migrant settlement that can be used by other regional communities
Power intercultural program ²⁰	Sporting programs identified by communities as welcoming refugee young people
Small Towns, Big Returns ²¹	Economic and social impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill
Regional Futures ²²	Focuses on resettlement of Karen refugees in Bendigo

¹⁴ Kooy, John van 2016, Refugee women as entrepreneurs in Australia, Forced Migration Review issue 53

¹⁵ Collins, Jock 2016, Refugee Entrepreneurship in Australia: One Strategy to overcome refugees blocked labour market mobility paper to Brotherhood of St Laurence Research forum: From Surviving to Thriving: Inclusive work and economic security for refugees and people seeking asylum

¹⁶ <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FECCA-Rural-and-Regional-report-June-2015-00000002.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/FECCA-future-of-work-and-workers-submission.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://welcomingcities.org.au/>

¹⁹ <https://welcomingcities.org.au/murray-bridge/>

²⁰ <http://www.portadelaidefc.com.au/community/power-community-ltd/programs/intercultural>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFZBMxLhLdE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VUtUbH7298>

²¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/economic-social-impact-karen-resettlement.html>

²² Ibid