



Consultation Report July-December 2019

Between July and December 2019 FECCA staff met with various multicultural and ethno-specific organisations as well as individuals from target communities. The consultations were conducted in Sydney, Western Sydney, Newcastle and Darwin and feedback has since been incorporated into FECCA submissions, policy and advocacy work.

FECCA would like to thank members the Multicultural Council of Northern Territory and Hunter Multicultural Communities Inc. for their assistance in organising comprehensive consultations. FECCA would also like to thank the Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency and the Australian Cook Island Community Council (NSW) for their assistance and openness to hosting FECCA and raising their challenges and hopes for the future.

FECCA met with the listed communities in the following locations:

Newcastle – Group consultation	Tonga, Eritrea, Poland, China and the Philippines
Sydney	Cook Island community
	South Sudanese
	Afghanistan (Hazara)
Western Sydney (Mt Druitt) – Group consultation	Iraqi, Nepal, Bangladesh and Egypt
Darwin	Myanmar (Rohingya)
	Syria
	Afghanistan
	Pakistan
	Iraq
	Sudan
	Burma/Myanmar
	Congo
	Philippines
	Fiji (Indian Fijian)
	Nepal
	Tonga
	Bangladesh

Each individual or organisation informed FECCA of different priorities and challenges faced by their community or individually. These issues ranged from English learning to employment. Whilst many issues were heard, the greatest importance was placed by all on the inequality caused by the Australian visa system and pathway to permanency.

Visa Permanency and Citizenship

FECCA heard from New Zealand citizens who find it extremely challenging if not impossible to become Australian citizens despite living in Australia, contributing to the wider community and paying taxes in Australia for many years since the policy change in 2001¹. FECCA also heard from people using their entire life savings and arriving on regional location specific skilled visas only to realise despite their skill being on the list of skills needed, there were no jobs for them. From those same people FECCA heard of the impact of increased processing

¹ Prior to 2001, New Zealand (NZ) citizens in Australia could access social security and obtain Australian citizenship without first becoming permanent residents. In February 2001, Australia entered into an arrangement with NZ and amended citizenship laws for NZ citizens. Under these changes, all NZ citizens who arrived in Australia after 26 February 2001 and who want to access certain social security payments, obtain citizenship or sponsor family members for permanent residence may only do so after applying for, and being granted, permanent residence through the migration program.



times for Permanent Residency effectively doubling the period people must remain temporary migrants—something they were not warned about. FECCA heard from people navigating the process to become a citizen for so long their children were now adults wanting to go to university—now grossly unaffordable due to being charged international student fees and without access to HECS-HELP. FECCA heard of how the wait for citizenship impacts on individuals, their wellbeing and their hope for the future. On citizenship, FECCA heard how the Australian system is inflexible and therefore often incompatible with the identification information available to many people arriving as humanitarian entrants. FECCA heard that while people are waiting for citizenship, they worry and feel insecure. Many are stateless and not recognised as nationals of their own country, adding to their stress and insecurities. FECCA heard that despite having money and annual leave, without a passport people cannot leave Australia to see their families. Their parents are dying, and they cannot go to them. FECCA heard that ‘if you don’t have family you become lifeless’. Other challenges associated with no access to Australian citizenship included excluding people from joining the Australian military, from government jobs and from playing sport at a state level. FECCA heard that laws changing regarding visa cancellation have affected many people with New Zealand citizenship who have been living in Australia their whole lives but have not yet become citizens due to multiple barriers. If these same people commit a crime, their punishment becomes deportation to a country they have never known and have no family in or other connections to.

[Why people want to be in Australia](#)

FECCA learned that people want to be Australian and are proud to be Australian. Australia provides many opportunities for some. In Mt. Druitt, FECCA heard that ‘Australia is a dream country’.

On living in Australia, a person from Iraq now living in Mt. Druitt said ‘Family is the highest thing for human beings. In this case, they have their future. It’s more safe here for their kids. They feel free here. Their kids are safe.’

FECCA heard from all consultations in Northern Territory that Darwin is very welcoming and heard many stories about random acts of kindness. When a Congolese man first arrived in Darwin as a refugee, he was not sure how he would be received but was welcomed by people saying 'how are you? Welcome and you have good babies, they can come and play with my babies'. When he first arrived, he didn't have a car so got around by foot. A car stopped near him and the person asked where he was going and took him to his destination. He had also received assistance from people in the community he had never met before when his car broke down. His neighbours helped him to find employment by creating links with employers. When asked about leaving Darwin he said 'other people are moving and going there but they don't have jobs. It's better for me to stay here where I feel like I am home'.

A couple from Iraq reported that not long after arrival in Darwin they were accidentally stuck in the rain and someone they had not met before stopped to pick them up and take them to their hotel. They were very impressed by this kindness and felt welcome.

Employment

FECCA heard that employment is difficult to find in Newcastle, Mt. Druitt and Darwin. Broadly, FECCA heard that 'everybody wants to do something', just needing barriers to be removed to achieve their goals and aspirations. FECCA heard from a volunteer in Mt. Druitt with 35 years of experience in his field and still can't get a job saying 'people don't want to rely on Centrelink'.

Skills recognition continues to be a problem. FECCA heard that unlike many other countries, Australia has a strong focus on pieces of paper equaling experience. For example, FECCA met a woman who worked in a bank in her home country but in Australia she needs to complete a course to do the same job.

Many people explained to FECCA that experience from overseas does not help them get a job in Australia: 'how can I get local experience if you don't give me a job?'. FECCA heard that lack of social networks and local references created barriers to finding a job.

FECCA heard that Jobactive providers are not helping at all-: 'They don't do anything to help and they don't provide interpreters'. In Darwin FECCA heard that a person's neighbor was



more reliable at helping them find employment than Jobactive providers. FECCA also heard that 'job providers do not understand about refugees and migrants' backgrounds and continue to put everything into just one box'.

Lack of computer literacy was cited by some women from Bangladesh and Nepal as a challenge to finding a job or accessing general information.

A man from Bangladesh told FECCA about his struggle to attain leadership opportunities within his organization saying 'every day it's like a hurdle race. One hurdle after another one. We think this will be the last one but it's not the last one'. He feels that he is not being selected as a manager, despite his experience, because he is not considered 'Australian' and because he comes from Bangladesh, and senior management do not believe he can do the job. In discussing these decisions, he said 'Fair go. I don't see a fair go for everyone expect for their mates'.

FECCA met with an informal interpreter helping the Burmese community in Darwin. She believed that the Government should focus on skills when addressing unemployment. She reported that her community are skillful in gardening, cooking and carpentry and that being active in these skills makes them happy and physically active.

Identified by some community members were the expectations of how a resume should look in Australia and how this differs widely from expectations elsewhere in the world. A person from Pakistan told FECCA that once they understood and changed their resume to the 'Australian way' they more easily found a job. They also suggested that everyone should receive this information on arrival.

Housing

FECCA heard that for new arrivals getting their first rental was quite difficult without an Australian reference or an understanding about what documentation would need to be provided (i.e. bank statement etc.).

FECCA heard that housing in Darwin is easy to find now as the population has greatly reduced, but the cost of living is high.

English

FECCA met with a Karen community in Darwin. They reported through an English speaking representative: 'it's very difficult for us. Karen people have been displaced for many years. In our own language we are illiterate. The education system here, AMEP and CDU, they don't cater for us. We don't fit into other categories of refugees who came here with degrees. We come here with nothing. We are still struggling since arrival because we don't fit into the 5 years (settlement period) with everyone else. That's why we are behind'.

FECCA heard in Mt. Druitt that people were happy to be learning English and recognised it as important to their lives in Australia.

Racism

FECCA heard that some people are very racist in the Newcastle region. People find themselves thinking 'is it racism or lack of cultural knowledge' and wished for a program to explain cultural diversity.

In Mt. Druitt, parents faced the difficulty of explaining to their kids why many people are not welcoming to migrants.

From a Hazara woman in Sydney, FECCA learnt that racism often occurs. She explained that 'people think because no English we are stupid'. She spoke of a friend who was verbally attacked on a bus for speaking Persian and told to 'go away, get out of this country'. She spoke of others in her community who have had negative interactions with police and told to 'go home' by others. She did not understand this attitude saying, 'we're all human'.

FECCA heard from all consultations in the Northern Territory that Darwin is very welcoming and diverse and heard many stories about random acts of kindness. From a young woman identifying as Fijian-Indian and Aboriginal in Darwin, FECCA heard that racism occurs during confrontations, when stress is high but reported that 'if you've got enough minority groups, you can feel confident to stand up for yourself or someone else'.



Youth

From a young woman identifying as Fijian-Indian and Aboriginal in Darwin FECCA heard that 'when you've got a migrant parent you've got three cultures with expectation in home and different expectations out of home. Confrontations and stress come out of this'. She explained that her and many of her friends have become part of youth groups to make decisions, start projects and run events.

In Darwin, a young person from Nepal explained the pressure on success after coming to Australia as an international student saying: 'it would be a terrible situation for him (the student). They have put all their bank balance, property, their parents earning for all of life to pay for the university fees. It's the son's responsibility to earn the money and pay it back. It's a big pressure for middle class.'

Access to Government Information

Access to Government information was highlighted as a challenge for many communities referring to information about health, Centrelink, services for older people and those with a disability. General confusion about eligibility to government services was heard throughout consultations.

Translator Availability

FECCA heard about a lack of interpreters available to people from the Cook Islands, a lack of interpreters in Centrelink in Mt Druitt, and no available translations in hospitals for people from Bangladesh.

FECCA met with an informal interpreter helping the Burmese community in Darwin. She spoke of needs such as learning how to make a doctor's appointment. She also spoke of her own struggles as she is supporting her whole community, but no one is there to support her.

Challenges in Applying for Grants

FECCA heard that completing grant applications takes too long for ethno-specific communities. People in Hunter and Darwin mentioned that grant workshops would be very helpful for their communities. From the Nepalese community in Darwin, FECCA heard that they lacked time to prepare grant applications.

Darwin

FECCA heard that due to lack of jobs many people are leaving Darwin even though they did not want to. This mass exodus has made Darwin a less desirable place to live, even with a job, because social connections and community are being lost. Many individuals consulted enjoyed living in Darwin especially as the weather was similar to the home country of many. A big challenge for many of the individuals consulted was the low numbers of people from their country or language group living in Darwin resulting in a lack of community. Darwin was described by those consulted as a multicultural city with a positive mix of people that is unfortunately experiencing an economic downturn. As reported by many of the individuals, another challenge unique to Darwin is lack of fresh food.

Transport

FECCA heard of challenges regarding transport in Newcastle and the region. In Mt. Druitt FECCA heard that free driving lessons would help people, especially women, get around more easily.