



Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Submission to the Migration Amendment (Australia's Engagement in the Pacific and Other Measures) Bill 2023

11 April 2023



In development of this submission, we pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and recognise that the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA proudly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice protected by the Constitution.

FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by First Nations peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support First Nations peoples in the journey to a more inclusive society.

Forward

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) welcomes the introduction of the Migration Amendment (Australia's Engagement in the Pacific and Other Measures) Bill 2023 and believe the introduction of permanent pathways to citizenship is integral to an inclusive, productive and vibrant nation.

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

Who we are

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing people from multicultural communities and their organisations across Australia. Through the membership of state, territory, and regional councils, we represent over 1,500 community organisations and their members.

What we do

For over 40 years, FECCA has proudly worked alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the broader Australian society and the Commonwealth government to build a successful, productive and inclusive multicultural Australia where everyone, no matter their background or how long they have lived in this country, can belong equally and reach their full potential.

FECCA draws on the lived experiences of the people and their descendants that have migrated to Australia and the expertise of its extensive and diverse membership to develop and promote inclusive, innovative and responsible public policy that reflects the needs and perspectives of multicultural Australia to build a strong, innovative and inclusive nation that harnesses its greatest strength, the diversity of its people.

The FECCA network is FECCA's greatest strength. Through our network we can enhance the capacity of governments to strengthen public policy to meet the needs of the diverse Australian population. FECCA is a proven trusted partner to both communities and government, operating as a sophisticated conduit by mobilising communities to work with government to develop and enrich public policy through community- led expertise and action.



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A Strong Migration System for Australia's Future

As a country built on migration, Australia should strive to be the best. A strong and effective migration system will help build a nation where the benefits of diverse cultures, languages, life experiences, skills, and strengths are fully unlocked. This will provide long-term social and economic value for both migrants and the nation. It will also help ensure a fair and inclusive society where everyone can belong, and no one is left behind. Studies show that inclusive and welcoming immigration and integration policies attract migrants.ⁱ Better access to the labour market, permanent residency and citizenship is shown to increase the perceived attractiveness of a country as a migrant destination.ⁱⁱ

Opportunity for change

FECCA welcomes the long-anticipated visa scheme targeted for the Pacific Islands and supports the Government's decision to provide greater security to the Pacific community beyond the traditional arrangement. This is a positive step in the right direction as for too long, the Pacific cohort has been left vulnerable to temporary labour arrangements programs that do not provide a pathway to permanent residency. The proposed Pacific engagement visa represents a departure from using the cohort solely to address labour shortages and instead creates opportunities for unrestricted access to permanent pathways for Pacific communities.

The number of temporary entrants in Australia increased from 1.605 million in December 2011 to 2.433 million in December 2019 (increase of over 0.8 million) and was at 2 million in August 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ As of August 2022, there were approximately 351,000 people holding bridging visas, up from 110,900 in December 2019. Our member organisations consistently express concerns about the rising number of temporary visa holders and their precarious status, which cause migrants to be vulnerable to economic and other forms of exploitation. This is particularly evident in the case of temporary employer-sponsored visas, where a power imbalance exists as the employer is responsible for both the financial security and the right to reside in Australia of the visa holder.

Recommendations

FECCA recommends the following principles to underpin the Pacific engagement visa:

Fair and affordable

A fair migration system prioritises permanency, consistency, and the ideological inclusion of all who arrive. People arriving to live in Australia, regardless of country of origin, entry visa, disability and wealth can access a simple migration program featuring consistent eligibility requirements, fees consistent with international standards and without fee for fast-track, and a transparent, inclusive, impartial, and timely pathway to citizenship for those who wish to become Australian.

Timely

In a timely migration system, people know how long their application will take to be processed because maximum timeframes are established, processing is efficient, bridging visas are not overused when timing blows out, and citizenship is achievable.

Transparent and accountable

A transparent and accountable migration system includes clear processing timeframes, accessible reporting on the numbers and status of lodged applications, and accessible review of decisions. A migration system's accountability is strengthened when robust feedback loops exist, and the program is evaluated by those who are affected by it.

Simple

A simple migration system features consistency across visa types, coordinated skill recognition, reduced visa types, greater skill match with available jobs and clear information and guidance on eligibility and process. Application processes and administration must be simple and easy to navigate.

Informed

An informed migration system is built-for-purpose through engagement with migrants and multicultural communities from the beginning. It includes frequent and accessible opportunities for migrants to provide input and feedback on their migration experience.

Safe and supportive

A safe and supportive migration system features policies and programs which strengthen multiculturalism and support migrants to access essential information and services, connect with Australian society and reach their full potential. A safe and supportive system prevents the creation of vulnerability and exploitation and has accessible mechanisms in place to support those experiencing harm and distress.

Specific recommendations

Visa costs and transparency

Australia's family visas are among some of the most expensive in the world.^{iv} The current cost of partner visas (\$8000) is well above the cost in the United States (\$2100), New Zealand (\$2000) and the United Kingdom (\$2700). For parent visas, costs vary between approximately \$6500 and \$48000 depending on visa type and carer visas costs almost \$4000. The 2016 Productivity Commission public inquiry on Migrant Intake into Australia reported that visa changes had increased in recent years and the revenue generated is now more than three times the costs of processing visa applications.^v

Considering that the scheme intends to include a range of skills and some applicants might be drawn from low incomes, high visa costs might serve as a barrier to inclusive participation.

- **Clear and comprehensive review of visa charges** - we support and reiterate the Productivity Commission's concerns about prohibitively high costs of visas and the barriers this causes to low income migrants and the reunion of families. FECCA strongly advocates for visa fees not to be used as a tool for raising revenue.
- **Full transparency of visa costs** – potential applicants need to be aware of the full costs associated with the program, including costs of partner and parent visas to assist them in making fully informed decisions.
- **Consider a visa-free model** – to enable visa access and equity barriers, a visa fee-free model should be considered, regardless of applicants skill level.
- **Evaluation and future expansion**
We recommend designing a comprehensive evaluation system into the design of the visa and once the visa has been implemented, conducting ongoing evaluations to determine the outcomes and efficiency of the visa program including access and equity issues such as visa cost and the ballot system. The evaluation will assist to determine consideration for future expansion and increasing intake.

ⁱ <https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/migration-strategic-foresight.pdf>

ⁱⁱ [Do potential migrants internalize migrant rights in OECD host societies? - Beine - 2020 - Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économie - Wiley Online Library](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Australia | MIPEX 2020](#)

^{iv} [Submission to the Inquiry into the efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions](#), FECCA (2021)

^v <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/migrant-intake/report/migrant-intake-report.pdf>