



Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland Response to Discussion Paper: Next Steps to improve Settlement and Integration of Refugees

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1



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Table of Contents

Organisational Overview 3

Recommendations..... 4

 1. Implementing a partnership approach with ethno-specific organisations 4

 2. Reframe the timeframe of settlement through a whole of community approach 5

 3. Create sustainable outcomes through investment in community 6

Social Inclusion 7

Co-design, co-deliver & co-evaluate..... 8

Outcomes vs. Outputs 10

Place-Based Coordination 11

Community support to enable integration outcomes..... 12

Individualisation of support with the family and community context 15

The Orientation Program..... 16

The AUSCO Program..... 18

Successful Employment Outcomes 19



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Organisational Overview

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) is the peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Queensland. We have a membership base of over 400 individuals, etho-specific organisations and multicultural owned businesses. We have been pioneering this work for over 45 years, since 1976.

Our work focuses on strengthening and advocating for the needs of CALD communities throughout Queensland. We do this by building their capacity through the delivery of leadership training, strengthening community associations as well as through the delivery of culturally tailored healthcare programs.

We believe that Australia's systems should allow for every Australian, irrespective of their background, to be able to participate and contribute in all aspects of Australian society. We know that the diversity of our multicultural society is one of Australia's greatest strengths.



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Recommendations

ECCQ held several open and individual consultations over the course of two weeks. The consultations were attended by individuals who identified as either or both a person with lived experience of settling in Australia and representing an ethno-specific organisation that provides community-based support to people settling in Australia.

This information was collated and explored in the following chapters. From the information three recommendations produced which aim to improve the settlement and integration of refugees;

1. Implementing partnership approach with ethno-specific organisations
2. Reframe the timeframe of settlement through a whole of community approach
3. Create sustainable outcomes through the investment in community

1. Implementing a partnership approach with ethno-specific organisations

A partnership approach is a partnership between settlement providers and ethno-specific organisations. The settlement provider holds an overarching contract and delivers on key outputs but subcontracts ethno-specific organisations for sustainable outcomes and a whole of community approach.

Settlement providers have an important place in this approach as they are secular, not culturally biased and they also have extensive resources and structure to be able to manage large contracts. These resources are essential to deliver outputs such as:

- local area coordination
- airport reception
- short-term accommodation
- coordination of BHG
- case management, including complex case management
- referral to mainstream and specialist support services
- connections to broader local community groups and activities
- assistance to find long-term accommodation
- help to learn English, gain employment and access education and training

The settlement provider, as the coordinator of numerous ethno-specific organisations would implement a community of practice style learning environment.

In this approach, ethno-specific organisations hold the key element which is missing in the current settlement approach. Ethno-specific organisations have lived experience of settlement married with a deep understanding of culture, specifically their culture within the Australian context. The subcontracting arrangement with ethno-specific organisations would be implemented on a case-by-case basis depending on the capacity and willingness to build capability of an organisation. In the partnership approach, the ethno-specific organisation role is to:

4



- mentor, matching to individual's preferences
- orientation to Australia, including values and laws
- targeted pre-arrival education
- develop relationship prior to arrival to enable smoother transitions
- social connection
- informal emotional and psychological support

The success of the model depends on flexibility in the program to meet the evolving needs of community. Such flexibility has been seen in recent times with the Afghan and Ukraine crisis where empowering community to support upon arrival has seen success in their settlement. As individuals and families settle the contract holders need flexibility to shift their KPI's to meet their needs. KPI's would be decided through ongoing co-designing and co-evaluating with community.

For successful settlement in regional areas, place-based providers would remain critical to provide local area coordination on key settlement needs. The larger ethno-specific organisations would be deployed to establish capability of their regional community members and provide ongoing coordination and mentoring at the ethnic community level to ensure sustainability for when settlement service eligibility expires. This model would work particularly well for regional settlement locations, but would require a longer lead in time to establish the community in place where an established ethno-specific community does not already exist.

2. Reframe the timeframe of settlement through a whole of community approach

The current time frame provided for an individual to be considered 'settled' is 5 years. Although there needs to be certain parameters placed on funding the 5-year time frame is arbitrary in the discussion of people. An individual's life is fraught with challenges, barriers and progress that is not linear and cannot be time-stamped. As such successful settlement is not linear not time reliant and one person or organisation cannot lead successful settlement. Success is achievable through collaboration and coordination of supports, provided on as needed basis.

The current model assumes that after 5 years in Australia the community is ready and able to support individuals at every next stage of their settlement. The model fails to adequately empower and train ethnic communities to do so. Including the whole of community in settlement and having an inclusive and supportive environment is key to progressing through the challenges and barriers to achieve success in settlement. This model enables bringing communities into the fold from the beginning of settlement, even before an individual arrives, with the collective agreement of life-long needs-based support.

While there are aspects of the current model which don't do the community development title, the model forces a focus on the visual aspects of development, festivals, celebrations and the like. What this model fails to do is empower the community to day-to-day support. It is success in day-to-day challenges which truly mark successful settlement.



The above model of empowering ethno-specific communities to be a key part of settlement is a whole of community approach. Having a community with the capacity and skills in settlement increases the capacity of Australia to welcome new Australians. This also takes into consideration the varying needs to community, be it their literacy, linguistic abilities or financial circumstances.

Take for example an individual who is illiterate and the proven inability to acquire English; this person may work full time in an accommodating environment but will continue to require support with completing forms and making appointments. Having an empowered community, without a timeframe of settlement will be able to provide this support and the individual will flourish in their community.

3. Create sustainable outcomes through investment in community

Empowering community and effective collaboration with and coordination by settlement providers needs a third element for success. The reason for a third party, without a stake in settlement services, was heard clearly throughout the consultation process.

An organisations livelihood relies on the continuation of the funding, that is just how the funding model works. As such there will always be a question of motive for those in the sector. Having a third party whose livelihood does not rely on settlement funding, but rather the progression of social cohesion to provide support and training to the ethno-specific partners would add an additional security layer to success.

A non-biased third party would work to assess, and capacity build ethno-specific organisations to ensure that they are able to deliver on the contract. The third-party organisation would provide competency-based training on governance, leadership, grant writing, planning and management, as an example. Their role would also be to conduct yearly planning for organisational health and continuous improvement. In the long term this would support subsequent generations to continue to build and grow the successful settlement of their community.



Social Inclusion

Attendees talked of identify through the migration experience and the differences between assimilation and integration. While assimilation is a term often used by media and society attendees noted that assimilation is talking away one's culture and wholly becoming the culture of the host country. As one community member stated, "I was told to assimilate but my culture does not match Australian culture. Because of this I will never wholly assimilate as an Australian, but I have integrated fully". This community member arrived in Australia as a teenage refugee. He has completed his schooling, attended university and now works full time. He is actively engaged in the Australian community and volunteers with an emerging human rights advocacy group.

Culture is intertwined with identity, by removing one's culture their identity and sense of self is diminished, this creates a community of people who are emotionally and psychosocially unwell. To have successful settlement outcomes, all cultures must be accepted and embraced. Migration needs to be seen as a strength of Australia society, not a burden or 'helping the less fortunate' as it is often perceived publicly.

Despite the definition of the word, inclusion is often delivered in such a way to make 'others' (migrants and refugees) fit into the host community, the Australian society. A useful analogy of this is the 'square peg in a round hole.' A new arrival with a culture and identify different to mainstream Australia is the square peg, while Australia is the round hole. The current model welcomes all 'square pegs' but the program attempts to force them to fit into the 'round holes'. This is a one size fits all approach and attempts to whittle down each peg to be round, removing the edges of culture and identity. A society which truly embraces multiculturalism would consist of holes of many shapes so any shaped peg could fit. An inclusive and flexible settlement program would work with the community and the new arrivals to ensure that there is a 'hole and peg' match for everyone.

Yearly celebrations and acknowledgements, such as harmony day and refugee week, while appreciated by culturally diverse communities, are often tokenistic. Public celebrations are a showcase of cultures without genuinely address day to day social cohesion and inclusion. As a community member stated, "on harmony day I am encouraged to wear my traditional dress. But I cannot wear it any other day of the year. I feel like there is only one day a year that society is allowing me to be me." Australia is a multicultural society, this is not disputable, but we are not an inclusive multicultural society. Until genuine inclusion is achieved there will continue to be an 'us and them' mentality. It is this mentality which inhibits progress to a stronger united country.



Co-design, co-deliver & co-evaluate

Codesign has become a buzzword in recent years and in doing so its essence behind its use has been lost. Codesign in its essence is involving service users in the development of the service to ensure that the service meets the needs of service users. This approach is not linear and therefore requires a flexible free-style approach, codesign cannot be achieved when the process of doing codesign is prescriptive and requires achievement of prescriptive outputs.

Throughout our consultations attendees expressed their disappointment with the approach that both service providers and government take with consultation, codesign and evaluation of settlement programs. This disappointment reigns from codesign and co-evaluation activities being 'tick-box' to satisfy achieving a providers contractual KPI. Activities such as community leader forums, which are held regularly, are said to be a mechanism of codesign and co-evaluation. While these activities are useful to engage with community, they are not effective for this purpose. For the codesign process to be genuine it must be used to inform program delivery. So, for the codesign process to be effective it needs to occur first and outcomes of the codesign used to develop the providers contractual KPI's.

When looking at consultations delivered by government there were two issues raised during our consultations; 1. The consultations are held with both community and service provider present and 2. The consultation process itself is not culturally responsive. When seeking honest and genuine feedback on settlement the provider of those programs cannot be present. The presence of a settlement provider instantly puts community members in a position of submission and disempowerment. As one attendee described it, "it is like a teacher asking the whole class who threw the paper aeroplane expecting an honest answer. Whoever 'dobs' on their peer will no doubt experience some retribution and the class cohesion will be compromised."

If looking broader at government consultation we can use this discussion paper response as an example of how government is not culturally responsive in their processes. Community leaders and ethno-specific organisations were not aware of the discussion paper until informed by ECCQ through an invitation to attend consultations. There were no active steps to engage people with lived experience and empower them to provide a response. It is the view of the attendees that without active steps to enable responses the government does not genuinely want to hear their viewpoints. In addition to this, the information available regarding responses reads as though all responses must be written, in English and submitted through email. Written responses are a specifically western approach and removes the possibility of any responses from people who do not fit this approach; people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who grew up in a society and system that is not western. The very goal of the discussion paper, to improve integration of refugees, is undermined because the process itself does not allow it.

Settlement providers employ people with lived experience to deliver the programs, these people are commonly employed for their linguistic ability and in support work roles. In addition, these staff are also used as cultural consultants to inform the delivery and evaluation of the programs. This process of using employees fails to



recognise the bias that an employee has towards their employer and how these bias transfers into their feedback and input into the service.

As will be discussed [further down in this response](#), there are significant challenges for people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to achieve stable and meaningful employment. These individuals also often have a history of intergenerational oppression and discrimination. When an individual secures employment, taking these experiences in consideration, they respect the company and hierarchy so significantly that they will not jeopardise this by providing negative or constructive feedback. Because of this any feedback or information given by the employee will be biased towards the organisation. Employing people with lived experience and placing the expectation on them be honest about program design and community sentiment is not only unrealistic but also not culturally responsive. Settlement providers, who should excel in culturally responsive practice, continually dismiss this fact, and utilise their own employees to codesign and evaluate settlement services.

By looking at this from the community's perspective, when a person from their community is employed by a settlement provider the employees' loyalty now sits with the employer, the settlement provider. Their motives are now questioned, and trust is either lost or unable to be established. The balance of power shifts to the employee as they have in-depth knowledge of the service system and hold all personal information of the individual using the service. This power imbalance can cause discord within the community and further impact on community cohesion and integration.



Outcomes vs. Outputs

Although current settlement programs allege themselves as being based on outcomes, in actuality the programs success is defined through the achievement of outputs. An outcome is defined as the way something turns out, the consequence of an action. Whereas an output is the quantification of something that can be produced. Program design that relies on outputs as a means for measuring success inadvertently takes away the possibility of achieving authentic outcomes.

An example of this discussed during consultation is that of new arrivals achieving housing sustainability. For a family or individual to have achieved the outcome of sustainable housing is measured through two outputs; 1. the settlement provider must show them two rental houses which suit their needs and 2. a 6-month lease agreement is signed. Employment outcomes was another example raised during consultations. Although the desired settlement outcome is that of an individual being employed and being able to participate economically in Australian society the measurement of this outcome is through an individual receiving payment for a minimum of two hours of work.

Once the outputs have been achieved has been achieved a settlement provider can state that the outcome has been achieved. The settlement provider can then be paid for their contribution to for enabling the achievement. After an outcome has been achieved the provider will have no further financial incentive or resources to provide further support in the achievement of the outcome. As an attendee said, the settlement provider can tick the box and then move onto the next box.

In both examples, sustainable housing and employment, the outputs do not take into consideration an individual's capacity or skill nor the varying local context from region to region. The prescribed output assumes a uniformity, that everyone engaged with the service will achieve a successful outcome through the delivery of the same activity. This could not be farther from the truth, as the word itself describes, individuals need an individual approach. The prescribed outputs only achieve short term band-aid outcomes to a more complex and challenging achievement.



Place-Based Coordination

The current design of settlement programs has seen the loss of place-based settlement coordination. As the funding model pays for outputs and importance of administration, the work to maintain a strong and well-coordinated service and social response within the community is often de-prioritised and impacts successful settlement.

Just as 'it takes a village to raise a child', it takes a whole community to achieve successful settlement. This also stands true for regional settlement locations, to successfully coordinate the service and social response in a regional location, this needs to be developed and maintained by local coordination, including the coordination and management of Local Area Coordination (LAC) meetings. The current model where LAC meetings are being conducted by the primary contract holder who is not based in the local community is ineffective.

Trust is essential for successful settlement, trust between the local community, the new arrivals, and services. Regional areas are close knit communities in which trust has been built of many generations. Those living locally are the ones who work in and deliver the local services. It is in these circumstances where trust can be build and the whole village works collaboratively to raise the child, or in terms of settlement the whole community achieves successful settlement.



Community support to enable integration outcomes

A strong theme throughout consultations was the want of community members to work alongside service providers and government to enable successful settlement outcomes for their community. Community understand the expertise of professionals and organisations but it is felt that their own expertise in lived experience of culture and migration is not appropriately utilised by said organisations.

It is a commonly used phrase that no one knows a person better than themselves. This phrase can also lend itself to the settlement sector; community members from the same cultural background with similar pre-migration experiences have in-depth understandings of new arrivals and how their settlement journey might proceed. Their expertise can include, but is not limited to;

- informal translation with cultural colloquialisms to deepen understanding
 - for example, when discussing mental health
- how one's culture might intersect with Australian culture and how to navigate this
 - for example, domestic violence
- experiences of torture and trauma and how they may manifest in the settlement journey
- personal experiences of navigating systems and transferring trust between the system and user
- literacy, numeracy, and linguistic abilities and how they may impact on settlement success
- familial pressures from overseas

Strengthening the relationship between community and services will deepen the understanding of culture, experiences, and abilities. This deeper understanding will reveal the potential barriers and challenges can be prevented through improved individualised supports in settlement. During a consultation, a community leader said "if the settlement provider knows that they have 10 Chin families arriving, tell us. We will work with them to plan their settlement."

Community leaders can be formally elected, informal or religious. No matter which type of leader, all community leaders are influential. They provide their cultural lens to the Australia system and society for new arrivals. If the community is existing positively within the Australian society, with feelings of inclusion and trust they can in turn positively influence the settlement and integration of newly arrived community members. If a community feels mistrust in the Australian system or society, these feelings can just as easily be transferred to new arrivals also. An example of this was shared during a consultation where a few young people who attended a local high school experienced racial discrimination from peers. A parent attempted to report this to a teacher, but no action was taken. During an episode of racial abuse, the young person punched the perpetrator and was in turn suspended from school. The community lost trust with the education system and removed all children from that school. With no other schools they trusted in the catchment area they were enrolled in a private school, the fees and transport cost putting the families into financial hardship.



By appreciating this sphere of influence, the client base of settlement providers expands exponentially from new arrivals to the whole of community. By delivering settlement through a whole of community approach integration and cohesion can develop in a sustainable way.

Settlement services have also been seen as a service to be exploited and create competition between. An example shared during a consultation is that of receiving basic household goods (BHG) through the HSP. A family was concerned that the kitchen goods were not adequate for their familial and cultural needs. They were told through the community that if they separated that they would receive double BHG. As there is some truth to this, they acted upon the information but consequently faced more significant challenges by the separation including financial and accommodation insecurity. Should the community and service providers had a stronger and deeper understanding of systems there could have been preventative discussion about BHG and Australian kitchen goods.

It was widely agreed during consultation that settlement providers should be seen as a resource and support for the community not an avenue to exploit for personal gain. However, the current system easily enables miscommunication and exploitation.

Although Australia is largely an individualistic society it is widely assumed that all humanitarian entrants are from collectivist societies. This is mostly true, and the values of collectivism are often exhibited through the support provided by settled community members to new arrivals. This assumption causes a further assumption that people from ethno-specific communities gladly and willingly provide support to their fellow community members. This support can be extensive but is rarely recognised through formal channels, either financially or professionally. An attendee told a story of a newly arrived family who were experiencing relationship breakdown and separation. As the family possessions were split during the separation the community used their own financial means to purchase household goods to ensure they were not left wanting. The community leader spent countless hours coordinating the purchasing of, deliveries and set up of the house for the family.

Most leaders provide this level of support while working full time, navigating their own lives, and supporting their own families' endeavours. These roles and responsibilities can compound to a stage where leaders physical and mental health, family and careers can be impacted. The impact on an individual can be a reduction of loss of employment, family breakdowns, significant health problems and loss of reputation within the community. To ensure the longevity of community support they too need support and recognition from community, providers and government.

Just as it is with every industry, the potential for exploitation and fraud must also be acknowledged. In this sector, settlement providers can be seen as a service to be exploited by individuals or a mechanism to create competition between. An example shared during a consultation is about a family seeking new rental accommodation. The family had only a few weeks until they were required to leave their rental property and were being supported by one settlement provider to apply for rental properties. The family didn't think that the provider was working fast enough so they went to two other providers for the same assistance. The family was then accepted for 2 different properties, didn't understand the paperwork they were signing and signed two leases. As they had to break one lease their reputation with the real estate and settlement provider was damaged.



The potential for settlement providers can be minimised when communities, service providers and government all work alongside each other. This relationship must be open and transparent to the individuals receiving the service. Providers and community should be seen by individuals as a resource, a community resource utilised to enable success in settlement.



Individualisation of support with the family and community context

Collectivist culture does not discount the individual, their needs, goals, or place within the family. In fact, individuals from collectivist cultures have a keen awareness of themselves and how they fit within the family and how they interpret culture. As such the settlement model must reflect this. During consultation community shared that there are many times when settlement services make assumptions of an individual's goals based on goals shared by their family members or previous experiences with people from the same ethnic group.

The current model has the output requirement of an individual case management plan which is expected to assume the outcome of individualised support. The output does not take into consideration the time it takes for:

- Building trust with individuals, especially those who have experienced intergenerational oppression
- Individuals to know and articulate their goals within the Australian context
- Trust between family and service to allow for individual conversations and assessment
- the ebs and flows of the settlement experience and how quickly it can change and develop
- learning and understand the opportunity and options available to them

Genuine client-centred, strengths-based case management must give the agency to the client and allow them to shape their own settlement. The current system boasts being individualised, and strengths based but requires each individual to conform to the same timeframe and fit within the same template of needs. By prescribing needs and timeframes the system creates new Australians who are dependent on services to tell them the problem and solution.

A community member shared a story of this during a consultation. A young person whose age placed them on the cusp of high school and TAFE had to decide their place of education soon after arrival. However, to make this decision they were only able to have one discussion with their case manager and one supported visit to one educational facility. The young person made the decision to attend high school, along with their younger siblings. Within weeks of the enrolment commencing, they found the school environment not suitable to their needs and wanted to enrol at TAFE. The settlement system was not able to support the individual to change their educational institute and told to wait 6 months before making any changes.

It must not be understated the extensive resources that are needed to be able to effectively deliver a truly individualised model. But it also cannot be understated the successful outcomes that an individualised model would enable.



The Orientation Program

The other theme extensively discussed during consultation was that of the orientation program. While the practical aspects were appreciated and needed the community stresses that there is missing a deeper conversation of culture, identity and how they fit within the Australian context. Those who attended the consultations who spoke of the orientation had experienced it first hand, either in recent years or over the course of a decade. The attendees acknowledged that programs and outputs have changed over years but wholly agreed that the outcome of understanding the Australian culture and its intersection with their own culture was always missed.

The orientation program largely focuses on teaching new arrivals skills and showing them how to fit into Australian systems and society. This does not acknowledge an individual's strengths, their culture or identity. As discussed in the [overarching findings earlier in this response](#), developing one's identity and maintain culture is essential for successful settlement, any process to diminish this is assimilation which does not enable social cohesion.

The example shared by an attendee was that of parenting in Australia. During orientation new arrivals are told strongly that Australian law does not allow a parent to hit a child, the result of which could be the child being removed and/or the parent facing legal charges. This one-way conversation disempowers the new arrivals as, in some cases, physical punishment is the only form of discipline. The result being the parent breaking the law and being accused of child abuse or a child having no form of discipline and understanding of consequence.

What is beneficial, and what many community members do with new arrival families is engage in deeper conversations. This two-way conversation discusses culture and the law and how they intersect with each other. They can explore personal experiences of settlement, shifting cultural ideals but maintaining one's identity. This approach is most successful when delivered in a preventative way rather than reactive. Unfortunately, the current settlement model does not engage community members within the orientation program and most examples of this approach by community occurs years after initial settlement after adverse events.

This one size fits model of orientation is equally as ineffective for young people. Arriving as a teenager requires the individual to attend school soon after arrival and discounts their need to orientation. A young person who attended the consultations shared their personal experience of orientation, "I got half a day with the provider where they took us for a walk around the neighbourhood and showed us where things were, like grocery shops and banks."

This is another example of the one size fits all approach within settlement. Young people have different experiences of migration and settlement, their role within a family can change dramatically and family conflict can arise. In addition to this young people often develop what is what is referred to as a 'third culture'. This is when individuals during their formative years are raised in a culture other than their parents' culture. They move between cultures before they have had the opportunity to fully develop their personal and cultural identity.



During settlement and orientation there is no opportunity for young people to explore this. By not addressing identity the provider is diminishing the young people experiences nor adequately supporting them through settlement.

It is not only the one size fits all approach to orientation which is not effective but also the length of time allowed for orientation. As is widely known a person only retains 10% of a speech, yet the settlement programs expect new arrivals to retain 100% or the orientation program which is delivered within weeks of arrival and over a few short sessions. The outcomes of this are seen clearly throughout an individual's settlement. For many years after the initial settlement period, new arrivals are consistently requesting support and information on areas and systems which were taught in orientation. New arrivals request additional support from SETS providers and community alike, often returning to settlement providers many years after their formalised exit for support in areas that were addressed during the orientation program.

Individuals often request support in those areas which have significant systemic barriers and inequities in access, such as housing, health and legal. The housing system in particular is complex and requires more than a few hours of orientation and case management sessions to fully grasp and navigate. Attendees spoke about success in housing navigation through individualised, practical support and advocacy. They described practical support along the whole spectrum such as booking and transport to inspections, filling in forms, reading lease agreements, advocating with real estates.



The AUSCO Program

AUSCO was discussed by attendees, in particular their experiences with AUSCO and unpreparedness for their settlement. AUSCO is very broad, providing an overview of Australia such as the states and capital cities. A significant challenge upon arrival is that mismatched expectations that the AUSCO program creates.

When speaking about AUSCO, an attendee said “The [AUSCO program] needs to better balance ‘nice to know’ with ‘need to know’ content. For example, it is nice to know the names of capital cities, however it is more important that [my community] know the consequences of doing something that may be a cultural norm when they lived before.”

Australia is vast and differs from state to state and suburb to suburb. An example within the AUCO program is that of the generic photographs shown of Australia houses. Depending on the climate, which varies extensively across Australia, houses can vary. A house is what brings a family together and in the context of settlement it is also where a new life in Australia starts. Expectations of a new home need to be realistic and managed to set up the family for a positive start in Australia. Housing is just a simple example of what was shared, but one attendee stressed that it is so many more aspects of Australian life and settlement that need to be explored better prior to arrival.

Engaging with people before they arrive in Australia is a unique opportunity to be preventative and set up new arrivals for success before setting foot in their new home. Community members who are linked to individuals prior to arrival have some conversations but without effective collaboration with settlement providers or AUSCO there is little impact they can have.



Successful Employment Outcomes

Employment, or economic participation as it often referred to, is the primary and most important goal for migrants and refugees. Throughout consultations attendees were loud and clear that everyone wants to work, but it is the systems themselves that are the barriers to people achieving sustainable, meaningful employment. Systemic barriers exist at each stage of a persons journey towards achieving sustainable employment; from within the education system, to the Job Active system and discrimination and racism within the community itself.

To effectively participate in the Australian workforce, appropriate and adequate English language and relevant education and training is necessary. However, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) which offers a structured 510 hours of free English tuition is far from adequate for many migrants and refugees, including for:

- those that have limited to no formal education or even no written literacy within their own language, or
- those that have been assessed as having Functional English, however do not meet the minimum International English Language Testing System (IELTS) academic score

From our consultations, attendees provided examples of vast experiences from within their communities. Examples of some people within their communities who were humiliated and shamed to attend AMEP class as they could not hold a pen, and would not participate in the discussion from fear of embarrassment and shame. However, these people were very skilled with their hands and could easily participate in the workforce, but to do so required different English to what they learned at AMEP, they needed work place appropriate English.

In contrast, other participants discussed how some members of their community were highly educated and could easily grasp Functional English, however struggled to pass IELTS and could not afford risking to continue to attempt to pass IELTS, or face the humiliation to fail again. It is recommended that the Australian Government redirect part of AMEP funding to support those migrants and refugees wishing to pursue university with unlimited access to free and accessible (in person and online) IELTS courses.

The role of native-language knowledge in second language acquisition is well-established and supports the concept of community run English classes where the teacher uses their native language to provide context and understanding. If empowered and supported, community would be well placed to work with employers and their community members to have the required English language appropriate for their employment. It is recommended that the Australian Government redirect part of AMEP funding to support those migrants and refugees wishing to pursue unskilled professions through the empowerment of community based language classes.

It is well understood that to be successful in gaining a job, you not only need the required skills such as teamwork, organised, able to solve problems, speak/write well, proactive, etc, you also need to quickly build a connection and impression with the interviewer. This can immediately put new migrants and refugees at a disadvantage,



particularly if the interview panel has had no engagement or relationship with people from some ethnic backgrounds. The current settlement programs do not allow for the large amount of effort to continue to build the capacity of employers and employees to ensure mutual cultural understanding and capacity building to accept new employees from migrant or refugee background and to provide a safe environment to ensure long term employment outcomes.

When exploring the Job Active system and its role in supporting employment outcomes for refugees and migrants our attendees strongly expressed that the system is more a hinderance than a help. One attendee described the system as being broken, “you are watched for how many hours you come to [the job active providers] office but all the work you do outside of there isn’t seen or acknowledged.”

This person was talking of their own experiences early on in their settlement when they were attending AMEP 4 days a week and on their ‘free day’ attending to other activities outlined as settlement outcomes by the provider; working towards getting their drivers licence, attending appointments with their settlement provider, managing their household including inspecting rental properties and attending social groups to improve their social network. They were pressured by the Job Active service to use their ‘free day’ to apply for jobs online or they would ‘have their payment cut’. The settlement provider pressured the individual to achieve the other goals as they were more important. There is a clear lack of communication and collaboration between Job Active providers and settlement providers. The competing demands of the providers create a conflict that the individual is stuck between, with neither provider considering the individuals’ goals.

Individuals face immense pressure to achieve employment, pressure that they put on themselves, from their families, employment providers and settlement providers. With this pressure many individuals experience exploitation and discrimination. One attendee used the rhetoric “getting some money is better than no money”, this means that many individuals continue to work in unsafe and unfair environments despite the risk it poses on them physically and mentally.

It is a well known that discrimination and racism exist in Australia, whether it is unconscious and inadvertent or conscious and intentional. The employment system places the blame on refugees and migrants for not working hard enough to get a job, but it is the system itself which is the barrier. Discrimination and racism are systemic but not often acknowledged as the problem. An example shared during consultations was changing one’s name on a resume. A young woman from Iran has tertiary qualifications and experience in Australia was made redundant from her position. After months of applying for role and receiving no interviews she changed her name on her resume to a Caucasian sounding name. She said that within one week she has 5 interviews scheduled and within 3 weeks she had commenced a new full-time role. This is a clear example of discrimination in employment, but it often goes unseen as the young women would be blamed for not contributing economically.

Settlement providers focus on teaching individuals to navigate the employment systems in Australia but fail to prepare them to navigate the realities to empower them to exercise their personal rights. After experiences of



discrimination or racism individuals turn to their own community, people with lived experience for support and advice. It is the community themselves who are best placed to provide this support and work in collaboration to set new arrivals up to achieve successful employment outcomes.

It was unanimously agreed by attendees that having Australian work experience is the foundation of future success. It was also agreed that the system does not adequately support that first work experience. As gaining employment is about who you know, not what you know, people without social networks in Australia are less likely to gain employment. New arrivals who are connected with their community quickly expand their network and set up to achieve employment outcomes.

Many ethno-specific organisations who attended our consultations shared experiences of working with employers and sectors seeking to employ people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. It goes without saying that these organisations are passionate about supporting their community to achieve successful employment and are eager to work with employers to achieve this, but these organisations are volunteer run and have limited resources to do this work. Ethno-specific organisations are best placed to collaborate with employers and coordinate their community members into employment. However, without resourcing and support from providers and government they are not able to do this effectively or efficiently.