Ethnic Communities
Council of Queensland

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
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Canberra ACT 2600

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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes

Introduction

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) is the peak body representing migrants and refugees across Queensland. ECCQ acts as a strategic mechanism for the empowerment of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds through advocacy, policy research and development, sector development, aged care, health education and community education and training.

ECCQ welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration regarding the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes.

Immigration has been an integral part of Australia's history. The benefits of cultural diversity made possible through immigration have been myriad. Refugees and migrants have brought social benefits through their diverse skills, knowledge and experiences and have brought many quantitative benefits through their contributions to Australia's productivity and economic growth.

People who have arrived in Australia as refugees or asylum seekers have survived adversity and, often, great suffering. These individuals have proven to be incredibly resilient and adaptable and demonstrate a willingness to "give back". Despite high levels of motivation, settlement is complex and cannot be achieved with a blueprint process that can be applied to all individuals or all communities. Every individual will experience settlement differently and may have different understandings of the settlement process. However, there are common barriers faced by new arrivals, which impact on their ability to positively settle in a new country. For this reason, migrants and refugees require support as they navigate their settlement journey.

This submission seeks to highlight some of the ways in which ECCQ and its members are able to support the settlement journey and examples of programs and services which cater to the specific needs of migrants and refugees.

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1. Settlement Services

ECCQ acknowledges that the definition of settlement has been problematic and highly contested in Australian immigration studies.[1] Defining settlement has direct implications on policy and the way in which services are provided. ECCQ recognises that debates around whether settlement constitutes a period of time or an achievement of objectives are important. However, for the purpose of this submission, ECCQ understands settlement to be an ongoing process, which may span across a person's lifetime.

Settlement cannot be considered solely the responsibility of new arrivals; it is a two-way process which relies on societal understanding and acceptance.

With respect to this definition, many of ECCQ's members provide settlement services or provide support to the many migrants living in Queensland, often without recognition or funding. The sector has proven to be incredibly innovative, agile and responsive, and has demonstrated a willingness to collaborate and foster partnerships to ensure that outcomes are met and in many cases, exceeded.

These services assist migrants and refugees regardless of their background and are delivered without discrimination. The many organisations and associations in the sector are best-placed to deliver services that are culturally appropriate, responsive and tailored to client needs across a range of different service areas.

1.1. Capacity building

Community leaders have an invaluable role and contribute immensely to community members' settlement experiences, often ensuring sustained and positive outcomes. It is a rewarding, often unrecognised and voluntary role, which involves negotiating with institutions, explaining systems and processes, advocating for their community, organising events, encouraging and counselling members of their community, among many other tasks. There is scope to increase funding for projects which build the capacity of CALD communities to deliver positive settlement outcomes.

ECCQ's Community Leadership Program equips people with the leadership skills, knowledge and contacts to better assist their own communities. It involves bringing a group of people from new and emerging communities together once a week for a 10 week intensive leadership training program, individual support and membership to a statewide network of community leaders and community associations.

The style of leadership that is promoted has an emphasis on community building: listening skills, taking responsibility, encouraging others to develop their skills and contribute, making a positive difference and improving things for their community through various forms of advocacy.

Topics cover: leadership, networking, meeting skills, event management, social media, the Australian political system, community engagement, communication skills, working with the media and conflict resolution; other topics are tailored to the needs of each group and can include sessions on education pathways, health, and setting up informal and formal community associations.

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[1] Burnett *Issues in Immigrant Settlement in Australia* (1998).

In Cairns and Townsville, ECCQ partners with local settlement organisations to deliver the program. This ensures the program reflects the needs of the local communities where the settlement organisations have strong connections to local experts, guest speakers and local opportunities. This also offers the participants a connection to a local service provider to ensure they gain a local network.

In Cairns, Centacare Migrant Services runs the program with assistance and guidance from ECCQ. A positive outcome from the training program in 2016 was the connection the group made with the Cairns Regional Council who came to several training sessions on topics such as organising events and food safety. Connections and relationships were made between Council officers and the participants. In December 2016, the Council established a 12 month pilot Cairns Region Multicultural Reference Group. One of the criteria for participating on the reference group is that members have been part of ECCQ's Community Leadership Program. Ten past participants are now actively involved with this Multicultural Reference Group representing their communities.

The Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG) runs the program in Townsville. TMSG organise local experts, service providers and inspirational speakers as presenters. One of the most productive sessions from 2016 was on engaging the community through social media held at the Townsville Library. The Congolese Community in Townsville were inspired to organise an event through Facebook to celebrate students' graduation from high school. Strong links with sporting associations were also made through the Townsville City Council, who is now assisting the Somalian and Congolese communities to join established sporting groups.

Programs such as these build the capacity of CALD communities to establish associations, develop critical skills and contacts and in turn, positively contribute to the settlement of new arrivals. These programs importantly recognise that settlement outcomes are best achieved through community participation and ownership.

2. Employment

It is widely recognised that employment is critical to an individual's economic and social wellbeing.[2] Gaining employment is a key milestone in an individual's settlement journey and remains one of the most challenging aspects of life in a new country. Barriers to participating in the workforce may include a lack of Australian work experience, difficulties with skills recognition, discrimination and limited language proficiency. [3]

Despite the many barriers to gaining employment, recent arrivals have proven to be optimistic about their employment prospects in Australia. The Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion survey is the largest parallel survey of Australia born and immigrants undertaken in Australia. In 2016, the survey found that 74% of recent arrivals agreed that hard work brings a better life. [4]

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[2] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Regional Settlement in Australia: research into the settlement experience of humanitarian entrants in regional Australia* (2006/07).

[3] ECCV, *Work Solutions: Improving Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace* (2014).

[4] Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2016* (2016)

This optimism has been harnessed by many initiatives and services in Queensland, which aim to assist people from CALD backgrounds to gain employment.

2.1. Education and training

The Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative of the Queensland Government is a positive example of improving employment prospects for individuals from CALD backgrounds. ECCQ is funded under this program to deliver tailored assistance to CALD individuals to gain nationally recognised skills and vocational qualifications up to a Certificate III level.

Outcomes of the program have been incredibly successful. Of the 29 students who graduated from the first round of training, 69% of the participants have been employed upon exiting the training, and 14% of the graduates are pursuing further education. Some of the successes of the project include:

- Providing work placement opportunities for all participants to experience Australian work culture and network with prospective local employers

- Actively engaging with local employers and higher education providers through information sessions and workshops
- Providing flexible training delivery methods and assessment measures (e.g. reasonable adjustment) to suit the learning needs of CALD participants
- Improving the participants' employability skills by providing learner support workshops covering a range of topics and individually tailored support for skills development
- Providing integrated learner support by providing a case management approach and referrals to key community agencies

It is important that education and training pathways are accessible to new arrivals and respond to the specific needs of individuals from CALD backgrounds. It is equally important that employers are engaged in education programs that encourage cultural awareness and reduce the risk of unconscious bias and discrimination. Members of the settlement services sector are well-equipped to deliver responsive and flexible education and training opportunities.

2.2. Regional settlement

The settlement sector has demonstrated strong outcomes in the regional resettlement of migrants and refugees.[5] A recent study by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation found that migrants and refugees are able to contribute greatly to the agricultural sector, particularly in regional Australia by increasing productivity and re-energising regional and rural towns.[6]

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[5] AMES, *Small towns, big returns* (2011)
[6] Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, *New Immigrants Improving Productivity in Australian Agriculture* (2016)

In 2010, 39 Burmese refugees from rural backgrounds were relocated to Biloela (a small rural town in Queensland) as part of the Access Community Services Rural Employment Assistance Program (REAP). An evaluation report published in 2011 found that the REAP project has provided a successful model for resettling refugees and migrants from an area with high unemployment to a small rural town facing significant employee and skills shortages.[7]

A key success of the program was the ability to broker solutions that simultaneously met employer's needs and labour requirements and the needs of job seekers. However, as outlined in the REAP report, employment alone cannot ensure successful refugee resettlement, but must be accompanied by a range of other support mechanisms and services.

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) has similarly demonstrated a number of successes in the settlement of migrants in regional Queensland, particularly evident in the Rockhampton case study.[8] Through its settlement program in Rockhampton, MDA has found that a coordinated approach to settlement, which ensures the participation of industry, community, government, settlement services and new arrivals is critical to successful settlement.

The resettlement of migrants and refugees in regional areas is an effective way to recognise the mutual benefits of migration and should continue to be explored and encouraged, provided settlement is well-planned and supported. Settlement services operating in regional areas are in the best position to deliver the range of services required to settle or resettle refugees and should be adequately funded to do so.[9]

3. Health services

Access to health services for migrants and refugees is challenging and a key priority in the sector. Barriers to accessing health information and services include language and communication difficulties, difficulties navigating the Australian health care system, different health beliefs, lack of cultural competence among the health care workforce and financial restraints.

Organisations such as ECCQ are well-placed to provide information and education, which enables and empowers migrants and refugees to access health services.

ECCQ delivers programs in chronic disease and hepatitis, HIV/AIDS and sexual health to migrants and refugees.[10] These programs provide culturally appropriate education, delivered by bilingual community health workers in the participant's first language. Bilingual community health workers are equipped with the skills to work in the community setting as they possess vital understandings of CALD client needs. There are a number of benefits of using bilingual community health workers, provided they are not used in place of an interpreter. The benefits of employing ECCQ's bilingual community health workers include:

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[7] REAP, *An evaluation of the rural employment assistance program (*2011)

[8] MDA, *Settlement Works: Stories from Rockhampton* (2012)

[9] SCOA, Exploring options for regional settlement (2016)

[10] For more information: http://www.eccq.com.au/what-we-do/health/

- Ability to build trust and rapport with a client
- Being culturally sensitive to client needs
- Can bridge cultural gaps
- Can provide information and resources in both English and their own language
- Are trained and possess knowledge about particular health issues, relevant to specific communities
- Are able to advocate for the importance of CALD communities accessing health services and where appropriate, can refer these individuals to health services

The settlement services sector not only works effectively with these communities, but also works collaboratively with mainstream health services in order to mitigate issues of access. ECCQ provides cultural training for service providers to ensure that refugees and migrants receive culturally appropriate information and services.

4. Language services

Proficiency of English language undoubtedly plays a critical role in the successful settlement of migrants and refugees in Australia.

While English language competency is important, it should not be a condition of entry to Australia as this would fail to recognise the various languages, skills and experiences these individuals contribute. Language proficiency cannot measure an individual's willingness to learn and contribute and therefore does not provide an adequate or holistic assessment of an individual's settlement prospects.

Government should continue to ensure that English language training is provided to all arrivals that require it, in order to strengthen employment prospects and their ability to participate in Australian society.

4.1. AMEP

In the 2016-17 Budget, the Government announced that the AMEP program will be re-designed to improve client participation, English language proficiency, and employment outcomes. The Department of Education and Training administers AMEP, which currently provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition to migrants and humanitarian entrants.[11] The re-design will see additional hours of English tuition to eligible clients, introducing better monitoring of improvements in client English skills and establishing two new AMEP service streams—Social English and Pre-Employment English. This re-design is a positive step towards ensuring equitable outcomes for migrants and refugees and bettering settlement prospects for these individuals. Programs such as these will also provide long-term economic benefits.

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[11] For further information: https://www.education.gov.au/adult-migrant-english-program-0

4.2. Engaging interpreters

Engaging accredited interpreters for people lacking English proficiency improves the effectiveness of service delivery, improves outcomes and ensures that long-terms costs are reduced through effective service delivery.[12]

However, there are a number of barriers to engaging interpreters, faced by migrants and refugees but also experienced by service providers, particularly mainstream service providers.

The Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group (QAIWG) was formed in 2008 to address the barriers for people from CALD and non-English speaking backgrounds arising from poor access to interpreters and poor cultural competence of government and community organisations. QAIWG have developed a policy guideline and policy template on engaging and working with interpreters to model how organisations can manage access to interpreters for clients with difficulty communicating in English.[13] While there is still more work to be done in this area, this is an example of an initiative which advocates for the use of credentialed interpreters to ensure positive outcomes for individuals from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

5. Aged Care

The 2011 Census revealed 20 per cent of Australian over 65 were born in non-English speaking countries. Current projections predict that 30 per cent of the population aged over 65 will be from CALD backgrounds by 2030.[14] The growing population of new migrants and an ageing migrant population will see a likely increase in demand for culturally appropriate care. In addition, the growing linguistic diversity of clients paired with the knowledge that some older migrants will revert back to their original language means an increasing demand for language services in aged care.

5.1. Community care

ECCQ's community care division, Diversicare provides quality community based and coordinated in-home care to individuals from CALD backgrounds as well as delivers education and training to support aged care service providers and CALD communities.

The organisation helps people from over 65 different ethnic backgrounds representing over 49 different languages.

Diversicare's Multicultural Advisory Service (MAS) shares these expertise with community and aged care service providers through:

- Delivering free cross-cultural training workshops;
- Promoting services to CALD communities;

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[12] QAWIG, *Still a matter of interpretation* (2012).
[13] For more information: http://www.communitydoor.org.au/culturally-and-linguistically-diverse/queensland-accessing-interpreters-working-group-qaiwg?page=1
[14] FECCA, *Aged Care Legislation Review* (2016).

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- Identifying, planning and developing multicultural and multilingual resources to support the provision of culturally appropriate services;

- Providing free consultation working with CALD clients and communities;

- Establishing networks and links with CALD communities and services to facilitate understanding of culturally complex issues of mutual concern;

- Working with services to identify barriers and gaps in current service provision for CALD clients and their carers;

- Assisting in the development of collaborative process aimed at enhancing the continued growth of responsive services.

Services such as MAS ensure that the aged care sector has the expertise to respond to the ageing migrant population and works collaboratively with these services to achieve positive outcomes.

5.2. Residential care

While many migrants may feel they have completed their settlement journey, new challenges can arise as they grow older. Older people from diverse cultural backgrounds are at increased risk of social isolation and evidence suggests that they may be more vulnerable to diminished self-esteem, depression, poor psychological wellbeing and increased mortality.

While an individual might reach proficiency in English as a second language, some individuals revert to their original language as they grow older.

In recognition of these challenges, Berlasco Court Caring Centre was purchased by ECCQ in 1988 to fulfil its vision of providing culturally inclusive care for people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The aged care facility provides a high standard of care to 60 residents from 22 different cultural backgrounds. Berlasco Court's staff come from 30 different cultural backgrounds and speak over 56 different languages. This allows some of the residents to communicate in the language of their country of birth when needed.

Staff are comprehensively screened to ensure cultural competence and factors such as education background, language and country of birth and qualifications are taken into account. In addition, Berlasco caters for the cultural, linguistic, religious, emotional and spiritual needs of its residents.

Berlasco has long standing relationships with a wide range of Priests, Ministers and Spiritual advisers who visit on a regular basis to provide group and individual services. Berlasco also maintains strong relationships with other CALD aged care providers, both community and residential, who can be consulted for advice, referral and information.

Conclusion

The settlement services sector, including those organisations and associations not formally recognised as settlement providers has proven to be resourceful, innovative and responsive to the needs of migrants and refugees. Australia is considered to be a global leader in settlement service and is repeatedly cited as a multicultural success story.

Undoubtedly, there are many challenges that migrants face during their settlement journey but they also bring with them many strengths and enrich the social fabric of Australia. As with any individual, in order to reach their full potential, migrants and refugees need to receive adequate support and have equitable access to the array of services in Australia. The settlement services sector is best placed to ensure these individuals are provided with the opportunity to settle successfully in Australian society.