



## Policy Paper: Urgent Need for Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at Mount Isa

### Background

In May 2024, ECCQ's Research, Advocacy, and Policy Manager met with representatives from multicultural communities in Mt Isa to discuss key issues facing the multicultural communities in regional Queensland, from the multicultural community leaders' perspectives. One of the key concerns raised by all community leaders was the lack of face-to-face Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), a free service to help eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants to learn or improve their English skills and settle effectively into the Australian society (TAFE Queensland, 2024). According to the leaders we met, the AMEP has not been available at Mt Isa face-to-face for several years, and this was confirmed through ECCQ's recent meeting with the relevant leadership at TAFE Queensland, which suggests that the program is only offered through TAFE New South Wales' distance learning for Mt. Isa residents.

### What's the problem?

Non-English-speaking eligible migrants, including refugees, have been eligible for AMEP since its implementation by the Australian Government more than seven decades ago in 1948, making it possible for them to access 510 hours of English training, with most of these typically transitioning into other programs by the completion of their AMEP. The program was

expanded in 2021 to allow clients to stay beyond the basic of 510 hours, especially where they struggle to accumulate enough linguistic skills to enable them to function independently and meaningfully in the society. This is particularly important, because some migrants, especially refugees, have had their education interrupted, and this means that some of them cannot write or read their native language (Hsieh, 2021).

Skilled migrants are expected to possess higher levels of English language skills, professional and educational qualifications, and prior work experience (Rajendran, Farquharson & Hewege, 2017), but this does not necessarily mean their spouses have the same level of skills and opportunities, creating perpetual dependency and oppression, including exploitation.

**The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) was established in 1948, providing 510 hours of English training.**

Even skilled migrants sometimes struggle to integrate into the new culture and labour markets, as a direct result of limited English linguistic skills. Ethno-cultural minorities, and especially those whose native language is not English, have poorer employment outcomes because they need specific upskilling in key areas such as English presentation and writing. Indeed, communication difficulties are a cultural theme, particularly when learning to understand the Australian accent or attempting to use/understand the so-called local English (Rajendran et al., 2017). As ABC (2021) puts it, it is very difficult for new migrants, especially those with poor literacy to engage in online studies. That's why face-to-face programs are essential to support more effective integration of multicultural communities.



In the key area of family and domestic violence, women leaders from the Mt Isa Filipino communities explained, the absence of the victim's voice is a major problem when assessing the level and impact of domestic and family violence in the region, due to some women's inability to report the abuses as a direct result of English language barriers. This is particularly true for the new arrivals. As such, victim's first-hand accounts of their lived experiences, including their intimate relationships, have not been reported anywhere, making the potential for informed interventions redundant (Cleonicki Saroca, 2013). While we are not suggesting that cultural and linguistic diversities are explicit indicators of risks and disadvantages, poor English skills in many people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) put them in a very vulnerable position (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).

Recent data indicate that 98% of Australians agree that domestic and family violence is a crime, and 80% postulate that forcing a partner to have sex is a very serious and violent behaviour.

In contrast, refugee and other migrant women often come from countries where laws and culture do not recognise women's right of control over their body. Those who were raised within such cultural contexts often come to Australia carrying guilt and shame about the sexual violence they have experienced (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2024). This literature was largely confirmed by the Filipino community leaders, who also argue that the lack of a face-to-face AMEP program makes it harder to provide information to women about their rights, achieve mindset change, and empower them to understand family and domestic violence in the Australian context and subsequently report related abuses to relevant authorities.



## What's the ask?

- Multicultural communities in Mt Isa would like to have full access to the Adult Migrant English Program, which includes free childcare for under school age children.



## References

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