



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

2007 Federal Election Policy Statement

This statement should be read in conjunction with and secondary to
the FECCA Election Policy which ECCV supports fully.

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc.
Statewide Resources Centre
150 Palmerston Street, Carlton VIC 3053
T 03 9349 4122 F 03 9349 4967

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Foreword



Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria is pleased to release its 2007 Federal Election Policy Statement which provides guidance on ECCV's policy positions in the lead up to the election.

The policy includes focus on making our citizenship laws more inclusive, improving language services, introducing an ageing and cultural diversity strategy and introducing a Commonwealth Multicultural Act in line with other Australian jurisdictions.

At a time when the principles of multiculturalism and human rights continue to be under challenge, we hope that the basic human rights and justice principles outlined in this document find resonance with political parties as they develop policies in the lead up to and following the election.

I would like to thank all ECCV members and staff who assisted in putting this document together. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia's federal election policy which ECCV supports fully as a constituent member.

Yours sincerely

Phong Nguyen
Chairperson



1. Australian Citizenship

Citizenship is one of the most important parts of the migrant settlement experience. Being embraced and welcomed as part of the Australian community is of significant importance to new migrants and particularly for refugees who may be stateless.

ECCV supports an inclusive and supportive Australian citizenship conferral process which is non-discriminatory. We believe that most Australian migrants are keen to become Australian citizens and participate fully in the important rights and responsibilities of Australian Citizenship.

Recent federal government citizenship policy has seen the process of obtaining Australian citizenship move from a welcoming and inclusive process to a more restrictive one. The Government, with the support of the Opposition, has increased the citizenship waiting period for some migrants from two to four years and has introduced a higher-level citizenship test in the form of a computer based test on Australia.

The higher level test has the potential to discriminate against refugees from non-English speaking backgrounds who may not pass a computerised test. It may also discriminate against family reunion entrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and has the potential to be a disincentive in attracting skilled migrants with non-English speaking spouses.

Recommendations

1. That the waiting period for Australian citizenship be restored to two years. Two years is an appropriate time to assess the credentials of permanent residents seeking Australian citizenship.
2. That exemptions to the new citizenship test be granted to applicants with low-level English language skills, particularly from refugee backgrounds, who be given the opportunity to attend citizenship classes rather than sit a test, in order to meet the requirements of Australian citizenship.
3. That the government conduct a high-level campaign targeted towards eligible-non citizen English speaking migrants from Great Britain and New Zealand to encourage them to take out Australian citizenship.
4. There should be widespread consultation with the Australian community, including CALD communities, around the composition and content of the test, to ensure that the questions are inclusive of all Australians.



2. Language Services Policy

English is the national language in Australia and proficiency in English is valuable for participating in Australian society. It is well known that good English language skills are strongly linked to effective settlement. Proficiency in English makes everyday situations and settlement processes much easier for migrants.

For migrants who are not proficient in English, translating and interpreting services are crucial to their participation in society and to accessing government services. Securing employment, child rearing responsibilities and a host of other factors may prevent some people from developing good English language skills.

The Australian Government funds a range of programs aimed at assisting migrants to learn English, communicate with the assistance of interpreters and translators, and settle effectively in Australian society. However, scope exists for policy and program improvements in the area of language services. At present, community groups have reported that high numbers of refugees and humanitarian entrants are exiting federally funded English language programs without having reached proficient English language skills, particularly for those refugees who have had minimal or no formal educational opportunities.

Systematically investing in the English language and vocational English skills of new arrivals early in the settlement process creates opportunities for employment as well as social and economic participation in Australian society.

Recommendations

1. Federally funded English language programs should better utilise methodologies that are appropriate to the needs of diverse learners with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of refugee learners who have experienced limited or disrupted education.
2. A systematic approach to supporting refugee young people as they transition from on arrival English language programs to mainstream education and/or training with provisions for social support, mentoring, case management and fosters opportunities for participation in the mainstream such as employment is required. Pre-ESL orientation courses are also particularly important for some young refugees given they often have had no formal educational experiences.
3. Strategies are required to improve vocational English language skills and create further opportunities for on-the-job training, including English for specialised employment purposes (e.g. English for engineers), and to all



migrants and refugees. The Federal Government should also implement systematic and industry focused English language training for new arrivals with higher levels of education to assist a transition into their areas of expertise early in the settlement process.

4. Special targeted arrangements are needed to engage women from refugee backgrounds in English language programs with more informal and flexible learning arrangements in addition to the provision of culturally appropriate childcare and transportation requirements.
5. Culturally appropriate programs and policies targeting migrants who have been in Australia for longer than five years are required so that migrants who have not developed good English language skills are provided with better opportunities to learn English. This should include programs for migrants who require new skills to reenter the employment market.
6. There is a need to improve the status, income level and regulation of interpreters. At present interpreters are accredited but not licensed. Standards between interpreters may differ and the labour force tends to be highly casualised. An inquiry is needed into the interpreter workforce to raise general standards in the profession, in the interests of both interpreters and clients. Such an inquiry should consider possible licensing of interpreters, and career development and salary issues for interpreters.
7. The Federal Government must implement policies targeted at achieving an increase in the numbers of NAATI accredited interpreters at higher levels of accreditation and consider incentives for CALD communities such as scholarships, reduction in fees and rewards and acknowledgement of the investment required to maintain bilingual skills. Particular attention must be paid to developing pathways for new and emerging communities to gain NATTI accreditation.



3. New and Emerging Communities Policy

Australia is a diverse and multicultural nation and more recently new and emerging communities have settled from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Although there is great diversity within and between new and emerging communities, these arrivals tend to have complex settlement needs when compared with more established communities in Australia. New and emerging communities generally do not have a well established community infrastructure and therefore require targeted services and resources from Government.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship defines small and emerging communities as those which have an Australia-wide population of less than 15 000, of which over 30 per cent have arrived within the past five years. Another way to define small and emerging communities is to say they are communities which are small in number and have complex settlement needs.

While the Federal Government funds a range of services which new and emerging communities in Australia are able to access, scope exists for programs and policies to be more responsive to the needs of these communities. The areas of employment, education and training, language services, health and youth affairs are all areas where a more targeted approach to emerging communities is required.

Recommendations

1. New and emerging communities should be consulted and be included on Government advisory boards to ensure they have a strong voice in shaping Government programs and policies which affect them.
2. A Federally funded and systematic approach to supporting new and emerging communities in the area of English language training, education, employment and training is required.
3. The Federal Government should invest resources in building the capacity, governance, and infrastructure of new and emerging community groups.
4. Policies directed at building a strong base of NAATI qualified interpreters and translators in new and emerging community languages should be implemented.
5. Communities that are small in number and have unresolved torture and trauma issues require targeted services and resources from government including special trauma and torture services.



4. Commonwealth Multicultural Act

According to the 2006 Census, 22 per cent of all Australians were born overseas. In recent years, people from around 185 different countries, speaking over 100 languages and dialects have made Australia home. These figures greatly reflect on the growing diversity of Australia's society.

The Commonwealth Government's policy statement *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* recognises, accepts, respects and celebrates cultural diversity in Australia. The statement sets the Government's aim to build on Australia's success as a culturally diverse, accepting and open society, united through a shared future and commitment to Australia, its democratic institutions and values, and the rule of law. The principles underpinning this statement need to be enshrined in legislation under a Commonwealth Multicultural Act. Given that similarly diverse jurisdictions such as Canada, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales have multicultural legislation, it is appropriate that the Commonwealth Government do the same.

Recommendations

1. The Commonwealth Government should introduce a ***Commonwealth Multicultural Act*** to enshrine the core principles of Australian multiculturalism and to reflect the Commonwealth's commitment to Australia's cultural diversity and enhance participation of all members of the community.
2. The Act should recognise the diversity of the people in Australia and promote mutual respect and understanding regardless of background, culture and faith.
3. The Act should recognise the responsibility for all Australians to abide by Australia's laws and democratic processes, promote community harmony and social cohesion and equality of opportunity, regardless of one's race, religious belief, gender, language or cultural practices.
4. As part of the new Act, the relevant Minister and all federal departments should report annually to the Parliament on their compliance with the principles of the Act.



5. Ageing and Cultural Diversity Strategy

Many of Australia's post-war migrants are moving into a period of their lives where they are likely to require aged care and support services. It is predicted that by 2011, the CALD 65 plus population will increase to approximately 23% of all older Australians (AIHW). Many older migrants require culturally competent care around areas like language and culture. It is acknowledged that people with dementia often revert to their first language and require language specific care.

It is now evident that culturally competent service planning and delivery is critical to effectively meeting the needs of this growing cohort of our older population. The next Federal Government should commit to a comprehensive *Ageing and Cultural Diversity Strategy* involving all aspects of Federal Government aged care and positive ageing programs.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should implement an *Ageing and Cultural Diversity Strategy* to improve the quality of care and support for CALD older people and their carers. The strategy would:

1. Mandate that cultural competency be included as a key service standard for all aged care and positive ageing programs.
2. Strengthen the capacity of ethno-specific/multicultural service providers to both better support their communities as they age and provide for greater consumer choice in aged care services.
3. Support ethno-specific/multicultural aged care service providers to deliver services across aged care and positive ageing program areas via direct service funding or brokerage agreements with partner agencies in order to achieve culturally responsive and person-centred continuity of care.
4. Develop and implement a language services policy for all federally funded aged care programs to ensure that people with low-level English language proficiency have access to professional interpreting and translating services when they are required to make significant decisions concerning their lives or where essential information needs to be communicated to inform decision making.
5. Conduct research into CALD communities' experiences and perceptions of elder abuse so as to inform the development of a responsive national elder abuse prevention strategy that builds on the recent reforms related to reporting of abuse in the residential care setting and ensures CALD older



people are appropriately targeted with regards to elder abuse prevention measures.

6. Undertake extensive research into CALD older people to detail their needs and expectations of positive ageing to inform the development of a national strategy for positive ageing, including the identification of best practice in particular states.

*An *Ageing and Cultural Diversity Strategy* is a core policy objective of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria. A full version of this Strategy will be made available in October.



6. Community Harmony, Justice and Human Rights

Since World War II, Australia has accepted 6.5 million migrants who have contributed immeasurably to our economic, social and cultural prosperity. Australia is a multicultural and multi-faith society with people from a diverse array of countries and backgrounds. Over 20% of the population was born overseas and around 15% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. With the exception of our indigenous custodians of the land here since time immemorial, Australia's population has derived from widespread migration since 1788.

With this significant cultural diversity it is important that the Federal Government continues to promote community harmony for all Australians. These efforts must target both more established Australian communities and more culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Community harmony programs should not place disproportionate pressure on individual CALD communities to promote harmony. The Federally funded Living in Harmony grants are an effective way of promoting respect for diverse cultures in Australia. There is still a need for greater protection of human—and cultural and linguistic—rights at the federal level.

The media has a significant role in promoting community harmony and multicultural media. Media outlets including SBS and community broadcasters need to be adequately resourced and supported.

Recommendations

1. That a federally legislated Charter of Human Rights for Australia be introduced, which encompasses civil, political, and cultural rights, with an appropriately funded education strategy to accompany it. This should include consideration over time of the incorporation of social and economic rights into such a Charter.
2. That the Federal *Living in Harmony* grants program receives on going funding to further promote harmony, mutual respect and understanding in Australian communities.
3. That a national advertising campaign be implemented highlighting the multicultural and diverse nature of Australian society and the social, political and economic gains diversity brings to the nation.
4. That a review of regulatory arrangements for electronic broadcasting media be undertaken to ensure that programs which promote racism, hatred, ridicule or contempt or incite violence against people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds receive appropriate sanctions so as to discourage such programming.



5. That there be increased financial and operational support for ethnic media in Australia in line with the recommendations of the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters *Value our Voices* campaign. Ethnic media contributes enormously to harmony and successful settlement.
6. That SBS television comply with its multicultural charter and that the Government adequately fund SBS to perform this role, including maintaining a strong focus on languages other than English in radio and television.



7. Refugee and Humanitarian Policy

Australia has a history of resettling refugees from overseas and providing them with settlement support. The range of services available to assist refugees and humanitarian entrants settle in Australia is to be commended. However, when it comes to settling asylum seekers the principle of generosity has not been extended in recent years. It is time for the Federal Government to implement a more humanitarian and compassionate approach to asylum seekers.

In 2005-06 the Australian Humanitarian Program offered 13,000 places to refugees and humanitarian entrants. This figure represents a very small proportion of overall migration to Australia. Accordingly the Australian Government should increase the humanitarian program to 15,000 places. 13,000 places is a small proportion of the global population of asylum seekers, refugees and persons of concern which UNHCR estimates to be around 33 million persons.

In Australia refugees are selected for resettlement on the basis of need and ECCV believes it is of utmost importance that this policy continues. Factors such as the ability to integrate or religious convictions should have no bearing on the composition of Australia's Humanitarian Program. At the same time, family reunion must be recognised as fundamental to the effective resettlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants and efforts made to ensure that the process of reuniting families straightforward.

Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should increase the annual offshore Humanitarian Program to 15,000 places in line with the recommendation put forth by the Refugee Council of Australia.¹
2. That the number of onshore protection visas issued to refugees should not be linked to the quota for offshore Humanitarian protection visas.²
3. The entire system of processing asylum seekers in offshore detention centers should be abolished. Additionally, in line with international obligations, asylum seekers who are recognised as refugees under the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees should be awarded permanent protection visas in Australia.

¹ Refugee Council of Australia, 'Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2007-08', RCOA submission, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>

² Refugee Council of Australia, 'Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2007-08', RCOA submission, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>



4. That with the exception of family reunion, the composition of the refugee and humanitarian program should reflect the selection of refugees most in need of settlement, not the ability to integrate into Australian society. Strong consideration should be given to the recommendations put forward by the UNHCR in determining the composition of the Humanitarian Program.
5. In recognition of the importance of family reunion for effective settlement, the recent restrictions made on proposers for Special Humanitarian Program visas should be reversed.
6. The Federal Government should provide further infrastructure, resources and settlement support for refugee communities in regional areas in the settlement process.
7. The Federal Government should ensure that intensive on-arrival family assistance is available to all migrants in the refugee and humanitarian scheme.



8. Immigration

Australia's current economic prosperity has been built around immigration. Since World War II, Australia has accepted 6.5 million migrants who have contributed immeasurably to Australia, economically and culturally. Australia has gone from being a predominantly Anglo-Celtic society to a multicultural society with people of many different backgrounds, cultures and faiths.

Australia has an ageing population. Currently 13.4% of the Australians population is over 60 but this will rise to 25.3% of the population by 2047. With such a huge increase in our ageing population and with its commensurate increase in welfare, health and aged care costs, immigration has never been more important to our ongoing economic development and prosperity.

The Australian immigration intake in 2005-06 was 142,000, including 97,000 skilled migrants and around 13,000 humanitarian migrants. The federal government has significantly increased the skilled migration component of our immigration program, at the expense of the family reunion program, and maintained the humanitarian component. It is unclear to what extent skilled migrants are working in the areas where they have skills and there may be a greater demand for unskilled labour in the service sector in future with our ageing population and labour force.

There are also around 200,000 temporary working migrants which represents a significant increase and could be seen to be at the expense of more permanent migration.

Recommendations

1. The refugee and humanitarian component of the immigration program should be increased to 15,000 and consideration should be given to a new category of climate refugees in view of global warming and its impact on our neighbours in the South Pacific region.
2. The Government should adjust the migration program so that permanent migrants receive priority over short-term working migrants and that short-term working migrants are not subject to exploitation.
3. Australia should maintain its current immigration intake, with any change subject only to unforeseen environmental considerations.
4. Consideration should be given to adjusting the emphasis of the immigration program away from skilled migration and include a category of unskilled migrants who may be suited to work in areas where there are unskilled labour shortages.
5. Consideration should be given to compensation or ameliorative programs to assist underdeveloped countries who face negative economic or social consequences from any adverse cherry-picking of their skilled labour force by Australia.



6. The Government should consider increasing provision for family reunion as people settle best when they are around family. Family reunion is critical to facilitate and assist in successful settlement as it provides culturally appropriate support structures.



9. Multicultural Youth Policy

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, particularly from new and emerging communities, face many challenges in the Australian community. CALD young people may experience higher levels of poverty, educational disadvantage, inadequate housing and racial discrimination. Young people from CALD and refugee backgrounds also face further barriers to participation and representation and are less likely to be included in decision making structures that affect their lives.

According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's settlement database in 2006, 75 per cent of those who arrived in Australia under the Commonwealth Government's humanitarian program were under the age of 30. Due to their experiences, young people from refugee backgrounds are exposed to risks such as having to deal with a complex education and employment system, recovering from trauma, adjusting to resettlement and experiencing social exclusion and disconnection.

The Commonwealth government needs to strengthen support for CALD youth participation and engagement. The establishment of an Australian Youth Forum should recognise the special concerns and needs of ethnic youth as part of its broader role.

Recommendations

1. ECCV supports the establishment of the *Australian Youth Forum* and restoring the position of the Minister for Youth, including having a focus on CALD and refugee youth under these new arrangements.
2. Government and non-government youth participation strategies and leadership programs should be more culturally sensitive to the needs of young people from CALD and refugee backgrounds.
3. Government and non-government organisations and agencies should keep accurate and reliable data on ethnic youth issues.
4. A national refugee youth strategy should be established to address issues such as trauma, disrupted education, social capital, health, fragmented families and settlement.
5. There should be greater focus and funding for tertiary institutions on the study of languages other than English, including new and emerging languages from Africa and the Middle East.



6. There should be a more flexible and intensive English language on-arrival program with appropriate methodologies to prepare young people from refugee backgrounds for secondary and tertiary education. On arrival programs should also include specific transition programs from education to employment for young people over the age of 16.



10. Multicultural Employment Policy

For many migrant communities, employment is fundamental to their settlement and for creating opportunities for their social and economic participation in civil society. Today, many migrants experience higher levels of unemployment or underemployment than similarly qualified members of the mainstream Australian community. The Federal Government must implement strategies and policies targeted at improving access to meaningful employment for culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia.

Australian employers continue to underestimate the value of overseas qualifications and international work experience. The federal government must play a significant role in communicating the array of skills and value that migrant communities bring and to the workplace. Additionally, the process of gaining overseas qualification recognition needs to be streamlined and further opportunities created for new arrivals to develop local work experience.

As well as the social benefits to be gained from developing pathways to meaningful employment for migrants and refugees, such investments will bring strong economic dividends to the nation, particularly in the context of skills shortages.

Recommendations

1. Systematic and industry focused vocational English language training options should be targeted to new arrivals with higher levels of education, and implemented to assist the transition of skilled persons into their area of expertise early in the settlement process.
2. The process of gaining overseas qualification recognition in Australia must be streamlined in order to assist migrants enter the labor market at a level appropriate to their skills.
3. That a national education campaign highlighting the benefits of cultural diversity in the workforce should be implemented to promote best practice in employment process, including partnerships from large and small businesses.
4. Further resources need to be allocated to ensure that refugee and migrant communities have access to training and are given better opportunities to develop local work experience, and ultimately gain meaningful employment.

