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Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into Strengthening Multiculturalism

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee in relation to its inquiry into Strengthening Multiculturalism (“Inquiry”).

SCoA represents over 80 agencies in the settlement sector across Australia, which comprise the vast majority of agencies providing settlement support to recently arrived migrants, including those from a refugee background. Our members work directly with a wide range of new arrivals from diverse backgrounds, as well as the mainstream Australian community and various stakeholders.

SCoA believes that Australia should be proud of its multicultural community, and should recognise the role of settlement services in supporting newly arrived migrants. Our members witness firsthand the true value of the contribution made to multicultural Australia by those it welcomes as migrants, as well as the challenges those people face when attempting to settle in their new communities.

The conversation about multiculturalism in Australia is important and needs to continue, given the impact these issues have both on recent arrivals and those in more established communities across the country.

SCoA therefore welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry, and make specific recommendations that we see as being crucial to the success of multiculturalism into the future. Our submission is based on our member consultations and also research conducted into the experiences of migrants and refugees in Australia.

If the Committee wishes to further discuss the contents of this submission, or any other matter of relevance, please do not hesitate to contact our National Office on 02 6282 8515.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these items with the Committee in person if that is believed to be necessary.

Sincerely,

Dewani Bakkum, Chairperson

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Executive Summary

The Settlement Council of Australia is proud of our country's commitment to cultural diversity and the bipartisan support of Australia's political leaders to maintaining a welcoming, inclusive and harmonious society.

SCoA celebrates the enormous contribution of migrants in Australia and the crucial role of Australia's settlement sector in supporting them as they establish their homes here. We submit that Australia's migration program has successfully delivered a multicultural society which operates to the benefit of all.

Support for multiculturalism is seen in the broader community, as revealed by the Scanlon Foundation in its 2016 Mapping Social Cohesion report which confirms high levels of support, nationally, of 83%.¹

Notwithstanding these positive indications, SCoA believes that it remains vital for Australia and its leaders to passionately defend multiculturalism against any attempts to devalue it. Through this positive commitment, we can maintain Australia's prominence as one of the world's most welcoming nations, and continue to enjoy the success of a strong, cohesive society.

We therefore welcome the Inquiry and see it as an opportunity to engage in a meaningful discussion about strengthening Australia's commitment to multiculturalism. We note the Inquiry's Terms of Reference as follows:

- a. the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities;
- b. the adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities;
- c. the adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes;
- d. the impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;
- e. the impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;
- f. how to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;
- g. how to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life;
- h. the potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation;
- i. the potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission; and
- j. any related matters.

¹ Scanlon Foundation (2016) "Mapping Social Cohesion", p54, accessible at http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/research_surveys/2016/

After providing some context for the Committee to consider, SCoA has set out below a number of relevant considerations and, where appropriate, recommendations, for each of the 9 terms of reference. For ease of reference, the recommendations have been extracted and are reproduced below:

Summary of Recommendations

The adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities

1. *Owing to their sophisticated, culturally sensitive and specialised delivery models developed over decades of dedicated experience, members of the settlement sector are recognised as the best placed to provide responsive and flexible services to migrants and to assist them to reach their full potential in Australia across all identified settlement outcomes, including both social and economic.*

Funding for settlement service providers should therefore be sufficiently flexible and adequate, particularly in line with any increases to client numbers, such that settlement service providers are empowered to deliver effective and tailored services to specific individual and community groups without being bound by a set of rigid, pre-determined outcomes.

2. *While preserving funding for the successful, intensive, services provided to recently arrived migrants from a refugee background under the HSS and CCS (soon to be HSP) it is crucial that federally funded settlement services be expanded as follows:*
 - a. *Settlement Grants Program funding should be increased to include a broader and more flexible range of activities; and*
 - b. *Eligibility for settlement services should be expanded to include all migrants and should be assessed on an individual needs basis irrespective of the visa they hold or the length of time they have been resident in Australia.*
3. *Consideration should be given to enhancing the role of settlement service providers in the delivery of mainstream services to migrants and refugees either by:*
 - a. *Transferring the delivery of these services directly to settlement service providers; or*
 - b. *Requiring mainstream service providers to demonstrate cultural competencies, meet specific targets relevant to local CALD communities, develop an understanding of the role of settlement service providers and to actively engage with settlement service providers in order to ensure the best outcomes for migrants and refugees.*

The adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes

4. *SCoA recommends a more structured approach to data collection on issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with specific funding, to ensure adequate and reliable data.*

The impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief

5. *Initiatives that enhance community harmony and social cohesion are crucial to promote the multiculturalism in Australia. This is a two-way process and as much focus must be given to educating the general public as is given to training recent arrivals. With this in mind, grants targeted at social cohesion should be increased, and efforts made to encourage a greater number of activities and initiatives that promote multiculturalism in Australia.*

The impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief

6. *The impact of leadership and media statements on community harmony and social cohesion should not be underestimated and it is therefore crucial that all Australian leaders focus on the positive impact that migrants make to Australian society and recognise the role of the Australian settlement sector in achieving this. Negative discourse which alienates specific groups and promotes disharmony must be actively discouraged. Australia should make clear its commitment to multiculturalism through an effective multicultural statement and/or developing a national legislative framework.*

How to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief

7. *The Committee should consider a range of measures designed to improve community understanding of, and therefore public discourse about, matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious beliefs.*

How to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life

8. *The work of the settlement sector, as well as various ethnic and multicultural communities should be recognised as crucial to building awareness of the contributions that migrants make both socially and economically and should be reinforced and strengthened through further government funding.*

The potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation

9. *The Government should undertake a thorough though expeditious public investigation into the value and form of an Australian Multiculturalism Act, to enshrine in domestic law all those elements of international conventions and covenants to which Australia is and should become a signatory in relation to social participation, human rights and cultural diversity.*

The potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission

10. *The Multicultural Advisory Council, or a new Multicultural Commission, should be enshrined in an Australian Multiculturalism Act, and charged with the protection and enhancement of multiculturalism across Australia, including in relation to social participation, human rights and cultural diversity.*

1. Context for the Inquiry: Australia's Multicultural Population

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) represents the broad network of migrant resource centres and settlement agencies around Australia. The MRCs were the first institutions established under the Fraser Government's Multicultural Policy initiated as a result of the Galbally Report of 1978. For over thirty years, the centres, together with more recently established settlement agencies, have played a pivotal role in enabling settlement, enhancing integration and ensuring equity. As advocates and service providers, the sector has a unique knowledge of the realities of the settlement experience, over time, across the country, and among hundreds of different ethno-cultural communities.

SCoA holds to a vision of an equitable, respectful and inclusive Australia where effective settlement outcomes provide every opportunity for humanitarian entrants and migrants to fully participate in society. We argue that the stakeholders in the process are not solely the immigrants nor their service providers, but the whole of Australian society. Good settlement outcomes contribute to social harmony, greater productivity, and wide social cohesion. Poor or distressed settlement processes corrode social well-being, waste human resources, and contribute to social exclusion and associated conflict.

The rapidly changing nature of settlement, globalization and economic challenges means that fostering community harmony is more important than ever. It is widely acknowledged that diversity brings a plethora of benefits to Australia, and it is important that public discourse on multiculturalism reflects this.

Australia has a proud multicultural heritage and is greatly enriched by migrants and refugees from around the world. Migrants, including those from a refugee background, contribute socially, culturally and economically to Australia.

The contribution of migration to Australia must not be undervalued. Migration contributes to the social and economic vibrancy of Australia in numerous ways and the success of Australia's multicultural population can be seen across the country in our strong and vibrant economy as well as the rich and diverse fabric of our society.

The success of Australia's migration program has been achieved through the maintenance of a suitable balance between economic and social objectives. On the one hand, government is committed to the attraction of significant numbers of highly skilled entrants who contribute to the economy as soon as possible following their arrival. On the other hand, it is accepted that certain classes of migrants, including family migrants and those from a refugee background, need more assistance to achieve their full potential. This is to be expected because these migrants have not been chosen on the basis of their economic characteristics. These streams meet broader social obligations, supporting social cohesion and Australia's role as a global citizen.² This does not, however, mean that these entrants and their families cannot, and do not, contribute to Australia. Indeed, considerable research has been undertaken which demonstrates the capacity of migrants from a refugee background to become fully engaged with

² Migration Council of Australia (2015), *The Economic Impact of Migration*, p17.

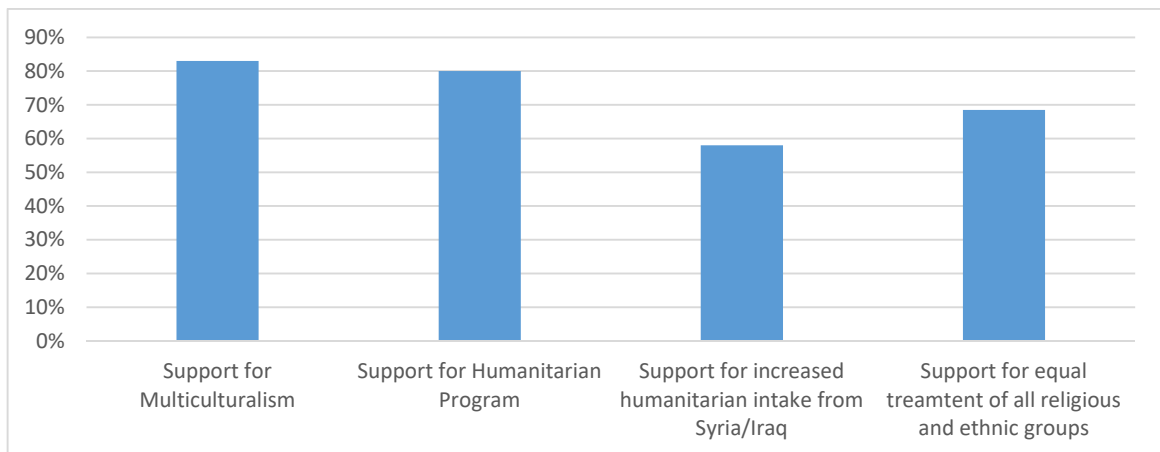
Australia on economic and social levels, to the mutual benefit of all.³ The OECD point to this as the dividend of Australia’s humanitarian commitment to the resettlement of refugees.⁴

Community acceptance of migrants has historically been a source of contention both in Australia and globally. At its heart is the public’s perception of migrants within community and the impact this has on social cohesion and multiculturalism.⁵

The Scanlon Foundation in its 2016 Mapping Social Cohesion report (“Report”)⁶ presents the results of the Foundation’s 2016 probability-based survey of 1500 Australians and provides a timely and insightful snapshot of the values and opinions held across a cross-section of the Australian community.

The Report demonstrates continuing high levels of support nationally for multiculturalism (83%⁷), a clear indication that Australia is largely welcoming and supportive of the diverse mixture of cultures it currently enjoys. Similarly, Australians exhibit strong support for our immigration programme. The Report notes the lowest levels of concern in its history,⁸ ranking Australia globally as the nation most supportive of its immigration intake.⁹

There is also very strong support for Australia’s humanitarian program (80%¹⁰) and a majority (58%) of Australians support the government's plan to bring refugees from the Syrian conflict to Australia,¹¹ and almost 70% support the view that there should be equal consideration for refugees of all religious and ethnic groups.



(Source: Markus, A. (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion*.)

³ Hugo, G. (2011), *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants* (DIAC, 2011) and DSS (2016), *Snapshots from Oz: Key features of Australian settlement policies, programs and services available for humanitarian entrants*, p8.

⁴ Liebig, T. (2007), *The labour market integration of immigrants in Australia* (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers 2007).

⁵ Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p280

⁶ Markus, A. (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion*, (Scanlon Foundation, 2016) accessible at http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/research_surveys/2016/

⁷ Markus, A. (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion*, page 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, page 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, page 49.

These statistics paint a very positive view of the general population's acceptance of immigration and the country's welcoming approach to migrants, and while discrimination and racism remain as issues for further attention, Australia is well-placed to continue its highly successful migration program.

This does not mean that the future of multiculturalism is settled however, and in 2017 it remains a highly debated and divisive issue. This is particularly so in light of the perception of growing global threats to national security such as terrorism. The emotion with which these issues are debated has the potential to erode years of crucial work supporting Australian multiculturalism. For this reason, SCoA welcomed the March 2017 release of the Federal Government's multicultural policy statement: "Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful".¹² We applaud the government's commitment to multiculturalism and see this statement as a continuation of an important discussion regarding how best to enshrine and protect Australia's cultural diversity.

2. The views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities;

As advocates and service providers, the settlement sector has a unique knowledge of the realities of the settlement experience, over time, across the country, and among hundreds of different ethno-cultural communities. Within their settlement work, our members are in a position to assist refugees and migrants who are living the reality of multicultural Australia. They also witness first-hand the experiences of their clients and the potential hurdles they face as they make Australia their home.

SCoA suggests that the focus of discussion must first and foremost be on the experiences of individuals themselves. Framing the discussion in such a way, it is suggested, enables stakeholders to focus on the development of each migrant within the Australian community, capitalising on their strengths and enabling them to participate and contribute to their full potential.¹³ This, in turn, will generate the best outcomes for a cohesive multicultural society.

The experience of newly arrived migrants is not always a smooth one, especially if they come from a refugee background. It goes without saying that the traumatic experiences that lead to their arrival in Australia can have long-lasting impacts on health and well-being. This, combined with the obvious culture shock of arriving in a new country, and the great volume of unknown and uncertain aspects to life in a new country, creates a significant challenge for any newly arrived humanitarian migrant seeking to establish a new life in Australia.

Just as the settlement journey discussed above is experienced differently by each individual migrant, so too are the experiences that led to their coming to Australia. Indeed, it is stating the obvious to note that each migrant is unique and brings with them varying levels of education, work experience and health, as well as different experiences of trauma and stress.

In 2016, the Australian Institute of Family Studies' (AIFS) published the findings of the first wave of its survey-based research project "Building a New Life in Australia", which details the challenges of recently arrived migrants.¹⁴ It found that migrants from a refugee background, for example, often face multiple

¹² Australian Government (2017), *Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/australian-governments-multicultural-statement>

¹³ Liston, K., *Valuing the Role of Humanitarian Entrants in Settlement* (2011 Migration Update Conference) p1

¹⁴ Australian Institute of Family Studies (2016), *Building a New Life in Australia* (Fact Sheet 2016).

disadvantages because of their experiences, and while these differ greatly from individual to individual, they can include:

- psychological distress arising from pre-arrival trauma, with the majority of participants (89%) in the AIFS survey reporting that they or their immediate family had experienced at least one type of traumatic event before coming to Australia;¹⁵
- mental health issues;
- physical disabilities;
- limited, disrupted or no prior schooling.¹⁶

The findings of this research are echoed by DSS which also identifies the following further hurdles to settlement:

- limited English language skills;¹⁷ and
- limited opportunities to gain skills and work experience prior to arrival in Australia.¹⁸

Despite this, migrants from a refugee background are resilient and enthusiastic about making a contribution to their new home, and the support they receive helps them in this regard.¹⁹

As will be discussed in detail below, Australia has a comprehensive suite of settlement services in place which support and empower newly arrived migrants. Before determining how effective those settlement services are in promoting a multicultural society, however, it is necessary to consider some of the common issues experienced by migrants as they arrive in Australia. These include:

- Policy and Regulation; and
- Experiences of Discrimination.

Policy and Regulation

There is a need to strike a careful balance between government regulation and the avoidance of policy which has the potential to restrict broader notions of multicultural society.

Australia's robust immigration laws, for example, are well-documented. The Migration Act 1958 and Migration Regulations 1994 contain a set of strict criteria detailing visa eligibility, compliance mechanisms and visa cancellation procedures. Furthermore, SCoA is aware of recently announced changes intended to strengthen requirements for citizenship applications in Australia under the Australian Citizenship Act 2007. SCoA is concerned that these changes, if enacted, have the potential to alienate certain members of Australia's multicultural community, for whom citizenship may become unattainable.

SCoA accepts that regulation is necessary for any country that wishes to maintain control of its borders. It would be unwise, however, to ignore the potential that this has to impact social cohesion.

¹⁵ Ibid., p4

¹⁶ Ibid., p3.

¹⁷ DSS (2013), *Settlement Needs Information*, p6.

¹⁸ DSS (2016), *Snapshots from Oz*, p8.

¹⁹ UNHCR (2017), *Far from being traumatized, most refugees are 'surprisingly resilient'*,

<http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/1/586b78de4/qa-far-traumatized-refugees-surprisingly-resilient.html>, accessed on 10 January 2017.

Australia's skilled and family visa streams, for example, contain specific prohibitions on access to government support (including, but not limited to, many of the settlement-specific services discussed elsewhere in this submission), at least for the first two years of residence in Australia. This can exclude migrants who may for a variety of reasons struggle in their adaptation to life in Australia and their ability to contribute.

Further, there is evidence that migrants from a refugee background in Australia can experience psychological distress associated with policies around immigration detention; the imposition of harsh conditions for those on bridging visas, and associated delays in processing; limits on opportunities for family reunification; and the use of temporary, rather than permanent protection visas.²⁰

The trend towards temporary residency is broader, however, and SCoA notes an increased focus on temporary migration across all visa streams over the past decade.²¹ By definition, a temporary migrant has fewer rights, less independence and clearly a significantly lower level of security due to the time limit imposed on their visa and the uncertainty surrounding renewals. This has clear consequences for considerations of the makeup and nature of the broader Australian community.

SCoA accepts the Parliament's right to enact legislation as it sees necessary. However, we would urge that in the adoption of measures such as these, consideration be given to the impacts they can have on broader considerations of fostering an inclusive, multicultural society.

Discrimination

Multiculturalism necessarily involves *all* members of society, requiring both migrants and the broader community to commit to inclusive practices and that migrants are not discriminated against as they engage socially and economically in their new home.²² Recent research by the Scanlon Foundation points to disturbing trends in the increase of experiences of discrimination in Australia. Despite finding that the majority (over 80%) of Australians support our multicultural society,²³ the Scanlon Foundation reports that 20% of respondents have experienced discrimination. This number is the highest in the 10 year history of the Foundation's surveys.²⁴

While the figure of 20% is unacceptably high, this percentage takes into account all respondents to the Survey, including Australian-born. When one considers the experiences of discrimination with relevance to a person's country of birth, the numbers become even more compelling. In this regard, SCoA recommends to the Committee another research survey conducted by the Scanlon Foundation in 2015, "Australians Today",²⁵ which reveals the following percentages of respondents from different backgrounds who report experiencing instances of discrimination:

²⁰ Settlement Services International (2016), *Working It Out* (Occasional Paper 1, March 2016), p12.

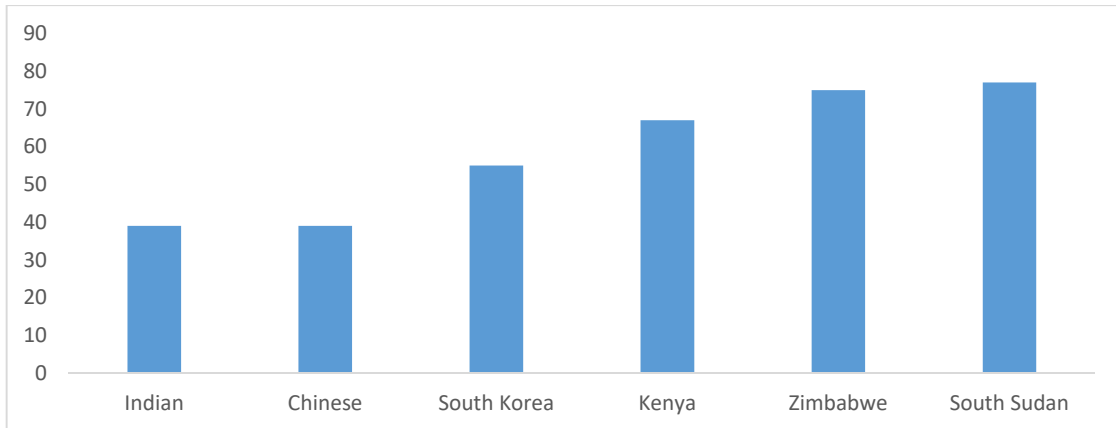
²¹ For example: the Subclass 457 skilled worker visa is a 4 year temporary visa and the government has recently announced plans to introduce a temporary, five-year visa for parents of Australian permanent residents and citizens.

²² European Council (2004), *Common Basic Principles on Immigrant Integration*, http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/common-basic-principles_en.pdf, accessed on 28 November 2016.

²³ Markus, A. (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion* (Scanlon Foundation, 2016), p54.

²⁴ Markus, A. (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion*, p25.

²⁵ Markus, A. (2016), *Australians Today* (Scanlon Foundation, 2016).



(Source: Markus, A. (2016), *Australians Today*, p62.)

These findings highlight the significant hurdle that discrimination within society can pose for fostering a successful multicultural community and demonstrate the need to strengthen measures designed to maintain a socially inclusive society, as suggested below.

3. The adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities

Both multiculturalism and social inclusion operate in the same terrain when they are seeking to reduce the barriers to full social participation for members of the Australian community who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We welcome the fact that the Government recognises that multiculturalism should be a “whole of government” approach. If the whole of government takes responsibility then we can better ensure the implementation of the four multicultural principles:

- access and equity;
- human rights;
- social inclusion; and
- anti-racism.

The settlement and inclusion of migrants in Australian society is a whole of government concern, including maternal and child health, early childhood education, education and skills acquisition, disability rights, labour market access, healthy lifestyles, secure and affordable housing, safe communities, substance abuse avoidance and recovery, and dignified ageing.

We commend the efforts made across multiple federal government departments to improve access for members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The role of government in the settlement and lives of migrants in Australia should not be undervalued.

Effective settlement of migrants is not an economic process alone. It also has social and personal elements. None of these are mutually exclusive and the failure to effectively participate in one dimension is likely to have multiple repercussions and could severely jeopardise progress in others.²⁶

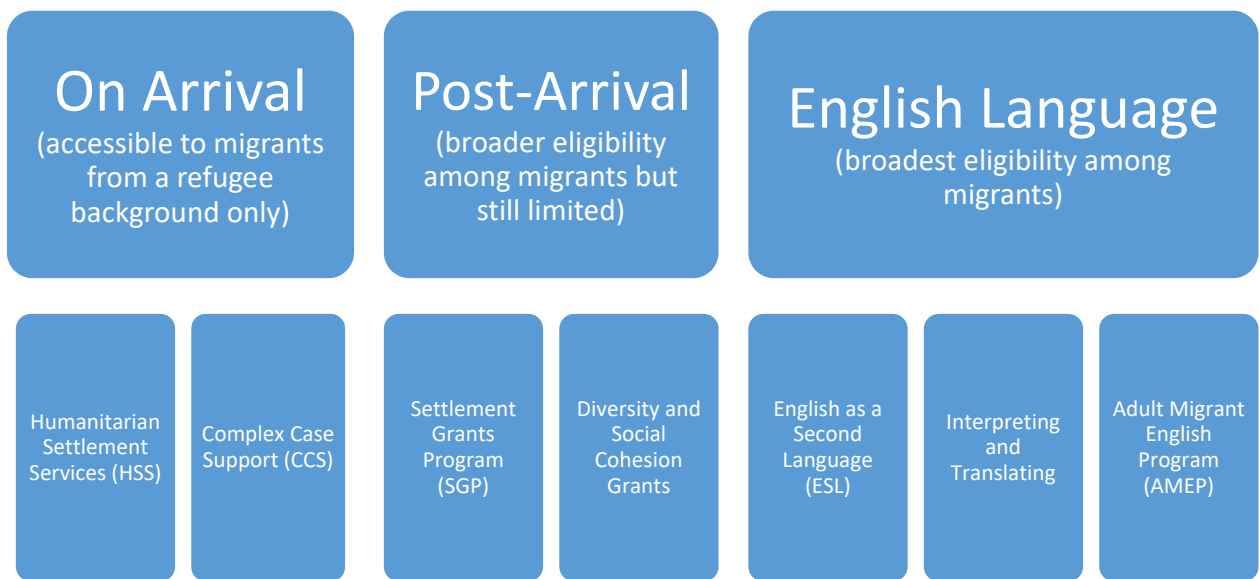
²⁶ OECD (2015) *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015, Settling In*, p19.

SCoA's consultation with members supports this view and stresses the need to adopt a holistic view of a migrant's settlement in Australia and how this contributes to our multicultural society.

Australia's assistance for recent arrivals: an overview of settlement support services

Each group of people coming to Australia is eligible for different levels of settlement services both on arrival and in the years following. The majority of on-arrival settlement services are reserved only for migrants from a refugee background. However, following the initial settlement period, a broader class of migrants, though still not all migrants, can access certain post-arrival settlement services and English language assistance.

In summary, the range of federally-funded settlement services provided in Australia includes:



Access to Settlement Services

SCoA's member consultations have highlighted a number of issues that can impact the effective delivery of settlement services to migrants. A major theme arising from our consultations has been the limited scope of access to many of the most crucial government-funded services.

For example, crucial and highly specialised "on arrival" settlement services are almost exclusively reserved for migrants from a refugee background – just 8% of the overall migrant intake. While other important services, especially in relation to language, are open to a broader cohort of migrants, approximately 92% of those arriving in Australia each year are left to navigate the initial arrival period alone, especially where they don't have family or other community links to support them.

There are numerous groups of migrants within this 92% who could otherwise be considered sufficiently in need to receive government assistance, but are prohibited from doing so. Indeed, it is members of these cohorts that are often featured in media reports highlighting alleged failings of multiculturalism. SCoA submits that by opening up crucial on-arrival services, on an as needs basis, to a broader cohort of migrants, Australia can unlock even greater potential in its annual migrant intake and ensure the success of multiculturalism.

Furthermore, the delivery and availability of settlement services for all migrants will always be subject to budgetary constraints, regional considerations, and fluctuations in the numbers of arrivals in any given location at a specific time. These matters are managed as best as possible by the hard working members of the settlement sector.

It is also important to acknowledge that many associated services are delivered not by settlement service providers, but by mainstream agencies (whether government or private). This is regularly reported as a source of further concern for migrants, who are required to understand and engage with a large number of complex requirements of different agencies that are not necessarily well-suited to dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

To that end, SCoA acknowledges the considerable work done by the government to ensure refugees, in particular, are settled in locations where adequate and appropriate services are available.

“On Arrival” Settlement Services

The Australian Government funds settlement service providers to deliver a range of settlement services to migrants from a refugee background immediately on their arrival in Australia. Settlement service providers are the first point of contact in Australia for many new arrivals and the support they offer has a significant influence on future settlement outcomes. Supporting people when they first arrive to help them understand not only the practical details of living in a new country, but the underlying ethos of tolerance and respect which informs multicultural Australia is an essential step in fostering inclusion.

There are currently two key settlement programs funded by the Federal Government tailored specifically for eligible migrants from a refugee background in the first six to 12 months of their arrival: Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Complex Case Support (CCS). In August 2016, the Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs, Senator Zed Seselja, announced a redesign of the settlement services provided “on arrival” with a focus on “better language and employment outcomes for humanitarian entrants”.²⁷ The redesign will see the combination of the HSS and CCS into a new Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). The HSP is currently being designed in a co-design process between the government and short-listed service providers, with a view to launching the new model in November 2017.

Post-arrival Settlement Services

As discussed above, the settlement process extends beyond the initial period immediately following a migrant’s arrival in Australia. Many settlement service providers are therefore actively involved in a comprehensive range of settlement initiatives aimed at assisting migrants and refugees over the longer term. These include the Settlement Grants Program (SGP),²⁸ Diversity and Social Cohesion Grants,²⁹ and others.

SCoA submits that these services are some of the most crucial to achieving a mutually beneficial and cohesive multicultural society.

²⁷ Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja, <http://zedseelja.dss.gov.au/media-releases/improving-settlement-outcomes-refugees>.

²⁸ For more information see <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/settlement-grants-program>.

²⁹ For more information see <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/diversity-and-social-cohesion-program-dscp/diversity-and-social-cohesion>.

Eligibility for the programs funded by SGP remains predominantly focused on migrants from a refugee background, though it is slightly broader, including permanent residents who have arrived in Australia during the last five years as:

- humanitarian entrants;
- family stream migrants with low levels of English proficiency; or
- dependents of skilled migrants in rural and regional areas with low English proficiency.³⁰

A small group of temporary residents (Prospective Marriage and Provisional Partner visa holders and their dependents) in rural and regional areas who have arrived in Australia during the last five years and who have low English proficiency also fall within the target group. Other provisional or temporary visa holders are not eligible for SGP services.³¹

Diversity and Social Cohesion Grants provide funds for non-profit organisations (often but not exclusively settlement service providers) for up to three years to deliver projects that address social cohesion issues. While not specifically designed to be “settlement services” these grants are crucial to the fostering of a cohesive multicultural society as they are intended to encourage “respect, fairness and a sense of belonging”.³² Programs funded under these grants do not possess the same eligibility limitations as initiatives funded by the SGP, however the level of funding provided under these grants is significantly smaller than SGP.

English language services

The largest portion of government funding within the broader settlement program is dedicated to the delivery of English language services, including:

- The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Skills for Education and Employment (SEE);
- English as a Second Language training within government-funded schools;
- Interpreting and Translating Services and the maintenance of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

Many of these services and programs are available to the full cohort of migrants and persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds generally. They are crucial to fostering inclusion and empowering culturally and linguistically diverse communities to contribute to a cohesive multicultural society.

Other sources of funding for Settlement Services

In addition to the above, there are a number of alternative funding sources utilised throughout the settlement sector:

- State, territory and local governments also provide funding for services, but this varies considerably across locations, in part reflecting differences in need and government priorities.³³

³⁰ DSS (2013), *Settlement Grants Program 2013-14 Application Information Booklet*, p11.

³¹ Ibid.

³² DSS, *Fact Sheet: Diversity and Social Cohesion grant funding*, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2015/diversitysocialcohesion_fact_0.pdf, accessed on 10 January 2017.

³³ Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p275.

- Private enterprise is increasingly becoming involved in the sector, partnering with settlement service providers to run employment programs, for example, as well as engaging in philanthropic activities.³⁴
- Settlement service providers are increasingly adopting unique business models, and in particular engaging in social enterprise, where that can assist migrants and refugees in the settlement process and, ideally, without the need for external funding.³⁵

Of course, a significant and vital asset of the settlement sector is also its volunteers and the countless hours invested by individuals across the country, for little or no reward, to assist newly arrived migrants as they settle in their new home.

These additional programs and funding sources supplement the initial settlement support provided with federal government funding, adding to the scope and range of activities of settlement agencies, and are a key way settlement agencies contribute to building community cohesion.

Who provides settlement services?

Over 100 organisations operating across Australia deliver settlement services under one or more of the abovementioned funding models. For some, settlement services represent the major focus of work and the major source of funding. Many others, perhaps the majority, include settlement-related services as part of a suite of broader services, often including aged and disability care, for example.

In 2017, the sector has evolved to contain a diverse range of organisations including a number of original MRCs (usually as more mature corporate entities than they began as), larger entities with sophisticated business and service delivery models and, in some cases national and multi-national corporations.

As noted above, the delivery of services to migrants settling in Australia is not provided exclusively by settlement service providers. A suite of affiliated services are provided by mainstream agencies, including:

- Centrelink;
- JobActive – which provides government-funded employment services;
- Various housing support services; and
- Schools and tertiary institutions.

The diversity of organisations providing settlement services demonstrates the vibrancy of the sector and has resulted in a collaborative, effective and adaptive sector that is simultaneously business-oriented and community-focused. In this sense, SCoA submits that settlement service providers serve as a vital centrepiece for the delivery of effective settlement services. They have assisted the building of ongoing partnerships and collaboration between private, public and the community sectors which has been

³⁴ Roumeliotis, V. (2017), *Private sector's inspiring efforts to help refugees* (SSI Blog, Settlement Services International, 13 January 2017) <http://www.ssi.org.au/news/ssi-news-blog/886-from-the-ceo-private-sector-s-inspiring-efforts-to-help-refugees>, accessed on 18 January 2017.

³⁵ Instances of these are numerous, but a very successful example is the Spice Exchange operated by SCoA member Access Community Services. See: http://www.accesscommunity.org.au/the_spice_exchange accessed on 10 January 2017.

pivotal in supporting settlement, improving social cohesion and achieving the best possible outcomes for migrants and the broader Australian community.

Supporting the best possible Settlement Outcomes

A key objective of SCoA in recent years has been to develop a set of national standards for the delivery of settlement services which identify target outcomes across 9 key areas of settlement service delivery.³⁶ The National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards (“NSSOS”) identify nine areas of equal importance that enable members to benchmark their service delivery against key practical considerations.³⁷ Rather than attempting to impose new regulatory burdens on agencies operating in the settlement services sector, these standards reflect best practice and highlight the considerable work and commitment invested by SCoA members to ensure the best possible outcomes for recently arrived migrants as they settle in Australia and begin contributing to their new home.

The nine NSSOS areas are reproduced below:

Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training pathways are paramount to the effective settlement of new arrival communities and demonstrate an evidence-base of sustainable outcomes
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement services and programs provide effective, sustainable and diverse support in contributing to employment outcomes
Health & Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement services clients are engaged through effective and responsive primary prevention and early intervention initiatives that encourage health and wellbeing
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to appropriate and affordable housing is an essential feature of a smooth settlement process and in meeting successful settlement outcomes
Language services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreting and translating services are a critical feature of effective communication and essential to the delivery of high quality services
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to settlement support services is supported by a range of personal and community transport options
Civic Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement service provision is outcomes focused and results in an increasing evidence base demonstrating civic participation of migrants and new arrival communities
Family and Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement services are informed in relation to the intersecting issues that impact family relationships within the settlement process and responsive to supporting clients to overcome these
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to justice is a fundamental human right and settlement services recognise that access to legal literacy is fundamental to successful settlement

³⁶ Mirrored in the National Settlement Framework (2016) adopted across all levels of Australian Government.

³⁷ Settlement Council of Australia (2016) *National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards*, <http://scoa.org.au/research-and-publications/national-settlement-service-outcomes-standards-may-2016>.

Factors critical to facilitating settlement in multicultural Australia

The settlement sector's role in promoting a cohesive multicultural society has been the subject of research which overwhelmingly concludes that the suite of settlement services funded through federal government programs have been crucial in facilitating Australian settlement and therefore generating the best possible outcomes for inclusion.³⁸

Settlement service providers have developed strong community links and, vitally, trust, including through constant and direct consultations which provide evidenced based service development and improvement. Service providers have developed significant language and cultural competence to cater for a variety of ethno-specific cultural groups and have large volunteer programs which contribute to program outcomes and provide a practical way to foster social inclusion for newly arrived migrants.³⁹

SCoA notes that the work of the settlement sector is only one element of the story and must be viewed in conjunction with the commitment, loyalty and hard work of recent arrivals as they make their lives in Australia. SCoA is confident that a continued dedication to the provision of high-quality settlement services and the adoption of a more nuanced understanding of the settlement process across all levels of government will enhance the settlement of all migrants and will continue to reap countless benefits for Australia.

Settlement services are delivered successfully to migrants from all cultural backgrounds without discrimination based on race, religion or nationality. The sector's dedicated workforce possesses a vital understanding of the needs of different cultures, providing culturally aware services that are sensitive, relevant and appropriate.

Ensure funding is sufficient and contracts promote the best possible outcomes

Recommendation 1

Owing to their sophisticated, culturally sensitive and specialised delivery models developed over decades of dedicated experience, members of the settlement sector are recognised as the best placed to provide responsive and flexible services to migrants and to assist them to reach their full potential in Australia across all identified settlement outcomes, including both social and economic.

Funding for settlement service providers should therefore be sufficiently flexible and adequate, particularly in line with any increases to client numbers, such that settlement service providers are empowered to deliver effective and tailored services to specific individual and community groups without being bound by a set of rigid, pre-determined outcomes.

As has been established above, the cohort of migrants arriving in Australia each year is a diverse and varied group with differing needs. The focus of the settlement sector and the services it is funded to provide is to assist and empower migrants, and particularly those from a refugee background, as they develop independence and security and are accepted into their community.

³⁸ See for example: Hugo, G. (2011), *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*, p257, as well as Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p274.

³⁹ Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p279.

As a result, it is essential that funding for settlement services be maintained and increased as program levels increase, and contractual requirements are sufficiently flexible so that service providers can focus on delivering services tailored to the specific needs of the individual. While this is successful for the most part there is room for improvement, both in terms of the requirements imposed on service providers in respect of how they deliver services and also in the management of the entry, and destination of, migrants generally.

Most settlement service providers operate lean and busy agencies, heavily dependent on external funding. They are therefore beholden to policy changes and government decisions that can have a significant, and often immediate, impact on the viability of their businesses.⁴⁰ Any cuts to funding, for example, will impact viable and critical businesses and lead to poorer settlement outcomes for migrants, potentially impacting their long term potential to contribute to multicultural Australia.

Increase the scope of Settlement Services

Recommendation 2

While preserving funding for the successful, intensive, services provided to recently arrived migrants from a refugee background under the HSS and CCS (soon to be HSP) it is crucial that federally funded settlement services be expanded as follows:

- a) Settlement Grants Program funding should be increased to include a broader and more flexible range of activities; and*
- b) Eligibility for settlement services should be expanded to include all migrants and should be assessed on an individual needs basis irrespective of the visa they hold or the length of time they have been resident in Australia.*

A resounding theme in SCoA's member consultations is that the time-limits imposed on the provision of funded settlement services is arbitrary and unhelpful. This is less so for the HSS program which, most SCoA members agree, is adequately delivered during the period of initial arrival for the cohort of migrants who need it most, but more of an issue for the SGP, which targets only migrants who have been in Australia for less than five years.

SCoA members witness first-hand that achieving inclusion can be a much longer process for some clients, though not for all, and therefore requires a flexible funding model that does not result in clients in need being turned away due to the length of time they have been in Australia. Arguably, this extends not just to first-generation migrants but also their families who, despite being Australian-born in some cases, may still need access to services and programs, but who, due to the timeframe imposed under SGP, are denied such access.⁴¹

The provision of federally-funded settlement services should therefore be assessed based on needs and not the length of a migrant's stay in Australia.

⁴⁰ Roumeliotis, V. and Paschalidis-Chilas, E. (2013), *Settlement and Community Development: Moving and Shaping our Civil Society*, p83.

⁴¹ Hugo, G. (2011), *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*, p241.

Settlement service providers are largely funded at the Federal level only to assist migrants from refugee backgrounds. Settlement service providers already provide services (often unrecognised and unfunded) to other groups of recent arrivals however there is scope to do more. With appropriate funding the sector is well-placed to increase the provision of services to other groups of migrants to ensure successful settlement outcomes can be enjoyed more broadly.

As has been established above, the percentage of migrants for whom the intensive “on arrival” settlement services are funded is significantly small at just 8 per cent. This results in the vast majority of migrants being excluded from crucial orientation and settlement services. Recent studies, including the Productivity Commission’s 2016 report “Australia’s Migrant Intake”, have confirmed the view that in addition to migrants on humanitarian visas, other cohorts of migrants may also need extra assistance to settle successfully.⁴²

While not every migrant will require the full suite of settlement services, the advantage of implementing a needs-based model will be that crucial services are available to those who need them most, irrespective of the visa they hold. This has the potential to further enhance the settlement outcomes of all migrants, without necessarily resulting in a significant budgetary increase.

The provision of federally-funded settlement services should therefore be assessed based on needs and not the visa held by a migrant.

Without significant budgetary impact, a more inclusive approach to settlement services can be implemented so that the needs of all migrants can be assessed and any migrant who needs assistance in some aspect of their settlement, whether it be orientation to Australia, assistance to access employment or being empowered to engage with their new community, can be supported and the best possible settlement outcomes achieved.

SCoA submits that this will help to ensure a cohesive and successful multicultural society well into the future.

Striking the balance between mainstream and dedicated settlement agencies.

Recommendation 3

Consideration should be given to enhancing the role of settlement service providers in the delivery of mainstream services to migrants and refugees either by:

- a) Transferring the delivery of these services directly to settlement service providers; or*
- b) Requiring mainstream service providers to demonstrate cultural competencies, meet specific targets relevant to local CALD communities, develop an understanding of the role of settlement service providers and to actively engage with settlement service providers in order to ensure the best outcomes for migrants and refugees.*

⁴² Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p277.

As identified above, the delivery of services to newly arrived migrants requires the involvement of both specific settlement service providers as well as mainstream agencies.

While some mainstream agencies have acknowledged the need to do more to better service migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds, and are open to more collaboration with the settlement sector, it is often noted that many mainstream service providers lack cultural awareness and sensitivity, particularly across a diversity of cultures, and for smaller, newly-emerging cultural groups.⁴³

This can have negative impacts on the settlement outcomes of migrants, who are excluded, often unintentionally, and therefore miss out on crucial services.⁴⁴

The delivery of services to migrants therefore often results in settlement service providers providing extra assistance and guidance to mainstream agencies, a service which is not resourced through existing funding arrangements, or otherwise assisting those migrants who are not able to be assisted in the mainstream and therefore risk falling through the cracks.

SCoA suggests that the settlement sector has demonstrated innovative and collaborative practices in the areas of employment, housing and others, as highlighted above, which puts it in the ideal position to broaden the scope of services it provides and, should the government desire it, to take over delivery of what have traditionally been seen as mainstream services.

It is crucial that the delivery of mainstream services to migrants and refugees is undertaken by providers that are culturally competent and are able to meet the needs of clients in a responsive and efficient manner.

4. The adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes;

SCoA is concerned that there are significant limitations on the collection and availability of data, both relating to racially-motivated crimes and also to the range of concerns that have been used by various spokespeople to call into question the success of multiculturalism in Australia.

Recommendation 4

SCoA recommends a more structured approach to data collection on issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with specific funding, to ensure adequate and reliable data.

5. The impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief

SCoA submits that discrimination and vilification remain significant barriers to the full participation of migrants in Australian society. This is not to say that the vast majority of migrants do not enjoy their

⁴³ Schetzer, L. & Henderson, J. (2003), *Public consultations: a project to identify legal needs, pathways and barriers for disadvantaged people in NSW, Access to justice and legal needs* (Vol. 1, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney), p61.

⁴⁴ Ernst & Young (2015), *Evaluation of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support programmes*, p57.

lives in Australia. Indeed a number of the surveys have measured happiness levels among recent arrivals. Notably, the Scanlon Foundation's 2015 "Australians Today" survey found:⁴⁵

Almost two out of three (62%) of those who arrived since 2001 indicated that they were 'very happy' or 'happy', one in four (23%) that they were 'neither happy nor unhappy', and close to one in eight (13%) that they were 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy.'

SCoA considers that these statistics paint a positive picture for Australia's multicultural society. However, as discussed above, discrimination remains prevalent and, among certain communities, is a growing problem and points to an urgent need to deepen social inclusion in Australia, to create an environment in which migrants and refugees can fully participate in all aspects of life in Australia.

The negative experience of discrimination can have a devastating impact on individuals and their chances of achieving a successful settlement in Australia. Research suggests that racism and discrimination can have lasting negative impacts on health, especially mental health and can also impede a migrant's capacity to engage socially and economically with their new surroundings.⁴⁶

While it is outside of the scope of SCoA's expertise, it is worth noting that the impact of discrimination, etc, is felt not just by migrants and refugees but also by other groups within Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. SCoA is confident that, in its deliberations, the Committee will have regard to this crucial matter.

Recommendation 5

Initiatives that enhance community harmony and social cohesion are crucial to promote the multiculturalism in Australia. This is a two-way process and as much focus must be given to educating the general public as is given to training recent arrivals. With this in mind, grants targeted at social cohesion should be increased, and efforts made to encourage a greater number of activities and initiatives that promote multiculturalism in Australia.

6. The impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief

The impact of leadership statements on community harmony and social cohesion should not be underestimated and it is therefore crucial that all Australian leaders focus on the positive impact that migrants make to Australian society and recognise the role of the Australian settlement sector in achieving this.

⁴⁵ Markus, A. (2016), *Australians Today*, p29.

⁴⁶ Nelson, J., and Dunn, K. (2013), *Racism and Anti-racism* ("For those who've come across the seas..." Australian Multicultural Theory, Policy and Practice, 2013, Australian Scholarly), p269.

In launching the recently released Multicultural Statement,⁴⁷ Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull heralded “a multicultural Australia in which racism and discrimination have no place and (in) which integration and contribution are core elements of our success.”

SCoA notes, however, that the within both politics and media, this message has not always prevailed.

Recommendation 6

The impact of leadership and media statements on community harmony and social cohesion should not be underestimated and it is therefore crucial that all Australian leaders focus on the positive impact that migrants make to Australian society and recognise the role of the Australian settlement sector in achieving this. Negative discourse which alienates specific groups and promotes disharmony must be actively discouraged. Australia should make clear its commitment to multiculturalism through an effective multicultural statement and/or developing a national legislative framework.

A regular issue reported by SCoA members and confirmed in recent surveys relates to the broader community’s willingness to welcome migrants and, in conjunction with that, the prevailing discourse in media and politics on the subject. Despite the negative dialogue sometimes found in certain mainstream media and some corners of politics, Australia is a welcoming and compassionate society, largely supportive of immigration and our humanitarian program. SCoA believes that this goodwill indicates that multiculturalism is alive and well in Australia and that Australia is therefore well-placed to reap the benefits from a strong migration program which delivers dynamic settlement outcomes.

However, the settlement sector is concerned about continuing high levels of coverage being dedicated to negative and often stereotyped views of certain communities. Recent examples include:

- Ongoing coverage in Victoria of alleged “anti-social” behaviour among migrant youths;
- Suggestions from within government that asylum seekers in Australia are in fact “fake refugees”;
- Various debates and proclamations in both political and media circles questioning the value of migration generally, or specifically calling for the cessation of migration by migrants from certain countries and/or cultures.

It is essential that leaders across Australia strive to maintain a socially inclusive society and work with community to reinforce standards of respectful and welcoming behaviour. Since the mid-1970s, Australia has promoted multiculturalism as being a cornerstone of society.⁴⁸ While the focus of multicultural policy has changed between successive governments, there is no denying that it forms part of the fabric of modern Australia. However, it remains crucial that multiculturalism and diversity be protected and, indeed, celebrated, in order for Australia to continue to enjoy the successes this brings.

⁴⁷ Australian Government (2017), *Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/australian-governments-multicultural-statement>.

⁴⁸ Ho, C. (2013), *From Social Justice to Social Cohesion: A History of Australian Multicultural Policy* (“For those who’ve come across the seas...” Australian Multicultural Theory, Policy and Practice, 2013, Australian Scholarly), p31.

7. How to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief

Recommendation 7

The Committee should consider a range of measures designed to improve community understanding of, and therefore public discourse about, matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious beliefs.

Potential measures that could be explored include, but are not limited to:

- A. strategies for engaging with everyday racism, and setting aside proper resources to do so, including developing a resourced education program covering both schools and the wider community;
- B. inclusion of multicultural education, bilingualism and inter-cultural competence as core characteristics of the education for all young Australians;
- C. establishing a focus within Australia's arts and entertainment sectors, emphasising cultural diversity;
- D. implementing incentives for greater representation of cultural diversity across multiple sectors including arts, entertainment, media and business; and
- E. developing best practice guidelines on Engaging with Cultural Diversity for widespread distribution and monitoring in the print and electronic media

8. How to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life

Recommendation 8

The work of the settlement sector, as well as various ethnic and multicultural communities should be recognised as crucial to building awareness of the contributions that migrants make both socially and economically and should be reinforced and strengthened through further government funding.

Significant research over the past ten years has investigated the social participation of migrants, and the contributions they make to Australian society. The overwhelming impression arising from this research is of a high level of social and community engagement, which increases over time.⁴⁹ In its recent report into Australia's migrant intake, the Productivity Commission supports this finding.⁵⁰

It is widely accepted that this integration brings multiple benefits for Australian social and community life. Across multiple sectors, including food and hospitality, the arts, language and culture, Australia boasts a rich, vibrant diversity which stands us apart from most of our contemporaries.

SCoA members report a common experience across the country: that the more they focus on building social capital and promoting integration, the better the outcomes for social participation among new arrivals.

⁴⁹ See for example: Hugo, G. (2011), *A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants, Summary of Findings*, p55.

⁵⁰ Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p247.

As illustrated by recent modelling, there are also substantial, economic benefits to Australia arising from our multicultural society. In modelling conducted by the Migration Council of Australia and Independent Economics in 2015, it was projected that Australia's population could reach 38 million by 2050, with migration adding 14 million or 37 per cent to the population over this period and contributing \$1.6 trillion to Australia's GDP. The study also concluded that migration could add 15.7 per cent to Australia's labour force participation rate, and increase real wages by almost 10 per cent in 2050.⁵¹

For these reasons, the contribution of migrants is truly something that should be celebrated.

SCoA submits that the tireless work of the settlement sector, largely through the delivery of activities funded under SGP and Diversity and Social Cohesion grants make a significant contribution to the overall acceptance of migrants within Australia and the recognition of all that they bring to the country.

SCoA recommends to the Committee the countless examples that our members can provide, including various multicultural activities as well as general educative practices, which assist in building community understanding and cohesion.⁵² We submit that this work is crucial to building awareness of the contributions that migrants make both socially and economically and should be reinforced and strengthened through further government funding.

9. The potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation

Recommendation 9

The Government should undertake a thorough though expeditious public investigation into the value and form of an Australian Multiculturalism Act, to enshrine in domestic law all those elements of international conventions and covenants to which Australia is and should become a signatory in relation to social participation, human rights and cultural diversity.

SCoA applauds the March 2017 release of an updated Multicultural Statement for Australia.⁵³ We also acknowledge the hard work that has been employed across numerous government departments to strive towards access and equity for members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

However, it is time for Australia to give serious consideration to adopting a whole-of-government and longer term approach to multicultural policy by developing a national legislative framework on multiculturalism, through a robust process that includes both legislative inquiry and consultation.

SCoA believes that a federal framework to support multiculturalism will ensure that access and equity is supported by culturally competent service provision. Such a framework as the foundation of all service provision will, over time, break down current silos which may exist in some service areas, where some agencies and projects may be doing great work, which is unknown in other areas.

⁵¹ Migration Council of Australia (2015), *The Economic Impact of Migration*

⁵² Roumeliotis, V. and Paschalidis-Chilas, E. (2013), *Settlement and Community Development: Moving and Shaping our Civil Society*, p90.

⁵³ Australian Government (2017), *Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/australian-governments-multicultural-statement>.

SCoA notes that the proposal for a national legislative initiative was first identified in 1989/90. While many states have legislated to some extent in these areas, there is no national legislation.

SCoA has seen that access to government services in jurisdictions where multicultural plans are supported by a legislative framework is stronger. The benefits to the community through ensuring equitable access to services are widely acknowledged, strengthening community cohesion and providing resultant benefits to the community and the economy from cultural diversity.

10. The potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission

Recommendation 10

The Multicultural Advisory Council, or a new Multicultural Commission, should be enshrined in an Australian Multiculturalism Act, and charged with the protection and enhancement of multiculturalism across Australia, including in relation to social participation, human rights and cultural diversity.

For the reasons discussed above, SCoA recognises the enormous value that strengthening the Multicultural Advisory Council, or legislating for a Multicultural Commission, could have. Such a body would necessarily be charged with the protection and enhancement of multiculturalism across Australia and, SCoA submits, could find its legislative basis in a new Australian Multiculturalism Act.

11. Conclusion

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull praised Australia's settlement program for migrants. He stated:

We have a long experience of, and commitment to, settlement services to ensure our immigrants, especially refugees, become successfully integrated into our society.⁵⁴

SCoA agrees that Australia should be proud of the settlement services it provides to migrants, and the role those services play in fostering a productive multicultural society.

SCoA celebrates the work done by its passionate, hard-working members and commends them and the efforts they make. Further, we acknowledge that the success of the multiculturalism relies heavily on ongoing support from government. Most importantly, SCoA pays tribute to the resilient and enthusiastic group of migrants who have chosen to make Australia home and who are committed to building their lives here.

This submission is intended to provide a range of options for further strengthening Australia's already dynamic multicultural society. SCoA is confident that by focussing our efforts and enhancing protections and systems already in place, Australia stands ready to benefit from its cultural diversity well into the future.

⁵⁴ The Hon. M Turnbull MP (2016), *Australia's National Statement*, <http://malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/australias-national-statement-in-the-general-debate-of-the-71st-session-at>, accessed on 30 January 2017.