



Settlement
Council
of Australia

Response: Draft terms of reference Multicultural Framework Review

Settlement Council of Australia

March 2023

The Settlement Council of Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate, the Ngunnawal people. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which migrants and refugees settle across Australia, and on which our sector operates.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to our lands and waters.

About the Settlement Council of Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is the peak body representing the vast majority of settlement agencies across Australia providing direct services and support to people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Our members include organisations large and small, who are committed to the successful settlement of migrants and refugees across the country. Their services range from greeting new arrivals at the airport, through to assisting them to secure housing, learn English, make social connections, access services and find their first job. Australia's settlement services are recognised as being among the best in the world.

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Introduction

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is grateful for the opportunity to review the draft terms of reference (TORs) for the Australian Multicultural Framework Review. SCOA is the national peak body for settlement. We represent a community of members whose core work is helping people make Australia home. Settlement and multiculturalism are both fundamental concepts for our sector.

Australia prides itself on being a successful multicultural nation. Multiculturalism is typically viewed positively in Australia. In 2022, 88% of people believed multiculturalism was good for Australia.¹ Despite Australians' overall positive attitudes towards immigration, multiculturalism, and visible minorities, it is crucial to address the challenges that arise from an increasingly diverse Australia. Populism, concern over heightened levels of immigration, racism towards religious and ethnic groups, hate crimes, and socio-economic disadvantages experienced by specific groups are among the challenges that require attention. While Australia has made progress in creating a diverse and inclusive society, ongoing efforts are necessary to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity or background, have access to equal opportunities and are treated with dignity and respect. By addressing these challenges head-on, Australia can continue to foster a thriving and harmonious multicultural society that benefits all its citizens.

Multicultural Framework Review - Draft terms of reference

SCOA welcomes the Government's review of Australia's Multicultural Framework. However, we believe there are some key issues missing from the current Terms of Reference and consultation process. These are outlined below.

Communities missing from the conversation

The draft Terms of Reference have mostly focused on institutional policies, with much less focus on multicultural communities. The Terms of Reference need to articulate the role and value of communities if the government wants a Multicultural Framework for how we all operate, not just government. In addition, there needs to be greater support and inclusion of new and emerging communities. There are a broad range of experiences and backgrounds from which people come to Australia, such as humanitarian entrants who frequently have experienced trauma or persecution. The review should also consider the specific needs of people from refugee backgrounds who typically face more significant challenges when settling in Australia. These particularly vulnerable cohorts need to be represented by people with lived experience and professionals working in this space that can advocate effectively. In addition, the review should seek input from and provide targeted recommendations for recently arrived youth to address the unique needs of this group. Lastly, there is no mention of faith or religion in the draft Terms of Reference, and faith communities (particularly minority faiths of predominantly migrant origin) should be included in any discussion. The Terms of Reference and the consultation process need to include communities with a diversity of resources, and a diversity of backgrounds.

¹ Scanlon Foundation. (2022). *Mapping Social Cohesion*. Available online at: https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/MSR%202022_Report.pdf

Recommendation 1

The Terms of Reference and the consultation process need to include communities, including new and emerging communities, religious and faith communities, refugees and youth.

Consultation and Reference Group representation

SCOA seeks clarification on how the review will consult extensively with communities, experts and the public. SCOA seeks clarity on how the review plans to do that and how rigorous it will be. As mentioned previously, SCOA believes the review needs to engage emerging communities and those with a diversity of resources, particularly communities that have little advocacy or social/financial capital. The consultation plan needs to be more clearly laid out, and involve thorough informed consultation with multicultural communities. Clarity is required in the procedural process in how this will work.

SCOA believes the Multicultural Framework Review Reference Group should include at least ten people with half being individuals/advocates and half being peak bodies/organisations. The process for appointing people with lived experience needs to be transparent, open and accessible (i.e., allow applications via non-traditional methods so as to not discriminate against those with lower levels of written English language proficiency). In addition, SCOA does not believe three people is enough for the panel of eminent Australians.

Consultation will be a crucial component of this process. However, consultation is often concentrated in major metropolitan areas such as Sydney and Melbourne, leaving out the voices and perspectives of communities in regional and rural areas. It is important to recognise that these areas also have unique challenges and perspectives. Therefore, consultation should take place outside major metropolitan areas to ensure that multicultural communities there have a say in important decisions that affect them. Regional perspectives should be included in any consultation process.

Recommendation 2

The Review's consultation plan needs to be more clearly laid out.

Consistency across states and territories

In addition, the framework should aim to be consistent across the states and territories. To ensure that all members of society are treated fairly and equally, it is essential to look to the multicultural frameworks of all the states and territories and seek alignment and consistency. By doing so, we can identify common themes and best practices that can be shared and implemented across different regions. The Terms of Reference should include advice on how the multicultural frameworks across states and territories align. Ultimately, a consistent and aligned approach to multiculturalism can help to build a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Recommendation 3

The Terms of Reference should include advice on how the multicultural frameworks across states and territories align.

Anti-racism

The draft Terms of Reference have not once mentioned the term racism. The Terms of Reference need to include racism and anti-racism policies. The framework focuses more on promoting cultural diversity and celebrating differences, rather than addressing issues of discrimination and prejudice. Government should introduce stronger measures to combat racism, including implementing policies that hold individuals and institutions accountable for discriminatory actions. Without a clear commitment to anti-racism policies, Australia risks perpetuating systemic discrimination and exclusion of minority groups.

In addition to explicit anti-racism policies, the framework should aim to look at implicit barriers to cohesion and belonging including discrimination, harassment and systemic barriers to equal participation. These forms of discrimination are often more subtle in comparison to overt racist behaviour.

Recommendation 4

The Terms of Reference need to include racism and anti-racism policies, including its less overt forms.

Lack of data

The Terms of Reference are missing an important aspect of multiculturalism – measuring it. Current data collected about multicultural communities is limited. Data about ethnicity or race can inform policies and programs which affect these communities. SCOA therefore believes issues surrounding data on diversity should be included in the Terms of Reference. Lack of available data is currently a major roadblock to policy and planning, and should be better measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). In addition, the government should put a benchmark in place for itself and measure the level of inclusion.

Recommendation 5

Issues surrounding data on diversity should be included in the Terms of Reference.

Conclusion

As Australia prepares to welcome around 1 million people over the next five years, the country is taking a proactive step by reviewing its Multicultural Framework. The framework should outline how the Australian government plans to support and celebrate the cultural diversity of the country. With such a significant influx of people expected, it is essential that Australia is well-equipped to facilitate successful integration and support the needs of its diverse population. This review comes at a crucial time and shows Australia's commitment to fostering a harmonious and inclusive society where people of all cultures can feel valued and respected.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Terms of Reference and the consultation process need to include communities, including new and emerging communities, religious and faith communities, refugees and youth.

Recommendation 2: The Review's consultation plan needs to be more clearly laid out.

Recommendation 3: The Terms of Reference should include advice on how the multicultural frameworks across states and territories align.

Recommendation 4: The Terms of Reference need to include racism and anti-racism policies, including its less overt forms.

Recommendation 5: Issues surrounding data on diversity should be included in the Terms of Reference.

References

Mansouri, F. (2023). The future of migration, multiculturalism and diversity in Australia's post-COVID-19 social recovery. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 7(1), 100382.

Scanlon Foundation. (2022). *Mapping Social Cohesion*. Available online at:
https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/MSO%202022_Report.pdf